

The First Word of the Gospel

by J. Edwin Orr

J. Edwin Orr emphasizes that the first and essential word of the gospel is 'repent', highlighting its critical role in true Christian conversion.

Duration: 54:02

Scripture: Matthew 3:2, Matthew 4:17, Matthew 9:13, Mark 1:14-15, Mark 6:12, Luke 13:3, Luke 24:46-47

Topics: "Gospel"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of repentance in the preaching of the gospel. He refers to the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 4, verse 17, where Jesus began his preaching by saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' The preacher highlights the need for true repentance and a change of heart in order for someone to truly come to Christ. He warns against the danger of leading people to the Lord without emphasizing repentance, as it can lead to a superficial faith that is not truly transformative. The preacher concludes by stating that a revival or awakening can only come through a preaching of repentance, as it is the first word of the gospel.

Transcript

The weekend before last, I had just finished lecturing three hours a day in Pasadena, and then I came down with a bronchial cold. I was supposed to speak at Mount Hermon to a pastor's conference near San Francisco, but I had to cancel it. My wife didn't want me to come any further, but I said, I'll go, she said, but it's going to be snowy there.

I said, I know, but the doctor gave me an antibiotic and some cough medicine, so I came at a certain amount of risk. You came at a certain amount of risk tonight through the snow, so here we are together. I would be glad if you would pray for me that my voice will hold out throughout this whole series.

I'm sure the Lord will answer prayer. I was talking to Dr. George Gallup the other day, some months ago. He told me that the number of people in the United States who claim to be born again has risen from 46 percent of the population to 53 percent.

Some months ago I quoted that to 50,000 people in the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, and some started to applaud. I stopped them right in their tracks. I said, I don't believe that.

I don't believe that 53 percent of the population of the United States is born again. I have lived in the same house on the same street in California for 34 years. That's a record for California.

You couldn't convince me that more than half my neighbors are born again. I asked Dr. Gallup how he reconciled that with the present crime wave. He said, I suppose it's what they mean by being born again.

Surely there must be something wrong somewhere. In our recent lifetime we notice that handicapped people are being given certain help. They have ramps of post offices.

There's a concern among public health officers for those who have birth defects, through some accident of nature, have a handicap. Has it occurred to you that maybe what's wrong with us in the States is the fact that many people who claim to be born again really suffer severely from birth defects, that they never fully understood what it meant to be born again? Do you remember some years ago, not too many years ago, a certain notorious pornographer announced that he was born again? Well, I remember leading a gangster who had done time for murder to the Lord, and he's now an evangelist in Arizona. So I thought, well, this is really amazing, let's see.

Now of course I do not subscribe to the hustler, but some of the students at the seminary got a copy of the first editorial published after this man's so-called regeneration experience. There was the headline for an editorial, Born Again? Yes, I am born again. I now follow the spirit of Buddha, Mohammed, and Jesus.

The poor guy didn't know the score, and apparently still doesn't know the score. But whoever told him he was born again? Therefore it behooves us to ask some questions. What does it mean to be born again? What does it mean to be converted? What does it mean to be a Christian? And I'm going to begin by asking a question of all of you.

What is the first word of the gospel? Now, when I ask this question, I get very varied answers. One man shouted, John 3, 16, love! I said, thank you, that's in the gospel, all right. Someone shouted, only believe! I said, yes, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.

That's in the gospel. One man shouted, heaven! Another man shouted, hope! And someone said, civil rights. Well, that's in the gospel, too.

One man was annoyed with me, and he said, the gospel is so rich, it has so many words of significance, how could you say there is a first word? Well, the English alphabet has 26 letters. Ask any kindergarten kid, what is the first letter of the alphabet, and he will tell you condescendingly, the letter A. So you say to him, why is A the first letter of the alphabet, and he will say, because it is. And if you say, why because it is, he will say, it always comes first.

