



grow. pray. study.

June 7, 2020 “Jesus, Protest and Repentance”

Scripture: Exodus 3:7-8a, Amos 5:21-24

Questions in this GPS marked with an arrow bullet point are particularly recommended for group discussion. Group leaders may add other discussion questions, or substitute other questions for the marked ones, at their discretion.

Repentance: a heart change, not just outside signs

The short prophetic book of Joel is a bit of a mystery. It mentions no kings or external events to help scholars date its writing, and we know nothing about the prophet “Joel, Pethuel’s son” (Joel 1:1) or about his father. Yet Joel’s profound, heartfelt appeal for repentance echoes for every generation of God’s people. Our God, the prophet said, is “very patient,” “ready to forgive.” God’s mercy is always there, but we can only claim it honestly when we truly turn away from what is wrong in our lives.

- “Tear your hearts and not your clothing” may sound odd. But “in the ancient world people would tear their clothing to show that they were sorry and wanted a change of circumstances.... Joel urges people to make sincere and lasting changes and not simply outward signs.” * That was also a key to the message Jesus, John the Baptist and the apostles preached. In your own life, what’s the difference between simply trying to look sorry and genuinely choosing to change?
- Israel’s good King David at one point did a string of wicked, hurtful things. He got a beautiful married woman pregnant and then had her husband killed to cover up his actions (cf. [2 Samuel 11:1-12:14](#)). Many Bible students see [Psalm 51](#) as David’s prayer repenting for those ugly deeds. The psalm didn’t just seek pardon. It pleaded, “Create a clean heart for me, God; put a new, faithful spirit deep inside me!” (Psalm 51:10). Joel called God’s people to that “all your hearts” type of repentance. What might a clean heart look like when we apply it to racism and white privilege?

Prayer: Lord God, if I try to fool myself (or you) with fine words while my heart remains unchanged, you see right through me. By your Spirit, move me to yearn for a new heart and a faithful spirit deep inside me. Amen.

* J. Andrew Dearman, study note on Joel 2:13 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 1449 OT.

A bold prophet gave practical guidance

TUESDAY 6.9.20 Luke 3:3-14

Luke said John the Baptizer (or Baptist), Jesus’ prophetic forerunner, baptized people as a symbol of cleansing and change. He also showed John showing how, in practical day-to-day actions, people could respond to his call to change their hearts and lives. Then (as now) people often hesitated to share with others (verse 11), tax collectors usually got rich by collecting more than they had to (verse 13), and Roman soldiers could cheat or harass people without facing legal penalties (verse 14).

- Scholar N. T. Wright wrote, “John was...preparing a pathway for the Lord himself to return to his people. This was the time. Rescue was at hand.” * How did John’s specific, practical counsel in verses 11, 13

and 14 show how their repentance could allow God to reshape the lives of tax collectors, soldiers and “the crowds”? In what way(s) is Jesus calling you to reshape your life?

- In verse 3, the phrase “changing their hearts and lives” translates a form of the single Greek word *metanoia*. It’s often translated just “repenting,” but a scholarly handbook for Bible translators noted that the word “does not mean simply ‘to be sorry about’ or ‘to regret,’ but rather involves a change of both attitude (or heart) and of conduct.” ** In what ways would a change of attitude or heart about racial divisions show itself in changed conduct in your home, neighborhood or business?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, it’s easy to pray in church, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth.” Beyond church and in my everyday life, John’s preaching showed that it gets harder. Help me mean that prayer every day. Amen.

* N. T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone* (New Testament for Everyone) (p. 33). SPCK. Kindle Edition.

** Barclay M. Newman and Philip C. Stine, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew*. New York: United Bible Societies, 1988, p. 58.

Jesus’ call: “Change your hearts and lives!”

WEDNESDAY 6.10.20 Matthew 4:17, 21:28-32

Like John the Baptist, Jesus’ core message called people to “repent” (change their hearts and lives) to enter the kingdom of heaven. He openly rebuked haughty religious leaders who abused the poor (cf. [Mark 12:38-40](#)), showing that he was the same God who saw his people’s suffering in Egypt and sent Moses (cf. [Exodus 3:4-10](#)). In Matthew 21, he asked some of those abusive leaders (cf. [Matthew 21:23](#)), which is better: nice words that ignore needed work, or honest hesitancy that does the job in the end? The answer seemed simple. But living that way is not always simple, then or now.

- Jesus’ story contrasted a son who talked a good game while disobeying with a son who in the end did what his father asked. Which son was more authentic, and less worried about “looking good”? Today in our society no major organization, and very few people, will openly say they favor racial bias. Yet many policies, laws and actions continue bias in very real ways. How can you grow toward more authenticity between your words and your attitudes and actions?
- In Jesus’ day, people didn’t just dislike tax collectors. They despised them—usually rightly—as traitors who abused the poor. In Jesus’ day, prostitutes were, well, prostitutes. How could Jesus say prostitutes and tax collectors were entering God’s Kingdom before the religious leaders? For what reasons does God prefer honest repentance that turns away from evil to pious words that don’t match the way we live?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I honestly think I’m honest. Yet sometimes, as the saying goes, my actions “give the lie” to my honest-sounding words. Keep guiding me toward the deep-seated honesty in which you call me to live. Amen.

Prophetic protester arrested, executed

THURSDAY 6.11.20 Matthew 14:3-12

When an event like George Floyd’s wrongful death triggers protests, some people say the church should “stay out of politics.” John the Baptist (and Jesus, who said John was “more than a prophet” and that “no greater human being has ever been born than John”—[Luke 7:24-28](#)) wouldn’t agree. They saw no conflict between boldly declaring that God’s kingdom was present and pointing out that the brazenly immoral marriage of the tetrarch Herod and Herodias scorned that kingdom’s ideals.

