

# True Repentance for the German and the Jew

by Art Katz

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*Art Katz's sermon emphasizes the need for true repentance among Germans and Christians regarding their historical relationship with Jews and the Holocaust.*

**Scripture:** Job 42:5, Matthew 3:2, Matthew 4:17

**Topics:** "True Repentance", "Responsibility towards Israel"

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## Description

Art Katz addresses the profound need for true repentance among Germans in light of their historical guilt regarding the Holocaust, emphasizing that genuine repentance is not merely an emotional release but a deep acknowledgment of God's holiness and our own unworthiness. He argues that true repentance must lead to a sincere response towards the Jewish people, recognizing the shared responsibility for sin and the need for a radical transformation in the church's approach to its Jewish neighbors. Katz warns against superficial expressions of remorse that seek personal relief rather than a true turning towards God, urging a repentance that acknowledges the weight of historical sins and the call to bear witness to the truth of the Gospel. He highlights that the church's failure to authentically engage with the Jewish community reflects a broader spiritual malaise that must be addressed for the Kingdom of God to manifest. Ultimately, Katz calls for a radical shift in the church's understanding of repentance, one that aligns with God's purposes and leads to genuine restoration.

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## Transcript

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The following message was spoken in Nuremburg, Germany in June, 1999 on the heels of attending a conference held in Berlin, Germany that had as its theme "Prayer for Israel."

Sensing that something was amiss, the Lord stirred in Art another kind of note that probed the issue of what true repentance means for the German. Instead of seeking relief from the guilt of the Holocaust in some kind of self-serving way, we need to be reminded that God recognizes only one kind of repentance for all people and for all ages, the fruit of which can be known in how we respond to the Jew in our midst.

## True Repentance for the German and the Jew

"Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand"

These words, spoken first by John the Baptist and then by Jesus Himself, are inexorably joined both then and now. We cannot speak of the Kingdom without speaking of repentance. There is no entry into the Kingdom without repentance. So we have the reality of the Kingdom to the degree that we have authentic repentance, and it is not a once and for all repentance. It is a continual state of being and more rightly a state of death. True repentance is the awesome acknowledgment of God as He in fact is and not as we thought Him to be. Before that holy presence, no man dare lift his head.

God described Job as being righteous and the foremost among men. God boasted on him, and yet at the end of God's dealings with him, the same man cries out, "I have heard of You with the hearing of my ear, but now my eye sees, and I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." This is classic and definitive, and we fall grievously short of that kind of repentance. For this reason the Kingdom does not come. It is the ultimate expression of God in glory, and it requires the most profound coming down of man before it.

What does it mean to repent in dust and ashes? What does that symbolically represent, having gone under the ground in burial? It means that there is no place for me other than to be buried. Job had glimpsed God as He was and there was no place for him as man but in death. And God received that statement from Job, and He told Job to pray for his friends and comforters, for His anger was kindled against them. They had not spoken as His servant Job had spoken. Though their statements in themselves were sublimely spiritual and deep in understanding, yet they still failed. There is only one statement that God will receive from man, namely, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

I doubt whether there is a nation today in which the issue of repentance is more important than Germany. That nation lives continually under the shadow of their historic past. It seems that they will never be washed from the stain of the Holocaust. And yet there is continual reference to the theme of repentance toward the Jew and toward Israel on the part of the German church. As a Jewish believer, however, I am not impressed, and the more I hear these appeals to repentance and witness the character of it, the more uncomfortable I feel in the inner man. Something is wrong with this kind of repentance, and one of the evidences of which is the continual need to reiterate it. How often are we going to feel sorry for the same thing? I believe that we have not rightly understood repentance. 'Feeling sorry' falls short of the true thing. I have the distinct impression that German saints are wanting some kind of emotional and psychological relief. They go to conferences in the hope of it and seem to need so desperately to experience it. There is a word for this in psychology. They want catharsis. They want relief for a burden of guilt that has not been met in any other way.

I began to ponder this before the Lord and came up with some thoughts as to the falsity of this kind of repentance. Maybe it has to do with not correctly understanding the issue of guilt. It assumes that Germany is the cause of the Holocaust against the Jew. If that is our understanding, then we will never be relieved. It misses the truth of the Holocaust itself. The magnitude of that tragedy is beyond the issue of German complicity. If we were students of God's dealings in history with Israel, we would be able to distinguish between these two things, namely, the judgments that God brings and the rod that He employs. Nazi Germany was the rod of God's chastisement, but the cause was Jewish sin itself both historically and presently. The sins of our fathers has never been recognized or acknowledged. The cries of the prophets were never heard nor repented for, and our sin accumulates and gathers weight. Though

God may deter in bringing His judgment, He is not under obligation to bring it immediately, but bring it He will in His own time and for His own purpose.