A is the first letter of the English alphabet, the first letter of the French alphabet, the first letter of the Spanish alphabet, the first letter of the Russian alphabet. Alpha, the same letter, is the first letter of the Greek alphabet. Aleph, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Now, don't confuse me with Chinese. The Chinese don't have an alphabet. They use ideographs.

You know, the Chinese word for peace is a little picture of a roof with one woman under it. The Chinese word for war is a roof with two women under it. Little pictures like that.

But ask any Chinese of your acquaintance, what is the first letter of the alphabet, he will tell you the first letter of the only alphabet he has ever learned, the English alphabet, the letter A. Now, could we say there is a first word to the gospel? You say, well, how would you establish that? Very simply. See, if you follow me. If the first word in the mouth of John the Baptist were the same as the first word in the mouth of the Lord Jesus, if that were the same as the first word in the mouth of the Twelve Disciples, if that were the same as the first word in the mouth of the Seventy Disciples, if that were the same as the first word in the Lord's last instructions to his disciples, if that were the same as the first word in the mouth of the Apostle Peter at Pentecost, if that were the same as the first word in the mouth of Paul the Apostle who what? His journeys.

Surely that would be the first word of the gospel. You say, why didn't you mention Billy Graham or Pope John Paul? Well, Billy Graham and Pope John Paul have to refer to the Gospels to find out what the first word is. We're going right to the root of the thing.

The first word in the mouth of John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus, the Twelve Disciples, the Apostle Peter, the Apostle Paul. What could come before that? So let's just establish it. In those days came John the Baptist preaching the wilderness of Judea and saying, Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Make a mental note. Matthew's Gospel, chapter 4, verse 17. Then Jesus began to preach.

Had he preached before? No. This was his first time? Yes. Then what did he say? Then Jesus began to preach and to say.

That means he kept on saying this. It wasn't a one-liner. Then Jesus began to preach and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Make a mental note of that. If you read the rest of the Gospel of Matthew, you'll find that word occurs another three times in the preaching of the Lord Jesus, when he was most compassionate, when he was most impassioned. There are some good people who make a distinction between the gospel of the kingdom of heaven and the gospel of the kingdom of God.

Out of deference to their odd view, I'll say let's look at the gospel of Mark, which uses the phrase, kingdom of God. After John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying that time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel.

The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand. That was introduction. What was his first word of challenge? Repent and believe the gospel.

Our Lord Jesus Christ trained twelve men to multiply his ministry. He coached them, rehearsed them in what to say, and they went out and preached that men should repent. There's that word again.

If you read the rest of the gospel of Mark, you'll find the same word occurs again in the preaching of the Lord Jesus, when he was pleading with people, when he was denouncing hypocrisy. He uses that word. Someone might say, but perhaps as gospel preaching developed, the concepts became a little more sophisticated, perhaps they changed.

Here's a fair test. Let's look at the end of the gospel of Luke, when he was saying goodbye to his disciples, giving their last word, as it were. He said it behooved Christ thus to suffer.

Why? That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem. Did you take in the significance of that? He said, in effect, the reason why I died on the cross was that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached to everybody, starting at Jerusalem. It must have been a great day for the Apostle Peter to stand before a vast multitude and preach the death and resurrection of Christ.

They were smitten with conviction. It says they were pricked in their heart. The better word is they were stabbed in their heart.

And they said, men and brethren, what shall we do? The Apostle Peter must have remembered what he had been told to say, because he said, repent and be baptized, every one of you, for the remission of your sins. Exactly what he had been told to say. When he reached the climax of a second great sermon, he said the same thing in slightly different words.

Repent and be converted that your sins might be blotted out. If you read the rest of the Acts, you find the Apostle Peter continued to preach this message. So what about the Apostle Paul? We know that he was converted on the road to Damascus.

We know that he had a vision of the Lord Jesus Christ. We know that he began to preach right away. But it does not tell us immediately what he preached.