- Mark 6:20 said John’s words “greatly confused Herod.” What was so confusing about telling Herod, “It’s against the law for you to marry [your brother’s wife]”? Nothing—unless Herod, like Herodias and many

privileged people, thought he was above any law. Which laws, human or divine, do you see yourself as free to ignore? What experiences or realizations have helped you rethink those inner “exemptions”?

- The Jewish historian Josephus said the unnamed, exploited young woman who danced for Herod was “Salome.” Scholar William Barclay wrote that Herod “kept his promise to Salome because he had made it in front of his cronies. . . . He feared their jeers. . . he feared that they would think him weak.” * Has trying to look “strong” to others by hiding your convictions or playing along with their biases ever made you weaker? How do you define truly strong choices for living?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, grow in me a character strong enough to not have to pretend to be strong by other people’s standards. Keep me as true to your principles as a compass needle is to the pole. Amen.

* William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Mark* (Revised Edition). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976, p. 153.

Jesus’ message continued to change hearts and lives

FRIDAY 6.12.20 Acts 2:22-39, Acts 3:13-19

To the Pentecost crowds in Jerusalem (just 50 days after Passover, when Jesus died on the cross), the apostle Peter starkly laid out the facts. “You, with the help of wicked men, had Jesus killed by nailing him to a cross. . . . God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” When the troubled crowd asked, “What should we do?” Peter gave them the same answer as Jesus: “Change your hearts and lives” (Greek *metanoia*, repent, go a different direction). The phrase “turn back to God so that your sins may be wiped away” clearly implied that change of direction.

- The crowd in Jerusalem could not go back 50 days and undo the scenes in Pilate’s courtyard where some of them had likely screamed “Crucify him!” at the beaten, bloodied Jesus. But if they realized what they had done, they could change the inner views that led to those actions. They could choose to send their life in a different direction. How does Peter’s call to them speak to us as we admit ways, knowing or unknowing, in which our attitudes or actions have hurt others?
- The call to repentance was not about blaming. Peter said, “I know you acted in ignorance. So did your rulers.” But earlier ignorance could not continue. Ignorance could change. They could learn and grow. Have you heard in the last two weeks the number of people in our country who have said some version of “I didn’t realize”? Have you realized any ways in which you have “acted in ignorance” in the past?

Prayer: King Jesus, open my eyes, my mind and my heart. Move me from ignorance to awareness of the ways in which division and hatred wound your heart and blight the lives of your children, including mine. Amen.

Repentance: “abandon their ways, return to the LORD”

SATURDAY 6.13.20 Isaiah 55:6-8

God is “generous with forgiveness,” Isaiah 55 said. It is never a matter of God being unwilling to forgive, of us having to “earn” forgiveness by repenting. Rather, as pastor David Mc. Kenna wrote, “Foreshadowing New Testament theology, the prophet puts out the double imperative, ‘Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts’ (v. 7). Sin is both doing and being. . . . To repent of our wicked ways and unrighteous thoughts, we must turn around and go the other way.” To ask forgiveness for something we do not see as wrong, and fully intend to keep doing, would be nonsense. Only as we see the need to “abandon” our sinful ways and “return to the LORD” can we meaningfully accept, and then live out, the forgiveness God so generously offers us.

- Today’s reading comes from the part of Isaiah most mainline scholars identify as “Second Isaiah.” This is the “comfort” or “consolation” section of the book (cf. [Isaiah 40:1](#)), likely written as the long

exile in Babylon was ending. It aimed, as we saw during the recent “Hope” sermon series, to reassure the Israelites that despite the hard times they’d faced, God was still with them and still loved them (cf. [Isaiah 40:27-31](#)). But even then, the people needed to realize that they must “seek” God, that they could not claim mercy and just go about “business as usual.” Princeton professor J. J. M. Roberts wrote, “A change of life and thought is demanded of the wicked.” ** In what ways is God’s Spirit calling you to “repent,” to choose a change of life and thought, in this time of pandemic and protest?

Prayer: Loving Jesus, your ways are not my ways. You are far more willing and eager to forgive than I am. Yet you set standards of life for me much higher than any I’ve ever imagined. Help me honestly abandon the wrong and commit myself to living in the holy light of your mercy. Amen.

* David Mc. Kenna, *The Preacher’s Commentary Series, Volume 18: Isaiah 40–66*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1994, p. 176.

** J. J. M. Roberts, study note on Isaiah 55:7 in *The HarperCollins Study Bible*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993, p. 1093.

Prayer Requests – cor.org/prayer *Prayers of peace and comfort for:*

Gerard Murphy and family following the death of Susan L. Murphy (wife), 4/18/2020

Bobbi Chapman and family following the death of Josephy (Joe) T. Bruno, Sr. (grandfather), 5/23/2020

Tom Telthorst and family following the death of Amy Weisser (sister), 5/23/2020

Patrick Murphy and family following the death of June Murphy (mother), 5/26/2020

Dave Klein and family following the death of Oscar Klein, Jr (father), 5/28/2020

Kay Huffman and family following the death of Deloyn W. Huffman (father-in-Law), 5/29/2020

Donna Kohl and family following the death of John Kohl (husband), 5/29/2020

Teri Moszyk and family following the death of Greg Gill (family friend), 5/29/2020

Julie Robinson and family following the death of Charlene Robinson (mother), 5/30/2020