

Talk-3

Matthew 4:17

Have you noticed, when they mess up, politicians and businesses speak of their.. *'regret'*. They rarely say.. *'sorry'*.

Or they deflect on to others by saying, "If YOU have taken offence to my choice words, of course, I.. *regret* this.

They're 'bang to rights'. *They* know they've messed up. *We* know they've messed up. And yet they'll do all they can to wriggle out of actually saying *sorry* - apologising.

They're just so full of.. *regret*.

- Regret that they got caught, that they've been called out.
- Regret that *they* - not those they hurt - might now suffer or be inconvenienced in some way.

By issuing a 'statement of *regret*' they want to give the appearance of being contrite but without actually accepting responsibility, the consequences of, the liability for, their actions.

Regret is no apology.

Jesus began with a very simple and direct message:

"Repent. For the Kingdom of Heaven is near."

That word *'repent'* can seem old-fashioned, even judgmental. Like you're being accused of something. Judged. Labelled. That's not what Jesus meant or what those around Him understood by it. The Greek word *'metanoia'* meant 'change direction', 'change your thinking or attitude'. Don't just express regret. Repent. You've been heading in *one* direction. Wise up. Come to your senses. *Repent*, head instead in *this* direction. You'll find life works better *this* way.

Yes, it even goes beyond apology. It's about a change of direction,

Somehow, despite how tough life could be, being with Jesus made everything seem just that little bit brighter, more hopeful.

When you - or someone you love - is faced with sickness:

- the cancer that isn't going away;
- the treatment that seems so invasive- and for what?

Or when life seems so stacked against you:

- your postcode and inherited genes always seem to hold you back
- you're treated less favourably just because of your skin colour

Everything within you wants to believe - dares to hope - that someday, somewhere - call it Heaven - there will be no more tears, no more death or mourning, no more crying or pain.

And yet, for some, they (maybe, you too?) feel so let down by life, so failed by the System that is supposed to protect us. To believe, just seems too painful. Like picking a scab.

Jesus says to you, dare to change your thinking. Take the risk - and embrace the life that Jesus has for you. Live the way you were always wired for. Kingdom, not Empire. A taste of Heaven on earth. Repent.

Sometimes, we have to repent - change our thinking/ attitude - not just about what we have *experienced*/ what Empire has done to us, but also what we have done to others - for the part we have played in tolerating / perpetuating the system of Empire, not Kingdom.

Jesus was speaking to ALL when he said 'repent.' It doesn't matter what your age, faith, gender, sexuality, ethnicity....

Today, light is being shone on the darkness of racism. Tragically, it's still often in response to a sickening incident. Yes, the direct and unsubtle racist comments / attitudes that are easier to 'call out'. But also on the far more subtle attitudes and tolerances that allow some people to be treated better or worse than others simply because of their skin colour, their place of birth, their first language. Unconscious bias, institutional racism, racism within the structures of life

We like to think, we're all in *this* together, that Covid-19 affects us all, equally... We know now, it doesn't. People of colour, for example, those who are Black British and Asian British, are twice as likely as White British people to die from Covid-19. Why is this? Earlier in the pandemic, some wondered if this was due to higher rates of underlying health conditions or even physical weaknesses within some communities?

The Office for National Statistics concluded the higher death rates among black and minority ethnic communities had *nothing* to do with their physicality or underlying health conditions. It's socio-economic factors, such as where you live, how many people you live with, the job you do... that determines your life chances.

The question we should ALL be asking then is, WHY. Why is it that more people of colour experience these socio-economic disadvantages than white people?

What are the social and economic policies, structures, way-things-just-are that mean people of colour in this country too often still start the race of life behind those who are white British or who are longer-settled.

This is a question for us ALL, whatever our ethnicity. If we accept this as just how things are, we are perpetuating *Empire, not Kingdom*.

In Mayn 2020, George Floyd was murdered. Police Officers knelt on his neck for 8 minutes 46 seconds. Even when he appeared to stop breathing, they carried on for 2 more minutes. When paramedics arrived, they still continued for a further 20 seconds. If only that was just a one-off, isolated, tragic incident by the one, rogue Police Officer. The true tragedy is that racism is alive today.

We need to hear each other's stories. To be honest, whatever our ethnicity or skin colour, this can leave us feeling uncomfortable. But that's no reason to duck it or try and pretend it doesn't happen.

Maybe it's time for us ALL to take the knee. Repent. Change direction.

There's a humility about taking the knee.

- When someone gets down on one knee to propose
- When surrendering to one more powerful than you
- When kneeling before the Monarch
- Ultimately, when kneeling before God, the King of *Kings*

So, athletes and sports teams have led the way in 'taking the knee':

- as a way of showing solidarity with those oppressed by racism;
- as an act of resistance against the disease / system of racism;
- as a sign of humility/ contrition/ repentance for the sin of racism

Whilst most see it as a brave and powerful symbol, a few react against it. Maybe you've heard some say, "I'd never take the knee." What they mean is, they wouldn't 'take the knee' for people of colour. They either think, there is no racism, or - if there is - it's got nothing to do with them.

Jesus says, change your thinking. Repent.

In July I went to London as an ally to my Ministers of Colour colleagues. Opposite the House of Commons, on the street, in silence we took the knee for 8 minutes 46 seconds. It was hugely powerful.

For the first minute or two, I was praying, talking to God. Then my knees started to hurt. Four minutes. The concrete became harder and I tried discretely adjusting my position. Six minutes. It became deeply uncomfortable, actually painful. Seven minutes. I just wanted this to end. Eight minutes. And still there was more. When the whistle blew, I was so

relieved. I felt so 'called out'. Here was me, a white privileged male who has had so many advantages in life - complaining about my sore knees.

Two / three hundred years of Transatlantic Slave Trade that ripped 12 million people from their homes, families, communities; shipped them as cargo, claiming insurance on the 15-25% of 'human goods' that perished *en route*; then forced them to work to create the wealth that propelled the British Empire, that our wealth, pension funds, privilege are built on today.

Repent. Change the way we see and do life.

In 2007 the Baptist Union apologised for the sin of racism and the enormity of the transatlantic slave trade. That was an important moment. There was no statement of regret. Just a clear and sincere 'sorry'. Next week, we'll see why it's an important *step* - not the final *conclusion*.

We all make mistakes. We all get it wrong sometimes. Apostle Paul, hero of the faith, says "and I am the worst of sinners." It's the Holy Spirit who searches hearts and convicts us of sin, whatever that might be. And it's different for each of us. None of us can claim to be practically perfect in every way. (Unless, of course, you are either Mary Poppins or Jesus.)

What God 'calls out' in you may be different to what God calls out 'in me'

Don't let pride stop you from experiencing the life Christ has for you.

When Jesus says, "Repent, for Heaven is near" what does that mean for you today.

What is the Holy Spirit 'calling out' in you?

The good news is that repentance comes with forgiveness, restoration, restored relationship.

When we say sorry we are restored to right relationship with others, God, and even ourselves.

What do you need to change your thinking/ attitude about?

What is God nudging you to repent of today?

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