

UNIT 14

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SEEK THE LORD,

ALL YOU HUMBLE

OF THE EARTH

“I Turn My Feet Back to Your Decrees”

by Matt Capps

When Martin Luther sparked the Protestant Reformation by nailing his ninety-five theses on the door of the Wittenberg Cathedral in Germany, it was no coincidence that the very first thesis focused on repentance. For Luther, repentance was so central to the Christian life that this famous document began by arguing that “the entire life of believers be a life of repentance.”¹ This may sound odd to our modern sensibilities. In fact, it’s not a stretch to argue that the doctrine of repentance has fallen on hard times in our day because it presupposes there is something wrong with us. In our therapeutic culture, this can come across as demeaning. No one wants to admit something is wrong with them, right? *Who has the right to tell me I need to change? Who has the right to tell me I don’t measure up? And repentance is needed for all of life? Come on, Luther. Isn’t that a little excessive?*

We all like to justify ourselves, in every part of our being. As the father of three small children, I am reminded of this often. When confronting a child’s

wrongdoing, I always notice how quickly their inner lawyer is revealed in their arguments. One common response is: “It wasn’t my fault! He started it!” We all are excellent at pointing out the faults of others, aren’t we? Another response is: “I didn’t do anything wrong!” We love to redefine right and wrong according to our own benefit. It’s fascinating how the actions of a child reflect how controversial repentance is from an early age. Things don’t change much as we grow older; our self-justification just becomes more advanced. This is common among all humanity. You see, the way the world typically deals with sin is blame-shifting or redefinition. However, God calls His children to deal with sin by repentance.

DEFINING REPENTANCE

Repentance is more than remorse over being caught. Repentance is deeper than regret for the consequences of sin. Repentance begins with sorrow over breaking God’s heart. But repentance doesn’t end there. Repentance is turning

from sin and returning to God with a desire to follow His commands. Mark Dever put it well when he said:

What is repentance? It is turning from the sins you love to the holy God you're called to love. It is admitting that you're not God. It is beginning to value Jesus more than your immediate pleasure. It is giving up those things the Bible calls sin and leaving them to follow Jesus.²

When one examines Scripture, repentance is always the first step to renewal and revival. The good news is God always initiates this renewal with a manifest call for repentance among His people. In this sense, all of God's warnings that precede final judgment are acts of mercy and grace. However, we must not presume upon His grace. Even in His long-suffering, God is also just. The Old Testament makes it clear: When people ignore God's warnings and proceed in their sin despite His summons, it always ends in judgment. Therefore, true repentance is marked by perseverance in obedience. To put it another way, sin forsaken is one of the best pieces of evidence for true repentance.

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REPENTANCE IN SANCTIFICATION

Now, you may be thinking, But even in my best efforts, I am not able to walk in perfect obedience! This is why Luther declared that all of life should be marked by repentance. Even from the beginning, an infant in the faith must first understand that repentance is required to understand our need for grace. As time goes on and one matures in faith, it becomes clear that the closer you get to our Holy God, the more you realize how much you need to repent. The brighter the light, the more visible the imperfections. In this way, we understand that the fruitful Christian life isn't a sinless life but a repentant life. The Christian who has stopped repenting is a Christian who has stopped growing. After all, Jesus exhorted people to produce fruit that comes from repentance (Matt. 3:8).

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THE GOSPEL IS FOR SINNERS

The gospel is such good news for sinners like you and me. Jesus came not for the healthy but for those who knew they were sick, to call sinners to repentance (Luke 5:31-32). As Christians, we know that Jesus died as the atoning sacrifice for our sin so that we could be forgiven (Luke 24:46-47). Because Jesus is the only person who has ever lived a perfectly righteous life, He is the only One who can make a satisfactory sacrifice to appease the justice of God. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the grounds of our repentance. And it's God's kindness that leads us to repentance (Rom. 2:4). This is good news for the entirety of our lives! Why? We can be open and honest when we repent of our sin because the Scriptures promise that our sins will be wiped out and remembered by God no more. Moreover, we are promised that when we repent, we will be refreshed by the Lord (Acts 3:19-20).

