The Kingdom of God and Eternal Life (#1)
Repent, The Kingdom of God Has Come Near
Sermon by Pastor Sylvia Chan

Brothers and sisters and friends, today we begin to study the Kingdom of God and eternal life in the Bible.

> NAU **Matthew 4:17** From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Mat 4:17 NAU)

This is the first message that the Lord Jesus preached. Heaven is the realm of God, the kingdom of heaven is the Kingdom of God.

Two thousand years ago the Lord Jesus proclaimed, "The Kingdom of God is at hand," which means the Kingdom of God is near; but why is it that today two thousand years later we still don't see the Kingdom of God on earth? What is the reason? And even if the Kingdom of God is near, why do we have to repent? Today we are going to look into these two questions.

Why is it that today we still don't see the Kingdom of God on earth?

In order to answer this question we need to look into the original language of the word kingdom. The New Testament was written in Greek, not in English; the original Greek word for kingdom is "βασιλεία" (basileia). This word "basileia" has two meanings:

- The first meaning is the kingship, the royal power of a king;
- The second meaning is the kingdom, the territory ruled by a king.

When the Lord Jesus said "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand!" he is talking about the spiritual Kingdom of God, not the actual Kingdom of God. The spiritual Kingdom of God has come to earth, but the actual Kingdom of God hasn't come yet, it will come to earth in the future.

If people repent and submit to the kingship of God now, they would be admitted into the spiritual Kingdom of God; in the future when the actual Kingdom of God comes to earth, they will be in the Kingdom of God.

But if people refuse to submit to the kingship of God now, they wouldn't be in the spiritual Kingdom of God; then in the future when the actual Kingdom of God comes to earth, they won't be in the actual Kingdom of God either, they will be rejected in the Kingdom of God. Brothers,

sisters and friends, if you are rejected in the Kingdom of God in the future, the consequence is destruction! Later on I will explain this point further!

The meaning of repent

But what is repent? Most people think that to repent is to feel sorry for something they have done. I consulted two English dictionaries about the meaning of repent:

- One dictionary says that to repent is to feel or express sincere regret about one's wrongdoing;
- The other dictionary says that to repent is to feel or show that you are sorry for something bad you did and that you want to do the right thing.

Both dictionaries define repent as the feeling of regret and the desire to do the right thing. But that is not the meaning of repent in the Bible.

The original Greek word for repent is "μετανοέω" (metanoeo); according to the Greek dictionary "metanoeo" means to change one's way of life as the result of a complete change of thought and attitude. That means when your thought and your heart attitude change, then your way of life also changes completely. Let's look at some Bible passages to understand this biblical meaning of repent.

> NAU **Luke 3:7-14** So he *began* saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 "Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father' for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. 9 "Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." 10 And the crowds were questioning him, saying, "Then what shall we do?" 11 And he would answer and say to them, "The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise." 12 And *some* tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" 13 And he said to them, "Collect no more than what you have been ordered to." 14 *Some* soldiers were questioning him, saying, "And *what about* us, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse *anyone* falsely, and be content with your wages." (Luk 3:7-14 NAU)

The word "he" in this passage refers to John the Baptist. John was calling people to repent, he was telling people what to do if they truly wanted to repent.

- In verse 11 John said, "The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise." He was telling people to change their attitudes and their actions, from now on they don't just care for themselves only, but they should also care for other people.
- In verse 12 when the tax collectors asked John what they had to do, he said, "Collect no more than what you have been ordered to." These tax collectors must be collecting more money than the required amount, that's why John told them from now on they should not take more than the required amount. That's the result of a completely change of heart attitude.
- In verse 14 when the soldiers asked him what to do, he told them not to take money from anyone by force, not to accuse anyone falsely, but to be content with their wages. These soldiers must be taking money from people by force and accusing people falsely, and John told them to change both their heart attitude and action completely.

From these verses we see that if people truly want to repent, they have to take action to make things right, it is not just feeling sorry for the wrong things that they have done.

NAU **Matthew 3:8** "Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; (Mat 3:8 NAU)

This verse shows that repentance would bear fruit. If you only feel sorry or have a desire to do the right thing you won't bear fruit, in order to bear fruit you have to do something. So repentance is an action to make things right.

NAU **Acts 11:18** When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance *that leads* to life." (Act 11:18 NAU)

Please notice these words: "the repentance that leads to life." Repentance can lead to life, then it certainly not just a feeling or a desire, because a feeling or a desire doesn't lead to life. If you want to repent, you don't simply desire it, you need to take action. For example: When the people in the world desire riches or social status, they need to take action, if they just sit there and desire, they won't attain it, they need to take action to acquire their goal. Brothers, sisters and friends, if you desire life, you have to take action to do something, then the action will lead to life. So repentance is an action.

These three passages Luke 3:7-14, Matthew 3:8 and Acts 11:18 show that repentance in the Bible is an action turning away from sin and doing the right thing. When the Lord Jesus calls us to repent, he is calling us to turn away from sin and do the right thing.

Some people might say that: "I am a good person, I do not commit crime, I pay tax, I do no harm to others, I even help people, I donate money to charity; therefore I don't need to repent, only those criminals and the wicked people need to repent, but I don't need to repent!"

