

“Acts 2:37, 38 “ “Repentance” Jerry Arnold, May 13, 2006

Couple of weeks ago I read this story in a book; I'd like to share it with you. It's about a young man named Jeff Nortek. Jeff graduated from a university with a master of business degree, business association I guess, MBA; he started working at Pacific National Bank. He worked there and eighteen months after being there, he was made dept. manager. He was an up and coming, a very bright young man. Two years later he was made chief of investments for the bank. He and his wife were living a good life. He was making lots of money by now. They bought a BMW, or were paying for one, they had an upscale house in an upscale side of town, and to entertain friends and family members, they bought a cottage in a resort community about two hours from where they lived. It was a good life, they were excited. Jeff had lots, but he wanted lots more. He knew some guys back from the University who were just whizzes when it came to understanding technology. And they were going to have a new company, a start up company, and was going to be all about computers, and all about this information age that we are living in; these guys were cutting edge, sharp, sharp guys, and their little company had just broken into the stock market, and so Jeff leveraged alone a large amount of money. He borrowed money and bought stock, there were a few other investors as well, and that stock soared to \$75 a share. They were poised to make billions of dollars at some point. But you recall there was a huge down turn in the stock market not too many years ago. The NASDAQ fell and what was a \$75 stock became known in the industry as a penny stock. It was down where it was worth pennies. They lost it all.

George Sourly was president of the bank. He called George into his office. And he said Jeff, how are you going to pay for the loan? And Jeff knew if the car, the house, and the cottage would sell it all, he didn't have enough equity in any of them, or he couldn't cover, he was in trouble. But Jeff was smart, he could think on his feet. And so he said, “I don't know right now, but George, if you give me 18 months, I'll pay for the whole thing, I'll have it.” George just sat there, looking at him. He said, “Jeff, you worked with us now for almost 4 years, you are a bright fellow, we appreciate your work, we think you have a wonderful future for us,” and he said, “I'll tell you what I am going to do. I have authority by the board, and from time to time, I can just choose some things, I am going to write this note off. I am not going to charge you at all. You don't owe anything.”

Wow, Jeff was so relieved. He went back to his office, and he just sat there, and sat there. Man, life is good, life is good! I don't have to explain to anybody why we lost the house, the cottage, the car, I don't have to go through the embarrassment, and I don't have to tell anything, oh, life is good! Life is good. So he is just living in this bubble of hope and courage, and its lunch time. So he walks to the elevator to go down, it's a large building they are in. And doors open on one of the floors, and an associate of Jeff's walked in. His name was Bill Elliot. Now Bill had also been an investor. But Bill was related in another way as well. Jeff, just on the side he bought a small house for a rental. Just when he was young and this, just to get started; and Bill Elliot and his wife and two children lived in that house. And Jeff says to Bill, “hey Bill, you are late on your payments, you are a couple of months behind.” And Bill said, “I know, Jeff, I got creamed in that stock market, it's just, I do everything I can to just feed my family right now.” And Jeff said, “I

need that rent.” Bill said, “Can you give me another month or two?” Jeff said, “No, I’ll give you until the end of this month, and if you are not all caught up, you are out.” Well, sure enough, the end of the month came, and Bill didn’t have the money, so he was kicked out. Bill and his wife and two kids moved in with her parents.

Well, word got back to George Sourly, the president of the bank. He called Jeff back to his office, and I am going to just read to you the quote from the book. Quote: “Jeff, you are nothing but a scoundrel. I went out of my way to keep you out of bankruptcy, forgiving more than I’ve ever done before. Then what did you do? You threw Bill and his family out the house because he was a few months behind on his rent. I am going to do the same thing to you. I’ve instructed the credit department to put the lean on your car, house and cottage, and as of now, you are fired, get out.” Jeff owed 3 million dollars.

