

STANDARD A: WHO IS JESUS AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FOLLOW HIM?

Lesson 6: What Is Repentance?

Introduction

Just as Jesus called people to be His followers when He lived on earth, so He does today. All followers of Jesus have repented. They live humble lives. They live in ways that are pleasing to him. They live in fellowship with other followers. To signify their following Him in fellowship with others, they are baptized.

A. John the Baptist Called People to Repentance.

Before Jesus started His ministry, His cousin, John the Baptist told people to “repent,” and God would forgive them. To hear John, crowds came to the desert where he lived and preached. He criticized them. He called them “snakes” (Luke 3:7). Yet they still came to hear him. They knew that He spoke the truth about them. Many of the people became John’s followers.

Some people believed because they were Jews they would not be punished. They thought because they were children of Abraham God would not punish them. So they could do anything. John told them that being a descendant of Abraham would not protect them. If they did something they knew was wrong they would be punished for their sins. It did not matter they were Jews (Luke 3:8). Here are some examples in the Book of Luke.

1. Some rich people began to feel guilty. They had two tunics (coats) while other people did not have any. John told them to repent and to give away one of their tunics (Luke 3:11).
2. Some tax collectors came to John. They had cheated others. They knew they had done wrong. John told them to repent and collect only the right amount (Luke 3:12-13).
3. Some soldiers began to feel guilty also. They had taken money from people they were supposed to protect. Sometimes they had accused people of doing things they knew they had not done. John told them to repent and to be content with whatever salary they were paid (Luke 3:14).

Wherever people repented, John the Baptist told them they needed to produce “fruit in keeping with repentance” (Luke 3:8-9). That is, their lives needed to be different. *Repentance* was not simply what they did one time. Neither was it just being dipped in the water. Now that they had repented and been baptized, they could no longer do the hurtful things they once did.

John was not afraid to criticize the rich and powerful. He even told Herod the King he should repent. Herod was living with his brother’s wife. He did many other evil things. Herod refused to repent. He knew he would have to change his life if he repented. He hated John the Baptist and put him in prison (Luke 3:19-20).

John the Baptist’s message prepared the way for Jesus (Luke 3:4). John told people that they were sinners. Unless people recognized they are sinners, they would not realize their need for a Savior. Repentance was necessary to receive Christ as Savior.

John the Baptist could not offer salvation. He was only a man. He could baptize with water. The water symbolized a person was repentant and was determined to change his or her behavior. But Jesus Christ the Savior was God. He would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16). The Holy Spirit would bring a kind of fire in the hearts of people. The Holy Spirit would change the inner character of people. Then, they would have the power to live holy lives. (See also Acts 15:8-9).

Question:Who should repent?

Question:Look at the sidebar about repentance. What are three things a person must do to repent?

B. Dinner with Simon the Pharisee

One time Jesus was eating dinner with a man named Simon. He was a Pharisee. In the eyes of his religion, Simon was a very good man. He did not associate with sinful people. (See Luke 7:36-50.)

Simon and his guests were reclining around a low table. While they were eating, a woman came in. Everyone knew she was a sinful woman. She was probably a prostitute in the town. She had a jar of expensive perfume. She began to weep. Her tears fell on Jesus’ feet. She wiped Jesus’ feet with her long hair. Then she poured expensive perfume on His feet and kissed them.

Simon criticized Jesus. Simon thought it was not good for Jesus to have anything to do with a sinful woman. It was not proper to have someone like this woman touching Jesus.

Jesus spoke up. In fact, He told a short story.

Two men owed money. One owed much, and one just a little. Neither had money to repay what they owed. But the moneylender canceled the debt of both men. "Which one," Jesus asked, "will love the money lender more?"

The one who owed more would love the moneylender more, Simon realized. He had more debt to be canceled.

What was Jesus' point? Simon had not thought it necessary to repent of his sins. He thought he had little to repent of. But this woman felt sorry for her sins. She knew she had much to forgive. So she loved Jesus more.

The sinful woman expressed to Jesus how sorry she was for her sins. Jesus said to her: "Your sins are forgiven."

This disturbed the other guests. "Who is Jesus to forgive sins?" they asked.

Then Jesus told the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

Like this woman, followers of Jesus have said they are sorry for their sins. They come humbly to him. They grieve over the sins they have done. They repent. Sometimes, like this woman, they can hardly begin to count all of their sins. But their humility, their grief, their attitudes, and their behavior prove they are sorry. When people are truly sorry for their sins, Jesus forgives them, just like He forgave this woman.

