

**March 3, 2019**

## True Repentance

Psalm 51:1-7

51:1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

51:2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!

51:3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

51:4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.

51:5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

51:6 Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.

51:7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

### **1. Repentance**

This Wednesday is “Ash Wednesday”, and “Lent” starts from the day. “Ash” represents three things. First, it is a sign of “repentance.” It is derived from ancient people clad in a rough cloth, replying with ash wrapped. When Daniel interceded for the Israelites, he prayed, “with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.” (Daniel 9:3). In the days after Daniel, when the declaration came out to eradicate the people of Judea living in Persia, the people of Judea cried and “lay in sackcloth and ashes.” (Esther 4: 3)

Jesus also linked ash with repentance and said, “Woe to you,

Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.” (Matthew 11:21) This is the word that Jesus mourned those who did not repent even though he did a mighty works and showed himself as a Savior. Chorazin and Bethsaida are the provinces that Jesus preached, Tyre and Sidon are towns in a different nation that does not know the true God. Though people of Judea were listening to the words of Jesus with their ears and watching the miracles of Jesus with their eyes, the people in the towns did not repent. Then they will receive more rigorous judgment than the people in the city who did not know God. Jesus asked people to repent by saying this.

The first voice of Jesus’ teaching was “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” (Mark 1:15) Jesus taught not only the arrival of the Kingdom of God but also the way to enter the Kingdom of God from the beginning. It is “repentance” and “faith” as it is said “Repent and believe.” We cannot enter God’s Kingdom without going through the gate of “repentance.”

But what is “repentance?” When the disciples asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” Jesus asked the child to stand in front of his disciples and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” (Matthew 18:3) The word, “turn” was translated as “repent” in the past. Repentance is that those who turned away from God turn back to God by “turning around.” When the prodigal son of Luke 15 chops down and went to the bottom, he said “I will arise and go to my father.” Like him we have to go back to the heavenly Father. It is the

“repentance.”

Moreover, once “change direction,” it is important to head straight to God as it is. Repentance does not end only when first believing in Jesus Christ. Going to God and approaching God is a privilege given to believers, there is no greater blessing than repenting and approaching God.

Martin Luther wrote this at the beginning of “The Ninety Five Themes”. “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent’ (Matthew 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.” True repentance is not a one-time thing. It is not like a ceremonial occasion to do. Repentance is the way of living for Christians. As Jesus says, we enter the Kingdom of God through repentance, but at the same time, the Kingdom of God remains among those who live in repentance. Let’s not ‘Ash Wednesday’ end on the day just above the calendar. Let’s seriously pray to God today and ask ourselves whether we have a life-long repentance or not.

## **2. Humility**

Secondly, “ash” is a sign of humbleness. As Genesis 2:7 says, “The LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” human is only dust of the earth. In fact, if a person dies, the body will become ash and dust, and the elements of the human body and elements contained in the soil are same. People’s lives and persons are precious, their lifetime has the meaning and purpose because they are made alive by God. We want to learn to be humble in front of God thinking about it.

When Abraham prayed for the town of Sodom where his nephew Lot lived, he said, “Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes.” (Genesis 18:27) God made humans “in the image of God” and speaks to them as if they are equal to God. In particular, Abraham was the man whom God had made close enough to be called a “Friend of God.” (James 2:23) But it is due to God’s special grace. God is the Creator, and human is still a creation. So Abraham humbled himself before God saying, “I who am but dust and ashes.”

True “repentance” is born from “humility” in front of God. The “sin” that the Bible teaches is not just about committing the law, not meeting society’s rules, and doing against moral codes. Something that did not do what it should do is counted as “sin”. The Bible says, “So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.” (James 4:17) People who lost their parents had surely regretted saying, “Why couldn’t I do better for my parents while were alive?” Sins damage our relationship with people and hurt ourselves, but at the same time, sins hurt the loving heart of God who wishes us to live justly, and helps us to do so. I think that everyone has the regret which makes you say, “Though God loves, teaches, reproaches, and helps me, I have committed sins against him.”

We apologize for the damage that we gave to others and will try to reconcile with that person atoning for those who can compensate. But at the same time, there is no peace of mind and no recovery from sin unless we ask God his forgiveness with sincere repentance.