Now we see that repentance is not just the door of entry into the Christian life. Repentance is the way we go further up and deeper into our walk with God. At the end of his life, the puritan theologian

John Newton was recorded as saying, "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: That I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Savior."³ You see, like Newton, we must understand that repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin. Repentance recognizes that we are so sinful that we need God's grace. Faith believes that we are so loved that Christ came to show us grace. And it's because of God's grace in Christ that we can approach the throne of grace with boldness to receive mercy and find grace (Heb. 4:16). Therefore, growing in repentance is the fruit of faithfulness. And faithfulness is proven through persevering in repentance.



A HUMILIATED KING

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Faithfulness is proven over the long-term, and later lapses of faithfulness will be judged.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGES:**

2 Kings 11–12; 2 Chronicles 22–24

+ **SETTING:**

Ahab, king of Israel, and his wife, Jezebel, brought great wickedness and idolatry into the land, leading their people far astray from the one true God. And Ahab's influence spread to Judah when his daughter, Athaliah, married Jehoram, the king of Judah. Through the word of Elisha, a general from Israel named Jehu brought judgment upon all the house of Ahab, killing the wicked kings of both kingdoms who were descended from him. The power vacuum in Judah was quickly and violently filled by Athaliah, the queen mother, but even she did not escape God's judgment and was replaced by the rightful king, Joash.

DAY 1

READ:

2 Chronicles 22:1–24:14

FOCAL PASSAGE:

2 Chronicles 24:4

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #62: DEITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity, possessing the fullness of deity like the Father and Son. His deity can be seen in the fact that He is eternal (Heb. 9:14), omnipresent (Ps. 139:7-8), the creator and giver of life (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:30; John 3:5-7), and directly identified with the Triune God (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14).

In 2 Chronicles 24:4, Joash decided that he wanted to renovate and restore the Lord’s temple. The Hebrew word used for “renovate” or “restore” was not a word used often in the Bible when talking about buildings. It was a word used for personal renewal (Pss. 51:10; 103:5; Lam. 5:21).¹ This tells us something about the kind of work Joash set his heart upon. It wasn’t just a fresh coat of paint on the walls. It was a rejuvenation of the temple’s heart. It was a reclaiming of the temple’s purpose. The temple was the center of worship for God’s people. It was the meeting place where grace could be found. It was God’s dwelling place on earth where the mercy seat sat in the innermost part of the temple. The temple was a holy place because the Holy One resided within.

But the temple had fallen into disrepair. It was abused during the reign of Athaliah, and it had become a house useful for staying alive rather than a temple that brings life. It was a shell of its former glory, like something you might see along the road and think, “I wonder what happened to that place?”

In 1 Corinthians 6:19, Paul asked if his readers were unaware that their physical bodies were temples of God. Some of them weren’t treating them as such. They were abusing themselves by living with abandon in the sinful lifestyles associated with the world. It’s not just old buildings that need renovation—we do too. We need to be refreshed by the Lord; we need a restoration to what we were made to be: living houses of worship to the Lord.

How do we reclaim that glory? We can pour more money into it. We can paint the walls of our scarred lives with all the makeup in the world. But it won’t do any good if the insides are still cracked and bruised. We need One who can clean what we never could. We need the Spirit of God to dwell within, for we are His temples (1 Cor. 6:19).

How do you need the Lord to restore you today?

DAY 2

READ:

Psalm 69

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Psalm 69:9

NOTES

In 2 Chronicles 24:4-14, Joash labored hard, involved many, and raised an abundance of funds to repair the Lord's temple. He had a zeal for the Lord's house, for its restoration and renewal, similar to that of his father David.

In Psalm 69:9, David spoke of a consuming zeal for God's house. Facing persecution and suffering, David could not shake his sense of justice. Things were not all right. Not only was he derided and slandered, but God's very house was disregarded. David's lament was not only for himself, but it also pointed upward to the God who was ignored and forgotten. Zeal for God's house consumed him, and he took up his pen.

Psalm 69:9 is not a one-off verse in the Bible. It appears later in John 2:13-17, when Jesus came to cleanse the temple. Zeal for God's house consumed Jesus as well, and He took up a whip. What happened in the temple mattered to God. The activities, the rituals, the comings and goings, the hearts of those who entered and those who longed to enter mattered to God. His name would not be derided forever. His glory would not be overshadowed by traders and money changers. The temple was the meeting place of God and humanity, and that sacred space was worth fighting for. It was for David and Joash. It was for Jesus too.