I have a question for you. Was George Sourly acting in a Godly way? Where is grace? Another question, what would Jesus do? I’d like to study today with you the relationship of repentance to forgiveness. Would you please turn in your Bibles to Acts chapter 2? Peter has been preaching it’s the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit was poured out, and he’s been preaching. We come to the end of his sermon; we are at verses 37 and 38 today; Acts 2:37, 38. Peter finishes what he is saying, and we have this. “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

In verse 37, it says, “They were cut to the heart.” Interesting expression, that’s the same expression used in the NIV. King James Version says, “Pricked in the heart.” New American Standard Bible says, “Pierced to the heart.” Amplified Version says, “Stung to the heart.” Peter was preaching, and what ever he said, resonated in the mind, but God himself got it down to their heart, and so emotionally they are feeling pricked. They feel pain, they feel conviction emotionally, and they say, “What shall we do? What do we do?” And Peter’s response is in verse 38. It says: “Peter said to them, Repent!” Now you’ve read that dozens of times, maybe hundreds. You’ve heard the word repent thousands of times. All Christians associated with church have heard the word repent, over and over and over. But what does it mean? Well, I’ve heard the clichés just like you have. And to be honest with you, I will confess that prior to three weeks ago when I started preparing this message, I figured I knew what it meant to repent. I figured I understood. But now, after studying for three weeks, I realized I did not understand what Biblical repentance was and how it’s associated with forgiveness and how it all interrelates together.

I figured that typical response would be, well repent means to change one’s mind. So repent, you turn in a new direction, you change mind, and you know, there is a term of some kind. But theologically repentance is much, much deeper than changing your mind. These people, they didn’t change their mind, they were pricked in the heart. Something got to their heart. And you know as well as I do until God gets our heart, He doesn’t have us. God got this people this day. Theologically repentance is the act of forsaking sin,

accepting God's gracious gift of salvation, and entering into fellowship with God, key phrase, fellowship with God. These folks start out the chapter, they are not in fellowship with God. They end the chapter; they are in the fellowship with God. What got them there? Repentance! Repentance is all about fellowship with God. Now, let's look at a few quick texts about repentance. Acts 5, verse 31. It's speaking of Jesus. Peter is preaching to the Sanhedrin council and he says: "Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." What we realize in this text is repentance is a gift from God. There it is. It is a gift from God! Yet, it is a responsibility of man. It's a gift but man must be repentant. Man has to respond. In Romans 2, verse 4 Paul talks about repentance. He says this: "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness," speaking of God, "forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" Other versions would say the kindness of God. God in His kindness, God in His goodness, when you see that, when you experience it, it leads you to repentance; something happens in the heart that seeks you to reestablish a fellowship with God.

In Philippians 2 verse 13 it shows us what the end result of repentance is. Just quickly we'll look at that verse. Philippians 2, verse 13. Paul again, the author says: "for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." The end result of repentance would be a desire to do that which pleases God. Now what we learned to date is this: Peter preaches! Peter preaches truth, Peter preaches facts, everything he says is empowered by the Holy Spirit of God. And the people heard it; they heard it in their mind, not only was it logical, but because of the supernatural element of the Spirit of God and the truthfulness involved, it went right to their heart. And they realized they were out of the fellowship with God, and they said: "what shall we do?"

So repentance deals with facts, and fellowship. Let's look at the fellowship theme for just a second. Isaiah chapter 59, verse 2 it says: "But your iniquities," that's a long word to say sin, "your sins, have separated you from God; and your sins have hidden His face from you." Bible says clearly that sin separates us from God. Sin breaks fellowship with God. Your iniquities have separated you from God. And so we discover that repentance is associated with reestablishing that fellowship. Here is how it works: Conviction came, it's followed by contrition and a sense of need for forgiveness.

Now, what I am going to share with you next, some of you are going to disagree with me. You'll be wrong, but that's okay. You can disagree. Some of you will disagree so much, you'll say, "Lord, help me to love him." It's okay. People have to pray that about me all the time. I want to share with you what would be absolutely, life changing and revolutionary. How many of you have ever been taught that as Christians we are to forgive everybody? You've been taught that? Did you know that's not in the Bible? And did you know that's part of the reason homes are falling apart, and churches are filled with unresolved issues. Here is the truth. There is never forgiveness in the Bible extended to anyone without them being repentant. Pastor, Jesus on Calvary prayed: "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." Who did He say that regarding? Who was He talking about? We've all heard this. He is talking about all of us. Right? That's a nice homiletical thing. But He was talking to the people of that day. I want to ask you

something. Those people that were around Jesus doing that, were all of them forgiven? Well I can show you in the book of Revelation they'll be raised to see Him come again, and they'll be slain by the brightness of His coming. They are lost, why? Because there is no such thing in the Scriptures as forgiveness without repentance; repentance reestablishes the fellowship. There is no such thing as this blanket forgiveness! But yet I've been taught I am to forgive everybody! No, what I should have been taught is I am not willing to hold a grudge against anybody and should they repent, I am willing to forgive them. I'm going to prove that to you from the Bible. So if you walk out of here angry with me today, hey, repent!

