

Just saying the words "I'm sorry" doesn't mean that somebody really is. I'm having to teach this to my young children. One of them may hit the other one and when I tell them to apologize, they shout "I'm sorry." I keep having to explain just because you said the words, your attitude, your heart all these other things have to line up to mean that you're sorry. We can't tell if children are sorry or not, but there are other times it can be more difficult to tell. Picture a woman being sentenced for 15 years in prison, crying and weeping and saying she is so sorry and she didn't mean any of it and it's not who she really is. Or we can think of a politician or a pastor or Christian leader apologizing for their sin that's been exposed and that they've betrayed us. Or a spouse who has been caught in adultery.

How do we know if someone has actually repented or not? We hear people apologize to us. We see leaders who fail or sin and seem to repent. But how can we tell? What should we look for? Because true repentance is more than just words.

This morning we're gonna see what full repentance looks like when someone is actually sorry when someone is actually repenting of their sin. What does it sound like and what does it look like?

Turn with me to 1 Samuel 7:3-17

I. Full repentance means radical change (v. 3-6).

Repentance means change.

Repentance means turning away from one direction and going a different direction.

If you were driving in a car and I say you're going the wrong way and I say I'm sorry but continue going the wrong way. I have not repented.

To repent would be to stop and to turn the car around to drive the other direction.

And this is true in our spiritual lives that it requires actual life change.

Very often, it requires a radical change.

I actually wanna go back to verse two for a moment.

Because of passage this morning begins 20 years after they Ark has returned.

It does not happen right away.

People have to be willing to repent.

And to change.

People can be quick to say that they're sorry.

But we are not always quick to be ready to change.

And it takes Israel 20 years before they're willing to make some changes in their lives.

Sometimes this is true for us.

A lot of the times people have to come to the end of the rope before they're ready to come to Jesus.

A lot of the times our lives have to blow up.

There are times that sin has to be discovered in our life has to fall apart.

And we've tried everything else then we're willing to come to Jesus.

And then we're willing to repent.

Verse three, **"And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, "If you are returning to the Lord with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your heart to the Lord and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines."**

This is one of the things that Samuel tells them.

He says if you're coming back with your full heart.

He says if this is real repentance, then there needs to be change.

If your whole heart is in it, then something is gonna look different.

Samuel gives them some of the things that have to change.

Real repentance means they have to put away these foreign gods.

They cannot serve idols any longer.

And this would have been hard for them.

These are popular idols.

These are the gods all the people around them serve.

And it does not just mean they have these statues in their homes.
This a life change.
These gods were often fertility gods.
Worshipping them meant going to the temple to participate in ritual sexual sin.
That was what people did.
So, they have to change.
They have to not be like everyong else around them.

And they have to direct their hearts to God alone.
Their heart needs to be focused on the LORD only.
They cannot be serving other gods.

And they have to serve God only.
They cannot submit to other gods.
They cannot be focuzed on other things.
They need to be focused on God.

Verse 4, **"So the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroth, and they served the Lord only."**

Do you notice the people don't say anything.
The Bible does not tell us what the people say in response to Samuel.
It doesn't tell us whether they give a beautiful prayer.
It doesn't tell us whether they makes some great declarations about at this time. It's all gonna be different and it's nothing to worry about. They'll never do that again.
We don't get any of their speeches or their thoughts.
But we do get their actions.

Because it is what they do that matters.
Especially when it comes to whether repentance is real or not, it does not matter what you say.
It matters what you do.

There are plenty of people that give incredible speeches about how sorry they are.

Just look at any abuser.

Listen to their speech after they've hit you again and the tears that they bring, and they hit all of the right notes.

Or read the statements of public Christian figures who have been caught in sin or controversy.

Their statements will always be filled with Bible verses and theology and rich, powerful language.

But what they say is insignificant it do they mean it?

And I don't know about you, but I don't have a heart detector?

I think I'm gifted at discernment and reading people.

Sometimes I even think it's one of my spiritual gifts.

But ultimately, we can't tell unless people act differently.

It doesn't matter what these Israelites say. It matters what they do.

And they do what they should.

It is far better that they say nothing or that they say something bad and do what's right.

Than for them to say the most perfect amazing beautiful thing that makes everyone cry and stand up and clap and then he'll go right back to there sin.

They have to act differently, but Israel does.

They put away their idols.

They burn them they destroy them.

They cast them off.

And then they serve God only.

This is also important.

Because their repentance changes how they act.

And they don't just replace those idols with different ones.

