

# The Fruit of Repentance

*Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*

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Today we begin in Nehemiah chapter 9:38 through 10:39. In the Hebrew Bible, the last verse of chapter 9 is actually the first verse of chapter 10. So the Septuagint, in the Greek when they translated it into Greek, I think they messed up this delineation. It should be, verse 38 should be the first verse of the chapter. Chapter and number divisions are not inspired, they were not there in the original. So chapter 9, verse 38, through chapter 10, verse 39.

The title of the message this morning is "The Fruit of Repentance." The fruit of repentance. We've been looking these last three weeks in chapter 9 at the soul-restoring grace of repentance, how repentance is such a great blessing. It's a gift of God but it is that which restores us to what we were created to be, and we saw that one of the things that is true of repentance is when God turns us back to himself, we see what we did not see before. We see our circumstances as we have not seen them. We see God as we have not seen him. We see the law of God differently. We see our sin differently. And so that's the essence of repentance but repentance also is known by its fruit, by the outcome. Genuine repentance is demonstrated in what flows after it.

So we're going to look at that this morning, the fruit of repentance. Before we do, I want us to pray and pray particularly as Ted was mentioning our brothers and sisters who labored in China and many of whom died during the Boxer Rebellion. I was reminded of our brothers and sisters in Afghanistan today who are being threatened by persecution and hostility, murder by those who hate God. So let's pray for them this morning as we pray for God to bless us that he be with them as well.

Let's pray right now.

*Father, we thank You so much for Your faithfulness and Your goodness and that You are the living God, that You reign sovereignly over all the affairs of men, that as You told Nebuchadnezzar and he testifies to us, that godless king that became a prophet, in a sense, in giving us part of Daniel, the fourth chapter. He came to understand that You are the one who reigns and that You set over the kingdoms of men of the kingdoms the lowliest of men, and we know that is true even today. We rejoice in the fact that Your sovereignty is reigning and ruling and so we pray this morning that in Your purposes as*

*You are accomplishing Your will, that You would protect Your people. We know we are to bear one another's burdens and fulfill the law of Christ and so we come today for our brothers and sisters in Afghanistan, those who have come to know Christ, those who are following You, those whom You have set apart for Yourself that will soon come to be believers, as You told Paul when he was in Corinth, "You have many more people in this place." And so You have many more people in Afghanistan that have not yet had their eyes opened to the gospel. Lord, protect all of them. Bring them all to Yourself. We pray for Your Spirit to minister and to give them courage, Your Spirit to give them wisdom to know the best way that they should proceed but that they would not deny You but that they would also have wisdom about how to carry themselves in these difficult days. We pray that You might work through our leaders, our President, our State Department, our military, that You might provide safety for those that need to get out of the country, and we pray that You might hinder the work of those who hate You, that they would not be able to, Lord, to hinder Your church. We thank You, Lord Jesus, that You are building Your church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. So we pray for our brothers and sisters to have that assurance and that they would love not this life but the life to come. And we pray that for ourselves, that we would not love this world but that we would place all of our hope in the world to come and long for that day and say with them, "Even so, come Lord Jesus." We pray now that You would use Your word to make our hearts what You want them to be. Grant us the grace of repentance ever more every day, and we pray that You would do that even this morning through Your word. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.*

The fruit of repentance. You know, repentance does produce clearly distinguishable fruit. I borrow the title actually from something that John the Baptist said when the Pharisees came out to see what he was doing. Remember, he was preaching and his message was, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The Pharisees came out to see what was happening and he called them a brood of vipers and he told them to bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance. You're coming out for the baptism of repentance. His baptism was a baptism of repentance to prepare the way for the Lord. The Jews were basically being called to acknowledge that they were as filthy as Gentiles. That's why they were being baptized. They were experiencing Gentile baptism which was what a Gentile who would come to be a Jew would be circumcised if he was a male and also baptized, and the baptism symbolized the washing of the filthiness of their lostness. But John's ministry to the Jews was to say, "Though you are children of Abraham by birth, by physical nature, you need to be washed in the same way as a Gentile."

So when John preaches that message, God begins moving in the hearts of the people and they are repenting and he issues that word, "Bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance," Matthew 3:8 and also Luke 3:8. Paul speaks of the same thing in Acts 26:28 when he says that he's calling the Gentiles to repentance and to the fruit commensurate with that. What is repentance? Well, it's something that is required. It's from the very beginning of John's preaching ministry, then when Jesus begins to preach, what is his first message recorded in the New Testament? "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel." It's throughout the New Testament. The New Testament ends in

the book of Revelation with the call to repentance still ringing out in chapters 2 and 3, Jesus calling the churches, the seven churches of Revelation to repent.

