

Episode #704 Matthew 3 Part 1-The Command to Repent

I. The purpose of the gospel of Matthew is to present Jesus as the Christ, the King of Israel. It is another grand treatise like John to prove to Israel Who Jesus really is. It is the book of being “in Israel,” in contrast to believers today who are “in Christ.”

II. Last time we saw that the record of Matthew skips over the Lord’s growing up years to the time when his cousin John begins his ministry to Israel. He came proclaiming the kingdom of the heavens, which we discussed means nothing less than the heavens’ government or God’s government over the earth. John called on them to “repent” in the light of this. What does “repent” mean, and what was John truly asking them to do?

III. What does “repent” mean?

- A. The commonly accepted meaning of this word in English is to have a great emotional and physical show of sorrow or contrition for (sinful) deeds committed. We cannot change the English meaning, but we can deny that the Greek verb *metanoeo* (as here) and the noun *metanoia* means any such thing. II Corinthians 7:10 shows us that repentance does not mean Godly sorrow, for Godly sorrow is the cause and repentance is the effect.
- B. Dr. Archibald T. Robertson, professor in Greek of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY, often quoted his father-in-law Dr. John A. Brodis, also a prominent Greek scholar of rank, as having said, “The translation of *metanoeo* as ‘repent’ is the worst translation in the New Testament.”
- C. We have no one English word that reproduces the meaning and nuances of the Greek word. The Greek word is more flexible and says more than we can say with a word we can use to translate it into English. So we must use some close word and then use other related words as the context demands. Yet ‘repent’ is not even close; it is a misrepresentation. The Vulgate makes it to do penance! Protestants strongly protest this, yet they use a word that means the same thing.
- D. Some therefore say the Greek means to change one’s mind, making this nothing more than a mental change. This satisfies many by relieving the “do penance” aspect, but this meaning does not come from the elements of the word nor its usage. There were many good, Godly people in Israel who wanted nothing more than to serve him. Did these people need to “change their minds”? Not at all!
- E. The Greek comes from *meta* = after and *noia* = mind. If one decides to go on a picnic tomorrow unless it rains, that is a foremind dependent on circumstances after. Yet if one decides to go rain or shine, that is having the aftermind in advance, *metanoia*.
Metanoia means the foremind and *metanoeo* means to have the foremind.
 1. In John 2:23-24 we read of men who had the foremind but not the aftermind. Their minds when seeing miracles was not the same as when they would see trouble and persecution.
 2. In Matthew 8:19 a man makes an impressive statement, but there is some question if he had the aftermind.
 3. John 6:66 shows disciples who did not have the aftermind.
 4. Acts 9:6. Paul reveals a Godly sorrow for the sins he committed before his encounter with the Lord on the Damascus road. He displayed a true submission at that time, and never turned from it nor regretted it afterwards.

- F. We suggest “submit” for *metanoeo* and “submission” for *metanoia* as basic translations, yet there are limitations to this. Sometimes we must use yield or ease to express the truth. John’s call is for men to submit, to make no resistance, to make no move, but simply to wait for further instructions. They were to yield their persons to the power of another. There were other steps they needed to take, but this was the first and most important step before others could be made.
1. This is what Joshua called on Israel to do in Joshua 24:15.
 2. Ruth revealed her complete submission to Naomi in Ruth 1:16-17. Her mind before she knew what the circumstances would be was the same mind it would be after the circumstances were known.
 3. Perhaps there is no better example of a promise to have the aftermind than the marriage vow. “For better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness or in health” I will stay married to you. Yet when the time comes, whether or not one really had the aftermind is revealed.
- G. Consider where these people were standing. The Lord Jesus, a Man Who was God, was about to be revealed to them. They would be expected to yield to His kingdom and His apostles. They would be expected to accept Gentiles into their number. And, finally, to accept that all nations are joint and equal with Israel, Ephesians 3:6. Was any generation ever asked to accept such huge and sweeping changes in the works and plans of God? These people truly needed the aftermind!
- H. Do we all have the aftermind regarding the truth God has revealed in His Word? We never know where our studies in the Word will lead us. We must be ready to pay a price. Or do we want comfortable, convenient, and widely-accepted ideas?
- IV. Conclusion: John called on the people of Israel to repent. Yet this is a bad translation of *metanoeo*. This means to have the aftermind, making up your mind right now so that it will not change after. The idea of this is submission, and we have many examples in Scripture of Godly people who submitted regardless of the cost to themselves. Do we *metanoeo* when we come to Scripture to seek God’s truth, or are we only interested in comfortable, widely-accepted ideas? A true student of God’s word truly needs the attitude of submission that John called on Israel to display.