It does tell us that the believers were scared of him. He had come up to arrest them, and they were hiding from him. It just seemed too good to be true.

Here is this man, he started to preach the gospel. But he told us many years later what he said. Whereupon, O King Agrippa, he said, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but first at Damascus, then at Jerusalem, then throughout Judea, and then to the nations, I told them that they should repent and turn to God and produce works meet for such repentance.

Did you take in what he said? Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. What does that mean? The Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him in person and told him what to preach. The Apostle Paul, Saul of Tarsus, had not been among the company of the disciples.

They had been told what to preach, but not Saul. So he said, I was not disobedient. I did what I was told.

What was he told? I told them they should repent and turn to God and produce works meet for such repentance. How can anyone avoid the conclusion that the first word of the gospel is the word repent? If the gospel is the sword of the Lord, the word repent is the point of the sword. I almost feel like pausing, as we do in a marriage service, and say, if anyone has any objection, let him now speak or forever hold his peace.

Do you disagree with what I said? What was the first word in the mouth of John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus, the twelve disciples, the Apostle Peter, the Apostle Paul? The answer is the word repent. Quite frankly, the average American Christian--Catholic or Protestant, whatever denomination--doesn't know this. The second mystery is that he doesn't know what the word means anyway.

Words do change meaning. When I came to the United States in 1935 as a young lay evangelist, I had a united campaign in the city of Seattle. We used the Moore Theater.

We had all denominations supporting us. The meetings were organized by a Presbyterian doctor. Not only did he do a good job organizing, but he had me stay in his own home.

It was my first taste of American hospitality. I wrote to my mother back in the old country and told her how wonderful it was. When I was saying goodbye, I thanked him for all the good work he had done.

I wanted to say something nice about his good lady, so I said, I think your wife is one of the homeliest women I've met in my life. Although that's nearly fifty years ago, I still remember what he said. He said, What? By extrasensory perception, I realized I'd used the wrong word somewhere.

So more carefully, I said, I think she's one of the homeliest ladies I've met in my life. Well, he said, she isn't exactly a movie star, but she's pretty, don't you think? I said, yes, she's pretty, but even more homely. He said, what do you mean? I said, what'd I say? He said, what does homely mean where you come from? I said, sweetly means sweet like, nicely means nice like, quickly means quick like, and homely means home like.

I said, you see, it's originally spelt with a K, but they dropped the K. Well, he said, not in America. I don't know how he got it twisted, but he said, the word here means ugly. Now, I was surprised.

I said, what have you got against home? I said, isn't home sweet home an American song? Oh, he said, you mean homey. All right, if you want to talk baby talk. She sang so sweetly, he played so nicely.

Oh, no. Now, I'm not joking about this. Outside United States, and possibly I'd say Canada's rather ambivalent about it, they know what the word homely means up there, but the word homely in English means home-like.

How did that word ever change? I haven't the foggiest idea. My son Alan, who came up through California high school, he said, well, Dad, it means some woman who's so plain she ought not to leave home. Now, that was accidental.

But sometimes they change words deliberately. When I was last in Europe, I noticed that Eastern Germany is called the German Democratic Republic. Abraham Lincoln said democracy was government of the people, for the people, by the people.

But Eastern Germany has been stuck with the same dictatorship that was fastened on them by Stalin at the end of World War II. They tried to change, they tried to change in Hungary, and they tried to change in Poland, yet they call themselves the German Democratic Republic. Don't you think that's deliberate? That's meant to fool somebody? You'd be surprised to know that behind the so-called Iron Curtain, they call themselves the democracies.

Now, would it not be a masterstroke of the enemy of the Christian faith to take the very first word of the gospel and change its meaning in people's minds so that it doesn't have any effect anymore? Well, that's exactly what's been done. The meaning of the word repent has been perverted. Sometimes its necessity is denied.