We've noted in previous weeks as we talked about this grace of repentance, that repentance biblically is a whole-personed turning. It's a turning of the whole person from sin to God. It's not merely something that happens in the mind. It does happen, it begins in the mind but it goes beyond that. It also engages the affections or the emotions, you might say. And finally, it engages the will so that the person's mind, affections and will are changed from loving sin to now hating sin and turning to God.

How do you repent? We've noted it's a gift. That's why we said the soul-restoring grace of repentance. It's something that God gives. He commands but he gives. He commands us to do it but you can't do it without his grace giving you the ability to do what he commands. We noted 2 Timothy 2:24-26 where Paul says that the man of God must not be quarrelsome but kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and be delivered from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

Repentance is something God grants. It's a grace. It's a gift. But it comes through the word. How do you repent? It comes through the word. This gift comes through the Scripture. This is what we see illustrated for us beautifully in Nehemiah 8 through 10. Repentance is a work of the Spirit of God where the Spirit of God brings the sinner to the awareness of his sinfulness, of his need of grace, and turns him. Remember the root idea of the word in the Old Testament is "to turn or to return; to make a 180." And so that is what we see on display in this revival that we have in Nehemiah 8 and following. The people of God are experiencing the Spirit of God bringing about true repentance on a large scale. The people return to God. They'd been walking away from God and we see them turn back to God. A whole-personed turning.

We've noted how we see their thinking change. They hear the word of God preached with understanding. They're convicted in their minds to think differently. We saw their affections engaged. They mourn over their sin. They're wailing in response to what they hear and they continue that sense of mourning into the ninth chapter when they gather with ashes on their head, fasting, in sackcloth, to mourn over their sin. And we see, then, the will is also engaged. There's a decisive change and we see this particularly even more in this particular chapter, the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter. We already saw it with them acting on what they were hearing but we see it come to a wonderful climax in this 10<sup>th</sup> chapter where they illustrate what it means to truly repent. And what we're going to see is the fruit of repentance is essentially a renewed energy for the things of God. There is a dramatic movement of God in the soul where the soul has been going one direction and now the soul is moved dramatically to return to God, this renewed energy.

So we're going to read the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter now. We're going to start in verse 38 of chapter 9 because that's the first verse of this 10<sup>th</sup> chapter. "Now because of all this," now remember they just ended up saying, "We're slaves. We are in great distress." They'd

expressed, poured out their hearts to God as we looked at last week. They poured out their hearts to God with this renewed vision of their sin and now having come to that full realization of their sin, they say this,

38 "Now because of all this We are making an agreement in writing; And on the sealed document are the names of our leaders, our Levites and our priests."

1 Now on the sealed document were the names of: Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah, and Zedekiah, 2 Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, 3 Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah, 4 Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, 5 Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, 6 Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, 7 Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, 8 Maaziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah. These were the priests. 9 And the Levites: Jeshua the son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel; 10 also their brothers Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, 11 Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah, 12 Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, 13 Hodiah, Bani, Beninu. 14 The leaders of the people: Parosh, Pahath-moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, 15 Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, 16 Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, 17 Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur, 18 Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai, 19 Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, 20 Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, 21 Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua, 22 Pelatiah, Hanan, Ananiah, 23 Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub, 24 Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek, 25 Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, 26 Ahiah, Hanan, Anan, 27 Malluch, Harim, Baanah. 28 Now the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants and all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the law of God, their wives, their sons and their daughters, all those who had knowledge and understanding, 29 are joining with their kinsmen, their nobles, and are taking on themselves a curse and an oath to walk in God's law, which was given through Moses, God's servant, and to keep and to observe all the commandments of GOD our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes; 30 and that we will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons. 31 As for the peoples of the land who bring wares or any grain on the sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the sabbath or a holy day; and we will forego the crops the seventh year and the exaction of every debt. 32 We also placed ourselves under obligation to contribute yearly one third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: 33 for the showbread, for the continual grain offering, for the continual burnt offering, the sabbaths, the new moon, for the appointed times, for the holy things and for the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and all the work of the house of our God. 34 Likewise we cast lots for the supply of wood among the priests, the Levites and the people so that they might bring it to the house of our God, according to our fathers' households, at fixed times annually, to burn on the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the law; 35 and that they might bring the first fruits of our ground and the first fruits of all the fruit of every tree to the house of the

LORD annually, 36 and bring to the house of our God the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, and the firstborn of our herds and our flocks as it is written in the law, for the priests who are ministering in the house of our God. 37 We will also bring the first of our dough, our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the new wine and the oil to the priests at the chambers of the house of our God, and the tithe of our ground to the Levites, for the Levites are they who receive the tithes in all the rural towns. 38 The priest, the son of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive tithes, and the Levites shall bring up the tenth of the tithes to the house of our God, to the chambers of the storehouse. 39 For the sons of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of the grain, the new wine and the oil to the chambers; there are the utensils of the sanctuary, the priests who are ministering, the gatekeepers and the singers. Thus we will not neglect the house of our God.

