

Yesterday's Sermon - In 10 Sentences or Less

Onward and Upward (Week 1) - A Journey of Many Turns:



1) We'll join our culture's annual rhythm for the month of January of reflecting on the year that's past, and the one that lies ahead: we'll do that by exploring one of the most common human metaphors for life and spirituality - journey.

2) First up, we looked together at a key "journey" biblical word or concept - repent.

3) Repentance stands at the heart of what both Jesus and John the Baptist came to achieve (Matt. 3.1-2, 4.17).

4) "Repent" is a word in common usage in the 1st century world, for instance it's used in navigation: it means simply to change direction.

5) Repentance is motivated by our deep present sense of lack (that is, we know we want to experience more or be something different): if you don't feel that need, you don't repent.

6) Thus, at root, to repent is to admit that you can't really make it through life on your own or trusting your own judgment; fundamentally, repentance is surrender to a God who knows better than we do.

7) Pay attention to the second half of Matthew 3.1-2 and 4.17, because it tells us the why of repentance: to repent is necessary preparation for something better.

8) So the focus of repentance is more on the better that lies ahead, not what we might be leaving behind, and, in fact, the assumption is that we can't experience the better without leaving at least some of the past behind us.

9) Thus, repentance rightly understood should never produce crippling guilt, shame, or despair (see 2 Corinthians 7.10).

10) So while we all might want a life that looks like a straight road with no curves, the indispensable spiritual practice of repentance tells us that the only possible spiritual journey is one that will have many turns and twists, by which God's kindness (yes, His KINDNESS - see Romans 2.4) leads us into a greater and greater experience and practice of His Kingdom.

For Your Exploration

1) Two quotes to remember:

- "In other words, a human being is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: he is a rebel who must lay down his arms. Laying down your arms, surrendering, saying you are sorry, realizing that you have been on the wrong track and getting ready to start life over again from the ground floor – that is the only way out of a 'hole.' This process of surrender – this movement full speed astern – is what Christians call repentance." (C. S. Lewis, in Mere Christianity)

- "Life was a myriad of twists and turns that no one could unravel, a path that must be traveled to be understood." (writer Terry Brooks)

2) Here's a great overview article of the book Pastor Chris cited at the start of the sermon, "Wayfinding - The Science and Mystery of How Humans Navigate the World," by M. R. O'Connor: [Place, Personhood, and the Hippocampus: The Fascinating Science of Magnetism, Autonoetic Consciousness, and What Makes Us Who We Are](#)

3) How repentance and hope are tied together - [Repentance and Hope - Chris Hall](#)

A Reflection Exercise for the Week

Spend some time this week focused on repentance - here are some reflection questions, and spiritual practices for the next seven days:

- Spend time celebrating the directional changes you've made in 2021, especially the ones you didn't see coming, or ones that God asked of you, to which you said, "Yes."

- Do you sense God calling you to make a change of direction (of attitude, action, behavior, priorities, etc.)? One way of answering that first question is ask a second: where do you sense your own lack right now, or, said differently, how would you like your present emotional, relational, spiritual experience to be improved? But as you do this reflection, be sure to focus more on the better that lies ahead, and not the subpar that you want to leave behind.

- Offer a short prayer of surrender every day this week, remembering that repentance is a kind of spiritual surrender to someone - God - who knows far better than you do. (You can use the C. S. Lewis quote above to help you with the wording of those prayers, if that's helpful.) By week's end, see if God doesn't respond to your surrender by showing you a specific turn or two He wants you to make, changes you might not have seen earlier because you hadn't yielded yet.