

# Sermon on LD 33

*by pastor Dirk M. Boersma*

**Preached at:** Emmanuel Church, Denver on July 15, 2007

**Title: No longer dead but alive!**

- sincere regret
- true joy

## **Liturgy**

**Call to worship:** Ps 145,

**opening:** Ps 112,1-3

**Profession of faith:** Hymn 1b

**before sermon:** Ps 51,1-3

**after sermon:** Ps 51, 4.5

**thanksgiving:** Hymn 56, 1.2.4

*I hope this sermon will serve to make your love for God grow and lead you to a deeper dedication to our Lord Jesus Christ. Praise him for his grace!*



Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

a huge oil tanker is going to run on the cliffs and spill millions of gallons of oil on the coast. Thousands of birds are going to die. It will be an enormous disaster.

The rudder is stuck. What are they going to do? They need to turn this thing around. A tow boat is working on it, but it goes extremely slow. It's not like a light toy boat, this is an oil tanker that weighs tons. It cannot turn quickly.

While we hold our breath about the disaster that might happen we can think of another disaster God has prevented: he has stopped us from crashing and burning on judgment day. He has turned us around. We are no longer on a collision course.

But it turns very slowly. The complete turn away from destruction takes your entire life. This is why the Catechism speaks about conversion as a lifelong process.

Maybe you have wondered how this works when you realized 'I want to serve God, I don't want these wrong desires in my life any more, but they are still there. Why doesn't God take them away, and make us perfect on the spot, once we believe in Christ?'

The Bible shows us that this is a long process. Can we sidestep it, find a shortcut to become perfect? No, there is none. Unless you be born again, Jesus says, you cannot see nor enter the kingdom of God. A major change in your life is necessary before you can enter the kingdom. And that change is not finished the moment you step through the door of the kingdom and enter. The first big change of conversion may feel like the biggest change you've ever experienced but it's not the last one. It continues right through, until the end of our lives.

Believers are God's work in progress: he replaces the old nature with the new.

The word 'nature' helps us to understand why this process is so extended and difficult. You can't change the nature of dog, people use to say, meaning that there are certain things that are characteristic for a dog, its nature is to bark in order to warn and protect its owner.

To change our nature is an almost impossible undertaking. It has happened earlier, by sin. The effect of sin on our nature has been so devastating that it requires no less than the power God used to raise Christ from the dead, to raise us from spiritual death, and to undo the effects of sin. This total change of our nature is what we are talking about in LD 33. We are moving from death to life. Now, everything that pulls us back into death, away from God, needs to be removed from our lives.

Our theme is:

**No longer dead but alive!**

- sincere regret
- true joy

Why are we speaking about true repentance? Isn't repentance always a good thing? Are there different forms of repentance?

In Scripture we read about Esau who despised his birthright and sold it to his younger brother, but later regretted it in tears. Too late.

Even worse, Judas sold Jesus for 30 pieces of silver and delivered Him to his enemies. But later he regretted this and returned the money, trying to make amends. Finally, he hang himself. He did not return to God and repent from his sin in true repentance.

Repentance is fake if it is for the wrong reasons: only being afraid of the consequences and the punishment.

As a child you've probably ran to your parents after doing something wrong, only because you knew they would find out anyway, or because you got hurt and needed their help.

Sometimes the consequences, the pain we receive, bring us to acknowledge that we were wrong. I tell everything because I see I ruined it, or because someone found out what I did. People cannot always see the difference between regret and true repentance, but God can.

We need to learn what true repentance is, in order to receive forgiveness from God.

We can be hindered by what we think people expect from us, we can learn the wrong things at home or in the church. That is why we need the teaching of the truth in the church: only the truth can set you free, a false sense of security, a lukewarm or people-centered repentance is not a repentance God accepts.

In church history, the roman catholic church had made repentance into a whole institution, and some churches still follow this. You go to confession, and tell all your sins to the priest, who then gives you some kind of punishment, after which you will be free from your sins.

When we make repentance a ceremony, a series of steps you must go through, and then you're done, we have missed the point, with terrible results. All these people go to hell while they lived in false security. That is how serious false repentance is.

Therefore, in the time of the Reformation, Luther started with repentance. When He published his 95 theses against the perverted teachings of the church, the first one he wrote down was this one:

“When Jesus said: ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near’ he meant that our whole lives should be repentance.”

Not just a moment, once a week or once a month, performing the right steps, but a lifestyle, a continuous process, from the heart.

Now we are in the middle of LD33: true repentance comes from the heart, and it means turning to God in sincerity. Repentance has two sides, like a coin: the dying of the old nature, and the resurrection, the coming to life of the new. When you read the explanation of both, you see a similarity: they are both about emotions in the heart (heartfelt sorrow, heartfelt joy), and both in relation to God: we have offended God; we have new joy in God, and love to live according to God's will.

Let us take a look at both parts of true repentance.

### The dying of the old nature

I already mentioned, that we are dealing with our nature here. We need to realize, and the Catechism taught us that already, that sin is not just an incident, but it is deeply entrenched in our heart, it has taken root there. If you want to take out some weeds, you pull them out, and there they go: the roots are not deep.

We have a huge Cottonwood tree in our backyard. If we ever need to remove it (like when it's old and dead), we're going to sweat.

We will need to dig out the roots, they are very thick and go deep into the ground. That's because they protect the tree against strong winds. It will probably take a whole week.

Likewise, sin has deep and strong roots: it has twisted our entire nature, so deep we cannot take it out by ourselves any more. Sin is part of our nature, it has destroyed our good and holy nature with which God had created in us.

And therefore, our salvation and new life concern more than just the sins we do. It also has to deal with our nature, the sin we were born in, the sin that is everywhere in our being. The decay that is inside of us.