This is nothing less than the renewal of the covenant of Abraham among the people of God with God himself. This is a covenant renewal ceremony. They are binding themselves by the covenant of Abraham which has now been further elucidated in the covenant of Sinai, the covenant of Moses, and here they are recommitting themselves to that.

What's happened is they were, they came back to the land, you know, many of them most recently with Nehemiah, a number of them before had been there since Ezra came in the second return, and many more of them had come back 90 years before with Zerubbabel and Jeshua from Babylon. They came back to rebuild Jerusalem, to rebuild the temple, to rebuild the people of God, and yet they have failed to truly worship God. They've gotten caught up and distracted by the opposition, the difficulties of their lives. They've gotten caught up and distracted by their own sinful lusts and propensity to turn away from God. And so God sent his word, sent revival through the preaching of his word. We've noted that revival came in this seventh month when they gathered for a preaching service on the first day of the seventh month, four hour sermon followed by preaching the next day, followed by preaching 10 days later for a full week, followed by preaching in chapter 10 for three hours which led to three hours of confession, six hour service, three hours of preaching, three hours of confession, and now at the end of that time, here is this covenant renewal ceremony. They are renewing the covenant. They realize, "We have broken faith with God," and they now turn back to God with all of their hearts. That's what's happening in this passage. This is what repentance, the evidence and fruit of repentance is demonstrated in this 10<sup>th</sup> chapter.

I want you to note, I mentioned earlier the word "energy," renewed energy for the things of God. There is a movement. The Spirit of God when he grants repentance moves someone. There's movement to action. There's not just merely a change of mind and a continuation of life as it has always been. It really means to turn but it doesn't just mean to turn and stay where you were like you can change directions and not move. No, this means change directions and be moving. This is what's pictured here. In fact, this movement is seen, first of all, in verses 28 and 29 as they describe this covenant, this

covenant making. Let me show you how this is here. When he says, "the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants and all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the law of God," you see that even there you see repentance. They separated themselves from the peoples of the land to the law of God. That's what repentance is, turning from sin to God. And verse 29, they're "joining with their kinsmen, their nobles, and are taking on themselves a curse and an oath to walk in God's law, which was given through Moses."

Now that is a picture of what's happened but if we go back to verse 38 of chapter 9 when it says, "Now because of all this We are making an agreement in writing; And on the sealed document are the names of our leaders, our Levites and our priests." So this idea of making an agreement literally in the Hebrew the word "making an agreement" is the word "cutting, we are cutting something firm." That's what it means literally in the Hebrew. We're cutting something firm, and the word "cut" is a key word in the Hebrew Old Testament which has in many times, it's not always used this way but often it is used in a technical sense to mean "to make a covenant." You cut a covenant literally. In fact, the same word occurs in chapter 9, verse 8, if you just look back over to chapter 9, verse 8 when they're speaking about God choosing Abram, "You found his heart faithful before You," chapter 9, verse 8, "And made a covenant with him." Literally, "You cut a covenant with him." Same word.

So when they say made an agreement, "We are cutting something firm in writing. We are cutting firmly in writing," that's really what the text in Hebrew says. Well, to say "cut" is to say, "We're making a covenant. We are recommitting to the covenant." The reason "cut a covenant" was because when somebody made a covenant, a covenant was a binding, solemn uniting of two parties together in the inviolable union where there are promises, there are oaths and there are curses. Promises that people make to one another. Two parties, this was the common way that people would make agreements, one king to another king. You know, "Hey, let's make an agreement you'll not attack me, I'll not attack you, and if we are attacked, we will defend one another." And so what they would do is they would get together and they would have a covenant ceremony and the way they would have a covenant ceremony is they would cut animals in two like a cow, cut it in two, and they would separate the halves. A lamb, cut it in two. A goat, cut it in two. And so it's this gruesome, you know, these carcasses still blood oozing from them now, the parties then make promises to one another, walk through the pieces, and what they're saying is, "If I don't keep my promise, let me be as these."

So there are oaths and curses. "I promise to be faithful to you and if this doesn't happen, let the curse of the covenant fall on me." So that's what "cut" means and so when they say, "We're making an agreement," they're basically saying, "We're recommitting to the covenant." It's a technical term and, "We're making a firm recommitment to the covenant." In fact, it's interesting, the word "seal" is emphasized, "and on the sealed document are the names." Then chapter 10, verse 1, "Now on the sealed document were the names." The emphasis on "sealed," the repetition of the word. It means "to be securely fastened." They would seal a document with some wax that could not be broken. To break it, you could only break it once and you know it's been broken. And a king

would put his signet ring on there. This is basically his signature. They're signing it. "We're making this, we're recommitting to this covenant and we are committing ourselves to it and look at the names that we're putting here." And this list of names, priests, Levites, and of course, the leaders. Nehemiah the governor. Zedekiah. Incidentally, just so you know, Ezra's name is not in the list because the way it works is they're actually listing family names that go back before Ezra. Ezra was really under the heading Seriah. Just so you know, Ezra was not abstaining from this covenant renewal. He was a part of it. We'll explain that a little more probably when we get to chapter 12 because it's going to come in even more clearly there.

