

January 30, 2005



Repent

by Rev. Jerry L. McGlone

John 9:1-2, 6-7, 13-16, 18-21, 24-17, 30-34

As [Jesus] passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

... [Jesus] spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and anointed the [blind] man's eyes with the clay, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Silo'am..." So [the blind man] went and washed and came back seeing.

[The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar] brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the clay and opened [the blind man's] eyes. The Pharisees asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "[Jesus] put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." Some of the Pharisees said, "This man [Jesus] is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath" ...

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight, and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself."

So for the second time [the Pharisees] called the man who had been blind, and said to him, "Give God the praise; we know that [Jesus] is a sinner." He answered, "Whether [Jesus] is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see... I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you too want to become his disciples?"

... *“Why, this is a marvel! You do not know where [Jesus] comes from, and yet he opened my eyes... Never since the world began has it been heard that any one opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man [Jesus] were not from God, he could do nothing.” [The Pharisees] answered him, “You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?” And they cast him out.*

The wino looked up when he felt someone touch his shoulder. When he looked up, he saw about a dozen men standing around him there in the litter-strewn alley way. They were all talking. They weren't talking to him. They were talking about him. One man asked a question to the fellow who appeared to be the leader of the group.

“Whose fault is it,” the man asked, “that this man is a drunk? Is it his fault? Did his wife drive him to drink? Were his parents bad people?”

The leader answered, “What difference does it make? You should ask a different question. Ask: where can this wino go from here? Can he change his life?”

The leader reached down, touched the wino under the chin, raised the man's eyes up so they were looking at each other. The leader spoke to the wino, “Come on, man, you're free. You can leave skid row. You can be a different man.” He handed the wino twenty dollars and said, “Go over to the YMCA. Get rid of your rags, shower, shave, and go home.”

Two hours later, that cleaned-up wino stepped off the city bus back in the neighborhood where he grew up. “Hey, look, isn't that Willie the Wino?” an old neighbor asked. “Can't be him,” another neighbor replied, “Willie's rotting in some alley down on skid row; but, it sure looks like him.”

“Yep,” Willie said, “it's me.”

“What happened to you,” the neighbors asked. “I don't know,” Willie answered. “Some man walks up to me and says, ‘Willie, you're free. Go home. You're O.K.’ I did. I'm here. I'm O.K.”

A whole crowd of people from the neighborhood gathered around Willie: some of his family members, old friends, a couple of clergymen,

and some passers-by - they all gathered around. "What's going on," they wanted to know. "What's with you," they asked.

Willie told them his story. "At nine o'clock this morning, I'm sleeping off a hangover, when this guy and his friends walk into my alley. He talked to me like I was somebody important. He told me I'm O.K. He said I was free to stop being a wino. He told me to go. I did. I'm here."

"You're putting us on," someone yelled. "Yeah, it's a hoax," somebody else agreed. "You're no wino. What's your angle?"

"No angle," Willie answered. "I've been drunk for years. Now I'm sober."

"Impossible," a clergyman snapped, "once a drunk, always a drunk!" "Could be," Willie said, "but this I know: I once was wet, but now I'm dry."

"Tell us again what happened," they said. "Why?" said Willie. "Do you want to change, too? Do you want some of this freedom to be different?"

"Change? You can't change," they said. "You can't change human nature. You're no different today than you were yesterday, Willie. Just you wait and see. You're Willie the Wino and you always will be. Get out. Go back to skid row where you belong."

Right then, the bus headed back to the city pulled in. Willie shrugged his shoulders and got on the bus. Back on skid row, Willie ran into the man and his group of friends again.

"All the good people back home said I'm no different. They said I can't change. They said I'll always be a wino. They said there's no hope for me. Are they right?"

"What do you think," the man answered. "I don't know," Willie said. "Today I felt like I really was different. I felt like God had touched me, like I really was free, like it's O.K. to be me."

"It's true," the man said. "Be free. God is with you."

"Why don't my family and friends see it?" Willie wanted to know.

The man answered, "There are none so blind as those who will not see."

What do you think? Can a wino get sober? Can a blind man see? Can a person turn his life around?

Both the scripture story of Jesus healing the man who was blind from birth and the story of Willie the Wino talk about more than just a miraculous healing or a sudden soberness. They also talk about the thoughts and the reactions of the people around our central characters. Because they all have to come to terms with change:

- a change of view,
- a change of drink,
- a change of attitude,
- a change of outlook,
- a change of behavior.

And we all know how hard it is to deal with change, how scary it is to embrace the freedom to be different.

But, don't you want it sometimes? Don't you want to feel free? Don't you want to be different? Don't you want to change something?

If you ever have -

- if you ever do -
 - what you're looking for is an old Christian word -
 - a word we don't use much any more -
 - you're looking for -
 - repentance.

