

Rescued to Know Him: The Necessity of Repentance

Exodus 35-40

I'm sure most of you know what holiday is today and you will be spending some time this evening celebrating. I'm talking about Reformation Day, of course.

(SLIDE) On October 31st, 1517, 504 years ago today, Martin Luther, a German Monk posted his 95 Theses to the castle church door in Wittenburg and this ultimately led to the Reformation. Luther was not trying to begin a mass movement, but he was trying to challenge some of the problems he saw in the Roman Catholic Church with doctrine and practice.

Luther's perspective on salvation had shifted leading up to this date as he studied the book of Romans. He now understood salvation to be a gift of God, given by grace through faith alone and not on the basis of works, including the sacraments. Luther understood faith to be a two-sided coin that meant turning from sin and self in repentance and turning to God in faith and trust. In fact, he begins the 95 Theses like this: *"When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ``Repent" (Mt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."*

In other words, the regular and consistent practice of every believer needs to be repentance. This does not mean beating yourself up. It doesn't mean feeling lousy for sin for a day or two until you think you've done enough to make up for your sin. Repentance means a full and honest confession to God and acknowledgment of your sinful thoughts, motives, or actions, and a grateful acceptance of your union with Christ and His complete and full atonement for your sin. Repentance involves a recognition of the terrible rebellion of my sin and the way it has offended God and then a turning from that sin to run to Christ in faith.

What does repentance have to do with the end of the book of Exodus? Well, we've just spent several weeks studying the golden calf story, which we find in Exodus 32-34. Right in the middle of that story we find God's most severe judgment on Israel for their sin in 33:1-3. And then we find what seems to be a genuine sign of repentance from the Israelites. 33:4-6.

At this point Israel had already broken the covenant with God and now they were looking at a future without Him among them and without the distinction of being His chosen people. Moses intercedes for the people and God reveals Himself to

be a God of mercy, grace, and forgiveness and because of His character He agrees to accept their repentance and go with them to the Promised Land. In 34:10 we see that He renews the covenant with them and at the end of chapter 34 Moses comes down the mountain and reports what God has told him about the renewed covenant and his plans for Israel.

So, what happens next? I'd like to show you the flow of the story over the last six chapters of Exodus and then we will draw out some principles regarding repentance.

Let's zoom out for a minute and let me remind you of what has happened in Exodus overall. In chapters 1-18 God rescues Israel from Egypt. He brings them into the wilderness to Mt. Sinai and makes a covenant with them and gives them His law in chapters 19-24. Then, in chapters 25-31 God gives Moses instructions for the house He will dwell in and the priests who will serve in His house. While God is giving these instructions for how He plans to come and live among the Israelites, the people are at the base of Mt Sinai constructing another god and worshiping it because Moses has been gone for so long.

We've studied the golden calf incident in chapters 32-34 over the last month or so and now we come to the last 6 chapters of Exodus. What happens after God renews the covenant with Israel and Moses comes down the mountain to them and reports what God has said? In other words, how does the book of Exodus end? Look with me at 35:4-6.

They have the instructions for the tabernacle and the covenant has been renewed so now they are instructed by God to gather all the materials necessary to build the tabernacle and construct these other items. But Moses also puts out the call for people to serve and actually do the work of putting all of this together. Look at 35:10. So they need materials and laborers, and the people respond with a willing heart and get the stuff and offer their abilities to God. Look down at 35:20-29.

Now the whole process is organized and two men are put in charge, almost like foremen to oversee the process and do some of the most difficult and technical work. Look at 35:30-36:2.

Now, at this point in the story we basically get a repetition of chapters 25-31 all the way through the end of chapter 39. Except this time instead of saying that

they “shall” build this piece or that, it says “they made”. They finish making every part and every piece exactly according to God’s command. Look with me at 39:32, 42-43.

Once it is all finished, they put it up on the first day of the new year. They have now been out of Egypt a full year. Look at 40:1-2, 16-17. And once it has been finished, God’s glorious presence comes to dwell in it, among the Israelites. Look at 40:34-38.

Now, this is a very good ending to the book of Exodus. The people have been rescued from Egypt and despite their sin, God has come to dwell in their midst to bless them so they can be a blessing to the nations. They have received His law and know what they need to do to dwell with Him. Now the expectation can be that they will be on their way to the Promised Land. How did they get to this point of blessing and presence despite their sin with the golden calf? First of all, God’s mercy and forgiveness. Second, Israel seems to be genuinely repentant of their sin. They acknowledge it and turn to God. Listen to how Paul brings these two together in Romans 2:4. When you see God’s unmerited grace and goodness in contrast to your sin, it draws out confession and repentance.