The idea is all of the people, virtually all of them are a part of this recommitment to the covenant and so now think about that. Cutting a covenant. What happens is you're binding yourself in an unbreakable, inviolable union. You're joining together in such a way that you can't break it apart. It's not a contract that you can say, "Okay, no, it's off now." No, it's a life/death bond in blood. And so what's happening is when you look at that and you look at like particularly when you look at verse 29 or verse 28, they "separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the law of God, their wives, their sons and their daughters, all those who had knowledge, are joining with their kinsmen, their nobles, and are taking on themselves a curse and an oath." Do you see that? That's covenant language. A curse and an oath to walk in God's law. What's happening is they're turning away from their former way of living and they are binding themselves to God. They're separated, the movement is, separating themselves from the world and the people they've been associating with and the activities they've been associating with. They're separating themselves from that and they're binding themselves to God. That is the fruit of repentance. That's the movement. That's the energy that's there, this movement away from sin to God, and it's obvious and evident and we see it continue to unfold.

So what I want us to do in the time we have remaining is talk about this idea of energy for the things of God and a renewed energy. If you think about now for a person who's saved, the first time someone comes to faith in Christ, it is a new energy, but for those who are already believers and who, remember, we're supposed to continue to repent. Repentance is to be a part of our lives continually the same way faith is. Faith is to, we grow in faith every day. We really should be trying to grow in repentance every day, hating our sin more, loving God more, separating ourselves, being more holy and loving God more, pursuing him. So there's a sense in which you could say for a believer repenting is a renewed energy for the things of God. That's the fruit. A renewed energy for the things of God. Listlessness, complacency, spiritual apathy give way to renewed energy when God grants again the grace of repentance.

So if you're listless, apathetic, complacent, distant from God, you need the grace of repentance because when God grant repentance, what he does is he grants energy that moves you to action and that's what we see in the lives of these people and the commitment that they're making right here. So there's really, it's a renewed energy for the things of God and I want to look at the rest of what we have in three points. A renewed energy for, first of all, the word of God. When someone repents, there's a renewed energy for the things of God, a renewed energy for the word of God. Verse 29, they "are taking

on themselves a curse and an oath to," the first thing they say, "walk in God's law, which was given through Moses, God's servant, and to keep and to observe all the commandments of GOD our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes." There's a renewed energy for the word of God. They recognize when God grants repentance, remember one of the things they saw was they saw the law of God in a whole new way, a week before last we looked at that. They saw the law of God as that which is most precious. Remember, we saw they were confessing in their confession in chapter 9 how they would not listen, they did not listen, they turned their backs on the law of God, they cast his law behind their backs, they stiffened their necks, they turned a stubborn shoulder to the law, all of these phrases they use in that expression of repentance in chapter 9.

"So this is what we have done with the law of God, we would not listen, we have not listened, we will not listen. That's what we have been like." But now when repentance comes, there is the hunger for the law of God. There's the hunger for the word of God and so now they are saying, "We will no longer stop listening, we're going to fill our hearts with it." And look how he labors, they labor to make this clear to walk in God's law which was given through Moses, and look there are three other words that are used to talk about it: observe the commandments of God our Lord and his ordinances and his statutes. Commandments, ordinances, statutes, law, all of those things to say the word of God.

We need the word of God. When God grants repentance, there's a renewed hunger for the word of God but not just to hear the word. It's really obvious in the text, they realized they don't need to be just hearers, they need to be doers because look what it says. "We make an oath not just to hear God's law but to walk in God's law." They want to live out the text. The energy that God has given them is not an energy to hear and to delight in merely in kind of a distant sort of way that we applaud it, we approve of it. No, when God grants repentance, there is a desire to do it, to live it, to walk it out. In fact, it becomes clear even with the other verbs he uses. You've got walk, walk in God's law, verse 29, but also to keep and to observe.

The word "keep," I'm reading the New American Standard, the word "keep" means "to guard; to watch over." It pictures careful attention, focus, an energetic interest. But when it says, "observe God's law," some of the other translations, I think, get this a little better in English. I mean, "observe" can mean this but sometimes "observe" for us means, "I observed that. I watched it." This is not what this word means. Literally in the Hebrew it's "do." So, "I want to live God's law. I want to keep and do all the commandments. I want to guard and do all the commandments, all of the ordinances, all of the statutes. I want to keep them and do them." That's what the people are saying, "We want to do this. We are binding ourselves to God to do this." There is a renewed love for the law of God and not merely to hear it but to do it.

