

Brokenness the Fruit of Repentance by Charles Swindoll

by Chuck Swindoll

The sermon emphasizes that true brokenness and repentance are essential for spiritual growth and effective ministry.

Duration: 45:36

Scripture: Isaiah 6:1

Topics: "Repentance", "Gods Grace"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the transformative power of God through brokenness and repentance, using the example of Charles Spurgeon and Isaiah to illustrate how God uses frail and feeble individuals for His great purposes. It challenges listeners to confront their own weaknesses, secret sins, and areas needing repentance, ultimately leading to a deeper understanding of God's grace and forgiveness.

Transcript

When God wants to do an impossible task, he takes an impossible man and crushes him. Alan Redpath, 1959. It's doubtful that God can use any man greatly until he has hurt him deeply.

A.W. Tozer, 1956. We are but men, frail, feeble, apt to faint. Charles Spurgeon, 1857.

Charles Spurgeon, the prince of the pulpit. Before he was twenty, Spurgeon was called to a significant church in the city of London. Within two years, he was preaching to crowds of 10,000 without the assistance of a public address system.

At the age of twenty-four, he had become the most popular preacher of his era. Twenty-four. By the time he turned twenty-seven, a church seating 6,000 had been built to accommodate the crowds which flocked to hear him preach, and they stood in the snow until the doors were open on Sunday morning at twenty-seven.

For more than thirty uninterrupted years, Spurgeon pastored the same church in that city without decrease in personal power or public appeal. To this day, over 100 years after his death, he remains a model and a mentor for many of us in ministry. Sixty-three volumes of his sermons published from his ministry in London, not counting the books he wrote or the pamphlets.

And yet he is the one who said, We are but men, frail, feeble, apt to fail. He wrote that in his quaintly worded Lectures to My Students, a volume every minister of the gospel should read rather regularly. You and I would probably agree that Spurgeon is not far off as he portrays us as those humble men who are frail and feeble and apt to faint.

But ask the congregation you serve if they realize that about you. On the contrary, if others watch us as we're doing our thing before the public, many would conclude we are more like angels, strong, stable, apt to soar. How impressive we can appear to be, how confident, how secure, how invincible, and far more importantly, how different from David's unguarded admission in Psalm 51, 17.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. I'm intrigued by the word broken, contrite. The word broken means literally shattered.

The sacrifices of God, my sacrifice to God, says the Amplified Bible, my sacrifice to God is a shattered spirit and literally a bruised heart. Is yours? Eugene Peterson in his paraphrase, the message renders this Psalm, I learned God worship when my pride was shattered. Men, it is not until the pride of our heart is shattered that we will begin to understand the deep things of God.

I think the shattering, the bruising experiences of life are so designed by God for His spokesmen that He, knowing the ending from the beginning, uses them to shape us, to prepare us, to move us into places of His appointment for which He has readied us by such crushings. When He increases in strength as I decrease in weakness, then I think we can unhesitatingly embrace Spurgeon's words, we are mere men who understand what it means to be frail, feeble, and apt to faint. I'm not referring to acting humble, I'm referring to being humble.

I'm not suggesting we look frail, I'm suggesting we admit we are frail. I'm not encouraging a facade of weakness and humanity, I am rather referring to an authentic confession of both. I am not advocating that repentance is good for someone else, some board members, some staff members, some member of the congregation.

I'm saying repentance is mine to own. I haven't long to speak, but today I believe I have a message that will not easily be forgotten. I will be candid and direct and as open with you as I can possibly be in a setting like this.

As I finish, I believe some of you will be moved to respond from deep within your soul, courageously, openly, sincerely. But first, please turn to Isaiah chapter 6. Isaiah chapter 6. I want to spend time in these verses. I want this to be the foundation of the application I have to share with you in a few moments.

For a moment, before we get into these verses, the first eight are on my mind. Enter with me into the ancient scene where the Prince of the Prophets once lived. We know Isaiah as a spokesman for God, who was called to minister to the affluent.

His is the finest Hebrew in the Old Testament, educated, ministering to people who lived in the lap of luxury. He stood not before one king, but four, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. He would marry a prophetess, and they would have two sons.

Through his pen, we would read of the Messiah eight centuries before he came, who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement for our peace was upon him, and by his bruise, we are drawn together. From Isaiah, we would learn that we are all like sheep who have gone

astray, who have gone on our own, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

What a prophet was Isaiah. While Jeremiah wept, while Jonah ran, while Habakkuk stood confused, wondering why, how long Isaiah preached, stood alone like a steer in a blizzard, standing for the things of God. Isaiah, what a prophet.