Luke 17, amazing concept; I am telling you brothers and sisters, when you see how this applies to your life; it will change your life. It will maybe make some sense of some things in your life. 17, verse 1, then Jesus said to the disciples: "It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come!" Hey, we live in the world, offenses are coming, difficulties, stumbling blocks, they are coming. Jesus says, woe to the person who purposefully sets stumbling blocks in someone else's way to trip him up. That's what it's all about. In fact He goes on to describe a "mafia like" murder. He says in verse two: "It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones." And when we read the word little ones, or the words little ones, we immediately think of the children; oh the children, the children! And we ought not to be stumbling blocks to children, but I'm telling you it is far bigger than just children. You will always find in any gatherings somebody who is younger in the faith than you, and spiritually they are considered little ones. And when you look at us compared to Angels or God, we are all little ones. In God's eyes, we are all little ones.

Now here is where it gets interesting. Notice what Jesus says, verse 3. "Take heed to yourselves. If our brother sins against you, rebuke him;" ahhhh, you like that? You know that's one of those texts you just want to end right there. Thank you God! "...And if he repents, forgive him." Let me describe what it means to rebuke somebody, scripturally. That means: kindly, lovingly, factually, caringly, you state what is true. What happens if the person repents? What does it say to do? Then, forgive them! What if they don't repent? You can't forgive them. It's a principle that God established. You can't forgive somebody who doesn't repent because repentance establishes or reestablishes fellowship.

Let me share with you, well let's read the next text and then I'll show you how we made a game out of it. Verse 4: "And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him." Well here is how we work it. We've all heard you're supposed to forgive everybody. So you have Mr. Microphone, and Mr. Speaker, or brother Mike, and brother Speak, all right? And brother Mike gets offended by brother Speak. Something brother Speak says, surely, he says something, and brother Mike is offended. Now, brother Mike does not want to confront him. He doesn't want to rebuke him; hey, Speak is a rude person. That's why he offended him. Speak is what ever he is, so brother Mike says, "I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll forgive the guy!" And fortunately, brother Mike here, he doesn't spread it all around. He's got some character, we appreciate that. He is a good guy. He just says, "Well, I'll just forgive

him.” Can he? No, because forgiveness scripturally means reestablished fellowship. Here is what he will do. Typical person, brother Mike; he won’t confront brother Speak, but he’ll begin to avoid him, right? He’ll begin to avoid him. And what started out in church, the hug at the baptism, or glad to be acquainted hug, becomes a distant, “look there he is, I am going over here.” until church becomes like a porcupine party. Oops, oops, you know, still over there, don’t want to get too close, going to get stung, you know, you’re going to get a quill. Now, in church we can get away with it because we only see each other once a week, and hopefully brother Speak takes enough vacations so we can tolerate being around him.

But what about if it’s a husband and wife at home; you have a couple of people, they are married. One of them does something to hurt the other one. Now, when it says to rebuke, remember, it’s in the context of reestablishing fellowship through repentance. That means it’s done with kindness and goodness because that’s how God is. So if a spouse has been hurt by the other spouse, if they say, “well I’ll just forgive him and go on”, will they? Oh, no, no, no; open the file drawer called “injustices” and put it in there. And it’s there, it doesn’t go, it’s ready to be dealt with, and pulled out at an opportune time. And instead of reconciliation, the fellowship is beginning to break down. Now here is what it should happen. The spouse should say to the other spouse, “what you did, or what you said has really hurt me. I really feel hurt.” Facts, truth, all in love; why? To bring repentance, to establish or reestablish fellowship. Now if that other spouse is one whit of a Christian, what they will say is, “I am so sorry that I hurt you, and by God’s grace I will not do it again, will you please forgive me?” Now what happens to fellowship? Oh, it’s sweet, it’s sweet. It’s like that country song, you know Garth Brooks is singing, it says: “Sometimes we get in a fight just so we can make up.”