Repent from the self-centered life

Brothers and sisters and friends, if you have committed sins, certainly you need to repent; but the Lord Jesus is calling you to do more than that, not only you need to repent from the sins you have committed, but you also need to repent from the self-centered life.

What is self-centered life? We human being are self-centered, because we always put ourselves first and highest, everything else and everyone else is secondary!

- We only do good to other people if it doesn't affect ourselves; if helping others can affect ourselves or affect someone we love, then we don't do it, or we compromise a bit so that the help we give to others would not affect our own interest!
- We only do good to those we love, we don't do good to those we hate or those we don't like.
- Many Christians only obey God's commandments if the act doesn't affect themselves or someone they love; if obeying God's commandments can hurt themselves or someone they love, then they won't do it, or they compromise, they water it down a little bit!

This is called self-centered life! When the Lord Jesus says, "Repent, for the kingdom of God has come near," he is calling us to repent from whatever sins we have committed, and also to repent from the self-centered life and change to the God-centered life!

God-centered life

What is God-centered life? In the self-centered life you put your own interests first, but in God-centered life you always put God first, you love God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind and all your strength, and you obey His teaching totally even if it can hurt your own interests or the interests of someone you love.

In the two thousand years history of the church there are many faithful Christians who gave up their possessions, their families and even their own lives to follow this calling of the Lord Jesus. In year 1988 my husband and I were working in the high-tech companies in Toronto, Canada; my husband was an electronic engineer, I was a computer system programmer analyst, we were living a very comfortable life; Then the Lord Jesus called us to go to preach the gospel, and we answered his calling. In year 1989 we gave up our professions and everything we had, we left our comfortable life in Toronto, we went to Asia. In the past thirty some years we have been preaching gospel in

different places: Hong Kong, Singapore, Philippines, Australia, Palau (it is in Micronesia – a group of small islands in the Pacific Ocean); we are ready to go anywhere the Lord calls us to go and do anything he calls us to do.

I am not saying that everyone has to go to preach the gospel, that is not what I mean! My point is to obey everything the Lord tells you to do. Maybe he will tell you to do different things, but preaching the gospel is what he calls us to do, and we obey his calling.

Why do we have to change to the God-centered life?

Some people will ask why they have to change to God-centered life? The life they are living now is very comfortable, they only do the things they like, and they don't do the things they don't like; Why can't they just believe in God but keep their life style as it is?

Because the Kingdom of God has come near! Since two thousand years ago the Lord Jesus proclaimed: "Repent, for the Kingdom of God has come near," more and more people have submitted to the kingship of God.

> NAU **Matthew 24:14** "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come. (Mat 24:14 NAU)

Gospel means good news. The Lord Jesus says that when the gospel, the good news of the Kingdom of God reaches the whole world, then the end will come, that means the end of this age.

What will happen at the end of this age? The Lord Jesus will come back to establish the actual Kingdom of God on earth. At the present time the actual Kingdom of God is in heaven, but the spiritual Kingdom of God has come to earth two thousand years ago, and more and more people on earth have submitted to the kingship of God; in the future when the gospel of the Kingdom of God reaches the whole earth, the Lord Jesus will come back to establish the actual Kingdom of God on earth, then the Kingdom of God will cover both the heaven and the earth.

If you repent from the self-centered life and submit to the the kingship of God now, you will be received into the Kingdom of God and be given eternal life when the Lord Jesus comes back.

But if you don't submit to the kingship of God now, you reject His kingship, in the future when the Lord Jesus establishes the Kingdom of God on earth, you will be thrown out of the Kingdom of God.

What will happen to those people who are thrown out of the Kingdom of God?

NAU **Luke 13:28** "In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God, but yourselves being thrown out. (Luk 13:28 NAU)

This passage says that when people are thrown out of the Kingdom of God, they will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

But what does it mean to be "weeping and gnashing of teeth" ? "Weeping and gnashing of teeth" is not just crying, it depicts a picture of destruction.

NAU **Matthew 13:42** and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Mat 13:42 NAU)

This Bible passage says that when sinners are thrown into the furnace of fire, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

These two Bible passages Luke 13:28 and Matthew 13:42 together show that those people being thrown out of the Kingdom of God will be weeping and gnashing of teath, and they will be destroyed in the lake of fire.

Conclusion

Now we sum up everything we have just studied. In Matthew 4:17 the Lord Jesus says the Kingdom of God has come near, he is calling us to repent from the sins we have committed, from the self-centered life and change to the God-centered life. Over the past two thousand years more and more people have repented and submitted to the kingship of God. In the future when the gospel reaches the whole earth, the Lord Jesus will come back to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. If you repent and submit to the kingship of God now, you will be received into the Kingdom of God and be granted eternal life in heaven. But if you refuse the kingship of God now, in the future when the Lord Jesus comes back to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, you will be thrown out of the Kingdom of God, that means destruction in the lake of fire.

This is the first message about the Kingdom of God and eternal life, in the weeks to come we will continue to study the Kingdom of God and eternal life in the Bible.