

Matthew
The Heart of Jesus' Teaching Ministry
Matthew 4:17
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I've entitled today's message, "The Heart of Jesus' Teaching Ministry." Now, why do we use the expression 'heart' in that way? Well, the physical heart in your chest is a muscular organ that's about the size of your two hands clasped together. Your heart weighs less than one pound, they tell us, and yet it is an amazing machine. The right-side pumps blood into your lungs as the left-side pumps it back into your body. Amazingly, your heart has its own electrical system, its own electrical supply, so that if it's supplied oxygen, it will continue to beat even separated from your body. It beats about 100,000 times a day, and with each beat, it pumps about four tablespoons of your blood. In a minute, your heart pumps one and a half gallons, which is about the volume of the blood in your body. In one minute, all of your blood has been circulated, and 2,100 gallons a day. In two weeks, your heart pumps enough blood to fill a 30,000-gallon railroad tanker. It's an amazing, amazing creation of God!

Because your physical heart is so central and vital to your life, we often use the word 'heart' metaphorically to mean 'the core of something,' 'the essence of something.' When we speak of 'the heart of the issue,' we mean 'the central—the most important aspect of that thing,' not the side details. Metaphorically, then, the heart of something is that which is inescapably central. So, in light of that, this morning, I want to ask you this question, "If you were forced to identify "The heart of Jesus' earthly teaching ministry," what would you say? How would you define our Lord's teaching ministry? How would you summarize the means that He used and the heart of its message? Well, fortunately, Scripture doesn't leave us alone on this; it actually answers this

question for us. Matthew condenses the entire teaching ministry of Jesus to one brief sentence, just one verse, but a verse that is pregnant with meaning.

Now, before we look at the verse together, let me first of all remind you of how it fits into the context and flow of Matthew's Gospel. So far, we've seen in the first 2 chapters, "The Messiah's Arrival." In chapter 3 through the middle of chapter 4, we've seen "The Messiah's Preparation." Today, we begin the third section of his Gospel, and it really gets to the heart of the matter, and that is "The Messiah's Ministry," the Messiah's ministry. It begins in chapter 4, verse 17, and runs all the way through chapter 16, verse 20. And this summary of His ministry, this description, I should say, of His ministry begins with a summary, and that summary is in one verse—it's in chapter 4, verse 17. That's the only verse that we're going to examine together today. Now, for those of you who are more mathematically inclined, let me just urge you to relax. I'm not going to do one verse at a time. You're not going to be, you know, approaching death before we finish Matthew's Gospel. But this verse warrants it, so let's look at it together. Matthew, chapter 4, verse 17, "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

As Matthew sets out to record Jesus' earthly ministry, he begins with this amazing summary of the method that Jesus employed, and the message that He preached. I want to look at those together. Matthew explains, for us, these two features about Jesus' teaching ministry. So, let's look, first of all, at "Jesus' Essential Method," Jesus' essential method—it is "The Preaching of God's Word." Now, you'll notice verse 17 begins, "From that time." As we learned last time, about a year after Jesus' baptism, and at the point of immediately after Herod Antipas' arrest of John the Baptist in verse 12, when those things happened, Jesus left for Galilee. There He

established His ministry headquarters in Capernaum, on the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee, and He began His Galilean ministry, a ministry that would last about eighteen months.

As Matthew introduces us to Jesus' ministry in Galilee, he begins by describing what can truly be called "The Heart of Jesus' Ministry." The central activity, the primary duty with which His ministry was consumed, and it's contained in a single Greek word, two words in English. Look at verse 17, "From that time Jesus began to preach," to preach. Now, the New Testament uses some thirty-three different verbs to describe biblical preaching. The Greek word translated 'preach' here is the primary one of those words; it's the word '*kerusso*.' It's usually translated 'I preach,' or 'I proclaim.' Literally, it means 'to be a herald,' 'to proclaim after the manner of a herald.'

Now, we don't have heralds today, so it's a little hard for us to sort of connect with this word, but this word was used in classical Greek. The related noun was used of a government official. There was an actual government official whose title was "The Herald," and he was appointed to summon and to speak to town gatherings on behalf of the ruler. It's not how it works today. If our government leaders want to speak to us, they do so through a news conference, or an address to Congress, or sadly, through social media. That's how they communicate, but it wasn't so in the first century. If you were a king in the first century, you sent your herald, that person who represented you, you gave him a message, you sent him to the community where you wanted that message to be circulated, he called the people together, and then he announced that message. He was the herald; he spoke on behalf of the ruler. So, this word 'herald,' or 'preach' here, always connotes a message that must be heard and obeyed because it comes with the authority of the one who sent the message.