And this is illustrated then immediately in verses 30 and 31 because they speak about how the law is to be lived out. We don't just have God's law, God's word just to know it, but it's to make us different. Verse 30, after they said to keep and observe all the commandments of God, our Lord and his ordinances and his statutes, and that we will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons. That's a



picture of holiness. That is a picture of holiness, to be separate. In fact, "the peoples of the land" is a phrase that occurs three times in verses 28 to 31. Verse 28, they separated themselves from the peoples of the land to the law of God. Verse 30, we won't give our daughters to the peoples of the land. Verse 31, as for the peoples of the land. You see, the people around them, all the people around them who do not love God, they must separate from.

Now this is not a racial issue, this is a spiritual issue. They aren't separating from the peoples of the land to protect the bloodline as much as they are separating from the peoples of the land to protect the spiritual integrity of the people. We know that because when we read the whole Bible, you always interpret Scripture in light of Scripture, we see amazing examples of God's kindness in saving people from all nations. Think about the whole book of Ruth. It's about a Moabitess who's not supposed to be able to enter the temple according to what we read in Deuteronomy and yet God brings her into his heart and puts her in the line of Christ. So it's not about your ethnicity, it's about your spirituality. So the idea is not to be separate from the peoples with some kind of racial issue. No, it's spiritual. "You are to separate yourselves from those who hate Me because you want to walk in a way that shows you love Me." That's what he's talking about.

So walking in the word, keeping and observing the commandments will inevitably involve separation. To separate themselves. This is one of the key themes in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. We encountered it in chapter 9 of Ezra, if you turn back over there for a moment. Chapter 9, verse 1, after Ezra has made the second return in 458 BC, he's delivered the treasure to the temple treasury. He's begun his ministry. Chapter 9, verse 1 of Ezra, "Now when these things had been completed, the princes approached me, saying, 'The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands,' look at what it says next, "according to their abominations, those of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Amorites. For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has intermingled with the peoples of the lands; indeed, the hands of the princes and the rulers have been foremost in this unfaithfulness." The problem is when you join yourself in marriage especially, well, this is true for us now, you're not to be yoked with an unbeliever. As a Christian, you're not to marry an unbeliever because you're yoking yourself to someone who does not love God and you're committing to love, if you're committed to love God, how can you pull together in life with someone who is committed to hating God? You say, "Well, they have a respect for God." If they haven't submitted to God, they don't have a respect for God. A lot of times people pretend in order to get somebody to marry them and you could talk to people in this church who made that decision and can tell you from experience the reality. So if you're considering that, stop dating them. Break it off. Tell them why you're breaking it off but not so that you can manipulate them into making some kind of simple decision. No, you break it off and you turn and go a different way and then see what God does. Maybe he will save them, and once they're saved and they've been disciplined for six months, then maybe you can think about getting back with them. I'm not saying that's exactly a hard-and-fast six months but I would think that's probably a good starting place. Maybe it should be a year. The point is you don't want to be deceived. We have to guard

ourselves and the reality is you may think that because you love them and the infatuation and all that, but following Christ is what you're called to. He's your Master. How can you take your life and yoke it to someone who hates him? So there is no evangelistic dating. That's not a good biblical, I mean, that's a completely unbiblical idea. I mean, you evangelize but you don't date while you're evangelizing.

So they separated themselves from the peoples of the land and they hadn't done that in Ezra 9 and Ezra is brokenhearted over it, and you see they were committing abominations. You see, when they intermarry, they would start being tempted to worship these other gods, to take part in practices that were ungodly. In fact, I'm going to just mention this. If you want to read Leviticus 18 this week and we're not going to take time to do it right now, but what you see in Leviticus 18 I'm going to summarize for you. This is right after God has chosen, I mean, he's delivered the people from Egypt, he's brought them out to Mount Sinai, he's giving them his law. He tells them in Leviticus 18, "Listen, I'm going to take you to the Promised Land and when you go into the Promised Land, you must not intermarry with those people. You must not be connected with those people. In fact, we're going to remove them from the land because if you did, you would share in their abominations." And it talks about all these horrible, wicked things they do: homosexuality, the murdering of their babies on the altar of Molech, bestiality. I mean, it goes on and on and on and it says, "This is why the land is vomiting them out because of their excessive wickedness, and you must be careful not to be like them. That's why you don't unite with them. What fellowship has light with darkness?"

