

A CHANGE OF MIND OR REPENTANCE TOWARD GOD

A Gospel Address

Matthew 21: 28–32; 2 Kings 5: 9–15; Genesis 28: 16–19

These scriptures present three persons who changed their minds. That is why I read them, because the reception of Christ truly implies a change of mind. Naturally our minds are otherwise, but acceptance of Christ implies a change of mind as to oneself—not only a change of mind as to Christ, but also as to oneself. As born into this world, and as we grow up into boyhood and girlhood, manhood and womanhood, we all think well of ourselves. One young man of whom we have often heard, Saul of Tarsus, thought very highly of himself, and he had good reason, as men speak, for he was of exceptional ancestry, had exceptional attainments, and possessed exceptional character, and he valued all these things, as all men do, and himself accordingly.

If one has an ancestor of distinction, or if one has money or special ability or education, one thinks of oneself accordingly. All these things converge on an individual; indeed they all exist on account of him, because it is remarkable how each one focuses the view upon self, and makes the most of whatever enhances one's glory.

In truth, that is the world; and, as I said, this young man Saul had immense advantages from this point of view, and valued them as men do, but HE CHANGED HIS MIND. In his account of his change of view, he says that he had been an insolent, overbearing man (1 Tim. 1: 13), and that he was not fit to be called an apostle (although he was an apostle, and a great one)—because he persecuted the church of God (1 Cor. 15: 9). He had changed his mind about himself—he repented. That is really what I have in mind.

Repentance towards God implies a change of mind as to God and as to oneself. This change of mind revolutionises one's whole outlook. It did in Paul's case certainly, and in the case of millions of others, it revolutionises the whole being and outlook; so much so in Paul's case that he said, 'For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain'. There is not one in this room who would

venture to say that, but he said it, and spoke the truth. For him, to live was Christ and to die was gain. Offer him all the world could offer (what the Devil offered Christ) and he would not take it, he would refuse it. I have reached my ideal, he would say, 'For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain'. That is complete victory! What can Satan do against a man like that? If he persecutes him it is gain. If he kills him it is gain.

You may say to me, Do not talk to us about Paul; he was an exceptional person. Of course he was; and I have brought him forward as presenting the full thought. It is well to present in the gospel the full thought. What one man experienced from it is presented in him, and if those were his experiences, then why are they not mine?

Well, in the scriptures read, I began, not with Paul, but with an ordinary boy. A certain man had two children, and he had a vineyard and he said to one, 'Son, go work to-day in my vineyard'. Fathers are a test to us sometimes. We may think them severe, not knowing that our fathers are God-given, and our mothers too, but to pull away the shoulder from a believing father, even although you may think he is a bit severe, is to pull yourself away from what God has provided for you.

This young man did not even speak respectfully to his father, but said, 'I will not'. Think of him, brought up by his father, and provided with all that he needed, and here is a simple, reasonable request, and the young man just says, 'I will not'.

There may be some young people here who are in that very position; then your attitude towards your father is rebellious. You may think you have good reason for it, but that is the fact.

Well, this lad's father left him; he did not say anything, nor urge him. The scripture is written to bring out what is in the young man. Our **fathers** may be a test to us, but when they ask **reasonably** in this way, they certainly should be respected. This young man did not respect his father. He did not even say, Sir, or Excuse **me**. **He** just replied, 'I will not'. That is full **blown** modernism—seen in all nominal Christian countries—disregard of parents, disobedience to parents, a mark of modern apostasy.

Then the father went to the other boy and said likewise, and he replied, 'I go, sir', but he went not. He was not honest. The first boy was outspoken, but it was impudent disobedience to refuse his father. This other boy said he would go, but did not go.

Now what about the first one? He says **to himself**, I have made a mistake. I feel I am wrong. My fathers request was reasonable, and **I will just go, and work, and he did so.**

You can see that father looking out on the vineyard (the one son had said he would not go, and the other had said he would), and he sees one of them go. Why did the one that said he would not go, go? He changed his mind; in other words, he repented. He repented and went. The gospel is for obedience, not ordinary obedience, but the obedience of faith. This young man obeyed, he changed his mind and went, and as the father sees his boy wending his way to the vineyard, how cheered he would be!

God is looking out on young men and young women who have been deliberately, methodically, resisting the gospel week after week, and now there is a change of mind! At a given period the self-will gives way, and good sense comes into evidence, and the person says, Well, I have been foolish; there is so-and-so—he confessed the Lord Jesus some time back and he is prospering and is happy and free, and I am holding back. God is watching your heart. We may bow our heads like bulrushes, and appear to recognise God, but scripture says, God looks at our hearts. He looks on your countenance and He looks on your heart.