When I was growing up, I had four older brothers, but I also had five older sisters, and my five sisters frequently gave me commands. Some of you understand that; you appreciate that. And what did I do with those commands that were frequently passed down from my sisters? Largely, I ignored them, unless my own physical well-being was at stake. But, on the other hand, if one of my sisters came and introduced their command with these words, “Dad sent me to tell you to...” the message now took on an entirely different meaning. And I was going to listen up, and I was going to respond. Why? Not because of the authority of the herald, but the dad she represented. That's the word ‘preach’ in the New Testament; it's someone who has been sent from an authority with a message that you better sit up and listen to because that authority is God Himself. In the New Testament, ‘to preach’ is to announce a message from God Himself, and to do so with authority.

Now, this is the ministry of New Testament leaders. Preaching was the heart of John the Baptist's ministry. Look back at chapter 3, verse 1, “Now in those days John the Baptist came preaching.” This same Greek word is used in Isaiah 61, verses 1 to 3, in the Septuagint, to describe what the Messiah would do when He came. And so, it's not surprising, then, that we're learning here this was the method Jesus, the Messiah, used—“He preached.” Look down at chapter 4, verse 23, “Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and (‘kerusso’) proclaiming (preaching) the gospel of the kingdom.” Turn over to chapter 9; chapter 9, verse 35, “Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and (‘kerusso’) proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom,” as well as healing. And we'll talk more about the significance of that when we come to this, but preaching was central.

Mark makes this point even more profoundly. Turn over to Mark, chapter 1, verse 14, “Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God,

and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’” And this wasn't just part of His ministry, some unimportant part—this was central! Later in this chapter, chapter 1 of Mark, Jesus teaches in the synagogue in Capernaum on the Sabbath. Then He heals Peter's mother-in-law. That night, after the Sabbath was over, huge crowds came, and He healed them all. The next morning, He got up early, went off to pray, and the crowds regathered, ready for another, “Let's have some more miracles.” And so, the disciples come to Jesus, saying, “Wow, look at this, it's working. The crowds are gathering, come back and do the same thing” (Paraphrase). Look at what Jesus says in verse 38, “He said to them, ‘Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for.’” This was what Jesus came to do; it was to preach; not to heal, He came to preach. This was His ministry.

Later, this would be the ministry of the Apostles as well. Look at Matthew, chapter 10, verses 6-7, when Jesus sent the Apostles out, He said to them, verse 6, I want you “to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” In Mark, chapter 3, verse 14, it says, “And He appointed the twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He *could* send them out to preach.” Paul had exactly the same commitment in Acts, chapter 20, verse 25, he's talking to the Ephesian elders, and he says, in my three-year ministry among you, he says, “I went about preaching the kingdom.” In the pastoral epistles, Paul commands every single church elder, everywhere, for all time, to preach the Word. More than fifteen years ago now, I received a flyer in the mail, and it's stuck in my mind, because it was a flyer for a most unusual church; it was for the Zero Church. I'm not making this up, true story, that really was its name, and its website said this:

Most churches are okay, but we think there should be something more basic, simpler, pristine, less concerned about an institution, a Zero Church. We have a warm community, but don't care a lot about formal membership. We have a band, but not much worship music. (I don't even know what that means. This was my favorite.) We have a talk, but no preaching,

Now, their strategy was not very successful. I searched this past week, and apparently it no longer exists. But sadly, like the men who led that church, many today think that preaching is outdated. But friends, Jesus didn't think so—this was the method—He came to preach.

Sadly, it's not popular today. Paul warned about that. Paul warned Timothy that there would be times when preaching, when proclaiming the truth of God as an official herald of God's own throne would be out of fashion, that it would be out of season. So, what do you do when you serve in a community in a society that thinks preaching is out of fashion, out of season? Well, 2 Timothy, chapter 4, verse 2 says, “Preach the word...(when it's) in season *and* when it's out of season.” Just keep doing it. This was Jesus' method. I don't stand up here and do this because I have some authority of my own. Listen, I'm just like my sister; don't listen to me; don't listen to my words; don't listen to my commands. The only reason you should listen up is if it's clear I'm speaking for the Father, His Word; that changes everything! And that's the method that Jesus followed and that every leader in the church is to follow. Preaching was the essential method of Jesus' ministry.