But Joash's zeal would wane. We will read of his many sins and his failure of faithfulness. Yet his renovation work still mattered because, despite who he became, the temple revealed that God longs to draw near to His people and to have His people draw near to Him. He desires to call all people to Himself. He made His dwelling with humanity, and He will do so again (Rev. 21:3). Zeal for His house consumed Jesus while on earth, and it consumes Him now in heaven. One day, He'll come again and renew this tired earth. On that day, nothing will stand in the way of us coming to Him.

How does Jesus's consuming zeal for God's house, especially as it points to an eternal hope of heaven, give you peace and comfort today?

DAY 3

READ:

2 Chronicles 22:10–24:18

FOCAL PASSAGE:

2 Chronicles 24:17-18

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Growing up in a Christian family should be a massive benefit to a child. A culture of grace inside a family looking to God is the kind of fertile soil perfect for faith to spring up. Jehoiada provided such a family to his nephew Joash. Furthermore, Joash had a long line of family history in which the works of God were evident in each life. He had every advantage to succeed in faith, and while Jehoiada was around, Joash seemed strong in the Lord. But when Jehoiada died, it seemed Joash's faith died with him. What are we to make of this situation and narrative?

Faith is not an inherited trait. Each generation must discover the beauty of the gospel, and every person must place his or her faith in Christ for themselves. Parents ought to raise their children in the church and teach them the things of God. That's a biblical command (Deut. 6:6-7). But faith cannot be passed down like a family heirloom. Faith is an individual step each one must take.

The story of Joash at least shows us this: faith cannot be dependent upon another. We must all follow God from personal choice. It is good to be in community with other believers, and their faith can encourage ours (Rom. 1:12), but if all community were stripped away, would we still believe?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"See how much one head may sustain, and what a great judgment to any prince or people the death of godly, zealous, useful men is. See how necessary it is that, as our Saviour speaks, we have salt in ourselves, that we act in religion from an inward principle, which will carry us on through all changes. Then the loss of a parent, a minister, a friend, will not involve the loss of our religion."²

—Matthew Henry (1662-1714)

The apostle Paul helps us diagnose our hearts with his exhortation in Philippians 2:12: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." God saves individuals and places them in a community of believers. We may sing along with the church's worship, but do we believe the truths proclaimed? We may listen to the sermons preached, but do we hear and believe the words of truth? We may pray along with the pastor, but is that as far as we bend our hearts to God? Faith must be a personal reality for each of us.

Though the Bible gives assurance of salvation, it also calls us to evaluate our relationship with Jesus. How do you need to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling today?

DAY 4

READ:

2 Chronicles 24:15-19

FOCAL PASSAGE:

2 Chronicles 24:19

NOTES

There are two types of people in the world: those who stay and those who leave. Jehoiada was one who stayed (2 Chron. 24:15-16). Joash and the rulers of Judah were those who left, abandoning the Lord and His temple (24:17-18). To whom did they go? To the Asherah poles and the idols. They left the God of the universe for a stick in the ground and a bust made from a log. They left the temple filled with glory for an idol filled with nothing.

That's crazy, right? That doesn't make sense, does it? Yet they went. They abandoned the one true God for many false gods, looking for a new life in a bigger world than they previously knew. It's a story of biblical proportions, one that started way back in the opening chapters of the Bible and reaches all the way to the final book. God's people leave Him for idols. Even after God has come in the flesh to live and die and rise again to save His people, the apostle John still felt the need to end one of his letters with an exhortation to the church to guard themselves from idols (1 John 5:21).

We are a leaving people. It's in us to go. We try to pursue more and more worldly things, despising what we already have, looking for the latest and greatest. But despite our habit of leaving, God never leaves or abandons us (Heb. 13:5). He stays faithful, though we are faithless (2 Tim. 2:13). He remains like the father of the prodigal son, waiting for the day we come back home after realizing all we have left behind (Luke 15:11-32). Our God is a staying God, a God who loves those hard to love, who is patient with those who rebel, who is steadfast with those who look in every direction but His. Just as He was with Joash and His people, the Lord is faithful to call His wayward children back to Himself. The question is "Will we listen?"

Where in your heart do you feel you've left God, even if in the sense of not letting Him control one certain aspect of your life? Will you repent today? Why or why not?

DAY 5

READ:

2 Chronicles 24:17-27

FOCAL PASSAGE:

2 Chronicles 24:24

NOTES

The judgment of God is a difficult doctrine. We instinctively know that if God is good, then He must act against all evil and sin in the world, yet His judgment is still a difficult thing to swallow. It has so many implications that we cannot possibly address them all here, so let's consider just one. How will our sins be judged?

