Sermon Series: What Does It Mean to Be Saved?
Sermon Title: Repent and Believe

Text: 2 Corinthians 7:8-10 -- For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. 9 As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. 10 For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

Introduction: **Roger Williams III** was sitting in the window seat and was looking forward to thumbing through a magazine on a short flight from Sacramento to attend a ***National Youth Ministry Conference*** in San Diego, California. He'd fastened his seat belt, made sure his chair was in the full upright position, his tray table was locked and his luggage was properly stowed in the overhead compartment when two well-dressed young ladies sat down next to him. **Being so close in proximity, their conversation competed for Roger's attention with the magazine he was holding**. They talked about the club scene—what they enjoyed drinking, who they were "dating," their embarrassingly intimate relationships with men, both single and married. Then it turned into a gripe session. "***Why do guys have such a hard time committing***?" one asked. "***And why don't they ever leave their wives like they promise to***?" Eventually their conversation turned to other topics, and then, about the time Williams was tuning out, one of them said, "***But you know, if it wasn't for church, my life would really be (a mess)***." By now, Williams, who was only pretending to read his magazine, gave them his full attention. "***Wow, you go to church, too. I know exactly how you feel. If it wasn't for church, I don't know where I'd be***." "***Yeah, I know what you mean***," the other lady said, "***if I miss more than two weeks of church, everything in my life goes nuts***." Not long after their comments, the plane started its descent into San Diego and everything got quiet. Williams sat still—stunned by what he'd just heard. He concluded that worship, to these ladies, was just a "religious fix." ***While going to church on Sunday certainly lifted their spirits, it did little to transform their lives***.

Unfortunately, we all know people who, when it comes to their religious views and experiences, are in a similar place as those two ladies. They frequently attend churches and enjoy the inspirational messages and songs that are part of the services. However, there seems to be a disconnect between their worship on Sunday mornings and the rest of their lives. While there are probably a lot of places to assign blame for this phenomenon, certainly one of them has to be the misunderstanding that ***Christianity is a religion of inspiration, but not transformation***. This morning, I want to talk about the next step in the process of salvation, as I continue in my series, "What Does It Mean to Be Saved?". I'm talking about CONVERSION. It comes from a word means "***to turn around or reverse***." It conveys the idea of change and is even translated that way (**Matthew 18:3 -- Truly, I say to you, unless you turn (i.e., (Wuest) reverse your present trend) and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven**). For the sake of our study, let me provide this definition of conversion from the book ***Systematic Theology***: **CONVERSION is our willing response to the gospel call, in which we sincerely repent of our sins and place our trust in Jesus Christ for salvation** (**Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, p. 709**). For the next twenty-five minutes or so, I would like to help unpack that definition so that you have a clearer understanding of what it means to be converted and the process by which it occurs in a person's life. ***Let's begin by reviewing what we said two weeks ago about conversion and the gospel call***.

CONVERSION AND THE GOSPEL CALL. IN OUR FIRST THREE MESSAGES in our series we've talked about the COMMON GRACE OF GOD that everyone experiences in each of the realms in which we exist (physical, spiritual, societal, intellectual etc); we've also looked at the DOCTRINE OF ELECTION and came to realize that the Bible teaches both election (*God is responsible for our salvation through His choice of us*) and human responsibility (*unbelievers are responsible for their judgment because they reject Christ*); then we looked at

THE EFFECTIVE CALL OF GOD. Let me remind of two important truths as they relate to God's call to us in the gospel of Christ.