At a meeting like this, God is looking at **the** heart of one who has been resisting and even saying, 'I will not', and there may be a change of mind creeping over you at this very moment. I have been foolish, you are thinking to yourself, as you look around and see this one and that one has come in and confessed the Lord. They are happy and I am not, and it is time for me to begin to change my mind in these matters. There have been times when you have been almost persuaded, and yet you just walked out and retained your attitude, 'I will not'. It may be that God is working with you now, and you will change your mind. May it be so!

The Lord asked His enemies, Which of these two young men did the will of his father? They answer, the first. The Lord uses that to emphasise that others have been changing their

minds, others have been repenting, the publicans and the harlots were entering into the kingdom of God, and yet those who were listening to Him were not doing so. You have been saying all along, 'I will not'. You have remained in your attitude of opposition to God, while wicked people have changed their minds and have confessed their sins and been baptised. These wicked people, as you call them, are going into the kingdom of God before you.

Now you see the **point of this; others have** been repenting, others have confessed the Lord, others have changed their mind and got blessing, but their example has not altered your mind one bit. The Lord is calling upon you now not to resist any longer. Take account of all you know who have been confessing their sins, and follow their example. In truth people are like sheep. 'All we like sheep have gone astray'. Young people follow one another, and when a young man or woman repents and confesses and accepts Christ, there is a lead given in the right direction, and it is for you to follow their good example. The drift in this world is to do your own will, and it is therefore a great advantage when exercised persons come into a meeting like this, because the current is all in their favour. Outside in the street the current is all against them. Here it is all in their favour. The Spirit of God is working here. It is an excellent opportunity to fall in with the examples of your acquaintances. That is the point the Lord makes. They repented and they got forgiveness. Why not you?

There may be some old persons here who have also been refusing the gospel for years! Your acquaintances have accepted Christ, and you still refuse. Is God not calling upon you *now* to change your mind? It is time you did. God has not changed His mind towards you. This is a wonderful period in which the world is said to be in reconciliation, Rom. 11: 15. That is how God is looking at it. God says, I am not suggesting sins are not there, but I am not charging you with them; I am offering you forgiveness instead. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. Is that because sins are not there? No, the world is full of sins, but God, in order to remove everything that is in your way, is not imputing your sins.

The world is in reconciliation, and hence God's mind is favourable to every one, but it is not always to be so. He is going to change His attitude, and the world will then cease to be in reconciliation. It is to come into judgment. 'For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth', 2 Thess. 2: 11, 12. He has not yet changed His mind. This gospel meeting is a proof that He has not. He is calling upon you to change your mind about Him, and about yourself—to repent and believe the gospel, as the word says, 'Repentance toward God, and faith toward our **Lord** Jesus Christ', Acts 20: 21.

Naaman is an excellent **example of this very thing**. The passage I read is one of the most used of the gospel scriptures. I read it just to bring out this particular point. This man changed his mind. He is not a young man, so I would now speak to the middle-aged who have not confessed the Lord. I am always free to speak to Christians because Christians are the best listeners, but there may be some middle-aged people here who have not confessed the Lord, who have not changed their minds about God, about Christ, about themselves or about the world.

Now, this man was rich and a leading man in Syria, a man indeed whom God had actually used, and now he came down to the king of Israel on account of what the little servant maid had said, but she had not spoken about the remedy, but about the **person** who had it. She did not say a word about the king of Israel, in Samaria. She said there was a prophet, and told him where he was, but Naaman went to the king of Israel, but so as to intercept the enemy's efforts to rob Naaman of the blessings, Elisha sent a message to the king saying, 'let him come now to me'.

In some little way we here to-night are possessed of an evangelical spirit, and would like to be of service to you. Naaman came to the door of Elisha's house; that is why many miss the Lord. It does not say that he came to Elisha. The gospel clearly directs you to Christ. The Philippian gaoler was told, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved', and he believed exactly what was said. The counsel given to Naaman was clear, but he would not act upon it. He first went to the king of Israel which was a mistake, for the king of Israel could do

nothing to help him, and then he came to Elisha's *house*. The little maid did not say a word about the house. She said, 'Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy'.