Jesus saw faith in this woman. She knew Jesus is holy and she was unholy. She knew Jesus had the power to forgive. Christ is the Redeemer. Because she repented, and because she had faith in Jesus, He not only forgave her, but He saved or changed her. Probably she had not had much peace in her life, but Jesus told her to go in peace.

Followers of Jesus have turned from their lives of sin. It does not matter how many sins they have committed. It does not matter about their reputation in the town. God can change anybody. He can forgive, save, and transform all people. Then, they can turn away from the old habits or patterns of their sinful life.

Humility is an essential part of repentance. The woman in the Bible story was willing to humble and even shame herself so she could be forgiven.

Jesus told a short story about two men praying in the temple (Luke 18:9-14). One is a self-righteous Pharisee. A tax collector was present also. The Pharisee prays,

“God I thank you that I am not like other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector.” Like all good Pharisees, this man fasted twice a week and gave a tenth of his income to the temple. And he was proud of it. To him, it meant that he was a righteous man whom God surely would save.

But he is not the hero of Jesus’ story. Instead, the hero is the hated tax collector who stood at the rear of the Temple. The prayer of the tax collector is very different. It showed that he was both humble and repentant. He prayed, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” This man, not the Pharisee, is the one that Jesus said would be saved. Repentance is necessary for all followers of Jesus.

Followers of Jesus remain humble. They know they are worthy only of God’s anger. They know there is nothing good in themselves. They remember they are nothing without the mercy of God in their lives.

At the same time, followers of Jesus are living in new ways. They obey God rather than their own selfish desires. They accept God’s rule over them. Christ is their King. Even though they are still living in this world, they are living like people of Christ’s Kingdom should live. They are generous with what they have. They give to the poor. In their work, they do not take advantage of their bosses or the people they work with. They do not take money that is not theirs. They do not cheat other people. They treat other people with kindness and respect, including their families. In their sexual practices, they are pure.

Followers of Jesus are able to live as He wants them to only through His power. It is not by their personal strength. In Jesus’ death and resurrection God has defeated evil forces. He can defeat sin in His followers.

Living as a follower of Christ means “taking up the cross.” Followers may suffer for their faith. Life as a follower of Christ may be hard. Followers give generously to others. Sometimes they have little for themselves. A follower of Jesus knows that the most important things in life are not material. They are spiritual.

Followers of Jesus are able to live as He wants them to because of the Holy Spirit in them. Throughout their lives, the Holy Spirit is there to enable disciples to choose what is good. Jesus appeared to His disciples after His resurrection. In a similar way, the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Jesus, is still living in the middle of His Church. The Spirit of Jesus gives power to His followers around the world to live as He lived. Sometimes, Jesus’ followers even need His power to die as He died.

Followers of Jesus are able to live as He wants them to because of what God has done in Christ. They have the presence of the Holy Spirit, and they are now part of a group of believers, the Church. From the time of Jesus until now, there have been those who have followed Him. When we as followers of Christ feel discouraged or alone, our friends in Christ are there to support us. We pray for each other. Fellow followers give us guidance and strength. We are part of a local group of believers that cares for us. A follower of Jesus is never alone.

Being part of a fellowship like this – the Church – is a great privilege. We watch over each other. Each person is an example for the others.

But sometime even followers of Christ fail to follow Him as they should. This even happened to Peter when he denied he was Jesus' disciple (Luke 22:54-62). Like Peter, sometimes Jesus' disciples sin against their Lord and their neighbors. When this happens, disciples need to confess their sins to Christ and make things right as soon as possible (1 John 1:5-10). Telling other disciples when we have problems, when we are tempted, and when we sin can be helpful. We do not give up caring and loving each other just because there are problems, temptations, and sins. We encourage one another to keep following Christ.

Question: What does it mean to live as a follower of Christ?

Question: How do we take up the cross of Christ?

Conclusion:

Some people who heard Jesus teach thought they had no reasons to repent. They were already proud of their religious accomplishments. They showed scorn for sinners. They believed they were very different than sinners. But Jesus said they were like blind people.

Only those who were willing to confess their sins had hope for the eternal life that Jesus gives. The hopeless people received Jesus gladly and received forgiveness. They loved Him much and wanted to follow Him.

Activity: In your discipleship group, talk about how to help others turn to Jesus. Talk about how we can rely on Jesus for help every day. Talk about how to confess when we fail to follow Christ as we should.