- **The gospel call guarantees a positive response to God when He begins to draw us to Himself** (**John 6:44 -- No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day**). God draws or drags us to Himself so that eventually we want what He wants for us…a relationship with Him through Christ. ***God's call is 100% effective*** because we know that those He predestines, He calls and those He calls, He justifies (**Romans 8:30**). There are no exceptions.
- **The gospel call does not, however, eliminate our responsibility to respond** (**Acts 2:37-39 -- Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" 38 And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit**). Though God's call guarantees a POSITIVE RESPONSE, it does not eliminate the need for it. This is evident in Peter's sermon at Pentecost. After listening to his teaching, the people were deeply moved and wanted to know what their response should be**. Peter extended the invitation to everyone,** yet we're told that only those who accepted his message received the promise of forgiveness of sin and the gift of the Holy Spirit. ***Those who were called by God responded positively and were converted as a result***.

  Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher, told a story about a goose that was wounded and landed in a barnyard with some chickens. ***He played with the chickens and ate with the chickens***. After a while, the goose thought he was a chicken. One day, a flight of geese came over, migrating to their home. They gave a honk up there in the sky, and he heard it. Kierkegaard said, "***Something stirred within the breast of this goose. Something called him to the skies. He began to flap the wings he hadn't used, and he rose a few feet into the air. Then he stopped, and he settled back again into the mud of the barnyard. He heard the cry, but he settled for less.***" Unfortunately, that's what many people do when they hear the Gospel Call. Though moved by it, they do not respond choosing to settle for far less.

CONVERSION AND REPENTANCE. In that third message, we briefly mentioned repentance and faith, but since they are the two fundamental features of conversion, I would like to look at both more closely. Here's what REPENTANCE involves.

- **Repentance involves our minds.** We must have a clear understanding of sin. A definition of sin that I use is…. ***doing something God does not want us to do*** (commission)***, or failing to do something that God does want us to do*** (omission). In either case, it is the failure to exhibit TRUST in Christ by refusing to walk in obedience to His commands (**Romans 14:23 -- For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin**). Repentance requires that we come to the point where we agree with God's assessment of SIN. What do I mean?
  - **We agree with God that sin is first and foremost an offense against Him** (**Genesis 39:9 –** (To Potiphar's wife, Joseph said this when she tried to get him to commit adultery with her) **How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?**"; **Leviticus 6:1 -- If anyone sins and commits a breach of faith against the Lord (and then Moses lists several sins**).
  - **We agree with God that sin leads to death, not life** (**Galatians 6:7-8 -- Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. 8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life**).
- **Repentance involves our emotions.** We must express godly sorrow in response to our sin (**2 Corinthians 7:9-10 -- 2 Corinthians 7:8-10 -- For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. 9 As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. 10 For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation**

without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death). Worldly sorrow, according to Paul is <u>regret that does not lead to repentance</u>. It is the difference between the way that Judas responded to his sin (**Matthew 27:3-4 -- Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, 4 saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood."**) and the way that King David responded to his (**Psalm 51:3-4 -- Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight**).

- **Repentance involves our wills**. We must make a personal decision to turn from sin (**Isaiah 55:6-7 -- "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; 7 let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; <u>let him return to the Lord</u>, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon**).

<u>Here's a picture of REPENTANCE</u>. Gypsy Smith, who served the Lord in South Africa, tells this story about a fine, handsome Dutchman who came into a worship service he was leading. There God laid His hand on him and convicted him of sin. The next morning, he went to the beautiful home of another Dutchman and said to him, "***Do you recognize that old watch***?" "***Why, yes***," answered the other. "***Those are my initials; that is my watch. I lost it eight years ago. How did you get it, and how long have you had it***?" "***I stole it***," was the reply. "***What made you bring it back now***?" "***I was converted last night***," was the answer, "***and I have brought it back first thing this morning. If you had been up, I would have brought it last night***."

CONVERSION AND SAVING FAITH. Repentance and faith are equally necessary for conversion to take place. Some call this response to God "saving faith" because of what it achieves for those who trust in Christ. Here are three observations about saving faith.