This question is vital to our understanding of God and the gospel. Let's assume you agree that you have very real sins that deserve a very real punishment. But you also know that God is gracious and merciful. You also know there is a judgment day coming. What will that day be like?

This question is more than a theologically interesting thought experiment. We need a real answer because we have real sin, and those sins deserve real judgment. So what does the gospel say about our sins?

Here's what we know from the Bible. God cannot overlook sin. He cannot just ignore it and move on. Passages such as Romans 1:18 and 6:23 tell us God's wrath stands against all ungodliness and that the wages of sin is death.

But God in His wisdom created a world in which sin could be forgiven. Instead of humanity bearing the cost themselves, He decided in His grace and mercy that He could bear it Himself. Jesus would come to live and die as our substitute. He would live the perfect life we failed to live and take on the penalty we owed for our sin at the cross. He would remove our unrighteousness and give us His perfect righteousness instead.

The answer to all our sin is Jesus. The judgment we are due has already been paid for. On the cross, Jesus took our punishment, and He paid it in full. Now, before the holy God above, all who believe in Christ's atoning work are proclaimed not guilty in the great courtroom of divine justice. That's the message of the gospel.

How does the judgment Jesus took on your behalf help you think through the doctrine of the judgment of God?

GROUP

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VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Every man in the state of nature makes an idol of himself; exalts himself when he should advance God; minds himself more than he minds God; aims at himself, when he should aim at God; rests in himself, when he should depend upon God; loves himself more than God; honours himself more than God; seeks himself more than God; would have that ascribed to himself, which is to be ascribed only to God; would have himself eyed, admired, praised more than God. Self-conceit, self-love, self-seeking, they are all secret strains of idolatry, and ourselves are naturally our own idols."³

-David Clarkson (1622-1686)

POINT 1: A faithful king restores the proper worship of God (2 Chron. 24:4-6,13-14).

The temple of the Lord had been _____ and ravaged by an ungodly queen, but young King Joash saw to it that the temple would be _____ and restored with the help of the Levites and his _____ .



What are some excuses people might have for delaying spiritual restoration in their lives and churches?

Joash and Jehoiada served well in their _____ and _____ duties, respectively. They restored and filled the temple and led the people to _____ the Lord as He had commanded.

POINT 2: A forgetful king reverts to the worship of idols (2 Chron. 24:17-22).

Joash's life exemplifies the truths that faithfulness is played out over _____ and that _____ company corrupts _____ morals (see 1 Cor. 15:33).



What are some things we can do to avoid the wayward path Joash took with his life?

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #62: DEITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is the Third _____ of the Trinity, possessing the _____ of deity like the Father and Son. His deity can be seen in the fact that He is eternal (Heb. 9:14), _____ (Ps. 139:7-8), the creator and giver of life (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:30; John 3:5-7), and directly identified with the Triune God (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14).

POINT 3: A fallen king receives the judgment of God (2 Chron. 24:23-25).

Joash, the leaders, and the people of Judah incurred the wrath and judgment of God for their rebellion.

The _____ and _____ Lord used a _____ people to judge Joash for his sin.



What does God's response to Joash's rebellion teach us about God's character?

Joash began faithfully, then forgot tragically, and therefore was judged justly. He died for his rebellion. But one day, the promised King—Jesus—would come. He is _____ faithful and died in our place, taking on the judgment we deserve. _____ in Him and be _____ !



What should a life of faithfulness look like for a believer in Jesus Christ?

MY RESPONSE

Because Jesus has gone before us in complete faithfulness, we don't rest in momentary acts of obedience but rather seek to live in a way that is fully pleasing to the Father as long as we draw breath.

- **HEAD:** What comes into your mind when you think about God? What thoughts need to be examined more closely, and how will you do that?
- **HEART:** Where does your path of life diverge from the faithful path Jesus has paved? What sinful patterns of idol worship do you need to repent of?
- **HANDS:** For whom is the Holy Spirit leading you to play the part of Zechariah, to warn and call them to repentance that they might be saved through faith in Jesus Christ?

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Like milk that turns sour, Joash never returns to his former wholesomeness. However, we remember that only with death do we reach the point of no return. While there is life, there is always the hope that by the grace of God, even a curdled life can be reinvested, or turned into *rasgullas*, the Bengali sweet made with sour milk."⁴

-Havilah Dharamraj