Now, back in our text, chapter 4 of Matthew, that brings us to a second feature of Jesus' teaching ministry, and that is “Jesus' Exclusive Message.” “Jesus' Exclusive Message” The Gospel of God's Kingdom.” Now, let's start by looking at “Its Description,” or we could say its label, its

title. Notice there is no label or title given in our text, verse 17, but go down to verse 23 because there, there is a title given, “Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming (He was preaching, here it is.) the gospel of the kingdom.” Now, the word ‘gospel,’ as you know, simply means ‘good news.’ It's the good news about the forgiveness and the righteousness that God gives to sinners, and He does so solely by grace alone because of the work of Christ alone, and it's received by faith alone. It's the good news that's made known in and through Jesus Christ.

You say, “When did the good news first arrive on this planet?” Genesis, chapter 3, verse 15. There, the second member of the trinity told Adam and Eve on the day of their sin that someday a unique human male would come and would permanently deal with sin. That's where the good news started. In the Old Testament, that good news is further developed, and we're told that the Messiah would bring good news. Isaiah 61, verse 1, “The Spirit of the LORD God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me (speaking of the Messiah) to bring good news to the afflicted; He sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and freedom to prisoners.” Jesus Christ brought the good news. Jesus is the good news.

Now, in the parallel passage, we read just a moment ago in Mark, chapter 1, verse 14, we find another label for this message, another description of this message. Not only is it “the gospel of the kingdom,” but Mark says this, Jesus came into Galilee preaching “The gospel of God.” That's the more common description, “the gospel of God.” Paul loves that expression, uses it often; Paul preached “the gospel of God.” Before him, Jesus preached “the gospel of God.” What is “The gospel of God?” The preposition there, ‘of,’ implies source, the gospel that is ‘from God.’ God is its source; it comes from Him. But as we saw here in verse 23, near our text, Matthew calls it the gospel ‘of,’ or ‘about,’ the kingdom.

Now, that brings us to a second insight about Jesus' exclusive message. We've seen its label, it's the gospel of the kingdom, it's the gospel of God. Now let's look at "Its Content." Verse 17, "From that time Jesus began to preach and say, (Here's the message; here's the content.) 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" So, what exactly was the content of Jesus' message, of this good news that He brought? Well, Matthew's summary of Jesus' exclusive message includes, notice, an imperative, "Repent," and an indicative. Let's start with "The Indicative." Notice verse 17, "Jesus began to preach and to say, '...the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." Matthew summarizes the entirety of Jesus' teaching on earth into this one basic concept, "The kingdom of heaven."

Robert Sose writes, "The concept of the kingdom looms large on the pages of Scripture. The kingdom of God is one of the grand themes, if not the theme, of Scripture." What exactly is the kingdom? Well, John the Baptist, Jesus our Lord, the Gospel writers, and all the Apostles used two phrases to refer to this kingdom. The first phrase is "The kingdom of God." The second phrase is "The kingdom of heaven." Now, some classic dispensationalists, traditional dispensationalists, like the ones at Dallas Theological, some of you grew up with the Schofield Reference Bible, those classic dispensationalists would say those two terms are actually talking about two different things. The kingdom of heaven is different from the kingdom of God, but the evidence does not support that. In fact, these two expressions are used synonymously by the Gospel writers. If I had time, I could show you a string and a list, I don't, but let me give you one example, our text. In chapter 4, verse 17 of Matthew, we're told of "The kingdom of heaven." In the parallel passage in Mark's Gospel, we read a moment ago, it's "the kingdom of God." So, it means exactly the same thing, just different wording, but exactly the same thing. So, think of an equal sign between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God. They're

equal. In fact, Matthew uses this expression, the kingdom of heaven, in keeping with the Jewish tendency not to overuse the name of God, but to refer not to Him by name, but to the place that He rules. So, Matthew prefers “the kingdom of heaven.” He uses that phrase some thirty-two times in his Gospel. He only uses “the kingdom of God” four times.

