

INNOCENT BLOOD

~Other Speakers A-F: Richard E. Bieber:

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel."

Mark 1:14 .

...."Repent and believe the good news." Why does he say repent? Why doesn't Jesus just say,

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand, believe the good news!"

Why does he always throw in this call to repent?

There were some present at that very time who told him of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.....

....in other words, Pilate killed them and then mixed in their blood with their sacrifices....

"Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

Luke 13:1-5

....unless you repent ... repent! "What does he mean, Repent? I know I'm not perfect, but I've lived a good life. I've never killed anybody. So what does he want me to do?"

We don't walk with Jesus very long before we discover that his good news of the kingdom is not only a word of mercy and a word of grace, peace, and hope; it's also a word of judgment.

Yes, Jesus heals the sick,
opens the eyes of the blind,
casts out demons,

...Yes, Jesus opens the door of the kingdom of heaven for us right now. But Jesus not only opens the door to the kingdom of heaven for us, he also warns us that unless we repent, unless our hearts change unless our lives change ... really change ... we are going to reap the consequences of every evil thing we have ever done.

"The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe the good news!"

And when we walk with Jesus he begins to get specific about those areas where there needs to be reÂ-pentance. For instance, Matthew 5:21....

"You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and, whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire."

In other words ... if I belittle my brother merely with my tongue and don't get that right, I'm going to be judged, not by my brother but by the living God!

"So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has someÂ-thing against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."

Matthew 5:23-24

And if there is something between this sister or this brother and me ... if I have in some way wronged them, if I've allowed a wall to come up between us, I'm wasting my time trying to draw near to God. First get it right with that person, then draw near to God.

"Make friends quickly with your accuser, while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison; truly I say to you, you will never get out till you have paid the last penny."

Matthew 5:25-26

And in this case the court is the court of heaven ... the judge is the living God ... and the prison is banishment from God's presence.

We're living in a day when everybody's trying to receive Jesus' message of mercy, while at the same time filtering out all his words of judgment. When you filter out the words of judgment, the message of mercy evaporates. When you no longer see or hear the warnings of hell, your vision of heaven is gone.

We love to remember how merciful and kind Jesus was to the woman who was caught in the act of adultery. And how hard Jesus was on the men who brought this woman to him---and allowed the man who was caught in the act of adultery with her to get away.

"He who is without sin among you be the first one to cast a stone at her!"

Jesus says, and bends down and starts writing in the sand. We're not told what he writes, but it could have been, "Where's the man?" It could have been the names of certain ladies that these men knew, perhaps, better than they should. From the oldest to the youngest they all turn, hang their heads, and walk away. Jesus stands up. Only the woman is left, and he says to her,

"Where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you?"

"No one, Lord."

"Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more."

We like to picture ourselves standing there with the woman receiving his mercy ... and we do ... but remember: once we receive his mercy he still has a few things to tell us about adultery.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Matthew 5:27-28

And then we say,

"Well, then we're all going to hell!" But Jesus says,

"If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell."

Matthew 5:29-30

With his good news of the kingdom Jesus turns on the light and shows us ... forces us to see that we need cleansing. Yes, he opens the door of the kingdom of heaven for us now. But the minute he opens the door of the kingdom of heaven, he opens for us also the door to hell. Before, we had a cloak for our sin ... our ignorance. Jesus said,

"If you were blind, you would have no sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' therefore your sin remains."

Now the light comes on, our hearts are exposed and we have only two choices. Either we repent and enter with him into the Kingdom of Forgiveness, or we harden our heart and put ourselves into the Outer Darkness.

Woe to him who builds a town with blood,
and founds a city on iniquity!

Behold, is it not from the Lord of hosts
that people labor only for fire,
and nations weary themselves for nought?
For the earth will be filled with the knowledge
of the glory of the Lord,
as the waters cover the sea.

Habakkuk 2:12-11

For a long time I had problems with that passage, I couldn't see the connection between those verses.

Woe to him who builds a town with blood.....

What does that have to do with,

The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord,
as the waters cover the sea?

When the earth is filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea, it's not going to be all joy bells and singing ... it's going to be terror! Because the knowledge of the glory of the Lord will expose and call to account every evil and every wrong that's not under the blood of the Lamb. Reading from Revelation 6:

When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale; the sky vanished like a scroll that is rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the generals and the rich and the strong, and every one, slave and free, hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand before it?"

One afternoon Marcus, Jerry and I were walking together in Clark Park talking to people about Jesus ... along comes Barbara Spears. Barbara says,

"Do you know there was a murder here in the park last night?"

We walked on a little farther, and there a few feet away from one of the park benches, was a pool of blood. And it hadn't dried yet, and the flies were buzzing around it. On the bench, just a few feet away a couple were having a smoke ... and over here was a man, probably drunk, sleeping a foot or two from the blood. They paid no attention. ... Who cares? The only creatures who paid any attention to that blood were the flies.

The ancient Jews had much better insight than we have. They understood that if a man murders another man, and nobody's around to see it, the blood of the victim will cry out against the murderer. Never mind the police. Never mind the corrupt court system ... the blood will scream like an alarm that can't be shut off. Who does it scream to? It cries to the living God.