David confesses to this in Ps 51: I am born in sin. This is not an excuse, in the sense of 'I cant help it, God, I just got it from my parents?'. Not at all. David looks deeper than the sins he had done, and that were terrible: he had stolen another's wife, killed her husband, and lied his way out of it. He got away with lies, adultery, and murder, by misusing his power as a king. But he looks even deeper, and confesses that these are not incidental sins, but they are the product of his sinful nature, that has not been fully changed yet.

The consequence of this is: I cannot stop doing sin, I will do it again, unless God changes me from the inside.

David's repentance is in the Bible to show us how we should repent. We need to acknowledge our sins openly before God, not only as far as we hurt people, but in how we offended God: David says: "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.

We need to acknowledge God's justice, the claim He has on our lives. We don't sin against people only, but we offend God and provoke His anger.

All the sins we do, lying, murder, jealousy, hatred, everything, they are an expression of a deeper seated problem: our hatred against God who tells us what to do. Sin is basically a desire for independence, and rebellion against God.

We need to confess our sins, not because we are afraid to be punished, that others find out, or we suffer the consequences, but because we have offended God.

So this is the dying of the old nature that must take place in our lives: see the true character of sin, confess it before God, and acknowledge how you have offended God himself and His justice. Heartfelt sorrow in your heart is not reached by human punishments, ordered by a priest. It is only reached when, in faith, you return to God, face His law, and acknowledge that you have broken it.

True repentance does not lead to laziness and an underestimating of sins in your life. Rather, it is realizing what sin really is, in relation to God.

True repentance and forgiveness do not make you reckless in sin either. As if you can continue in sin because it's not that big a deal, and God will forgive you anyway.

No, part of true repentance is the mortification of the old nature, that means declaring war at sin, its power and temptations. Not giving it opportunity to reign in your body and mind and heart, but to hate it and to flee from it. A broken spirit and a contrite heart are the opposite of a reckless sinner who continues living in sin and loving it. For the believer, sin shows its true colors –and it's ugly! You have turned your back to it. Turning towards God means turning away from sin at the same time.

Hate it and flee from it – that means that we fight it with all our power, all the power of the Holy Spirit.

This fight means flight, running away when it you realize you are weak –and when are you not? Your friends may dare you to do something and show that you are strong, but it is a sign of strength to get out of a situation that will lead to sin. It is part of our responsibility as Christians to keep our eyes open and to detect where the danger is. We can look at this when we are going to study all the different commandments.

## Resurrection of the new nature

The other side of the coin of true repentance is the resurrection, the coming to life, of the new man. We find a lot about this in Rom 6. I often mention this chapter because it is so basic.

It is important that we take our starting point right: Romans 6 argues, that we cannot continue living in sin, loving it, enjoying it, making it our life, since we have died with Christ. The death of Christ is like the cutting of the umbilical cord of a baby: a definite beginning of the new existence.

The important starting point we need to take is in v 11: count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

The characteristic of this new existence, this new life in Christ, is joy.

You will have found that the teaching of the Bible about forgiveness and our new life in Christ gives you a tremendous sense of joy. Still in your sins, you will always be afraid for God's judgment. Even notorious sinners can never escape the feeling completely. They will not be looking forward to their death, they push it away, including the possibility that God punishes evil.

But for believers, once you have confessed your sins and received forgiveness, you can be sure that your sins will not be held against you any more. Davids song of repentance is at the same time a song of praise and joy. From vs 7, the pitch is higher: Cleanse me, I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

True repentance leads to certainty of forgiveness, you know for sure that God has forgiven all the sins you have confessed. You will have the joy of salvation David is talking about in v 12.

When God forgives your sins, you do not need to bow your head in shame any more. Your guilt and shame have been taken away. You can look at the future with expectation and hope: God has wiped the slate clean. You have joy because the past is wiped away, and you have joy because God has given you this new life, that is shining like a new day after the liberation from a war. Life lies open before you, invites you to enjoy it, to enjoy and to keep the freedom that you now have received.

V 10-12 in Psalm 51 are characteristic of the new attitude God likes to see in His children:  
“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.  
Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.  
Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.”

The Holy Spirit awakens in us an earnest desire to keep the freedom we have received, to enjoy the presence of God. We cherish our relationship with Him even more, we don't want to lose it. And the claim God has on our lives fills our mind again: we should not serve the devil and build his kingdom with everything God has given us. “Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness”. We start realizing that really, when we sin, we are again serving the devil, promoting his kingdom, and we are opposite God again. But this is not what God saved us for!

“Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.” (v 19)

When you are a slave you must obey your master. When we were ruled by sin, all we could do was serve the devil and do his will, following our sinful desires.

But after we have been saved we should serve our new master: Jesus Christ, our God. This serving is not out of bondage and oppression, but we do it willingly. That is the big change God has brought in our nature already.

This love and delight, as the Catechism calls it, to live according to the will of God in all good works, is something that is growing in the lives of believers.

Still, there is a fight going on in our lives. The old nature does not let itself be defeated without resistance. There are so many things, especially in our own heart, that will try to pull us back into our old life.

You're in for the fight of your life!

We should not underestimate our fight against sin: ‘we're talking not a matter of days, we're talking a lifetime of sorrow and joy, defeat and victory, fighting and rejoicing.’ But God works it in us with his power!

And getting back to the question at the beginning: why is this such a long process?

This is not because God's weapons are not powerful enough. But it is in order to make us grow in humility and trust in His power. In this fight, we long more and more to see God and to have fellowship with Him. We grow in holiness, and in appreciation of God's grace. And we discover in a powerful way that we cannot live a single day without Christ. This is the goal of that fight: we are trained in holiness, and drawn to our savior and king more every day we turn away from sin and turn towards God, in joy and love.

Amen