But what exactly do these phrases mean? If they mean the same thing, what exactly is “the kingdom of heaven?” Or to say it a different way, what is “the kingdom of God?” Well, a kingdom is simply “The realm over which a king rules.” So, biblically then, the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God simply refers to “The Realm over which God Rules,” or to say it differently, “The Realm over which Heaven Rules.” So, what is this realm that God rules? Well, the kingdom of God includes two distinct truths, or we could even say realms, although they're related. First of all, those phrases can mean “The Universal, Sovereign Rule of God over Everything.” For example, Psalm 103, verse 19, “The LORD (Yahweh) has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all.” That is His kingdom; everything is under His rule, is part of His kingdom.

But more often, this phrase is used, secondly, or these phrases, of “The Messianic, Mediatorial Rule of God.” In other words, this use of the kingdom is much more specific, and it specifically denotes the rule of God through His Son, the rule of God through the Messiah. This rule, as we saw, was hinted at as early as Genesis, chapter 3, but it's refined throughout the Old Testament. Here's the problem, however; this created a problem. In the Old Testament, the Messianic kingdom, the mediatorial rule of God through His Messiah seems to be primarily physical and political. So, when Jesus came in His first coming, that's what many of the Jews expected of Jesus. They thought this way, “If Jesus really is the Messiah, then He's going to defeat the Romans and currently, immediately, establish a physical, political kingdom.” And He will

someday. But Jesus taught, during His ministry, that although the Messianic kingdom is one kingdom, there are two distinct aspects. You have to have these in mind as you read the New Testament; two distinct aspects.

First of all, let's talk about 'The Present' aspect of Christ's kingdom. You realize that His kingdom is here, it's now. What is this present aspect of Jesus' kingdom? Well, Luke, chapter 17, verses 20 and 21, Luke writes this.

Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here *it is!*' or 'There *it is!*' (Listen to what He says.) For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst." (The kingdom is here, it's among you, it's present now.)

You understand that starting with the coming of Jesus, from that time until today, there is a present aspect of Jesus' kingdom. What is that present aspect? Listen carefully, "To enter the present aspect of Jesus' kingdom is simply to receive eternal life or to receive salvation." This is crystal clear! Turn over to Matthew, chapter 19; Matthew, chapter 19. Now, you remember the story of the rich young ruler, he comes to Jesus, verse 16, here's why he comes, "Someone came to Him and said, 'Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?'" So, he comes looking for eternal life; that's what he wants. You remember Jesus confronts him. Jesus says, "Listen, you think you've kept God's law. You haven't kept God's law, and He puts him to the test. If you really aren't an idolater and things haven't become so important to you, then go sell them, come follow Me" (Paraphrase). Doesn't mean everybody that follows Jesus has to sell everything they have. That was Jesus was putting His finger on the issue in this man's life,

the idol in this man's life, and of course he refused. He left because he had a lot of stuff, a lot of land. But watch Jesus' comment in verse 23.

And Jesus said to His disciples, “Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I say to you, (So He's going to say the same thing a different way.) it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man (Now watch, Jesus changes the phrase.) to enter the kingdom of God.” (So, kingdom of heaven equals kingdom of God.)

But what exactly does it mean ‘to enter?’ Look at the next verse, verse 25, “When the disciples heard *this*, they were very astonished and said, ‘Then who can be saved?’” So, kingdom of God equals kingdom of heaven, and to enter those in the present aspect of Jesus' kingdom is simply to enter into salvation. It's to be saved. This same Gospel of the kingdom was at the heart of the ministry of the Apostles. Acts, chapter 28, the last chapter of Acts, verse 23, Paul finally gets to Rome after the shipwreck and everything else, and it says:

When they had set a day for Paul, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening.

This was his ministry. The last verse of the book of Acts, chapter 28, verse 31, Paul was “preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.” You see, to enter Jesus' kingdom today is to enter a spiritual kingdom, to be saved, to be under His rule. That's why in Colossians, chapter 1, verse 13, Paul writes of all believers (What?) “For He (God) rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us

to (What?) the kingdom of His beloved Son.” That's what happened to you at the moment of your salvation if you are, in fact, a believer. So, the present aspect of the kingdom simply refers to the people over whose hearts Christ currently rules, His spiritual kingdom, those He has saved, and the church is simply the fellowship of those who have entered Jesus' spiritual kingdom. So, there's a present aspect of the Messianic kingdom.