- **Saving faith requires more than a knowledge of the gospel message**. **Certainly, as I have shared in an earlier message, people cannot come into a personal relationship with God without faith, but faith must be more than head knowledge**. The Bible tells us that demons have some orthodox beliefs about God, but it only produces fear in them (**James 2:19 -- You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!**). Paul wrote that certain men suppress the truth, though they know God's decree and the consequences that await disobedience (**NASV -- Romans 1:18 -- For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness; Romans 1:32 -- though they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them**).
- **Saving faith requires more than mere approval of the gospel message**. In **Acts 26:27**, King Agrippa, who was himself a Jew, believed (approved) the message of the prophets about the Messiah, but that was not enough to save him.
- **Saving faith requires personal faith in the gospel message** (**See John 3:16**). Christ, the son of God, became a representative human being and fulfilled the agreement that God had made with the first man (Adam) in the garden. Though Adam sinned and earned death, Christ obeyed and earned life (**2 Corinthians 5:21 -- For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God**). This enabled Jesus to offer Himself as a substitute for us, taking our sin in His body on the cross and giving us the righteousness of God and eternal life. **<u>When we respond to this message and personally invite Christ to become our Savior and Lord, He applies the benefits of His sacrifice to us</u>**.

CONVERSION AND CONFUSION. When it comes to conversion, there seem to be two errors that need to be corrected. Some think that …

- **Conversion does not require repentance**. Because repentance is considered by some to be a work and we know that we are saved '**not by works that no man should boast**', repentance is not necessary. Those who hold to this view cite passages such as **John 3:16, Ephesians 2:8-9,** which talk about faith but not

repentance as the condition for inheriting eternal life. In response, let me say that there are just as many passages about CONVERSION where only repentance is named (**Acts 2:38 -- Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit; Acts 3:19** – (Peter speaking to some Jews) **Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out**). ***Certainly, those passages that mention only repentance do not exclude faith any more than the verses mentioning only faith exclude repentance***. The New Testament authors understood so well that the two go together (**Mark 1:15 -- The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"**) that they often did not feel the need to mention both. They were simply understood. Our Lord believed people needed to repent if they were to become Christians, and that should be good enough for all of us.

- ***(a second error) C*onversion does not require trusting in Christ as Lord**. In other words, salvation does not necessitate the desire to follow Christ, only to be saved from the wages of sin. This is absolutely ridiculous! Paul puts this argument to rest in **Acts 20:20-21 -- I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, 21 testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ**. It is impossible to receive Christ as anything but what He is…Savior and Lord. This has been the historic understanding of the church because it is the biblical understanding.

Conclusion: **If common grace inspires thanksgiving in us, election … humility, effective calling … confidence, regeneration … spiritual ability, then perhaps conversion should inspire action**, that we would turn from our sin (repentance) and turn to Christ (faith). In **Putney, Kentucky**, a community of largely conservative Christians, **Michael Braithwaite** was a novelty. Braithwaite owned a sex shop that sold leather goods and porn paraphernalia. Today, however, he sells Bibles, having undergone a religious conversion. "***Morally, I couldn't sell it any longer***," he said. Neighbors have embraced the change, helping Braithwaite restock his 5-year-old store with Christian merchandise and buying groceries for his family until his new business begins to turn a profit. He dropped the old name, "***Love World***," and now calls his store "***Mike's Place***." He covered the formerly bright red walls with a fresh coat of white paint. Braithwaite, with tears gathering in his eyes, said God persuaded him to close the shop, burn $10,000 of merchandise, and open the bookstore. A pile of ashes in his parking lot is all that remains of his former inventory. "***I stopped and got 10 gallons of diesel fuel, and we packed load after load of stuff out of there***," said **Frank Howard**, a local pastor. "***We were hauling it out by the wheelbarrow***." Some of his customers, as you can imagine, have been shocked to walk into the building to find a shelf of Bibles where unmentionables used to be displayed. "***When the Lord gets a hold of you, you make some changes***," said Braithwaite. That's really true, isn't it? We turn from our sin (repentance) and turn to Christ (faith), and the result is a changed human being.