The Holocaust was judgment in exact proportion to Jewish sin<sup>¾</sup>even in Germany. In our Jewish history in Germany we had substituted German civilization for God's messianic answer. We encouraged German rationalism that is offended by the supernatural God and had its final expression in "God is dead" theology. God's judgments are always in proportion to our sins. When Eichmann was tried in Jerusalem, the prosecuting attorney, Gideon Haussner, wrote in his memoirs that a man's sin or crime or that of a nation may go for a long time unattended, but there must come a time when the culprit is apprehended and the righteous judgment inflicted. So had it come for Eichmann many years after the Nazi time. The Scriptures admonish us that our sins will assuredly find us out. It found us Jews out in the Holocaust. Germany happened to be the rod of our chastisement not least because of our celebration of German culture. There was no segment of the German population than Jews that was more enthusiastic for Goethe, Schiller, Kant, Fichte and Hegel. We could not believe that a 'Hitler' could come to power. Germany was too civilized we thought, but that nation finally became the rod of our judgment.

To feel guilty, therefore, as the cause of the Holocaust is a false guilt and one that God would not have the German to assume. That does not mean that Germany is absolved of all responsibility. That nation is still the rod of God's chastisement, but it was a willing rod. This is the thing that needs acknowledgment and repentance. There is a deeper sin than the Holocaust, and God is yet waiting for this repentance. He will not therefore honor Germany's false repentance. He will not give them the relief they want. The German sin is exactly the same as the Jewish sin. This sin is the betrayal of the true faith by both Christians and Jews in taking our inheritance in God and domesticating it. We are both guilty of making it a 'Saturday' or a 'Sunday' culture that would not threaten our real interests and yet allow us a modicum of religiosity. That is the sin.

We both took the apostolic faith and made it some kind of addendum to our busy life, not just in our liberal Christianity but also in our orthodox. It is nothing less than the misuse of God for man's own purposes and ends. It is ultimate idolatry because it is performed in the name of God and thinks that it is even doing Him service. To seek psychological relief, therefore, through repentance is to continue in that same sin. We remain the object of our religious life<sup>¾</sup>our relief, our satisfaction, our happiness. It is the way it has always been and its character yet remains, even in its charismatic and evangelical forms. We have not seen this as the misuse of God and repented. We have framed our religious lives in which our personal and selfish interests are foremost. We have no interest in a 'Kingdom come.' We would rather have a religious accommodation and sanctify the purposes of the State by giving its imperialist ambitions a little religious aura. This is not only Germany's sin but also the sin of nations everywhere.

There is a repentance for which God is waiting that has nothing to do with our relief but His. We have offended against Him since time immemorial. The salt is rubbed into the wound all the more by the fact that we are Jews and Christians who share together the same mentality of a religious convenience that serves the purposes of man and is entirely indifferent to the purposes of God.

If the church in Germany (or anywhere) wants to repent toward Israel, it would be due to its failure to make known to its 'Israel' in their midst the reality of her own Messiah and God. We allowed the Jew to coexist side by side and to have their own religious institutions, thereby giving validity to the synagogue as a religious reality and not a statement of continuing Jewish apostasy from God. Is there any nation in Europe that has had a longer Jewish presence than Germany and has so little affected them by their

witness? The church has a direct mandate in Scripture, "This gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." We are guilty of having consciously circumvented God's priority and order. We inwardly sense that the Jew is intimidating and intellectual, and therefore an obedience to this command is one that we safely leave alone. The only one who would dare bring the gospel to the Jew is that one who is truly repentant and broken. The one who has descended into death, which is what repentance is in the burial of the inadequate, religious life, does not therefore need Jewish approval. Only he can bear the offense of the gospel itself.

The church of Germany had not and still has not maintained an apostolic witness to that people whom God has placed in their midst. It is a betrayal of the Kingdom and has never been recognized or acknowledged as sin and therefore continues still. The scandal of the Jew is not something that polite Christianity can afford, be it German or any other. A Christianity that is polite is not Christian. It is a contradiction in terms. The very nature of the faith is radical and will always bring upon itself reproach. It is a reproach for which German Christians have been unwilling.