Some people restrict its application. Now, I take it that most people who earn their living don't have much chance to learn Koine Greek, New Testament Greek. The Greek word that's translated repentance is metanoia.

M-e-t-a-n-o-i-a. Meta means change. Noia means thinking.

We have words like that in English. When a caterpillar becomes a butterfly, it changes form. Sprout swings, flies away.

It's still the same creature, but it has changed form. So we call that meta, change, morphosis, form. Now, the word metanoia, without any fear of contradiction, means a change of thinking.

But that's not what it means to the average person in America. A lot of people think the word means to feel sorry. It doesn't mean to feel sorry.

It might involve feeling sorry. It might involve feeling glad. The essential meaning of the word repent is to change.

You say, well, how did it get mixed up? It was an error of translation. Our first English Bible was translated from the Latin, and they borrowed a Latin word, penitentia, to translate metanoia. Now, penitentia means a sense of suffering.

We talk about sending a man to the penitentiary. We talk about penitence. But the word doesn't mean that.

One of the greatest Greek scholars of all time was Richard Trench, Archbishop of Dublin. He defined repentance as that mighty change of mind, heart, and life, wrought by the Spirit of God. That mighty change.

Whereas we treat it as a sentimental, emotional thing. He repented, that means he started to cry. No, no, the word doesn't mean to feel sorry.

It means to change. You who don't have time to study New Testament Greek may have seen a little translation called the Amplified Version. It gives shades of meaning.

It defines metanoia, repentance, to think differently, to amend your ways. By the way, the French word for repent is amendez-vous, the same word, to amend your ways, to abhor your past. In other words, a change of thinking, a change of behaving, and a change of feeling.

You say, which is it? All three. When Nicodemus came to the Lord by night, what was his problem? Was he an immoral man in the grip of some awful addiction? No, no, he was a good living man, member of the Jewish Council. But when the Lord Jesus said to him, if I explain earthly things to you and you don't understand me, how can I explain heavenly things? His problem was thinking.

Just as, for example, if a Buddhist priest came into this meeting and talks to me about Christ, do I tell him about his sins? No, Buddhist priests are good living men. The eightfold way is excellent ethics. Christians say, do unto others as you would have others do unto you.

The Buddhists say, don't do unto others what you wouldn't want them to do to you. The ethics are the same there. But a Buddhist is an agnostic, doesn't believe in God, so he can't believe in the deity of Christ, so he must change his thinking.

Now take, for example, the woman taken in sin. What was her problem? Confused thinking? No, no. She was caught in the act and she didn't deny it.

What did the Lord tell her? Go and sin no more. It was a problem behaving with her. And if an old drunkard came in here tonight and I spoke to him about the Lord, I said, what do you know about Jesus? He might say in his maudlin way, Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.

He knows that all right. It's not thinking, it's his bad habits. Take the rich young ruler who came to Jesus and said, I have kept all the commandments since I was a boy.

Note, the Lord didn't contradict him. He loved him, commanded him. But he put his finger on his problem, he said, sell all that you have and give it to the poor.

He went away sorrowful. Why? He loved his money more than God. And if a Wall Street broker who gets his kicks out of money-making comes here, we'll have to tell him, no, no, you've got to put God before mammon.

You see, it's a very rich word. The word repent is used in such a sense that when John the Baptist used it, he said, repent and bring forth fruits for such repentance. And the Apostle Paul said the same thing, I told them to repent and turn to God and produce works meet for such repentance.

There are some good people who teach that the gospel of repentance was preached to the Jews only. A famous Canadian gave me a tract he had written which was entitled Peter or Paul. In it he said, Peter preached a gospel of repentance to the Jews, but Paul preached only belief to the Gentiles.

And even when Peter spoke to the first Gentile converts, he didn't use the word repent. That intrigued me. I turned to the Acts of the Apostles and I found to my amazement he was right.

You know how it was. There was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a captain of the Italian regiment, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave liberty to the people, and prayed to God always. There was a good living man.