All this shows that this man was a distinguished man in his own mind, and he had not changed his mind about himself. He was a great man in the eyes of the world, and everyone who knew him regarded him as a man of distinction, and he regarded himself in the same light, and says, 'Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand . . . and strike his hand over the place and recover the leper'. He evidently thought that Elisha did not know who he was, what a great man he was. He stands at the door of the house of Elisha. If I wanted to get cured of my leprosy I would go inside, and make no delay in going inside, but he did not do that. He did not go to the *man*. There are thousands who do not go to Jesus. They may go to the Priest, the Pope, or the Oxford Group, but you see the gospel does not speak of any of these persons. It speaks about *Jesus*. It is the gospel of God concerning His Son. Instead of going to Elisha he went to Elisha's house, but he did not go to him personally. He did not even knock at the **door**. He said, 'he will surely come out to me'.

That is pride, and that keeps thousands of people away *from* the Lord. They do not change their minds. He turned away in a rage. His leprosy and his rage were a poor combination. It is the working of the will and pride, and that is what keeps many away from the **Lord** Jesus—turning away with rage.

Thank God, Naaman had wise men in his retinue of servants, and he doubtless did thank God many times afterwards that he had such good servants. They treated him respectfully, but they were truly evangelical in spirit. They wanted to save their master, and that is a word for every Christian. You want to save a man, and in order to save, it is well worth humbling yourself.

I remember hearing of a man who got converted by a little tract that was handed to him. Speaking of his conversion afterwards to the person who gave him the tract, he said, 'It was not exactly the reading of the tract that helped me, but I was affected by the great exercise I noticed

in your spirit when you gave the tract to me. I saw that you were genuinely affected on my account and it was your exercise that led to my blessing.’ I mention this so that we all may be more concerned about the need around us, and seek to meet it.

The incident shows what God does when people see you are in earnest, you are concerned about them, and it is not natural with you, but against your will. As the apostle Paul said, ‘If against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me’, 1 Cor. 9: 17. It was against his will. He did not like it naturally, for he was proud. Yet, as **an** evangelist, no one was more used than Paul. Think of how he reasoned with big people, such as the Roman governor, Felix, and king Agrippa! What courage he had! It was God who helped him to speak to them.

Well, Naaman’s servants made bold and said, ‘My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?’—and he changed his mind.

If I could get you to change your mind now it would be worth while—a change of mind as to what you have been, as to what you are, as to what God is towards you. Christ died for you, and gave Himself for you. *Change your mind* about these things, and then what a victory! Naaman changed his mind. That is the simplicity of the gospel. Like the young man who said to his father, ‘I will not’, he repented and went. Naaman changed his mind and went to apply the remedy, and he did not simply go into the Jordan; he *plunged* himself seven times. Do you not see his pace quickening as he went down to the Jordan. It is the *going* that saves you. Just as the blind man in John 9 says, ‘Jesus . . . said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam and wash; and I went and washed, and I received sight’. He went and applied repentance with faith. Naaman went to Jordan and his flesh became as the flesh of a little child. Now, that is beautiful. The Lord brings a great man down to a little child. Look at the difference in the man. The flesh of that distinguished captain was leprous, loathsome; he really was not fit for the company of anyone; whereas what is more acceptable than the flesh of a little child? This incident depicts conversion—the complete change that comes over a man by the **power of God**, but all in faith.

Naaman comes back, ‘he and all his company’—not a word now about the chariots and horses. He comes back to the man of God, not merely to his house. It is to Him—Jesus—we invite you. Come to Jesus!

What we observe in the third scripture I read is that Jacob called the house of God a dreadful place. Sleeping in the open, with a stone for his pillow, he awakes during the night, following upon a dream, and he becomes conscious that God is near him, though he had not previously realised it. As it was with Jacob, so it is perhaps with you—the proximity of God makes you feel uncomfortable. Jacob had not sought after God, but He came to him.

God comes to man. ‘God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night . . . that he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man’, Job 33: 14, 15, 17.

At dawn there is a confused mind with Jacob. He took the stone that he had for his pillow, set it up for a pillar, and poured oil on top of it, and he called the name of that place ‘Bethel’, which means, ‘House of God’. He definitely called it ‘Bethel’, but he said it was a dreadful place.

Nowhere else in Scripture is the house of God called dreadful. When Jacob first touched it he spoke thus of it, but a change of mind took place in him. In his subsequent journeyings ‘Bethel’ had a great place in his mind and he finally came back to it. There God spoke with him and blessed him, also changed his name to Israel, making him a prince (Gen. 35: 9, 10).

There may be someone here who has said in his heart, I would rather be somewhere else to-night; my mind is elsewhere. Before you leave we would urge you to change your mind, so that the house of God may be no longer a dreadful place, but that it may become attractive to you. In that change of mind you will find that God is your best friend, and will accomplish in you the end reached in Jacob. You will no longer be a stranger and foreigner, but a fellow-citizen of the saints and **of** the household of God (Eph. 2: 19).

May God bless His word!

J. Taylor.

