

The Message of Jesus: Invitation

Key Question: *What was Jesus' invitation?*

Introductory Meditation

Jesus challenged the Jews of his day to true, heart-based repentance and to follow him. This is in contrast to the religion of the day that called Jews to find God through the Temple and its rituals and ceremonies. In this context, it was easy to become complacent and go through the routines of worship.

But Jesus brought with him the prophetic expectation of the Old Testament. In Isaiah 40, we see that God declared he would bring an end to the people's exile (40:3-5) and renewal and restoration for them (40:28-31). In stating what he did not want (66:3), God also stated whom he will look favourably upon—"the humble and contrite in spirit, / who trembles at my word" (66:2).

Yet, by the time of Jesus, the people still lived in expectation of this great deliverance from God. They had experienced it in part but waited for the full promise. The Temple establishment taught that the way to God was through pride of heritage ("we are Abraham's children") and law observance in the Temple (for examples, see the Pharisees, who were prime proponents of this view). Jesus arrived in this scene, inviting people to the true way to God—true repentance, which meant changing your life totally to live righteously and humbly, turning from your sins, and turning away from pride. This radical, once-for-all repentance would bring in the promise of God—the kingdom of God—for that person. Clearly, this message stands in stark contrast to the message of those who seek to control access to God through their teachings, ceremonies, and expectations.

In this lesson, we will look more deeply at Jesus' invitation.

1. What do you think the Jews of Jesus' time would have been most proud of, religiously?

2. What things are you most proud of at church?

3. Is it good, bad, or neutral to be proud of your religious heritage?

4. Read Matthew 4:17 and Mark 1:15.

a. What does "repent" mean?

b. What is "the gospel"?

c. What is the "kingdom of heaven" (or "God")?

5. Read Matthew 3:1-10 and Luke 3:1-14.

a. Is John a prophet? (see Luke 3:2).

b. Look at these passages: Amos 5:18-24; Micah 6:6-8; Joel 2:12-13. What is distinctive about the prophetic messages in the Old Testament?

c. Amos 5:18-24—How is this text similar to Lk and Mt?

d. Joel 2:12-13—What is at the center of turning to God? What does it mean to “rend...your clothing” and why does God not want it?

e. From these texts, does God want ceremonial things, or heart things?

f. Might repentance of the heart make ceremonial things meaningful again? How?

g. In Luke 3:10-14, what are the forms of justice the truly repentant will engage in? How are they specific to each one’s situation in life?

6. Read Matthew 4:13-17 and Luke 4:16-21.

a. What is unique about these texts?

b. What is each text about?

c. If both these OT promises are fulfilled in Jesus, how do they tie in with Matthew 4:17 and Luke 4:19?

7. Go back to Matthew 3:1-10 and Luke 3:1-14.

a. According to these texts, what did the Israelites need to repent of?

b. How is the repentance required here similar to the repentance the Old Testament prophets required? How is this seen in the Luke 3 text?

8. What form of repentance best fits this study: ongoing, daily repentance for private sin, or the radical, life-changing repentance prior to our baptisms? How are these two types of repentance both different and similar?

9. Look at the specific outcomes of repentance in Luke 3:10-14. What types of sinners do we see today, and how would we urge repentance on them? How would you apply this to yourself? How do you need to repent?

10. The Jews of Jesus' time needed to repent of their belief that ceremonial practices and pride of heritage was the way to God. What similar things might we need to repent of today?

11. How is a life of repentance different from a life of ceremonial or ritual religion? How can an act of worship be either a repentant (heart-based) or ceremonial act?

12. According to this lesson, what does it really mean to be faithful? What is Jesus' invitation?