Sure enough, if you read the rest of the chapter, you find not one word telling them to repent. But I once heard Dr. Campbell Morgan say, a text without the context is nothing more than a pretext. So I read on into chapter 11.

When the Apostle Peter went back to Jerusalem to tell the Jewish Christians why he had broken the rules of segregation and had been eating and drinking with Gentiles, which was forbidden, he said, if then God gave them the same gift that he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to stand against God? When they heard this, they were silenced. And they glorified God, saying, Then to the Gentiles also, God has granted repentance unto life. Whatever it was that Cornelius did, the Holy Spirit called it repentance.

You say, just a moment, you say the word means to change? How did he change? He was a devout man? Did he cease to be devout? No. He feared God? Did he stop fearing God? No. He gave liberally? Did he stop giving? No.

He prayed constantly? Did he stop praying? No. Then how did he change? Think it through with me. Up to that time, Cornelius, who was what was called in Greek a God-fearer, was trying to be saved by his good works.

After that time he put his trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ, and that was a change. A well-known Christian speaker in the States said to me, Edwin, I didn't repent when I became a Christian, I just believed. I said, maybe you misunderstand.

I was converted on my ninth birthday. My own mother led me to Christ. I still remember this as if it were yesterday.

She said, Son, isn't it time you put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior? I said, but ma'am, I do believe in Jesus. She said, but can you say he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities? I finished the verse for her. I knew the whole of Isaiah 53.

I said, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. I said, I believe that. Mother was struggling for the right words to say to her little boy, so she said, can you say he was wounded for my transgressions, he was bruised for my iniquities? And somehow or other it got through to me.

If you were to say, when did you become a Christian, I would say on my ninth birthday. Up to that time I shared the Orr family religion. I believed what the family believed.

I answered what they would have answered, in my own way. But after that, it was my faith. It was my experience.

I heard someone interview Ruth Graham on television recently, and said, Mrs. Graham, when did you become a Christian? I said, I don't rightly know, because I was brought up in a missionary home in China. We read the Bible every day. But she said, I did find my old Bible when I was a little girl, and in Isaiah 53 I found I had written, he was wounded for Ruth's transgressions, he was bruised for Ruth's iniquities, the chastisement of Ruth's peace was upon him, and with his stripes Ruth is healed.

She said, I know I was a Christian then. Ruth Graham was converted exactly the same way that I was. It wasn't a dramatic conversion.

I assure you, before my conversion, I hadn't shot a single policeman, or robbed a bank, or anything like that. But it was a change for me. So you see, some people misunderstand, but when people say that only Jews are supposed to repent, and Gentiles are supposed to believe, there's something wrong here.

That means the next time Billy Graham has a crusade in the Madison Square Garden, he has to say, you Jews from the Bronx need to repent, but you Gentiles from Jersey City, you need only to believe. That's what some people teach. But it's not in Scripture.

The Apostle Paul spoke to the faculty club at Athens, those professors of philosophy. He said, God commanded all men everywhere to repent. Only Jews? There wasn't a Jew present.

When Paul said goodbye to the church at Ephesus, he said, God's my witness for two years, from house to house, I preached repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Besides, it was the Lord Jesus who said, repent and believe the gospel. You say, well then are you telling me I need to do two things? To repent and to believe? Not two things, it's really only one thing.

If I said, leave Washington and go to London, is that one commandment or two? It sounds like two, but it's really only one. Allow me to assure you, you couldn't possibly go to London without leaving Washington.

And you cannot truly believe without repenting.

If you profess to believe without repenting, then it's false faith, not true faith. You say, does the Bible mention false faith? The brother of our Lord James said, what does it profit though a man say he has faith and have not works? Can that kind of faith save him? In other words, what's the test of believing? It shows through the repenting. That's why we are seeing whether or not this notorious pornographer had changed his lifestyle.

