

³ For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.

⁵ I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,” and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.

5. Repentance occasions the greatest joy in heaven.

Luke 15:3-7

³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ ⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

- A. Luke 15 is the only time the Bible records Jesus telling three stories in a row that all made exactly the same point—the stories of a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost boy.
- B. Nothing rivets the attention of heaven any quicker than one who begins to wander away from God. And nothing is such cause for rejoicing as one who turns to come back.

The Ninety and Nine (Elizabeth Cecilia Clephane)

There were ninety and nine that safely lay
In the shelter of the fold;
But one was out on the hills away,
Far off from the gates of gold,
Away on the mountains wild and bare,
Away from the tender Shepherd’s care.

“Lord, Thou hast here Thy ninety and nine—
Are they not enough for Thee?”
But the Shepherd made answer, “This of Mine
Has wandered away from Me;
And although the road be rough and steep
I go to the desert to find My sheep.”

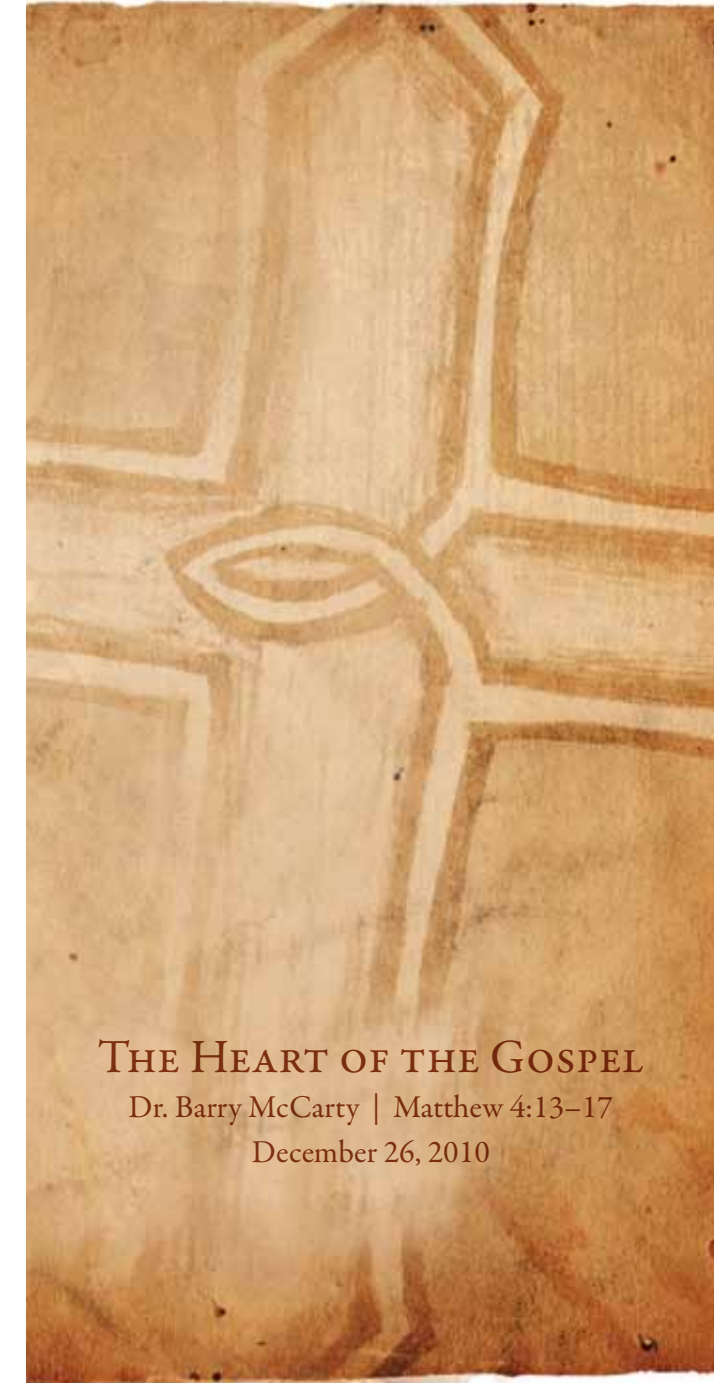
But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed;
Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed through
Ere He found His sheep that was lost.
Out in the desert He heard its cry,
Sick and helpless and ready to die.

