No. 57.1
On Repentance

April 23, 1826?
Matth. iv. 17. "From that time Jesus began to preach and to say: repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Suppose, my friends, you had long been waiting impatiently for the arrival of a message, and while you were ready to disclose to you the news, a man arrived, I was ready to disclose to you the news of so many of your hopes, so much of your interest, so much of your labors, so much of your suffering. Would you not listen with eager attention to the first words he should utter, would you not hang upon his lips with breathless expectation? would you not give the attention of soul to him who engages in the communication he is about to make? Most certainly you would. And why

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then will you not listen to the first words of the messenger of heaven? When a message from God is announced, shall we be indifferent or careless? We have a communication from a higher source than any, even the most venerable human authority. Subject to the interest of all transactions everywhere in interest, as of an importance far beyond the importance of all other objects in the pursuit of life, which we live; shall this communication, which we have as certainly needful, as we were before? It is such a message as we have in the words of the text - the first words of the preaching of Jesus of Nazareth the ambassador of heaven. When the messenger of heaven opens this instructions. He comes from the Most High. He executes the ministry of communicating; he comes in the power of God, His lips are inspired to teach the wisdom from above, to disclose the whole counsel of heaven. Wherefore does he come? - to bring forth a people that are ignorant, among whom are enemies, to bring in strong arms against the enemies of the peace. And should not such beings wait with anxious earnestness for the first proclamation of this divine teacher? - And what is this proclamation? It is this: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." This short sentence contains our measure to consider as the commencement of the instructions of our Lord. Thus it comes fraught with meaning of endless importance, clothed with a most solemn and commanding authority. There was much in the circumstances of the time when our Lord commenced His ministry, which gave to these words a peculiar appropriateness and force. Perhaps never was there in the world a more deadly gross corruption of morals, or a more triumphant reign of vice and wickedness, that when a preacher appeared, we might almost say, that God was forgotten by His creatures, or they were then being in their sins as if they thought that God too had forgotten them. In this corruption the human nation had long been very largely, their sins were of a deeper dye, because
they had been favored with extraordinary enlighten-
ment and privileges. Yet notwithstanding God's benefi-
tion, they were not neglecting their studies. In
some respects, the deserts of divine love
for their benefit, raised up a long succession of profest
teachers, notwithstanding these marks of favor, the
men of obedience, they had become, at the time of
our Saviour's prophetic declarations, that a historian
of their own nation, wrote, many prejudices in this
carry, thus speaks of them: "I believe," says he, "that
Israelites, had not brought destruction upon
these wicked men, the earth would have stood
in a deluge, or have experienced the fate of Sodom.
For the race of men, who inhabited it, were much
more quickly than were these, who suffered such
terrible calamities. If then, such was the obdurate
state of their natures, if they had so abused the means
of improvement, given them, by God, one wonders that
we have commenced the instruction of my ministry
by saying, "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."
There was another reason very common among the
yea, to teach in the text there is an allusion. It
is well known that they expected their Messiah
to be a temporal prince, one who should fight the battles
of his country, lead them to victory & glory. This
principle was settled very deep in their minds. To
destroy it as the last hope, aroused much their fear.
spirits might really & find relief. But the type
was to be vanished, if it was a false one; these
vices were to be eradicated. If, then, we have
indicators by a bad spirit of wickedness, we may, at
the reason for importance, that the kingdom of heaven
is at hand, i.e. not that temporal kingdom
which earthly glory or they fondly & mainly expected,
but that spiritual kingdom, righteousness, joy &
peace, oh! be these sent by God to establish among us
There was to be a revolution in their feelings, visions
of instead of a king, who should reign on a throne, they
were to receive a king, he should reign only in the
hearts of men. Taking interview these circumstances,
and we see how peculiarly fit he was the image
of our mediator, in the hearts of so many consider.
This phrase is used in different senses in different places of the O.T. We are in the habit of considering it as intended solely to express that future state of glory, of the righteous in the presence of God, which exerts its power forever. But that it has not always this signification is evident from the text, as well as from many other passages. The phrase was not first used by our Saviour or his apostles, but was in current use among the Jews before their time. Many passages in the O.T. not only predicted a future period of happiness, joy to the nation, but led the Jews to speak of their expected Messiah as a king, and his institution as a kingdom. In the prophecies of Daniel there is a passage, or in is supposed to have introduced this mode of expression: "Now in the night visions," says the prophet, "I beheld one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an ever-lasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom"
dom that oh shall not be destroyed... This phrase can be interpreted as referring to the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God. Sometimes it signifies all the salvation and happiness that are obtained by faith. As they say, "seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," and sometimes it refers to the future inheritance of heaven, as in "for this is the kingdom of heaven." It means simply the true religion as it was and is again to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. It would be easy to point out various other senses in which this expression is used in other places. In this text, it refers not to the future world of glory, but to the immediate approach of the Gospel dispensation. When therefore I say, "the kingdom of heaven is at hand," we must consider them, as intending to assign it a motive for repentance. What God was now about to set up on earth, the Spiritual kingdom of His Son, that being about to reveal himself, was merely this, that it was the obvious

...the sons of men...