That should follow. It doesn't happen all at once, but it certainly starts when a man says, God be merciful to me, a sinner. I was chaplain of the Hollywood Christian group some thirty years ago.

A well-known Presbyterian Sunday School teacher, Dr. Henrietta Mears and I started what was called the Hollywood Christian group. Some of the converts you know, I'm sure, ever hear of Roy Rogers, Dale Evans, Colleen Townsend. She's the wife of Louis Evans of the National Presbyterian Church.

Red Harper, the youthful Christ evangelist, all those were converts of that work of grace. One night I was leading a meeting in the home of a famous producer in Beverly Hills, when whom should I see sitting in front of my wife but Mickey Cohen, the gangster. I can almost tell your age by saying whether or not you recognize the name.

In 1950 he certainly was the leading racketeer in the United States, with the government working overtime to try and trap him and put him away. He was too clever for them. They finally got him.

But there he was sitting in front of my wife. This was a meeting for movie stars. My first thought was, how did he ever get in here? Then I found he was brought by Stuart Hamlin, you know the man that wrote the song, It is no secret what God can do.

He was another convert of that work. That night the speaker was Billy Graham. But he gave no invitation.

However, I knew they were ready for some kind of invitation. Some had brought their friends in the entertainment industry, hoping they would be converted. So I said, if there's anyone here who would like to talk to Dr. Graham directly after the meeting or by appointment tomorrow, would you just raise your hand, we'll see and talk to you afterwards.

Half a dozen raised their hands. All came through, by the way. Then Mickey Corn looked over at Stuart Hamlin and he raised his hand.

I gave him a New Testament. Dick Halverson talked to him. Bill Bright talked to him.

Jim Voss talked to him. And he had an appointment with Billy Graham the next day, but didn't come through. Then a friend of mine, quote, led him to Christ.

He used that verse of scripture, Behold I stand at the door, knock, if any man hear my voice, will open the door, I will come in and sup with him, and he with me. He said, Mickey, all you need do is to invite Jesus into your heart. Mickey says, is that all? He said, that's what I did.

Now this publisher was a Baptist minister's son who had wandered away, and he knew the gospel, of course, came back again. So Mickey said, I could do that, couldn't I? My friend was so pleased. He flew Mickey Corn from Los Angeles to New York, put him up in the Waldorf Astoria to hear Billy Graham preach for a week in the Madison Square Garden.

But he never really came through. I still remember it flashing through my mind. He borrowed my friend's credit card and ran up a bill of five thousand dollars.

He said, I was obliging the sucker. They parted bitterly. He said to my friend since deceased, you didn't tell me I had to give up my career.

He meant his rackets. You didn't tell me I had to give up my friends. He meant the gangsters working for him.

You didn't tell me this, you didn't tell me that. If that's your Christianity, I want no part of it. Mickey Corn had heard that Roy Rogers was a Christian cowboy, and Colleen Townsend was a Christian actress, and Tim Spencer was a Christian songwriter, and Don Moomaw was a Christian footballer, and Frank Carlson was a Christian senator, and Mickey thought he could be a Christian gangster.

You laugh at that? Wouldn't you agree that in our churches today there are young people who think they can be Christian fornicators? At a famous Christian college a girl came to me and said, My boyfriend says there's nothing in the Bible against premarital sex. I said, You must be kidding. I couldn't think of a verse.

I said, I'll give you one. The Apostle Paul said, Flee fornication. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own personality.

She said, What does that have to do with premarital sex? I said, That's the meaning of the word fornication. Apparently she didn't know that. I said, Look it up! She came back the next day and said, My boyfriend says, Don't quote the Apostle Paul to me.

The Lord Jesus was more understanding. He said, Neither do I condemn thee. I said, Finish the verse.

That's what he said, Neither do I condemn thee. He said, Go and sin no more. That was adultery, not fornication.