So energy for the word of God creates that kind of energy for holiness. It's also illustrated in what he says about the sabbath back in Nehemiah 10 now in verse 31, "As for the peoples of the land who bring wares or any grain on the sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the sabbath or a holy day; and we will forego the crops the seventh year and the exaction of every debt." We will keep the sabbath and we won't, this is interesting, I mean, basically what they're acknowledging there is there was apparently the tendency among the Jews to say, "Well, I'm not working on the sabbath but if I buy something from someone that's a Gentile, he's working but I'm not." Do you see what's happening here? "I'm not even going to be a part of transacting business on the sabbath so that we can show, we can remind ourselves that we're resting in God." The sabbath was all about rest like we sang about a little while ago. Resting in Christ. The sabbath is ultimately about that and we believe it's fulfilled in the gospel. The way that you're saved is you stop working and you rest in the finished work of Christ. Hebrews 4, a couple of verses. Actually, there remains a sabbath rest for the people of God we read this morning. That's the verse we started at, Hebrews 4:9. The author of Hebrews is making the point that salvation which is typified by going into Canaan is also the same thing as entering God's rest. And how do you enter God's rest? You cease from your own works and you trust in God's work. And so the sabbath was an important thing that was to teach them that point.

So they had energy for the word of God, renewed energy for the word of God. That's a fruit of repentance. The second thing: renewed energy for the worship of God. Renewed energy for the worship of God. From verses 32 to 39, the focus is the house of God. The

house of God. Over and over again the house of our God. Verse 32, "We also placed ourselves under obligation to contribute yearly one third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God." The end of verse 32, "to make atonement for Israel, and all the work of the house of our God." Verse 34, "we cast lots for the supply of wood among the priests, the Levites and the people so that they might bring it to the house of our God." Verse 35. Nine times in eight verses "house of our God," ending up with that summary statement at the end of verse 39 when they talked about bringing the tithe in, bringing the contributions in to the sanctuary so that those who were ministering, the gatekeepers and the singers, will have what they need, "thus we will not neglect the house of our God."

What happens when you repent is you see that all of life is really about worship. You have a renewed energy for worshiping God. You see, this is why we were created. This is why I exist. Worship is to be at the center of our lives. It's not something we add on, it's not something that we do as an optional thing, it's not something we do when it's convenient. No, for the person who is walking in repentance, worship is the main thing. It is the one thing. Like Jesus said to, remember Martha and Mary? You can get distracted from worship a lot of well-intended ways. Remember the story of Martha and Mary in Luke 10:38-42? Two sisters. Their brother Lazarus, this is before he dies and is brought back to life by Christ. Jesus is visiting their house. Martha is busy fixing dinner for all these people. She's got Jesus plus his 12 disciples plus who knows who else. I mean, it's a big group of people and she's working herself to death and Mary is sitting in there at the feet of Jesus listening to him teach. I can imagine Martha kind of walking through, you know, just sort of like trying to make eye contact with Jesus, maybe doing a little, you know, something like this, a little hand motion, "What's going on over here? Have you noticed this?" And finally she's had enough, "Lord, don't You care that I'm doing all the work by myself," essentially is what she says, and Jesus says, "Martha, Martha, you're worried about so many things but only one thing is necessary." She had good reasons to be doing what she was doing, I mean, she's fixing a meal for Jesus, the Son of God. But he says, "No, you've missed the point. Only one thing is necessary. Your sister has chosen the good part which will not be taken away from her." That had to just really shock her but, of course, it's what she needed. She needed to repent. She was valuing a good meal and preparing a good meal and being a servant over worshiping Christ. She had an opportunity to sit at the feet of Jesus. How many opportunities was she going to have to do that? If you're seeing things correctly, you understand everything else is dropped. Mary has chosen the good part. And he's basically saying, "We'll eat sandwiches. It's no worry. Just sit down and listen, sit down and worship."

There's a renewed energy for worship and that's what we see in the hearts of the people. I mean, these verses are just loaded with the importance of worship. The service of the house of our God, verse 32. The work of the house of our God, verse 33. But look at verse 33, "We're going to give back the shekel, the money that needs to be given to the house of God because we want to have," verse 33, "the showbread, the continual grain offering, the continual burnt offering, the sabbaths," that is, the special worship associated with the sabbath, "the new moons," the special worship associated with each new month, "for the appointed times," all of the various festivals are meant in that, "for

the holy things and for the sin offerings and to make atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God."