You may not know it, but you want to repent.

You want to be free from the ties that bind you to yesterday's mistakes.

You want to be different.

You want to turn your life around and head out in a new direction.

Repent.

It's an old Christian word. It's a word we don't use much any more. There's a good reason we don't use it much any more. Because -

- as soon as I said it, you thought, "Oh, no;"
- as soon as I said it, you felt a turn in your stomach;
 - your eyes glazed over;
 - your mind started wandering.

Maybe you conjured up the image of some wild-eyed John the Baptist-type harping at you to get right with God.

Maybe you pictured some Pentecostal preacher pointing his finger and yelling at you in his revival tent.

Maybe you imagined some woman, long hair tied up in a knot on top of her head, no make-up on her face, wearing a formless cotton smock, swaying and moaning in some religious ecstasy.

Those are images you don't want to see, thoughts you don't want to think, concepts you don't want to contemplate.

Oh, yes, repent is an old-fashioned kind of word we don't use much any more. But it's something every Christian needs to do.

One day a young man came up to Jesus and asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" [Mark 10:17] He was a good man. He had already done everything he knew he was supposed to do, but he had a feeling there was something else he needed to do, one more thing that would set him up for heaven.

Jesus gave him one more thing to do. And when he heard it, that young man said, "Oh, no, I can't do that."

I suspect Jesus responded to him, "*Yes you can; the trouble is, you won't.*"

Jesus really pinned the tail on our donkey with that one, because we're like that young man. We say it, too: "I can't do that." And just like that young man, no matter how good we are, we know we're missing something, that something needs to change, that there's at least one more thing we need to do.

How about you? Isn't there at least one more thing you need to do?

One thought considered...

One word spoken...

One deed done...

One act accomplished...

One oversight corrected...

One mistake mended...

One habit changed...

One hurt forgiven...

One wound healed...

One person cherished...

One soul saved.

You know it in your heart, there's that one more thing you need to do; and when you do it, when you change, when you turn that part of you around - that's called repentance.

You probably already know what you have to do. The only thing that's stopping you is when you say to yourself, "I can't do that." Jesus wants you to know: *you can!*

There's nothing that can keep you from changing your life, not one thing. The power to act, the freedom to do, the ability to perform, the direction to take - they're all in you already.

As a child of God it is your responsibility to change, to turn around, to repent.

Responsibility is another one of those words we don't like. You don't like it because you know what it means. It's made up of two other words: response and ability. It means you have the ability to respond to whatever happens in life in whatever way you choose to respond.

Life, environment, circumstance, friends, family, money, luck, whim, church, job - those things don't control you. You may think they do, but they don't. Your loving father, God, sent Jesus to you with a message that said:

- *you* are a child of God,
- *you* have the power to act,
- *you* have the freedom to respond,
 - to all those outside things,
 - any way you choose.

So...

So what if your wife nags you, or your husband ignores you...

So what if your boss doesn't appreciate you, or your job is a drag...

So what if you have money troubles,

or health concerns,

or family problems...

So what if the only break you get is a bad one...

that's called life.

Those things don't control you. They don't make you act the way you act. **You** have the ability to respond to all those things in whatever way you choose.

And **if** you're not satisfied with how you're living your life,

if you think there might be a better way,
if you suspect there's something that needs to change...
 maybe you need to repent.

When Jesus began his ministry, his first words were: *“The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel.”* [Mark 1:15]

Jesus is calling to you today: repent!

Repent - and take responsibility for your own actions.

Repent - and take control of your life.

Repent - and stop punishing yourself for past mistakes,
 stop hating yourself for yesterday's failures,
 stop repeating unsatisfactory behaviors,
 stop depressing yourself with feelings of worthlessness.

Repent - and finish off all the unfinished business of years past.

Repent - and choose a new way of life.

When you repent, you stop wasting your time with self-recrimination and regret. You learn whatever lesson your mistakes need to teach you. You accept responsibility for the results of your actions. And then, you get on with living the kind of life you want to live. You turn your life in a new direction.

And Jesus says, *“You can do it!”*

True repentance is not a once-in-a-lifetime moment. It is a continuous, on-going process.

No one ever reaches that state of perfection.

No one truly sees with complete clarity.

No one keeps a constant sober thought.

Everyone has at least one more thing he or she needs to do.

A Christian life lived in repentance is the key to growth;

the key to wonderful, fulfilling relationships;

the key to opening your eyes to see God's great work
 in this wonderful world.

Have faith that you **can**.

Have faith that you **will**.

You are God's child.

You are forgiven.

You are loved.

You are accepted.
A new life can be yours for the taking.
So, turn around.
The time has come.
The Kingdom of God has arrived.
Repent,
and believe
in God's great, good news!