How do we know Israel experienced God’s kindness and repented? Well, we saw their sadness over God’s presence being removed from them in chapter 33 and we saw them take off their jewelry as God commanded. But the entire conclusion of this story and the construction of the tabernacle gives us further evidence that the Israelites were honestly repentant. So, let’s look at **4 Results of Repentance that Flow from God’s Mercy.**

1. Change of Heart

Repentance will not just be a change in actions. It’s not simply outward conformity to the rules. Real repentance happens because there is a change of heart. We aren’t just sorry because we’ve experienced the consequences of sin and they are pretty uncomfortable. We see sin for what it actually is and we see how it has damaged the relationship with God.

Real repentance requires an accurate assessment of sin, and this can do nothing but trouble a heart. I think we see this change of heart for Israel in how they

respond to God's instructions regarding the tabernacle. Look with me at 35:5, 21, 22, 26, 29, 36:2.

Each person wants to be involved and they offer whatever they can to God, whether materials or skills. In 2 Cor. 7:10-11 Paul describes how godly repentance comes from the inside and motivates action. And it definitely does motivate action.

2. Obedience

If we return to Luther's 95 Theses for a moment, I want you to notice what he says in the 3rd Theses. *"Yet it does not mean solely inner repentance; such inner repentance is worthless unless it produces various outward mortification of the flesh."*

The inner change of heart always results in outward changes in action. We saw this in 2 Cor. 7 as the one who is truly repentant goes to great lengths to make things right. And you see this with Israel. I want you to think for a moment about the way in which Moses has structured the book of Exodus here. We had chapters and chapters of God's specific instructions for the tabernacle and priesthood in chapters 25-31. Now we have the same material again and in many places it's almost the exact same wording. Wouldn't it have been enough for Moses to just say, they completed the job and built the whole thing? One verse Moses! You could have used the space to give us more details about the frogs in people's ovens. You know, real life stories. Why all the repetition?

The point of all the repetition is to show that they obeyed exactly as they were supposed to. The Lord commanded in places like 35:1 and 36:1 and Israel did it all as pointed out throughout the passage and summarized in 39:42-43. The details give weight to their obedience.

And true repentance always shows itself in change of action or obedience. In fact, part of Luther's reason for saying that all of life should be one of repentance is that the consistent practice of seeing our sin and turning from it to God is actually how we make progress in holiness. Tim Keller comments on Luther's statement by saying this: *"Indeed, pervasive, all-of-life repentance is the best sign that we are growing deeply and rapidly into the character of Jesus."* – Tim Keller

3. God's Presence

The repetition of the details certainly shows that Israel obeyed God intentionally and specifically. But it also shows us just how important the tabernacle is in the Biblical story and in the life of Israel. Moses devotes over a quarter of the book of Exodus to the details of the tabernacle. It's a ton of material and it's purposeful and we should make note of it.

And it's important because the reality of God's presence among His people gets to the very center of the message of the Bible. Remember what Moses said in 33:15-16 about God's presence among Israel? God's presence is so important because the whole Bible begins with God creating man and putting him in a place where God would come and dwell with him. This was man's ultimate good. The tabernacle and God's presence with Israel is an important step in the plan of God to return to dwell with humanity.

And in the story of Israel God's presence returning to be with them highlights the importance of repentance in the salvation plan of God. How would God respond after sin and what will He do with a sinful people? When there is repentance there will be forgiveness and He will restore the relationship. It's why the entire book ends the way it does with God's glory coming to dwell among the people in 40:34-35. But God's presence showing up to the tabernacle isn't the end of the story of Israel. It's really only the beginning and this is why repentance results in being put on mission for God.

4. On Mission

Notice what it says in 40:36-38. Moses draws our attention toward Israel's future and how God will be with them throughout their journey, which will end in the Promised Land.

This brings the entire book of Exodus to a resolution. God has rescued Israel so that they can know Him. He has brought them out of Egypt by a powerful hand. He showed His mercy and wrath over sin. He revealed His holiness through His law and the necessity of the tabernacle to mediate His presence. He proclaimed His goodness and glory to Moses on Mt. Sinai and then He responds to their repentance by mercifully coming to dwell among them. God's character has been put on full display here for Israel to see. Now, they are to take this knowledge and

mediate it, as a kingdom of priests, to the world when they are brought into the Promised Land.

And of course, even as all these themes come together in this high note ending, they all ultimately point toward John 1:14 when God truly came and tabernacled among His people in order to make Himself known. And because of that we clearly see our sin, our need for repentance, and the mercy and grace of God. Let's pray.