Down to verse 35, it talks about bringing the firstfruits of the ground, the firstfruits of the fruit of every tree to the house of the Lord annually. God willed for his people to bring the firstfruits of all of their crops to the Lord. Now sometimes they could gather them up for a while and then take them all together at one time like that's why the main feasts were a part of that. Passover, particularly the feast of Pentecost, they brought the firstfruits of the wheat offering and the barley offering to Pentecost. The end of the year, the Feasts of Tabernacles is also called the Feast of Ingathering. That's why you'll get confused when you're reading your Bible sometimes, it uses the different words. Same feast but different angles of what it's about. Tabernacles was about living in tents, remember homemade tents, to celebrate the time in the wilderness but it was also about celebrating the end of the harvest. They harvested their barley in the spring and their wheat in the later spring and then in the fall they celebrated the harvest of their grapes and the olives, and what they're saying here is, "God willed for us to take whatever we get, whatever God gives us and bring it to him in worship." And so they're saying they were taught for their whole calendar. And think about it, if you're an agrarian society, you depend upon sunshine and rain at the right times. It makes you very dependent and more like you can't do that, I mean, well, you can make it rain in a way right now, in our culture you can. They couldn't though. They didn't have the irrigation then that we do now. They were completely dependent upon God and so when they got the crops and they came in, they were grateful for that. They were to think about God all the time because worship, the Lord wanted them to make worship the very center of their lives because that's what we were created to do. We were created to live all our lives centered around God and his glory, and when you have been granted repentance, there's renewed energy to worship.

Now what I'm going to do is we're going to save point 3 for next week and I want to talk to you for a moment about how do you repent. How do you repent? I mean, how do you seek repentance? If it's a gift and a grace, and it is, though God commands it? I mean, Paul's message that he preached in Athens was essentially this: God commands every men everywhere to repent. Well, how do you do what only God can make you able to do? Well, the Bible says you seek him. You seek him in his word. How did these people get repentance? They were under the word of God. In fact, a Psalm that you can look at this week, I'm going to share a little bit of it with you but it's a really wonderful Psalm. Psalm 130. "Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive To the voice of my supplications. If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?" The psalmist feels far from God. He feels out-of-touch with God. He may be experiencing times of apathy and distance and so he cries out to God for help. He knows God must do something about his circumstance. "I need repentance. Lord, help me! I'm crying out to You! I'm apathetic, I'm lethargic, I'm spiritually dull. I need You! Out of the depths I cry to You, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive To the voice of my supplications." And I love that, "If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?" This person is beginning to have some

repentance even there. "I know I'm unworthy to come but if You marked iniquity, nobody could come to You."

He says this, "I wait for the LORD." Now he said, "Lord, please speak to me, come to me, help me! I wait for the LORD, my soul does wait," and the next words are very important, "I wait for the LORD, my soul does wait, And in His word do I hope. My soul waits for the Lord More than the watchmen for the morning; Indeed, more than the watchmen for the morning." Do you hear that repetition? Think about a watchman waiting for the morning. He's tired, he's exhausted, he's got a job to do, he can't fall asleep, the death penalty in many armies in the ancient world. He's got to stay awake. He's waiting. He wants that morning to come. He wants the morning to come but it won't come. You're wanting God to answer, you're wanting God to grant, what do you do? He says, "Keep waiting on the Lord. Keep your eyes on the Lord." How do you do that? You stay in his word. You wait expectantly in the word. You read the Bible. You memorize the Bible. You meditate on the Bible. And all the time you're in a spirit of dependent humility crying out to God to do what only he can do.

Something that's very important is you can't produce repentance in yourself. It's a paradox but it's absolutely true. Repentance is a gift. You cannot make yourself hate your sin appropriately. Only God can. And one of the things that the orthodox faithful believers throughout history has seen is this idea of waiting on God and yet not waiting in complacency and apathy as if to say, "Well, God's gotta do it and if God doesn't do it, I can't do it. God says repent and believe but he has to give me repentance and faith and he's not doing anything about it so I forget it." That is a heart of wickedness. Turn from that. Yeah, God says he has to but you must wait upon him. You must call out to him. You must cry out to him. You must seek him.

Sometimes you will hear people misunderstand this. They think that Christ will not receive anyone but the truly penitent, that you have to repent before he'll receive you. No. The opposite is true. You can't repent until you go to Christ. You must go to him first. A very helpful book on this is Thomas Boston's book on repentance. He was an 18<sup>th</sup> century Scottish preacher. He's writing against this false doctrine of telling people that you have to turn from sin before you go to Christ. Now listen to me very carefully. You can't turn from sin before you go to Christ. You go to Christ and then you turn from sin. You have no power. You have no life. Whatever turning you will do will be some kind of human engineered, temporal, temporary turning that will not last. You go to Christ in faith. Faith, in a sense, precedes repentance. Repentance sometimes comes right along with it, almost indistinguishably but faith is first and faith is trusting, resting in Christ, and repentance flows out of that.