But there's a second aspect, and that is “The Future” aspect of Christ's kingdom. For this, turn over to Matthew 26; Matthew 26. We're Thursday night of the Passion Week. Jesus is instituting the Lord's Supper, and He says this at the end of it in verse 29, Matthew 26:29, “But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.” So, there's a future aspect of the kingdom; didn't happen when Jesus was on the earth; didn't happen between His resurrection and His ascension, hasn't happened yet. It will happen someday when we enter into that future aspect of His kingdom.

Paul talks about this in 2 Timothy 4, verse 1, “I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom,” which follows His appearing. Verse 18 of that same chapter, “The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen.” So, there's a future aspect of the kingdom. It's not now; it's future.

And this future aspect consists of two parts. First of all, there is “The Millennial Kingdom” when Jesus reigns after the seven-year Tribulation on this planet, having renewed it, for a Thousand Years. Look at Matthew, chapter 25. Here, in the Olivet Discourse, Jesus talks about the judgment that happens when He returns in the Second Coming after the Seven-Year Tribulation. This is not the Great White Throne Judgment; that happens after the Thousand

Years, according to Revelation 20. This is at the end of the Tribulation of those who survive it. Verse 31.

But when the Son of Man comes in His glory (There's the Second Coming.), and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another” (so, person by person), as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.” (Now watch verse 34.) Then the King will say to those on His right, “Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

Jesus invites those believers, who survived the Seven-Year Tribulation, to enter into His Millennial Kingdom, the Thousand-Year reign on this earth.

But there's also another part of this future kingdom and that is “The Eternal Kingdom.” It comes after the Thousand Years is over. Peter talks about it in 2 Peter 1:11, “the eternal kingdom,” he calls it. In 1 Corinthians 15, verse 23 and following, “then *comes* the end, when He (Jesus) hands over the kingdom to the God and Father.” Now, that's just talking about the end or completion of Jesus' incarnational work. It's not that there are inequalities between the members of the trinity. It's talking about, “I've completed everything I was supposed to do, and then there is the eternal kingdom.”

Now with that understanding of the kingdom, go back to our text. Go back to Matthew 4, verse 17, as Jesus preached, notice His definitive statement, and this is key, about the present spiritual aspect of His kingdom. Verse 17, “the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” It has come near; Jesus means it's come near in a temporal sense. My spiritual kingdom is here, now! You can be a part

of it. The good news is that you can get into My spiritual kingdom now, and you can, therefore, get into My physical kingdom, My political kingdom, My literal kingdom forever. You can be part of God's kingdom. Now, you read verse 17, and particularly this statement, “the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” and if you're not careful, you can look at it in too shallow of a way. There is so much implied here. Think about what's implied in that statement.

First of all, sin is implied in that statement because what Jesus was saying to those listening to Him is, “You aren't in God's kingdom right now. In fact, you're in Satan's kingdom but you can be in my kingdom.” It's implied forgiveness, right? He says, “You can be part of God's kingdom even though you have rebelled against Him, even though you belong to a rebel kingdom.

(Why?) Because God's going to forgive your sins.” It also implies atonement; that God has to have made a way for rebels to be reconciled to Him and to be forgiven. How? Well, later, Jesus explains in chapter 26, verse 28 when He says, “My blood...which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” All of that is included in this expression, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand; Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” You know what Jesus is saying? He's saying, “Listen, even though you're a sinner, even though you're in an alien, enemy kingdom, even though you don't deserve it, you can be forgiven, and you can be transferred into My kingdom today, and that will be accomplished through the forgiveness I purchase in my death” (Summary paraphrase). That's the indicative for “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

But such profound good news calls for a profound response. That brings us to “The Imperative.” We've seen the indicative but notice the imperative. Verse 17, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” This is how you get into Jesus' kingdom. Here is the condition for entering His spiritual kingdom today and His eternal kingdom forever. And Jesus reduces this condition to one profound concept, repentance. Now understand this, when the conditions

for salvation are presented in Scripture, sometimes both faith and repentance are presented together. Mark, chapter 1, Jesus says, “Repent and believe the gospel.” They’re both there. On other occasions, only faith is mentioned, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.” But on still other occasions, only repentance is presented as the condition for salvation. Luke, chapter 13, verse 3, Jesus said “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” Peter, in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost in Acts, chapter 2, verse 38, said, “Repent...for the forgiveness of your sins.” It’s because the two go together as I’ll show you. But what Jesus says here is, “If you want to enter God’s kingdom, you must turn from your rebellion, you must repent!” This is the consistent message of the New Testament. Repentance is not something you can work up in your own heart; it’s something that is a gift of God. Acts, chapter 11, verse 18 says, “God grants repentance.”

