



Dear Friends,

Pastor Doug O'Donnell says that when he and his wife were living in Chicago, they belonged to a church which was also attended by a university professor and his wife who were very hospitable. Every Sunday night, they would invite young adults over for an informal dinner. What grabbed Doug O'Donnell's attention was the small decorative sign that hung just inside the front door to their residence. The sign had one word written in large block letters. REPENT.

I can see why the sign grabbed his attention. It's not the kind of sign one usually attaches to their wall in a prominent place for all who enter to see.

Repent is not a welcoming word. Neither is it a happy word. Repent is a word you might see on a placard being waived around by a religious person trying to grab the attention of passers-by outside of Sydney's Town Hall to heed biblical warnings of an imminent judgment or you might expect to hear on the lips of a street evangelist cajoling listeners to escape hellfire.

Repent is not a word you are likely to use at a dinner party or in polite conversation. But it is an important word. It's a biblical word.

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." (Mt 3:1-2)

You may be thinking, "I would expect John the Baptist's message to be, REPENT. He was like a wild OT prophet. He'd fit in well with those street evangelists. But Jesus was different."

Jesus was different. John says that very thing in Matthew 3. But their messages were identical.

From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." (Mt 4:17)

Repent is not a word most of us want to hear. Especially not if it's being applied to us. I don't want someone else to tell me that I am doing something wrong and that I need to change. It's an affront to my pride. I like to believe I am mostly a good person. I also don't like being told by another what to do. I'll decide for myself how to behave.

You may be thinking, "I'm ok with repentance. I repented when I came to faith in Jesus. Isn't John's message and Jesus' message for unbelievers rather than people like me?"

In 1517, the German Reformer Martin Luther famously nailed 95 theses to the church door at Wittenberg to protest the sale of indulgences by the Catholic Church for the forgiveness of sins. The first of the theses stated:

When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said "Repent," he intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance.

Doug O'Donnell says that he has often thought about that sign and been tempted to hang a similar sign in the entranceway to his own home. He's even considered expanding on the message to repent by hanging a sign in his living room with the words, "FROM THE WRATH TO COME," and then one in the dining room that says, "I REALLY MEAN IT."

I've thought a lot about 'repent' as I have prepared this Sunday's sermon from Matthew 3. I was struck by Doug O'Donnell's story and his afterthoughts. Christ did not only save me from the guilt and punishment of sin. He rescued me from its power over me. So, my life is to be one of repentance, to become more like my Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ.

God Bless,
Mark Adams