Thomas Boston says this, that to avoid this temptation to think that you must repent first, he says, "Then for sensible sinners to think that they dare not and ought not to believe and embrace Christ until they are more deeply humbled and need to more thoroughly repent of their sins, in a word, this is deceit. This is a trick of the enemy." You're not to think you need to repent more and be humbled more before you go to Christ. Embrace Christ instead and then you will be humbled. He says, "Therefore let every sensible

sinner under the temptation think that he is in the case of a drowning man who is if he as sitting drowning in the ocean, if he is thinking should I grab onto that rope that is right there, and he thinks about it, am I repentant enough to grab onto the rope? Stop thinking! Grab the rope! Grab onto Christ!" That's the way to seek repentance, you go to Christ and you believe, believe that Christ is yours, Boston says, "Believe that Christ is yours, that God is reconciled to you in him, that your sins are pardoned for Christ's sake and you are no more under condemnation for them. Believe that you are now in a state of peace with God and safe under the covert of his blood. This will effectually melt your hearts into sincere repentance. The stronger your confidence, the more keen will be the melting of your soul in repentance."

That is how God wills to grant repentance and where do you get faith, where do you get Jesus? In the word. You stay in the word and you keep believing. You keep holding onto Christ. One of my favorite passages in all of the Bible is the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman. Matthew's gospel has the fullest picture of it. She's in a couple of other places too but in Matthew's gospel you see that she is a woman from the region of Tyre and Sidon, Syro-Phoenician, that's the Phoenicians, Assyrian Phoenicians basically. She's a Gentile. Jesus comes up, the Bible says Jesus went up into the region of Tyre and Sidon. He's preaching up there. She goes and she's crying out, "Lord, have mercy on me! Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus ignores her and the Bible says he ignored her. She keeps crying out. The disciples, it's getting embarrassing, they say, "Lord, will You just please tell her to go away because we know You've been hearing her and You haven't done anything, so just tell her to go away. She's making a scene. Would You do something for her or tell her to go away?" And he says, he then says, "I have been sent to the lost sheep of Israel. I've not been sent to the Gentiles first." Second rejection. She keeps on saying, "Lord, have mercy on me!" He speaks to her and he says this, this is the third rejection of Jesus, apparent rejection of Jesus, apparent rejection of Jesus. Jesus rejects no one who comes to him sincerely. But the apparent rejection is he says this to her, he says, "Shall I take food from the table and give it to the dogs?" He's saying because the common view of the Jews was Gentiles were dogs and he says this to her. Now Jesus knows the Gentiles aren't dogs. He's made them all. He's going to save all the Gentiles, in fact, the Gentiles are going to come to him a whole lot more than the Jews are but he says this to this Syro-Phoenician woman and she says this, "But Lord, even," he says, "Shall I take the bread and give it to the dogs?" She says, "Lord, even the dogs get to eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table." And he says, "Woman, your faith is great." Do you see what he's doing? He's drawing out her faith. "Come on, you believe. Come on a little more. Do you believe? Do you believe? Do you believe?" And he saved her. He didn't turn her away.

What appeared to be turning her away was drawing out faith, so when you're crying in the depths, "Lord, in the depths I cry to You, out of the depths I cry to You, Lord, hear my voice!" Keep on. He's just doing like he did to this Syro-Phoenician woman. Keep believing. And I love this, what Richard Sibbes says about that. He says the reason she was able to say that was she considered the end of his coming, that is, the purpose, "Wait a minute, You came to Tyre and Sidon. I didn't come finding You, You came finding me and I know that You would not have done that if You were not willing to save me." And

that faith believing laid hold of Christ and brought salvation and that's what we must believe. He is good and he shows mercy. He delights to save sinners. No matter how black your life is, no matter how wicked you feel like you are, no matter how lost you feel like you are, no matter how many times you said no to God, say yes to Christ today. Go after him. Keep seeking him. Stay in his word. He will not disappoint you. He will always say yes but he may be rooting out unbelief in your heart. He knows the best way to deal with his sheep, and when he works in your heart and grants repentance, then you will see the fruit of it. You will have energy for the word of God. You will have energy for the worship of God and people will see the glory of Christ in you.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, we thank You for the beauty of Your salvation, the way that You have worked to save sinners like us, we who are conceived in iniquity, brought forth in sin, who from our mother's womb go astray. We're like the Jews who turned their backs, cast Your law behind their backs, would not listen, stiffened their necks, and yet Your compassion and Your mercy continue to invite people who will come to You, who will seek You to be saved. You command us to repent but You give us the power to repent. You command us to believe but You give us the power to believe and You will give it to any who seeks You. Father, help us to be so overwhelmed by the riches of Your lovingkindness, the abundance of Your mercy, the perfection of Your wisdom. You know how wicked our hearts are and what we need to have purer faith, deeper repentance. Thank You for dealing with us, Lord, according to Your wisdom and according to Your grace. Give us great energy for the things of God. Make us more earnest in our desire to walk in truth, not just to know it but to live it. Make us more earnest to worship You with all of our hearts and all of our souls, to delight in nothing else compared to seeing the glory of Christ. We ask this, Lord, that You might be glorified in Your people and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*