They could put aside the Baals and Ashtaroths, and then take up other idols.

Start making statues of Dagon or the gods of Egypt.

Purely hypothetical, but if I told my son to stop punching his brother and he kicked him instead.

And then protested, "you said to stop punching, and I stopped punching."

That might sound like technical obedience, but it's not repentance.

Israel stops their idolatry and only serves God.

Because full hearted repentance is interested in full hearted obedience.

Not technical obedience.

Not just doing the bare minimum to get out of trouble.

It's not just going through the motions.

Verse 5, **"Then Samuel said, "Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the Lord for you."**

Israel is to gather all together.

Samuel will pray for them.

But this is also a chance to see if they mean it.

If they are willing to put aside their busy schedules to make time to do nothing but publically repent.

Verse 6, **"So they gathered at Mizpah and drew water and poured it out before the Lord and fasted on that day and said there, "We have sinned against the Lord." And Samuel judged the people of Israel at Mizpah."**

So, they gather to fast and pray.

They gather to repent and change.

Notice the words that they say.

They just say that they have sinned.

There is no sugar coating.

There is no excuse that they make.

There's no blaming of other people.

There is no downplay of their sin. There's just acknowledging the sin..

And they deny themselves food to just spend time praying and saying they're sorry.

Real repentance comes we act different and we're honest about our sin.
This is one of the ways personally that I look for.
It's one of the ways I determine whether somebody really is repentant or not.
Are they honest about their sin?
Are they telling me the whole truth?
A lot of the times people just want to confess what you know.
It'll keep the rest of us sitting and hidden until you find that out and then I'll come and say well yeah I'm sorry for that too.
Or the confession blame someone else or makes an excuse.
True repentance doesn't do that.

If you want to really, you gotta change the way you're living.
This is the beginning of the Christian life.
We want to follow Jesus then we can't just start by saying yes I'm a Center.
I've done things that are bad.
We have to stop following the path of him and decide. Follow Jesus.
We have to decide to look differently today that we were living yesterday.
To remain a Christian, we have to continue to repent.
To continue to turn away from our sins and back to Jesus.
Repeat this so much more than just saying you were sorry.

II. Full repentance means making a different choice (v. 7-11).

It means when we are in the same circumstances where we sinned.
We don't do it again. We do something different.

Verse 7, **"Now when the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the people of Israel heard of it, they were afraid of the Philistines."**

This is another chance for Israel.
They are in the same position they were before.
The Philistines have a massive army and are coming to destroy them.
They are not confident in their power to win.
The last time they felt this way, they took the Ark.

They tried to manipulate God into victory.
They did not trust in God alone.
They trusted in their own power.
Now, they have another chance to change.
This happens to us all the time.
We fail in one area.
Then we get another chance to try again.
Parents who have lost your cool with your children and gotten angry in sin,
You will have another chance to act differently.
God gives us chances.
And here He gives Israel another chance to come back.
To make a different choice.

Verse 8, **"And the people of Israel said to Samuel, "Do not cease to cry out to the Lord our God for us, that he may save us from the hand of the Philistines."**

And so they begin well.
They don't look for the Ark.
They ask Samuel to continue praying for them.
And they acknowledge that God is the one who needs to save them.
They are willing to trust in God and God alone.

And they rightly see this isn't just something they need to do, but they need the help of spiritual leaders.
Samuel has been put over them as God's prophet.
Samuel is their leader.
And so they don't want to do anything that he doesn't tell them to do.
So they ask him to pray.
I don't think it means that they aren't praying, but it is showing that their trust is no longer in themselves.
It is in the Lord.
They're not getting their own leaders together to have their own discussion on what to do anymore.
They're making a different choice.

Verse 9, **"So Samuel took a nursing lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the Lord. And Samuel cried out to the Lord for Israel, and the Lord answered him."**

Samuel listens.

He takes a innocent lamb to offer it to the Lord.

He makes a sacrifice to God.

On behalf of of the people of God.

And he cries out to the Lord to save His people.

Before Israel tried to fight the Philistines with the ark.

Now all that they have is a nursing lamb.

The sacrifices were always foreshadowing Jesus.

They always pointed to the fact that Jesus is the only one who can remove the guilty of our sins.

But here we also see it, pointing into the fact that he is the conquering lamb.

We call him the lion of the tribe of Judah.

But a revelation Jesus is revealed as the lamb who was slain.

And is the lamb that conquer the world.

Here that's where shadowed in a small nursing lamb.

Something that seems innocent and powerless.

