

## **“Honest Repentance: Law” – Pr Jim Sprenkle – Lent Midweek 2 March 1, 2023**

- I. **Genesis 1:1 to 2:3 previously read –**
- II. **I read that Mark Twain once saw a man shot in the street...**
  - a. It gave him bad dreams... and he said that he had a recurring dream that some fool put a family Bible on the man's chest to help him... except it only made it worse because not only was he shot, but he couldn't breathe!
    - i. Twain said, "In my nightmares, I gasped and struggled for breath under the crush of that vast book for many a night."<sup>1</sup>
  - b. So, what is the Bible to you?
    - i. Is it a heavy weight on your chest, making it hard to live your life?
  - c. I suppose as we go into this season of reflection and repentance, it's important to know what we think of the Bible – especially God's law.
    - i. If we think of the Bible as filled with random rules and restrictions that are only there to make our lives miserable... then the idea of repentance is probably a tough pill to swallow.
    - ii. To be honest, if we think about the Bible like a bunch of demands and burdens to deal with, it would be easy to resent it in our lives... along with God.
    - iii. Yes, we can work our hardest to be the best Christians possible... trying to live up to God's law – and lots of people do this...
      - 1. But here's the trouble... we may try to live up to God's standards, but if we don't believe that God has the absolute best way of living and that it helps us thrive as human beings, then we may end up bitter and resentful in the end.
    - iv. At some point, we may even wonder if all the energy to follow His will is worth it...
- III. **As we read in Genesis 1 today, God built boundaries into creation.**
  - a. These boundaries were not a burden or anything, they were all about creation and life in the perfect place!
  - b. For example, the second day of creation is when God separates the “water from the water” (vs 6) and essentially makes a space for land, plants, fish, birds and animals... and of course, Adam and Eve.
    - i. If God didn't make that boundary, we would be aquatic creatures living in a watery world.
  - c. And whether we like boundaries or not, as people created by God, we also set them up in our lives.
    - i. We have a house... or shelter... to live in, which keep the elements separated from our day-to-day lives.
    - ii. We clean our houses and try to fight the chaos that is always building up around us.

- iii. We tell our kids not to play in the street because we know it's not safe for them – even though they might not understand such an “arbitrary rule” 😊
  - d. God's laws are no different.
    - i. What kind of chaos would we have if no obeyed the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment... “you shall not murder”?
      - 1. Think about it... every single person around you would be suspect... you couldn't trust anyone.
      - 2. You would be on high alert, ready to fight or run, and your daily life would be under immense stress... it would be exhausting.
    - ii. Or on a practical level, if you felt like your house was too restrictive and you started breaking out windows, or knocking down walls... how long would your house be a house?
      - 1. At some point, you would just make it a heap of rubble...
    - iii. Without God's law, we sit in a pile of dust.

#### IV. **The ashes on Ash Wednesday are a sign of that dust.**

- a. It's interesting that God used the dust of the earth to form Adam... breathing into him the breath of life.
  - i. Yet Adam and Eve stepped outside of God's command, and from that point forward it was, “Dust you are, and to dust you will return.”
    - 1. In their rebellion, God basically allowed sin and chaos to consume Adam and Eve – just like He does for us.
    - 2. Our bodies are like the example of the house I just talked about – we go around knocking down walls and breaking out windows as sin takes its course.
    - 3. Ashes are a good reminder that we end up in a pile of rubble.
- b. Some sins are obviously turning our bodies into dust... for example an alcoholic or an addict usually knows that their bodies are breaking down – even if they can't figure out how to get sober.
- c. But most people are dealing with a more subtle sense of “something just isn't right” in their lives.
  - i. Maybe you have experienced the emptiness that comes from sin.
  - ii. You might have mostly good things in life – a family, a home, a decent career or retirement, enough to get by – but there is a nagging feeling that it's all missing purpose.
  - iii. That feeling of emptiness lets us know that something is not right... that our decisions and focus are out of touch with God's will.
    - 1. Maybe we could say out of touch with the way God created us.
- d. Honest repentance is about realizing that we have things in our lives that keep us from living our best life with God.
  - i. Honest repentance is humility.... That we admit our wrongs against God and others... but also who we are as broken people.

- ii. Yet, it doesn't stop at just admitting our wrongs and our brokenness, it means we have a desire to change... to put those things away and live our best life the way God intended.
- e. None of us are able to do this on our own – in other words, how can you fill an empty void or fix the brokenness?
  - i. How can we overcome death and the curse of sin?
  - ii. We can't – and that's something else we can admit in humility.
- V. **We have one solution to this problem, and it came to us 2000 years ago.**
  - a. Jesus, our Savior, gives us hope in the middle of all this chaos and sin... as our houses – our bodies – turn to rubble, Jesus has an answer.
  - b. Remember when He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it"? (Jn 2:19)
    - i. He didn't mean the actual temple in Jerusalem, He meant His body!
    - ii. In a sense... He allowed His body to return to the dust in our place.
    - iii. He died our death, and the Good News is that He didn't stay dead.
    - iv. On the third day, He gave us back the gift of life – as we believe in Him, death no longer holds us... the grave no longer keeps us.
  - c. Honest repentance is only possible because we have come to believe that God's way is in our best interest, and is the way He intended us to live.
    - i. What we have broken and turned away from, God has managed to salvage and give us hope....
    - ii. It is this hope that makes honest repentance possible. Amen.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Harriet Elinor Smith ed., *Autobiography of Mark Twain*, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 158.

<sup>2</sup> Sermon based on "Honest Repentance", Copyright © 2023, Concordia Seminary Press, St. Louis, MO, and Dr. David Maxwell. Permission granted to the purchaser for congregational use.