But what exactly is repentance, what are we talking about? Let me give you the three elements of repentance. Here’s what true repentance looks like. You want into Jesus’ kingdom, or you think you’re in Jesus’ kingdom, here’s repentance. Number one, there is “The recognition that you have sinned.” 2 Timothy, chapter 2, verse 25, Paul says, “With gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.” In other words, at some point you have to realize, “You are in opposition to God and you’re wrong, the recognition that you have sinned.” I like Matthew 5, verse 3, “Blessed are the poor in spirit (the beggars in spirit), for theirs is (to them belongs) the kingdom of heaven.”

There has to be the recognition that you’ve sinned. You know, there are people who go through this world thinking they haven’t or if they think they’ve sinned, they just don’t think it’s that bad. They don’t think it deserves God’s justice and judgment. They think it’s going to work out all right. No, repentance begins with the recognition you’ve sinned.

Secondly, a genuine sorrow for that sin. Here's the emotional aspect of repentance. 2

Corinthians 7:10, “The sorrow that is according to the *will of* God produces repentance...leading to salvation.” In other words, it's not just, “Yeah, I've sinned.” No, it grips your soul. You realize what you've done to other people but more importantly, what you've done to God, your Creator and Sustainer.

And thirdly, repentance involves the determination to turn from everything you know to be sin in your life. Here's the volitional part of repentance. Acts 8:22, “Repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that...the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.” In other words, repentance includes a decision to abandon what you had planned to do. That's repentance. You say, “Well, can you give me a picture?” Yes, let me give you a couple pictures. Here's what repentance is like. Repentance is like a rebel who lays down his weapons and acknowledges his king's right to rule him. Or it's like a prodigal son who comes to himself and realizes he's thought all the wrong things about his father, and he comes seeking his father's forgiveness. Or it's like a criminal who confesses his crimes, agrees with the justice of his sentence, and pleads, in spite of that, to be pardoned. It's like a person who has destroyed a relationship, acknowledging that it's all his fault and seeking to be reconciled. That's repentance.

So, how does it unfold in the heart? What is “The Process of Repentance? Let me give it to you. Here's how it works. First of all, the first part of the process of repentance is, “The Word of God, empowered by the Spirit, produces conviction of sin.” Acts 2:37, “When they heard Peter's message, they were pierced to the heart and said, ‘What do we do?’” (Paraphrase). That's where repentance begins. It begins with being pierced to the heart, convicted of your sins. Secondly, “Conviction produces Godly sorrow.” 2 Corinthians 7:8, Paul says, “I caused you sorrow by my letter,” Godly sorrow—conviction produces Godly sorrow. In other words, not only are you

aware of your sin, but you also hate it, you're grieved by it. Number three, "Godly sorrow is accompanied by hope in the grace of God." In other words, it's not just negative. It doesn't leave you going, "Oh, there's no hope, drives you away from God." No, true repentance drives you to God, hoping in who He is, that He'll receive you in spite of who you are. Joel 2, verses 12 and 13, "Yet even now," declares the Lord, "Return." There's one of the Old Testament words for repentance, "Return to me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping, and mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments. Now return (Listen to this.)...for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness (steadfast love), and relenting (he relents) of evil." In other words, on the one hand, there's the recognition of your sin and the grief over that sin, a godly sorrow over it, but that godly sorrow doesn't push you away from God; it draws you to Him because you also hope in who He is, in His grace, and you say, "He will receive me." Number four, "Godly sorrow then produces true repentance." 2 Corinthians 7:10, "The sorrow that's according to the *will of God* produces a repentance without regret, *leading* to salvation." And then finally, "True repentance produces the fruit of repentance." Acts 26:20, Paul "*kept* declaring...that they should repent and turn to God (And listen to this.), performing deeds appropriate to repentance." Now, "the deeds appropriate to repentance" aren't repentance, but they're the fruit of repentance. That's how you can tell if it's real. Is it followed up by you do something about it? You actually work to change by God's grace and strength. This is how repentance works in the human heart.