Something it takes faith to believe can save them.

Verse 10, **"As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to attack Israel. But the Lord thundered with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were defeated before Israel."**

Picture what is happening right now.

This is not telling us that Israel got bad news and asked him to pray then he saved them.

This is the Philistine's are coming.

They have heard that they are coming now. They can hear the sound of their chariots and the army thundering.

They can see the army drawing near in the distance.

They are running out of time.

There is not time to get away or to flee.

There is not time to muster up a new army to have a better battle.

Their doom is approaching.

And all that they have to fight is Samuel with a nursing lamb.

And this is happening in the middle of the sacrifice.

They are having to choose at this moment to trust that God will listen.

That prayer is enough.

How many of us if you saw an army coming to destroy your family would just get down on your knee and pray?

We would run we would fight we would need to clammer to do something.

But it's Israel is willing to trust in God alone.

They have no backup plan. They have no other option. They will trust in God.

This is showing their faith and showing their repentance.

This is very different than how they acted back in chapter 4.

There is no manipulating God there is just begging and trusting.

And God shows up.

God thunders.

God himself fights their battle and fights for them.

Apparently, the Philistines did not learn their lesson before with the Ark.

They thought that they could defeat God.

God destroys them all by himself.

God defeats them, and God destroys them.

God confuses them.

Verse 11, **"And the men of Israel went out from Mizpah and pursued the Philistines and struck them, as far as below Beth-car."**

It is real seized that God has already given the battle of their hands and then goes to fight.

It's actually giving us the picture that the Philistine's are running away and then Israel goes to fight.

They go to chase them back.

If we are going to repent, do we have to act differently the second time around.

If my child says that he's really sorry for hitting his brother.

And then he immediately goes and hits his brother again is he sorry?

Has he repented?

No.

The same thing is true of Israel here.

If they are truly repented for trying to manipulate God instead of trusting in him when things got hard.

Then the next time the Philistine came, they would've acted differently.

If they were unrepentant, they would've tried to bring out the ark again.

Or they wouldn't have prayed or they wouldn't have sought Samuel.

But because they have done something different now we can see this is genuine repentance.

This is one of the ways that we can tell whether or not someone else is actually repented or not.

Most of the time people are just sorry that they have to face the consequences of their actions.

But genuine repentance acts differently when it has another chance.

So I'm so tells you that they're so sorry for betraying your trust.

And then the next time you trust them, they portray it again. They're not sorry.

This is true for ourselves too.

We haven't really repented if we're not doing something different now than we were doing before.

I can think about seasons in life when I didn't know how we were gonna pay the bills.

When Brianna I first got married, and I was serving the Lord at the church and she was nannying.

We had an apartment filled with cockroaches.

We had less than \$500 in the bank account

And a car breaks down and I wonder, Lord, how you can provide for us?

And I struggled to trust the Lord and yet he showed up.

And shut up, but I repented of my ignorance and the next time, but he gets tight,

Gas goes up or something happens and I doubt again have I really repented?

So we need to examine our own hearts.

Because repentance does mean that things need to change.

It doesn't mean that we're perfect that we never seen in that area ever again.

But at the very least repentance looks like we're living differently immediately.

At the very least, the first chance we get, we're trying to do right thing.

We are progressing in sanctification.

III. Full repentance leads to restoration (v. 12-17).

This is the good news of the gospel.

When we approach Jesus in faith.

And when we truly repent of our sins, there is restoration for us.

We can be restored to a right relationship with God and we can be restored it made new.

Anything that has been lost can be found again.

So as we continue in the story, we see that this just hasn't been a moment of repentance and a salvation, but that God is restoring them to himself.

God is actually rewriting the story.

Verse 12, **"Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer; for he said, 'Till now the Lord has helped us.'"**

Samuel takes a stone.
And he takes it in order to set up a monument.
So that every time they go by, they can see this giant rock and remember what God did here.
Now this may sound familiar to some of you.
And there is a whole lot that is significant about the name.

Because there is a famous hymn using the words, Ebenezer.
Come thou fount of every blessing in the second verse begins with the words "here I raise my Ebenezer"
That sounds great an old timing as a child leaving an adult we just have to shake my head and say I don't even know what that means but I'll sing anyway.

In the word itself actually has a whole lot of meaning.
We are told that it means till now the Lord has helped us.
Part of that means that up at this point in Israel's history, God has always helped them.
It is a reminder that he began helping us with Abraham, and he has continued all the way till now.
It also has a geographical idea in that God has helped us all the way even up to this physical place.
God has not just helped us in Jerusalem, but he has also helped us here.