Technically there's a difference. Adultery is extramarital sex. Would you like a verse of scripture of what the Lord Jesus said about premarital sex? If there is one, why is there one? He said it's not what goes into a man that defiles a man, but what comes out of him, and out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, fornications, thefts.

Why does it put such a nice thing as sex relationship in such bad company? You've got a point. Sex is the tender passion. Normal sex can be the highest expression of love between a man and a woman.

Sometimes I wonder when I read of these ghastly rapes and assaults and murders, has something gone wrong these days? But normally you could say it's the highest expression of love. If some thug punches an old lady in the face and steals her handbag, he can't feel very thrilled about it. But the sex relationship is a tender feeling.

What I see the teaching of scripture is it's wrong outside marriage. Marriage is a contract, and it's wrong outside that contract. Lots of people today don't seem to realize this.

There's something further I should say about this subject, is there are lots of good people today in the United States who tried to win souls to Christ without the word repentance. They never mentioned it. I was reading the fifteenth chapter of Luke, what we call the gospel parables, devotionally, and I decided to see how does each one finish.

When the shepherd found his sheep, he called together his friends and neighbors and said, Rejoice with me, I have found my sheep that was lost. That's the end of the story. You read no more about shepherd or sheep.

But the Lord Jesus quickly added, Just so I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine people who don't need to repent. Why did he say that? If he had not said that, some would have said the sheep never repented. You don't need to repent to be saved.

Take the story of the lost coin. When the woman found it, she called her friends and neighbors together, saying, Rejoice with me, I have found the coin I lost. You read no more about the woman or the coin, or her neighbors.

But the Lord Jesus quickly added, Just so I am telling you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Why did he add that? If he had not added that, some theologian would have pointed out that a coin is incapable of repenting. Therefore repentance could hardly be required.

Take the story of the lost son, the prodigal son. How does that end? The father said, It was fitting that we should make Mary and be glad that your brother was dead, but now he's alive. He was lost and now he's found.

That's the end of the story. You read no more about father, older brother, or younger brother, or anyone else. It's strange to relate.

The Lord Jesus didn't say a word about repentance. Why? It's in the story. When the young man said, I will arise and go to my father, I will say, Father, I am no more worthy to be called your son.

Make me a hired servant. That was his repentance. The fact that it is underlined in two places, and left in the other, emphasizes that repentance is part of our evangelism.

Yet it's not preached today. Instead of that, we tell people to invite Jesus into our hearts. They misunderstand.

I suppose Larry Flint thought he could invite Jesus into that mess in the Hustler. He never realized that Jesus wanted to take him out right away. You can invite Jesus into your heart, but that's not what the scripture says.

The scripture says, repent. That means change your attitude. It will result in a change of behaving and a change of feeling.

One well-known youth evangelist said to me, I just used Revelation 3.20. That's a verse for a church. No more about the woman or the coin, or her neighbors, but the Lord Jesus quickly added, just so I'm telling you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Why did he add that? If he had not added that, some theologian would have pointed out that a coin is incapable of repenting, therefore repentance could hardly be required.

Take the story of the lost son, the prodigal son. How does that end? The father said, it was fitting that we should make Mary and be glad that your brother was dead, but now he's alive. He was lost and now he's found.

That's the end of the story. We read no more about father, older brother, or younger brother, or anyone else. It's strange to relate.

The Lord Jesus didn't say a word about repentance. Why? It's in the story. When the young man said, I will arise and go to my father, I will say, Father, I am no more worthy to be called your son.

Make me a hired servant. That was his repentance. The fact that it's underlined in two places, the left and the other, emphasizes that repentance is part of our evangelism.

Yet it's not preached today. Instead of that, we tell people to invite Jesus into our hearts. They misunderstand.

I suppose Larry Flint thought he could invite Jesus into that mess in the Hustler. Never realized that Jesus wanted to take him out right away. You can invite Jesus into your heart, but that's not what the scripture says.