Now, Jesus was God's herald. He came preaching, and He preached the Gospel. He preached the good news that God has made a way to make men right with Him through the work of His Son, His perfect life, His substitutionary death, and His supernatural resurrection. And if a person will repent, then he can enter His spiritual kingdom today. You can be under the rule of Jesus

Christ, His gracious rule today, and you can live with Him in His physical kingdom forever.

That is the message Jesus preached. The imperative, “Repent;” The indicative, “for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (here; you can belong).”

So, what are the “Key Implications” for us from this text we've looked at this morning? Let me quickly give you four of them. Number one, “Repentance is an essential part of the gospel message.” You say, “Okay, does anyone question that?” Yes, they do. Here's Lewis Sperry Chafer, co-founder of Dallas Theological Seminary. “The New Testament does not impose repentance upon the unsaved as a condition of salvation.” Listen, you compare what Chafer said with the message that Jesus preached that we just looked at together. Jesus actually gave repentance as the reason for the incarnation. In Luke, chapter 5, verse 32, “I have come...to call sinners to repentance.” He told his apostles in Luke 24, verses 46 and 47, “Thus it is written (in the Old Testament Scriptures) that the Christ (Messiah) would suffer and rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed (preached—*‘kerussowed’*) in His name to all the nations beginning from Jerusalem.” His apostles preached the same message. Mark, chapter 6, verse 12, “They went out and preached that *men* should repent.” On the day of Pentecost, Acts, chapter 2, verse 38, Peter said, “Repent...for the forgiveness of your sins.” Acts 17, verse 30, Paul to the Athenian philosophers finishes his message with these words, “God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent.” Acts 20, verse 21, Paul says, (I am) “solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” Repentance is a core part of the Gospel message. Don't ever listen to anybody who tells you that it's not.

Number two, “Christ is still preaching through Matthew's Gospel and He is calling you to repent.” You see, Christ preached this message, but he also told Matthew, His apostle, to write,

and so he recorded it for you. If you're here this morning and you don't know the Lord Jesus, if you're still in the kingdom of darkness, if you're still under the rule of Satan, Jesus, it's as if He is here this morning preaching this message to you again, and He's saying:

Friend, repent for the kingdom of heaven is here. You can belong to my spiritual kingdom. You can enjoy forgiveness of your sins. You can know me, your creator. You can be with me forever. Repent for the kingdom of heaven is here.

Number three, repentance is a test of the reality of salvation. If you want to know whether or not that profession of faith you made years ago is genuine, don't go back and try to unpack whether you were repentant enough then. Just ask yourself this question, "Is repentance what marks my life today? Do I live in repentance?" Jesus said in Luke 13:3, "Unless you repent, you will likewise perish."

Number four, and this is for most of us, "Believers' lives should manifest a life-long pattern of repentance." In other words, you don't just repent at the moment of salvation. You live in repentance. Psalm 32, David pouring out his heart. Psalm 51, David pouring out his heart. Jesus, in the Lord's prayer, what did He teach us to pray? He taught us to pray daily, "Lord, forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." 1 John 1:9, "If we are confessing our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Christian, if you began the Christian life with repentance, if that's how you got into the kingdom, then guess what? Your Christian life should still be marked not only by faith in Jesus, continuing faith in Him, but by continuing a life of repentance. That's Jesus' message. That's "The Heart of His Teaching Ministry."

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for our time together this morning. Use Your eternal Word in our lives. Lord, "The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever." Lord, may we respond to it appropriately.

I pray for those here this morning who don't know You. May they, this morning, recognize the reality that they are living under the rule and reign of Satan himself. They think they're free, but they're slaves. Lord, help them to see Your goodness and the goodness of Your Son, and may they recognize their spiritual poverty, recognize their sin, grieve over that sin, and come like beggars crying out for Your mercy, even today.

And Lord, I pray for those of us who are in Christ. Help us to rejoice in the message You brought us to believe that we, today, belong to Jesus' spiritual kingdom. We're under His rule, His gracious rule, and someday we will be with Him in His eternal kingdom forever. Lord, thank You for the truth of the Gospel, seal it to our hearts, in Jesus' name, Amen.