“Lord, whence are those blood drops all the way
That mark out the mountain’s track?”
“They were shed for one who had gone astray,
Ere the Shepherd could bring him back.”
“Lord, whence are Thy hands so rent and torn?”
“They were pierced tonight by many a thorn.”

And all through the mountains, thunder-riven,
And up from the rocky steep,
There arose a cry to the gate of heaven,
“Rejoice, I have found My sheep!”
And the angels echoed around the throne,
“Rejoice, for the Lord brings back His own.”

Notes:

Sermon by Dr. Barry McCarty
Peachtree Christian Church—December 26, 2010
1580 Peachtree St. NW, Atlanta, Georgia 30309 | peachtree.org



The Heart of the Gospel

MATTHEW 4:13-17

¹³ And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴ so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

¹⁵ “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—¹⁶ the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.”

¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (ESV)*

The very first word of the gospel is not “love” or “grace,” but “repent!” From Matthew through Revelation, repentance is an indispensable theme that lies at the heart of the gospel message.

Repent!

Why is repentance so important?

1. Repentance realigns your character and conduct with your Creator.

- A. The New Testament word for repentance, *metanoia*, means to have another mind regarding your actions. This is not a casual changing of minor opinions, but a radical redirection of your entire life. It involves turning from sin and turning to Christ. Real repentance begins when you stop trying to defend your actions and simply admit that you were wrong. Repentance comes from a heart that is broken because your sin has broken the heart of God.
- B. Like scales that must be centered or any other instrument that must be reset to be accurate, each of us needs to be constantly put in a right relationship with our Creator.
- C. In C.S. Lewis’s *Perelandra*, the narrator describes a man’s encounter with an angel as seeing a vertical rod or pillar of light in a dark room. While the column of light appeared to be perfectly vertical, it was not at

right angles to the floor. To Lewis’s character it seemed that the column of light was actually vertical, but that the floor was not really horizontal. He writes:

“The impression . . . was that this creature had reference to some horizontal, to some whole system of directions, based outside the Earth, and that its mere presence imposed that alien system on me and abolished the terrestrial horizontal.”

- D. That is exactly what Christ does for you when you repent and turn to him. He alters your perception of everything. Our fallen world is turned on its side. And our flawed human nature is often wrong about what is right and good and true. It is only by knowing Christ that we can rightly understand ourselves, other people, and the world around us.

2. Repentance clears a path for sinners to return to God.

Matthew 3:1-3

- ¹ In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,
- ² “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”
- ³ For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.”

- A. You have powerful enemies—the world, the flesh, and the devil—who are bent on leading you into all kinds of destructive foolishness and sin. A constant, ongoing attitude of repentance offsets their negative influence.
- B. Repentance helps us “look where we’re going” and not stray off of God’s path.

Proverbs 4:26-27

- ²⁶ Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure. ²⁷ Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil.

3. Repentance brings the light of God’s life into your life.

- A. You are born into the dark kingdom of this world. Repentance is stepping out of spiritual darkness into the light.
- B. Matthew says that Jesus’ ministry fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that “. . .¹⁶ the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.”
¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 4:16-17)

C. Charles Wesley wrote:

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature’s night.
Thine eye diffused a quick’ning ray:
I woke—the dungeon flamed with light!
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

4. Repentance brings times of refreshing from the Lord.

Acts 3:19-20

¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰ that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.

- A. Psychologists often try to help patients relieve tension and anxiety by bringing their repressed feelings and fears to the surface, usually by talking about them. That process is called *catharsis*, which is a Greek word meaning to cleanse or to purge.
- B. Real catharsis doesn’t come from a psychology technique. It comes from confessing your sins to God and turning to him in genuine repentance.

Psalms 32:1-5

¹ Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. . . .

* All scripture references are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version** (Good News Publishers, 2001).

† Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, rev. ed. (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), p. 30.