Kyle Yates writes of him, as a preacher of social righteousness, he had no equal among the prophets. He had clear convictions, kingly courage, clear vision, spiritual intuition, and unusual power in driving home the truth. His righteous indignation burned at the very thought of injustice, cruelty, oppression, dishonesty, immorality.

His thoughts were practical, his judgments accurate, his vision clear, his zeal aflame, his purpose large, and his enthusiasm unbounded. Dignified oratory poured forth from his heart, his pure heart, with peculiar directness and uncanny effectiveness. As a spiritual giant, Isaiah stands as the loftiest peak among the mountains.

And then Yates adds, from the day of his vision in the temple, he possessed a spiritual depth that set him apart from his contemporaries. Suddenly I'm grabbed by that statement. What happened in the temple? What was it that gave him depth? That's where he was crushed.

That's where he became contrite, shattered. You've preached from this passage. Let's act as though you've never heard it before, just for a few moments, because everything changed as a result of the events recorded in these first eight verses in Isaiah's life.

First, he saw the Lord. In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw the Lord. His attention did not turn to prophetic events that would come later.

He was not preoccupied with his own training and skill. The Lord would use those things. He did not get a glimpse of the fruit of his labors.

Not yet, not now, not first. At first, he saw the Lord. I saw the Lord.

Where? Lofty, exalted, sitting enthroned. Surrounded by incredible, angelic beings. Sarath.

It's a verb that means to burn. Used only twice of beings. Right here, only here in the scriptures.

Verse 2, verse 6. Sarathim, seraphs, flaming, six-winged, angelic beings that flooded the throne with two wings covering their faces. With two wings covering their feet, and with two of the wings, they flew. We've never seen anything like that.

Isaiah saw it in the temple, perhaps lost in the grief of his friend's death, Uzziah. He looked up, and he saw this throne room of the king. And not only did he see these things, but he heard from the Lord.

What did he hear? He saw Seraphim who stood above him having six wings. Verse 3, listen to what he heard. One called out to another, the ideas antiphonal voice, back and forth, back and forth.

They said, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The earth is full of his glory. This is a perfect place to play this out.

You on this side, when I point to you, sound it out. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. And then you answer on the other side, same words.

Here we go, nice and loud. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. Answer, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

Louder, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. When he heard that, the foundations of the thresholds trembled.

The word means to shake. In chapter 7, it's used for the shaking of leaves in the trees blown by the wind. But in this case, it isn't trees.

It's the foundation below the building. Those of us from California have no problem understanding that moment. Suddenly, everything came loose.

And down beneath the doorposts and beneath the windows and beneath the throne room, there was this incredible sense of shaking, trembling, and moving as he saw the Lord, saw the angels, and heard the words, the trembling that followed. Then I said, woe is me. Woe is me.

Lexicographers refer to this particular statement as an interjection of deep sorrow. And when it is followed by the first person singular pronoun, it indicates utter despair. I'm ruined.

Luther translates it, I am dissolved. The Hebrew is cease. I cease to exist.

We would say, it's curtains. It's over. I'm finished.

Isaiah saw the Lord. Isaiah heard from the Lord. Isaiah responds to the Lord in the temple as he says to the Lord, not, lucky you.

You found me. No. I'm finished.

It's over. He's crushed. He's shattered.

Dissolved in his own realization of sin. I am ruined because I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. Living Bible says, I'm a foul-mouthed sinner in the midst of a foul-mouthed race.

What was it that crushed him? When he heard the infinite cry of thrice-repeated holy, Kalash, Kalash, Kalash, Kalash, Kalash, Kalash, Kalash, back and forth, back and forth. That's all he could handle. And having seen the Lord in all of his resplendent light and absolute perfection, he realized how undone he was.

And Isaiah began to search and face the music. Then he was finished. What was it? If he's a man of unclean lips, was he guilty of flattery? Maybe.

Lying? Exaggeration? Being a preacher probably was one of those. Lack of confidentiality? Gossip? Profanity? Probably all of the above. And he said, my doom is sealed because Lord, I'm not holy.

He sees the Lord. He hears from the Lord. He responds to the Lord.

Verses six and seven, he is broken before the Lord. One of the seraphim, this multitude of angels fluttering about the throne of God, heard the statement of Isaiah. And look at what he does.

He flew to me with a burning coal in his hand. Angels can handle things like that. Which he had taken from the altar.

That wasn't mentioned earlier. There was an altar there as well. And with tongues, he touched my mouth with it.

Where did he touch? My mouth. Why? Because that was the area of uncleanness. He touched the place Isaiah had admitted.