It becomes sweet, fellowship. But if that spouse, this spouse doesn’t communicate about that, that relationship will begin to deteriorate. And brothers and sisters, we are running dead even with the world in the number of divorces. It’s a crime, it’s a shame, and part of it is, it’s a false concept of forgiveness. It even goes further Jesus says in Matthew 18, please turn there. Mathew 18, you always here that; church discipline, “well, did you follow Mathew 18?” And certainly, the principles for discipline are here, but that’s not necessarily the intent of the passage. In Matthew 18, verse 15 Jesus says: “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.” That’s a good principle. Tell him his fault. That means, confronting him with the facts. Fellowship is breaking down between brothers, and you go and you confront with the facts, that’s what it means to rebuke; that’s what it means, be honest, sincere, kind, truthful. You approach him with that. If he hears you, that means he’s heard, he’s understood, he’s asked for forgiveness, he’s repented, then, you have gained your brother. There it is. But what happens if he won’t hear? Then, take couple of others, what happens if he won’t hear them? Then take it to the church, what if he won’t hear the church, then don’t call him a brother! That’s what Jesus says. Look at verse 17. “And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.” He is not even a brother.

And then Jesus is going to tell a story; fascinating story, verse 21, Peter, after hearing this comes to him and says: “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.” Here is the story Jesus told. “The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king.” What’s this story about? Kingdom of heaven, and what, a certain king; that’s what it is about, kingdom of heaven is like this, and like a certain king. “Who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying: “Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.” Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. But the servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat saying, “Pay me what you owe!” So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, “Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.” And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, “You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?” And his master was angry!” Who is the master in this parable? It’s God! “...his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.” But there is no forgiveness without repentance.

Now, I started out by asking the question. The question, was George Sourly acting in a Godly way? I should identify where I got this story. I got that story from a book called: “Preaching parables to post moderns” and it’s a rewrite of Mathew 18, to help make a point. So, was George Sourly acting like God? Oh yes, he was God in a parable. This is telling us something very serious about sin. Number one, God doesn’t fool around. Number two, He is willing to forgive if we repent. If we don’t repent, there is no forgiveness, and there is not fellowship. He doesn’t play games. And He doesn’t like for us to say: “Oh yes, Baby I got grace,” and then go out and cream somebody else. It’s not going to work in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Now you maybe wondering, ‘but what about the prayer that Jesus told us to pray? Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.’ Right? Here is what it means. Christians, like God are ready to forgive anyone who repents. Willing and wanting to do that. What we should be taught, is that we don’t hold a grudge against anybody, and we are willing to forgive anybody should they repent. Are you beginning to understand maybe why your heart doesn’t heal in some relationships? He’s left you, she’s left you, and somehow the church is saying, “Well just forgive him or her and get on with your life.” You can’t forgive them unless there is repentance. Does that make sense because the process is to reestablish fellowship? What can I do is pray, “God let me not be filled with bitterness, let me not position my self where I won’t forgive them should they seek forgiveness.” But somehow, we sissified the whole thing; emotionalized it, until we make cripples of

ourselves thinking we are retched individuals because somehow, I am not getting through on this forgiveness thing. You can't forgive somebody unless they repent, that's the truth of the Word of God.

The purpose of repentance is restored fellowship with God. If God who is the author of love and the author of relationships functions on that principle, you think He asks us to function on any other principle? No He doesn't! And so, our homes are under stress because we are not honestly and kindly confronting people with the pain they are giving us. Many times, we just seal it off and begin to withdraw. Maybe even secretly laugh at some pain that may come upon them. Serve them right; it's all quite ungodly and terribly destructive. Churches, people avoiding each other, we don't want to take on their responsibility, you may win a brother. But there is good news in this brothers and sisters; you don't have to loose sleep trying to forgive somebody who won't be repentant. You can't. It's not possible in God's universe. He doesn't do it, and He doesn't ask you to do it.

So, on the human level, healing can take place; rather greater level than a human level. That's our relationship with God. Is God convicting you of sin in your life? Is God showing you where you are, disturbing Him? Is God showing you how fellowship is breaking down with Him as a result of the choices you are making? Then I appeal to you brothers and sisters, repent! Confess your sins to God. He'll accept you. He wants to accept you, He'll embrace you, He'll forgive you, and you'll have fellowship with the Creator of the heavens and the earth. So today, I ask you if you'd like to say, "Lord, I want that fellowship with you, I want to repent," I am going to ask you to stand right were you are at.

Father in Heaven, here we are, many of us broken and confused, but all of us longing for peace in our hearts. And we are standing Lord because we want fellowship with you. And we pray, for the gift of repentance. We acknowledge our sinfulness before You, we praise You for our Savior, and we thank you for accepting us into Your family, in Jesus name we pray, Amen.