For a long time it appears as if God doesn't hear. It looks as if the murderer gets away with it. He gets up in the morning, takes a shower, has his cornflakes and blueberries, goes down to the bank and pulls out some more money has a good time. He goes shopping in Hong Kong and next week he's going to be lying on the beach in Hawaii. His family's healthy, his wife is beautiful ... everything's going fine. Then one day there is an earthquake, and the sun becomes dark, and the full moon turns to blood. Suddenly, off on the horizon, a ribbon of light widens and approaches like a tidal wave. It covers the surface of the earth like a flood. It's like Noah's day, but this time it's a flood of light. When that light reaches the blood, in a mystery, the murderer is called back to the scene of his crime. God speaks to him,

"Where's your brother?"

"How should I know, am I my brother's keeper?"

"What have you done? Your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground."

Well, you say, that lets me off the hook because I've never murdered anybody. I'm not perfect, but I've lived a decent life ... a far better life than most people.

That's exactly what the scribes and Pharisees said to Jesus. In many ways they implied,

"We're okay. We're far, far better than most people. We live religious lives. We discipline ourselves to pray to God ... We know the law."

And Jesus says,

"You're murderers!"

Reading from Matthew 23.....

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, saying, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' Thus you witness against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar."

How can this be? Zechariah the prophet was murdered between the sanctuary and the altar in the temple that had long since been destroyed ... centuries before. And Jesus says to these men,

"You killed him."

And they stand there blinking their eyes trying to figure out what he's talking about, not realizing that within a matter of days they're going to be screaming for Jesus' blood.

"Crucify him..... kill him!"

And Pilate, the man who mixed the blood of the Galileans with their sacrifices now calls for a basin of water and washes his hands and he says,

"I'm innocent of the blood of this just man."

And they scream again,

"His blood be on us and our children."

And Jesus says that unless we repent and enter into the kingdom of righteousness we are in that blood-thirsty mob that still kills every prophet and every wise man God sends to us. And their innocent blood is on our heads.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent.... repent repent, and believe in the gospel."

So, how are we to repent? Of what are we to repent? Basically, two things:

- 1. Our arrogance before God.**
- 2. Our mercilessness toward each other and toward all people.**

First, we are called now to repent of our arrogance before God. Jesus says to us,

"Unless you repent and become as children, you will never enter the kingdom of God."

meaning that unless we repent of our arrogance, get off that throne which belongs to God and get down and become children we'll never get in.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

And who are the poor in spirit? The poor in spirit are the ones who repent of their arrogance, become children, and admit their need.

From the time Adam ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, his heart and the heart of his race, is arrogance,

pride,
 self-idolatry. This is why we nailed him to that cross. And this is why we still block our ears when he talks to us. We are offended by this God who comes to us in lowly garb and calls us to repent and follow him. And we will not see him,
 hear his voice,
 believe in him, until we repent of our arrogance.

"Wait a minute arrogance is not my problem. My problem is self-esteem. All my life I've been trying to find my own worth. I have a low self-concept."

You can read all the self-esteem books in all the bookstores, from Norman Vincent Peale to Robert Schuler to Dale Carnegie ... all of them ... and your self-esteem won't grow a thirty-second-of-an inch until you understand that beneath your bad self-esteem is a secret arrogance that resents having anybody on the throne but yourself. That refuses to revolve around God and wants everything to revolve around you.

Until you get off that throne and repent of your arrogance your self-esteem will never improve. Innocent blood was shed for this arrogance of ours, but it cannot be washed away until we repent of it.

The second thing we need to repent of is our mercilessness toward each other and toward all people.

I'm talking about the lack of mercy in our dealings with people we know,
 people around us every day.

The mainline churches are busy trying to get rid of all the injustices in the "structures of society." I can remember a man who a few years ago was a leader in the grape boycott. He was out there marching in front of A & P every day. And while he and his wife were marching, they employed a babysitter who was kind of heart and slow of mind. He cheated that babysitter left and right. Until this man pays his babysitter, he might as well forget about trying to make the grape growers just. The same is true for us. It's so easy for us to see everybody else's injustice. The Lord is telling us about our own lack of mercy. If you want to improve the structures of society, go to it, but start with your self.

"Go learn what this means," Jesus says to us. "I desire mercy and not sacrifice,"

....forbearance, kindness, goodness, patience toward each other.

And we can't begin to do that until we see our hardness of heart for what it is ... as sin ... and repent of it.

Innocent blood was shed so that this heart of stone could be pulled out and a heart of flesh put in, by God. But that holy exchange will not happen until we repent.

Woe to him who builds a town with blood, and founds a city on iniquity!
 Behold, is it not from the Lord of hosts that people labor only for fire,
 and nations weary themselves for nought?
 For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord,
 as the waters cover the sea.

And on that day when the earth is filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea, we will either be washed in the blood of the Lamb or we'll be answering for it ... and for all the innocent blood that was shed from the beginning of time.

"The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand;
 repent, and believe the good news."