Unclean lips. Call for coals from God's altar. He touched my mouth and with it said, behold, this has touched your lips.

Your iniquity is taken away. Your sin is forgiven. I love that.

It wasn't with a note that said, we'll be watching for three months to see how you do. It wasn't, we're going to take a long look at you and we're going to listen for a while, discuss it in heaven, and send a message. It says, your sin is forgiven.

Your iniquity is taken away. I heard a voice saying, now whom shall I send? Who will go for us? Don't miss the first word of that eighth verse. Then, when, after all of this, after the brokenness, after the shattering of the spirit, the bruising of his heart, after the event when the coal touched the place of his iniquity, then I heard the voice saying, whom shall I send and who will go for us? And he said, here am I. It's just what Moses said at the bush.

In the Hebrew, it's just tiny. Isn't that great? You don't even have to put your lips together to say it. And then, send me.

You want to see the most wonderful evidence of grace in this passage? The first word in the ninth verse. Go. Isn't that terrific? Send me.

Go. We keep waiting for the other shoe to fall. Maybe there's going to be more coals.

Go. Here am I. I'll go. Go.

A broken and a contrite heart God will not despise. Hudson Taylor, the founder of the China Inland Mission, said all God's giants have been weak men. Every man that sits on this platform is a weak man.

Every man who fills the seats or sitting on the floor or walking about this building is a weak man. Every one of us. The one who speaks to you today is a weak man.

Frail, feeble, apt to faint. Why do we act like anything else but that is true? Our flock loves to hear that kind of talk. I've said for years the greatest gift you can give your congregation aside from Jesus Christ is an authentic model of humanity.

Give it to them. Every man I study from church history who represents some significant position, when I look deep enough I find weakness. I find brokenness.

I find something missing. F.W. Robertson, 1816 to 1853, called by some the preacher's preacher, died at age 37. Suffered ill health throughout his life, struggled throughout his ministry with introspection and melancholy.

Joseph Parker preached 28 years in the same pulpit with commanding authority and widespread popularity but tormented throughout his ministry with feelings of inferiority because he was the son of a stonemason and he had only scanty theological training and he lived among the theological giants of the Victorian era. Charles Spurgeon himself endured deep depressions. In one 1866 sermon he admitted, I am the subject of depressions so fearful that I hope none of you ever get to such extremes of wretchedness as I do.

From his lectures to my students. In the same chapter, my favorite chapter of the book, *The Minister's Fainting Fits*. Isn't that a great title for a chapter? *The Minister's Fainting Fits*, he refers to his depression as a black cloud.

Depression and occasional desires to run, to get away. That's the man whose bio I read earlier that is such a model to us. But he's frail.

He's feeble. He's apt to faint. Now, I'm not through so much for Isaiah.

What is your undoing? You've listened very carefully to a rather hurried exposition of the text. It's time to do your own soul surgery. Where is your secret sin? With some of these I name, I could identify.

There was a period of time in my ministry where I talked about my wife's being my partner, but she wasn't. In fact, it came to such difficulty after 10 years of marriage, she said to me, we were in Boston ministering at a little church there, and times were hard for us, and the future was bleak, and the weather was dreadful, and the congregation wasn't growing, and neither was I. And I was eating supper with her one evening. She said, you know, honey, I think you should stop telling people that we're partners.

I thought I misunderstood her, and so I corrected her, which I did a lot of then. And she said, no, I mean it. I don't want to hear you say that again, because we're not.

You have your life, and I have mine. You go in your direction, and I suppose I'm supposed to find my direction, but we're not partners. She says, I vowed that I would stay with you for the rest of my life, and I'll never leave you, no matter what.

But I want you to know, and tears are running down her face, she said to me, you and I aren't in this together, so quit telling them we are. She left. She went up to her room, and the kids were down for their night, and I sat there with a table full of dishes and looking out a window where everything was dark.

And I walked upstairs, and I said to her, you're right. She didn't hear me say that much the first ten years of our marriage, but I needed the coal from the altar applied to my distant relationship with my darling wife, Cynthia. We began a process together that took about four, four and a half, almost five years to work it through.

As *Insight for Living* began and grew and time passed, years later, I'll never forget the day, though she had forgotten, somewhat forgotten our conversation in Boston, and she was by then really running the ministry, which all of you who know about it know that she does that so well. She said to me, I had a great day. Let me read you a couple of letters, and she did.

She said, listen to this one from the Philippines, and read this, and listen to this, and her eyes just were dancing. Kids are now older teenagers, and one of them is married at that time, and she said, you know what's so much fun about this? She said, we're partners. It was one of the greatest breakthroughs of my life.

