

## The starting point is repentance

Erlo Stegen:

Summary of sermon by Erlo Stegen, 22 Dec 2013

Acts 3:19; Matthew 3:1-3; 8-10

In Acts 3:19 it says, "Repent and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out." During Christmas people are going to shops and buying presents to give to each other and we rejoice because of the birth of the Lord Jesus but before His birth, the message was repent and turn to God. Repent is an amazing word. At Christmas time we are happy and buy gifts but before being happy about the birth of the Lord Jesus we have to repent. In the gospel of Matthew John said, "Repent." The prophets also said, "Repent." It does not start with accepting the Lord Jesus and with his birth but it starts with repentance. If we celebrate the birth of the Lord Jesus and we don't start with repentance, we are guilty. That is where John the Baptist and the prophets started.

What does repentance mean? When we think of the Lord Jesus coming, the first thing we must experience is repentance. You can buy gifts for family and friends but if you do that without repentance, it is in vain. You can have a Christmas tree and many celebrations, but if there is no repentance, you are playing around. It is important that you repent. The Child is coming but it is important that you repent. You, therefore, need to stop and think, "Is there anything I need to repent from?" because instead of Christmas being a blessing, it will be a curse. Maybe there is hatred or grudges or stubbornness and without repentance, Christmas will not be a blessing.

David was a great warrior but before he could experience the Lord Jesus, he had to repent. You cannot celebrate the coming of the Lord Jesus, without repenting first. When Peter denied the Lord Jesus, he regretted it and was forgiven. Mary Magdalene had remorse for her sin. You cannot celebrate Christmas if you do not repent. Before the Lord Jesus can visit us we need to ask ourselves if there is anything we must repent of. John the Baptist's first word was "repent." We need to examine our lives and see if we have sinned. It means nothing to celebrate Christmas if we haven't repented. Is there any where I have sinned? Have I done or said anything wrong. Have you ever sinned against your husband, or child or relative? If you haven't made that right, then the coming of the Lord Jesus is meaningless. Maybe you have hurt a person and if you don't make it right, His coming will mean nothing to you. Search your heart and life because if you haven't made it right, Christmas will also be nothing to you.

You must make the path straight or the Lord's coming will not help you. What is not straight must be straightened. What is not straight in your life? There are things that must be fixed. If you are with someone who is wrong, then even that way must be made straight. The Lord said that there was no-one born of woman that was greater than John the Baptist. Some he spoke harshly to. Why? It was because they came but didn't repent of their evil ways. Children and adults must search their lives and if they have gone wrong, they must go to that person and say, "I have sinned." How can the Lord Jesus forgive you if you haven't followed His instructions? If you haven't repented from that anger in your life, how do you expect to enter heaven? You cannot celebrate Christmas, if you haven't repented. John called the Pharisees a brood of vipers because of the evil in their lives. If you have had an argument and spoken harsh words to each other, how can you go to heaven if you haven't made it right. Don't think you are descendants of Abraham. God can raise up descendants of Abraham from these stones. John the Baptist said, "Make the pathway straight" and if we haven't repented, then woe to us. Fix that which is broken and wrong now. That was John's message. Some were baptized but they repented half-heartedly. You can't say "I am a man." No, you too must repent. God can make something from a stone and he will enter heaven and you will stay outside. The axe is at the root of the tree and anything that doesn't bear fruit will be cut down, old or young, and thrown into the fire. These are the words of the Lord Jesus. We celebrate His coming, but do you hear what He says? You must repent of your hatred and grudge. Even if it was a long time ago, a sin doesn't get old. It must still be made right.