Today ‘s Bible is a prayer that David, a king of Israel, repented before God, asking God’s forgiveness. David deliberately killed his

men on war to own his wife. Among the kings of other countries at that age, such a thing seemed to be done by anyone, but it was unacceptable to David, the king of the people of God. David repented his sin and prayed, “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.” (verse 4) David stood before God, not in front of a man. He faced his own sin before the eyes of God, not by human eyes. And without making any excuses, he stood before God as a sinner who required God ‘s forgiveness, not relying on the position of being a king.

David and Saul are often compared. King Saul did not commit sin like David, but he misjudged God and did not obey the Word of God in preference to his own judgment. The heart of a person who is not straight with respect to God will soon be distorted. Saul was jealous of David who was his subordinate and a son-in-law, and tried to kill him many times. Since God rescued David each time, Saul was unable to touch David. Although David had many opportunities to kill Saul, he never tried to do so. Since David feared God, he never harmed Saul who was appointed by God. However, Saul killed many priests who were consecrated by God because they protected David. Saul was not afraid of God, he stepped into the realm of God and trampled on it.

But, David was a man who feared God and lived before God. So David received the blessing of God after his repentance despite the great sin he committed. God will give blessing again to those who humbly repent in front of God in all ages. However, Saul was surrounded by enemies on the battlefield and killed himself. He was given the opportunity to repent, but he didn’t do it. David is saying in Psalm 51:17. “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and

contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” Let us also repent with a humble heart like David, before God, and take part in God’s great blessing.

### **3. Holiness**

Thirdly, “ash” is a sign of a cleanse. Jeremiah 2:22 says, “Though you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me, declares the Lord GOD.” Baking soda and lye were used to clean various things such as body, garments, cooking utensils and furniture. However, although ash can clean the surface of what is visible, it can not clean the invisible inside of man.

But the blood that Jesus Christ shed on the cross has the power to cleanse the inside of man from sin. Hebrew 9:13-14 says, “For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” The “Ash” of Lent is also a sign of forgiveness for sins and purification from sin, to be given to those who repent.

David was a person of the Old Testament, so he did not know the Cross of Jesus Christ. But David was a person who was specially loved by God and knew God’s truth, grace and mercy better than anyone else. Rather than knowing with the head, he learned them through his life-long experience. He was a shepherd boy, and became the king of Israel. He was wandering because Saul was seeking for his life, but he established his throne against his opponents. He

experienced the grace of God and mercy. David wrote many psalms from that experience, and they prophesied of Jesus Christ. David did not know that Jesus was born as his descendant after his 28s, but he never doubted that God's grace, and compassionate love would bring about forgiveness of sin and purification from sin. "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." (verse 7) This prayer was heard by God even before the Cross. David took part of the grace of the New Testament by faith.

Psalm 30:11 says, "You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness." and Isaiah 61:3 says, "To grant to those who mourn in Zion — to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit." For us living in the era of the New Testament, "Lent" is not a time to spend with dark feelings. "Lent" is protected for the day of spring equinox, and the day becomes longer day by day. It tells us that the forgiveness of Christ and the power of holiness will overcome the darkness of sin. We will wait for the brightness of life's light to appear completely through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and we will spend this season in hope.

Everyone sins, fails, and regrets. There is no life without committing sin, making failure, and regretting the past. However, if we repent properly, we can live a life without regret. However, if we do not go through "repentance," our life will be left with only "regret". The Bible teaches this. "For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death." (2 Corinthians 7:10) "Regret" and "repentance"

are different. “Regret” says, “I should not have done such a thing” or “I should have done this at that time.” Moreover, there is no confession of sin against God there. It is only to have done embarrassing things to the human eye. However, “repentance” admits his sin before God, and ask forgiveness and recovery from God. From the past, it is to turn our attention to the future. Those who repent have a future. There is hope for recovery. Let us spend this “Lent” season looking at this hope.

**(Prayer)**

God of full grace and mercy, Your grace and mercy became the Cross of Jesus Christ, and it was standing on this earth. Make us experience the forgiveness of sins and holiness flowing out of the cross and give us the experience of healing and recovery by the life of Resurrection. For that, please lead us to true repentance. We pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.