Took me, took me years to get there, because I didn't know how to be a partner. I didn't know how to be a preacher. I just didn't know how to be a partner.

I knew how to minister to congregations. I just didn't know how to minister to my family. And neither do some of you.

This is the time to admit it. Your conflict may be with your mate or with your child, and it may still be unresolved. As Joe pointed out so clearly today, that impacts your prayer life.

That undercuts your ministry. You cannot leave it alone. You must be broken before God about it.

With a shattered and a bruised spirit that says, oh God, this is the real me, and I hate what I see. But more importantly, you can heal it. It may be a strife between you and some church board member.

Between you and a staff member. You and a member of your church. And you come and you listen to three days of this great American preach-off.

And you go back with a book full of sermons, carrying the grudge. It may be an unforgiving spirit. It may be chemical dependency.

We would be shocked to know how many alcoholics are in this room today. It may be drug abuse. It may be wife abuse.

You may be touching one of your daughters where you should not be doing that. Incest. It may be the secret viewing of pornography.

It may be plagiarism. Where you're living off someone else's sermons. We were late getting our sermon tape out one week.

At the church I once pastored in Fullerton. And we got a phone call in our tape department. Rather panicked voice on the other end said, where's my tape? And the lady who answered the phone and worked in our department said, well, we're a little late getting it out this week.

What do you mean? She said, we're not going to be able to mail it out until next month. You can't do that! What will I have to preach Sunday? Found out the man took what I had preached the previous Sunday, listened to the tape, and he just stayed a week behind me. It's plagiarism.

Could be gluttony. You eat too much. Could be a critical spirit.

You talk too much. Could be an uncontrollable temper. Could be envy.

Or the cardinal sin of pride. Or those sins that Jesus hated most of all, sins of hypocrisy. I don't know.

I do know this. But until you come to terms with it, it's going to have a drastic effect on your ministry. Or it is, and it won't let up.

I love Isaiah's response. It is so authentic. Woe is me.

There's no rationalization. There's no blaming. There's no pointing a finger at anybody else.

There's no excuses. Just woe is me. My lips, my lips, Lord, they're unclean.

What's yours? I want us to bow our heads. I know you've been here a long time. I know what time it is.

Forget that for a few moments. David Bryant and I want to conclude this evening in a special way with the help of our musicians. We want this to be a special time of repentance, which is crucial to this whole thing.

Brokenness is really the fruit of repentance. I want you to sit quietly right there. We've had a lot of laughter today and a lot of fun, a lot of moving moments.

I think it's time for quietness. When God wants to do an impossible task, he takes an impossible man and crushes him. This may be the whole reason you came to the clergy conference.

I want you to look down at your hands, which are in your lap. Leave your hands open. Isaiah writes elsewhere, Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yes, she may forget, but I will not forget you.

Our Lord says, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands. Your ways are continually before me. Your hands.

As you stare into the palms of your hands, you have thoughts that are all your own. You know your secret life. You know your legalism, your hypocrisy.

You know your tendency toward holding a grudge, your temper, your lust, your greed, your envy, your gluttony, you name it, your pride. I want you to burn that right into your hands, whatever may be that besetting sin. Maybe not another soul on earth knows it, but I want you to put it right there in your hands.

I want you to close your hands. Okay? Just keep your head bowed. Close your hands.

Now, in a symbolic way, I want you to give this to God. By closing your hand, you're saying, woe is me. I am ruined.

I'm not looking. We're not looking. We're all in this together.

I want you to lift your hand and release it to Him. Just let it go. Let it go.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Just leave your hands open. When I repent, I turn around in my mind.

I've been moving in one direction. Repentance sends me in another direction. I've been wrong about this.

Repentance makes me right as I turn in obedience to Him who has cleansed me. If it has harmed another person, I make it right with that person. If she or he is alive, I'm releasing this to you, Lord.

I'm giving this to you and I'm claiming your great, merciful forgiveness. Cleanse me, O God, and know my heart. See if there be any way of pain in me and lead me in the everlasting way.

Repeat that with me. Cleanse me, O God, and know my heart. See if there be any wicked way in me and lead me into the way of righteousness.

Purify my thoughts. Cleanse my lips. Open my heart.

Stand quietly. Heads bowed. Arms down.

It's a very significant part of the evening. We don't want you to leave. Lights are down.

This is the time for you. You've listened to us. This is your time.

Having been cleansed by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are not on probation. Our focus now turns to Christ. We're moving from guarding the flame to spreading the flame.

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