Paul could say that he would rather be accursed for his brethren's sake. He was not crying out because he was Jewish, but because he was an apostle. The grief he was expressing was not some ethnic identification, but that of the High Priest and Apostle of our faith Himself. If that is true, then there is a possibility of an identification with the Jewish people that is beyond sentiment. It is the deep, heart cry of God Himself, for which we are willing to forfeit our own salvation. Paul was crucified with Christ and therefore in union with Him, and that is what made his cry true. His repentance was authentic. Everything that he celebrated as a man died with him, and therefore he could be raised to newness of life. For Paul, to live was Christ. What then is our excuse? What expression of the resurrection life, which bears the grief of God for Israel and the courage to express it, is not available to us also? Everything depends on the reality of our repentance.

How should we expect apostolic reality for the church that is very much alive unto itself and has never repented unto death but wants only relief? How can it ever come into this reality corporately and individually when it is itself the object of its own consideration? The issue of the Jew searches us out and has always revealed the true condition of the church. There is something about the unbelieving Jew that reveals our secret heart. It shows us where in fact we are, not only with regard to them, but also with regard to God.

A really repentant German Christian will tell Israel their sins and Jacob their transgressions. Isaiah's cry was that we should not hold back, but rather that we should lift our voices like a trumpet and tell Israel of its sin and Jacob of its transgressions. In other words, we need to make known that the Holocaust was not some momentary, historical aberration but the calculated judgment of God. It had been promised in Scripture in Deuteronomy and Leviticus of what would befall us in the Last Days if we would not acknowledge our transgressions and that of our fathers. The sword would pursue us. There would be terror for us and that God would not avert it or He is not God. Jesus spoke of a yet future judgment and that there would never be anything again like it. It will eclipse all of the suffering of the past, even the Nazi Holocaust itself, and if that time were not cut short, no flesh (Jewish flesh) would survive. Who will tell Jacob their transgressions and that they will suffer again for their unrecognized transgression?

Instead of coming out of the Holocaust broken and repentant, and asking why we suffered it and why God was silent, we adopted the motto, "Never again." We never saw it as the judgment of God, and that what we suffered was in exact proportion to our sins and the sins of our fathers. There has been no covering or

remission for those sins, no Levitical priesthood, no place of sacrifice and no shedding of blood. We have experienced two thousand years of accumulated Jewish sin, open and naked to the retribution of the powers of darkness who are only too happy to inflict the judgment and take a malicious delight in so doing.

Who is there who contradicts us Jews and who is there who warns us? Who shows us the Word of God of the judgments that have come and the judgments that will come? Only a church that really loves us and who wants to save us from the eternal fire will speak a warning. Such a warning will not be appreciated or understood. It will likely invite angry reprisal. So long as we condescend to the Jew and don't want to offend and try to seek a reconciliation that never comes, nor can it come, is only serving our emotional need. It offers nothing to the Jew of any redemptive kind and confirms them in their understanding of themselves as victim. They see themselves as victim of the church's failure and the bankruptcy of Christianity. The Jew has no consciousness of any sin that would require the magnitude of judgment that was laid on them in the Holocaust. Only those who have the courage to speak to us the truth can save them from the judgment that is to come both in time and eternity.

The resurrected Christ to whom all authority has been given in Heaven and in earth and the ultimate prophet, who is truth as well as love, would not withhold Himself. He would rather suffer the death of their disappointment. He would rather suffer the pain of their rejection. He did it two thousand years ago in His own body and He will do it now in ours, that we would be able to say with Paul, "For me, to live is Christ." The Church is guilty of living beneath the resurrection life while yet applauding itself by endorsing the doctrine, but having no necessity for its reality. We can conduct services and programs so long as we have our own satisfaction for our purpose and being. But to take the apostolic mandate of God earnestly will compel us to say with Paul, "Who is sufficient for these things?" A church that is 'sufficient' in itself is outside the faith. It is already apostate and does not know it.

Only by Jesus' life could Paul's apostolic burden for his brethren after the flesh be known. Only by that Life could he have the courage to express it and suffer the rejection that it must bring. Only by that Life can we show the Jew in our midst the difference between mere religion and authentic spirituality. Too long have they seen a cultural Christianity not much better than their own Judaism. We are called to move Israel to jealousy, and Paul does not explain what that means. He sees it though as a critical purpose for our life as the church. To move to jealousy the enemies of the gospel is an ultimate requirement, and the church that can answer it is indeed the church. We can only become such a church out of true repentance. We need an awareness of our terrible, historical failure and its present failure still.

"Woe is me, I am undone!" Out of that death will come the Life that will move Jews to jealousy. We will find that we are compelled by the love of Christ that cannot keep silent. When they see that you are willing to risk their censure, condemnation and painful rejection, then that very courage alone has the potential to move them to jealousy. They will know that it is beyond religion; it is very God Himself.

"Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand!" This requires a valid baptism, one that is a real burial, because our history and present life has persuaded us that in ourselves there is no man good. Even our best intentions are not good enough. Only Christ, the Resurrected One, as our life consistently is our answer, and God has provided the means. A baptism that is more than a religious ordinance is a burial of that which needs to be brought to death. Who will enter those waters? And if there is no resurrection after that burial, we of all men are most to be pitied. Let us not think that we can go back to our jobs, our businesses, our hopes for the future and all of the nice amenities of our present life. We have no hope. We have died to that. This is a newness of life<sup>3/4</sup>and it is radical. It has one motivation only, namely, the glory

of God and not our convenience. We have practiced a Christianity of convenience, and it has left a great vacuum, as it necessarily must, and into that unreality came demonic Nazism. We made it possible and provided the vacuum into which this evil came as a flood.

If there is no reality of God, the reality of Satan will quickly enter in. Nazism is our fault. Respectable and polite Christianity not only made it possible, but also inevitable. The kind of Christianity that we thought was polite and humane becomes ironically exactly its opposite. Be assured, our sins will find us out, and it will express itself in the most bestial forms of human behavior. God is not mocked and whatsoever a nation sows, that too will it reap.

There is no understanding of what is Jewish independent of what is German. We have affected each other and shaped a common culture in our conspiracy against God and against His King, and we have both suffered for it. What will it mean for a German church now that does not seek its own emotional relief, but will find a place of true repentance and broken-ness, not only for itself, but also for its fathers? We are not to think that we would have done any better than they had we lived in the Nazi time. There is no man good, no not one. God is waiting for that repentance and the laying down of that life. The evidence of the truth of it is that we will find a new ability and a burning passion to tell Jacob of its sins and Israel of its transgressions.

The church that can warn the Jew of the judgment to come is alone qualified to speak of the restoration that will follow. They are the only ones who can speak comfort to a people who will have suffered double for their sins. Jews do not need some kind of sentimental pat on the back, but a comfort that is by the Spirit and God's own word in the midst of their judgment by a people who do not withhold and do not spare. They speak the word of judgment and call Israel to the recognition of its sin, and so they will also speak the word of comfort that will be a comfort indeed. It will be the same comfort that we will know who have been raised out of death unto newness of life and can rejoice in Christ Jesus as Savior and Deliverer. We can comfort then with the same comfort with which we have been comforted, if indeed we have been comforted and our religious life is not a fraud.

The church's sin is Israel's sin, and it is exactly the same sin. We will not charge them with their sins from some place of superiority, but from the place of broken-ness. It is the priestly place that is able to speak to a sinning people as those who know their own sins are exactly as Israel's. A church that is willing to come under the Jewish people in a priestly service, not seeking anything for themselves, will alone be a blessing for Israel. I cannot think of any single message that Germany needs more to hear. God's purpose for Germany is not its imperial ambition. Nor has this ambition ever died. When the historic reconciliation between West and East Germany came, I personally did not rejoice. Something in my inner man was disturbed, and now we will see again the true Germany in its ambition and power, and it will likely once again betray God's call to be a priestly nation to the people Israel.

Israel will need once again to be restored to Zion out of her soon-coming calamity as the redeemed of the Lord. Their redemption ushers in the Lord's coming, and His coming is His Kingdom in which nations will no longer study war again. The Jew is not just another ethnic people. They are at the heart of God's theocratic design. For only with their return will the Law go forth out of Zion. The church in Germany could do nothing more for the nations than effecting Israel's true restoration, that she might bless all the families of the earth. And all the nations will know that the God of Jacob is alone God. That is the church in Germany's task, but it can only be accomplished by a people whom He has raised from the dead because they have truly repented for their sins.

The Holocaust is for Germany what the crucifixion is for Israel. Our Jewish sin is not the crucifixion of Jesus, but the summation of all our sins and our long history of apostasy and our rejection of the prophets who were sent to us. When the Lord Himself came, we could not recognize Him. We were offended by Him and 'had' to crucify Him. He was the summation of our sin and not the sin in itself. So also is the Holocaust for Germany. It is not the sin in itself. It is the summation of all their sin through all their generations in converting the radical faith into a domestic addendum and a Sunday convenience. We need to repent for our fathers and for ourselves, for nothing has changed, and God will not honor false repentance that seeks only our relief. He waits for this recognition and this death that He might be all in all. Israel's destiny is at stake, and it waits for a repentant church in Germany. The nation that cast Israel into the physical fires is the same nation intended by God to save the Jew from the eternal fire of God's judgment. The German church has a destiny and a mandate that is unfulfilled, but can only be fulfilled in the power of His life in union with Him, both in death and in resurrection.

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