The scripture says, repent. That means change your attitude. It will result in a change of behaving and a change of feeling.

One well-known youth evangelist said to me, well, I just used Revelation 3.20. By the way, that's a verse for this church. For a church, not for unbelievers. But he said, I use it, but I hope they'll change.

I said, why don't you tell them? He said, in fact, I'm disappointed if they don't change. When I was last in the Philippines, I met a missionary and I asked him, when did you become a Christian? He said, I went forward in the Billy Graham crusade. I said, thank God for that.

I've met converts to the Graham crusades everywhere. But Billy told me once he was flying east. The little stewardess was fussing, Dr. Graham, would you like some more coffee? He said, Dr. Graham, my mother prays for you every day.

You sure you wouldn't like some more coffee? There was a big man up front under the influence of drink. Loud, profane, making passes at the stewardesses. And it so outraged this little girl that she went up and said to him tremblingly, sir, I must ask you to be quiet.

Did you know that Dr. Billy Graham is flying with us today? And the big mountain of a man got up, came down the aisle, and he said, where's Billy Graham? Billy said he didn't know whether he should introduce himself or not. He stopped opposite Billy, he says, you're Billy Graham. Billy said, that's my name, sir.

Billy, he said, put it there. Your sermons have really helped me live the Christian life. What was the difference between the missionary in the Philippines and the drunk passenger? They both professed.

The difference was repentance. If you want me to put it as bluntly as I can, returning to that word born again, the only evidence of the new birth is the new life. Yet this note is missing so much from our evangelism today.

And if, please God, we see another great awakening, it'll come through a preaching of repentance. It's the first word of the gospel. Have you ever seen men learning defense in gymnasium, so that no one gets hurt? They put a cork in the point of the sword.

Could you imagine British officers during the Battle of the Falklands saying, fix bayonets, but put a cork in the point of your bayonet so no one gets hurt? Oh no. Yet we find that we are being shackled today. And the tragedy is, every time you, quote, lead a person to the Lord, unquote, without his understanding repentance, and his heart doesn't change, it's ten times harder for somebody else to lead him to Christ.

Because he says, I went forward once. How many times have I said that? I went forward once, or I signed a card once, or I did this, or I did that. You say, what's the connection between this and the subject of our week's lectures, Revival and Awakening? Every great awakening has meant a renewal of the preaching of the first word of the gospel.

A lady came to me, who says, I'll close, speaking of a certain famous preacher, said, oh, it was so inspirational. So I said, what did he preach on? Well, she said, I can't remember the subject, but it was so inspirational. Well, I said, what was his text? She said, I don't remember the text, but it was inspirational.

I said, what was his topic? She said, I can't remember that either. This is February the 6th. I'm over 71 now, I don't know how many more months from the years the Lord will give me.

But if I should see you again, I'd be very disappointed if you didn't remember what I preached on. What did I preach on? What does it mean? Now you're on the spot. I call God to witness.

You know what the word means now. Whether you're a minister of the gospel or a humble worker in the church, any time you seek to influence anyone for God, don't forget the first word of the gospel. That's your duty.

It doesn't mean you must reform yourself. It just means you must change your attitude. If I had time, I'd give you quite a different talk on the use of the word repent to believers.

It occurs seven times in the seven letters of the churches. But there's no time for that tonight. Let us stand for prayer.

Oh, God, when we think of the need of our country, of the multitudes who are living in sin, of the grossness of immorality, and yet of the millions who call themselves Christians and claim to be born again, yet their lives have never changed. Help us to be faithful. We pray, we pour out thy Holy Spirit first upon the church, upon all true believers, to revive us to what we ought to be.

Then pour out thy Holy Spirit upon the masses, the victim of sin and of righteousness and of judgment. Grant then, Lord, that we'll be faithful in pointing them to Jesus Christ the way he taught us. Now may grace, mercy, and peace from Father, Son, and Spirit be our portion now and forevermore.

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