With the most significant thing I think about this is that we have already seen the name Ebenezer before.
Maybe you remember the worst day in Israel's history in chapter 4.
Is the time the Philistines came and it instead of really repenting they went to get the arc to manipulate God.
That battle happened at a place called Ebenezer.
This doesn't appear to be happening at the same place though maybe it could be.
The main thing is that it is being named after the same place of their greatest failure.

What is happening here is God is restoring them.

No longer will the name Ebenezer make them cringe and weep and remember where they were when they heard the news.

Now they will hear Ebenezer and they will remember how God saved them.

Because this is what God does.

This is the pattern we see so often the scriptures God takes things and he renamed them.

God takes people and he restores them and renews them.

If we we repent, this is what God does.

He can take even the worst moment in your life and restore it.

The moment that you were caught in sin is the moment that you have the opportunities you repent and the opportunity to change your story and be restored.

Picture of a man who is the leader in his church. He's well respecting to the community. He has a great job.

Everybody loves and respects him, but he's been hiding really serious addiction.

And the truth comes out and he's going to lose everything.

There's no covering up there's no going back. It will forever mark him and all the forever to find how people think about him.

In the moment, it is a choice to make.

It can be the moment that destroys his life and ruins everything, and he tries to cover it up or tries to explain it or tries to brush it under the rug in move forward and hope its never talked about again.

Or if he truly embraces the gospel and truly repents.

It can be the moment that begins his journey to restoration.

If we repent, God can take the worst things in our lives and make them new.

He can take the worst moments of our story and let them be the beginning of something good.

Verse 13, **"So the Philistines were subdued and did not again enter the territory of Israel. And the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel."**

And God's restoration that they didn't have to go through this again.
God restored them to even better than they were before.
Now the Philistine's never fought them again.
For all of the decades Samuel was alive the Philistine's were handled.

Verse 14, **"The cities that the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron to Gath, and Israel delivered their territory from the hand of the Philistines. There was peace also between Israel and the Amorites."**

And it is more than just handled, and there is peace. God restored would've been lost.
The restoration God brings when we repent is even better than it was before.
The cities the Philistine stole were returned.
Land that they had lost had come back.
Places they had not seen for generations were theirs again.
And it's not just with the Philistines we got also brought peace in other areas of their life.
Because the restoration that Jesus brings doesn't just start in one place where we have messed up, but it flows to the rest of us.
And so now they have peace, even with the Amorites.

Verse 15, **"Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. ¹⁶ And he went on a circuit year by year to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah. And he judged Israel in all these places. ¹⁷ Then he would return to Ramah, for his home was there, and there also he judged Israel. And he built there an altar to the Lord."**

And they are restored by having the leader who continues to care for them.
He does not abandon them and leave them alone.

He continues to make a circuit intentionally coming back to this place with these people had failed so greatly to lead them.
To judge them into shepherd them.

Unfortunately, a lot of people want the restoration the gospel promises without repentance of their sin.

They just want a quick I'm sorry that they want everything back.
True repentance can lead to restoration, but we have to repent first.
We have to actually change what we're doing. We have to be willing to accept whatever consequences God's placed on us.

The good news of the gospel is that we can be restored.
There is no sin that the gospel cannot forgive.
There is nothing the locusts have eaten that cannot be restored.
There is nothing you have done, Jesus cannot forgive.
There may be consequences here you have to face.

But in the life to come, everything you have lost can be given back.
There is always redemption and restoration possible.
The gospel makes us clean.
In the life to come, we can be a true new and final good creation.
There will be no more sin and no more failure.
No more making that same mistake again.
No more wondering if we can or cannot trust that person.

Everytime we see someone restored here and now, it is a picture of what will come.
But I invite you to do is that the next time that you sent remember there's restoration.
There's not just forgiveness.
You can be brought back.
This is the whole trajectory of our faith.
Our eschatology been thinking about the last things.
It is not just about how nice heaven might be one day.

It is that we believe one day Jesus will come and bring restoration. That he will bring resurrection, and the Earth and the heavens themselves will be renewed and restored, and all that has ever been lost will be brought back.

And we can experience that restoration if we repent of our sins now and come to faith in Jesus.

Don't miss it.

Don't cheat yourself through half hearted repentance.

Don't miss out on what Jesus wants to bring you.

All of us are going to send countless times from this morning.

It does not have to be the end of your story.

Not if you come to Jesus and you repent.