

MORE THAN WORDS PART ONE

THE LESSON: MATTHEW 3

“Sin” is the word we use to describe human rebellion against God. Since the first man and woman sinned, all of humanity shares the “sin nature” – an inclination to disobey God. Scripture tells us that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). We have all sinned, and the consequence is physical death as well as separation from God. This is bad news!

Moreover, when we try to set our own ethical course, we end up going down the very same path. Proverbs 14:12 says, “There is a way that *seems right* to a man, but its end is the way to death”. If we want to be restored to *life*, then we must listen to the one who made us. God told his people through the law how they should live. His prophets called them back to holy living, generation after generation. And since none other could fulfill God’s law, Jesus came and took upon himself our sin, suffering death on our behalf, so that we could know life beyond the grave.

On Ash Wednesday, believers all over the world will kneel while ashes are pressed to their foreheads and they hear these words: “*Remember that dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return*”. This is a reminder to those of us who are living today that one day each one of us will face death. The promise of eternal life in heaven is only possible because of the great price that Jesus paid for us. And this sacrifice must motivate us to repent sincerely – to confess and turn from our sin.

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John the Baptist was a prophet sent to prepare the way for Jesus. He followed in a long tradition of prophets who had the unpleasant task of calling God’s people to repentance, and reminding them of the consequences should they turn away from the God who went to such lengths to make their redemption possible.

AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Each morning and evening, follow your own rule of prayer.

(IF YOU DON’T HAVE ONE, TRY SAYING THE MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS FROM THE “FORMS OF PRAYER TO BE USED IN FAMILIES”, WHICH BEGINS ON PAGE 728 OF THE BCP. IF YOU DON’T HAVE A COPY, YOU CAN LOOK IT UP HERE: [HTTP://PRAYERBOOK.CA/RESOURCES/BCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER](http://PRAYERBOOK.CA/RESOURCES/BCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER).)

Ask God to bring to your mind the things in your life that you need to repent of. Spend some time quietly listening for his leading. Consider what the “fruits of repentance” should be in your life. Ask God for his help in bringing about true repentance in you, repentance that bears fruit. Close your time with the following prayer.

Turn thou us, O good Lord, and so shall we be turned. Be favourable, O Lord, Be favourable to thy people, Who turn to thee in weeping, fasting, and praying. For thou art a merciful God, Full of compassion, long-suffering, and of great pity. Thou sparest when we deserve punishment, And in thy wrath thinkest upon mercy. Spare thy people, good Lord, Spare them, and let not thine heritage be brought to confusion. Hear us, O Lord, for thy mercy is great, And according to the multitude of thy mercies look upon us; Through the merits and mediation of thy blessed Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (FROM THE PENITENTIAL SERVICE, BCP, P. 613)

MORE THAN WORDS

PART ONE

MATTHEW 3: **BEAR FRUIT IN KEEPING WITH REPENTANCE**

¹In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ²“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” ³For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’”

⁴Now John wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt round his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, ⁶and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

⁷But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹“I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹²His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”