We have thus considered the meaning and application of the text; let us now attend to the duty that ensues. This duty is repentance; and it is of high importance because it must form the commencement of the plan. The very first step in the sinner's path is to repent; the first step which is taken to the throne of heaven, must come from a contrite heart. The first tear that streams from the eye looking to the sky, must be the beginning of repentance. What, then, does repentance mean? It means the first of all senses for sin, that sorrow which arises from a heart humbled by a sense of unworthiness, produced by the recollection of repeated transgressions. We see for a moment we step out of the busy agitation of life, sit the busy crowd off by, while we sit down to examine ourselves, whenever we dismiss for a while those rushing cares which press like a flood over the heart, and when we thus commune with our own souls, and feel that we stand alone in the presence of God, it is then we learn how little we have done for our own

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we have left undone, it is then we trace the dark lines of guilt in the records of memory. Present to our view, we see our sins starting up around us, and turning on us as accusers. (The view when we with a dreadful look of retribution, see that we have wandered away from you, often from the path of duty that leads us.) Thus are we made what we should be in that. Being when we have offended, should deal with us with the measures of justice. Now it is when we thus review our thoughts, our lives, feel how impure have been these thoughts, have visions these lives, that sorrow begins to open itself in the soul, and this sorrow is the commencement of true repentance. The heart must be softened before it can be purified; it must sorrow before it can reform. There is little hope that we shall strive to be good, till we feel, as of being bad. If we are not that we have sinned, we shall probably be anxious to own one more. But here we should be careful that we do not impose on ourselves by substituting the fault for the true, the shadow for the substance. Let our sorrow for our sin be real, sincere, not the mockery of affected sentiment; let us not only press the mourning for our sinners gives us a licence to continue in their wrongs, as our sin does in dishonoring the face, but in humbling the heart; it is not to be posted on the frontiers of the countenance, or the tongue, but it must be seated deep; it must go through the soul, unlock all the fountains of our subdued and tender emotions. We are very apt to persuade ourselves, that others have said we are sorry for our sins, we are in truth; or let our conscience only can tell us, whether we are, or not. We flatter ourselves we are deceiving others, or not. Certain it is that the professions of the lips are not always the true indicators of the state of the feelings. It is very easy to look very humble, to talk much of our own unworthiness, yet we want a heart as proud, as stubborn, as grand, and the ambitions and worldly concerns. And there is another mistake under this head, from which it is necessary to guard. When we reason over our transgressions, for what are we sorry? Is it for the sin or for the sequence of the sin, for the crime or for the punishment of the crime? If for the former, then indeed
grief may be urgent, y. have, grace that the God, but
if for the latter, trust it is little better than the
selfish person allowing, short, to ascend the mountain; but
has not firmness or resolution enough to abandon the
sin. We may be very unwilling to suffer the conse-
cquences of our sin, we are not very glad to enjoy their
pleasures or privileges; y. for we though we may truly
report that our sins have brought upon us misery, we
may still love the sins themselves. "If we have teared
the unhappy shell of separating the effect from
the cause, of our grief about our love, if we consent
blind looks at our sins even though these tears with all
our eyes are reddened, thisundy will be far
from accomplishing our designs, as God's will, y. will
leave us equally unpardoned as unpardoned." But
that since sin, or begins the work of true repent-
ance, must be a sorrow for our sins because they are
violations of God's laws, not principally because they
bring ruin or misery on ourselves. We think to
them, not mercifully because they injure us, but be-
cause they offer. Due to. this sorrow, too, must be cast
in the heart, of from whence ascend faith to exclude
ing influences through all out thoughts of sin.
But sorrow for sin is nearly the commencement
of repentance; if it stop here, it is little better than
lack of sorrow, if it is not accompanied by a repentance
of heart, y. i.e., it will avail us nothing.
But repentance, like faith, must not be cold.
Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall
enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth
the will of my Father in heaven. What shall it
mean, and our sins be then embraced them again? y. shall
we lament our vices, y. then aspire to claim then
abuses? This may have a very good method of
deceiving ourselves, y. good thing our minds into the
belief that, although the lines of guilt are deep on
our hearts, yet a few tears will wash them away,
but in the eye of God, it will be a more external
eye; y. will not be allowed the plead for a moment
in our behalf. The moral religious character of
men can be judged only by their fruits. For instance,
it is not from any more verbal professions, but from
genuine and strong sentiments of humility. Still more from acts of humility, that we judge of a truly 
righteous heart; — as likewise from the entertainment of chari-
estable sentiments, from deeds of true piety, from be-
nessence, not from any occasional or ostentatious phe-
mena, that we decide upon a charitable character.
In like manner, information of heart and life is better
evidence of sincere repentance than any words of mere 
profaneness, or a look cast over the countenance, is than any decla-
ration of purpose, though accompanied with the utmost solemn 
protestations. To acknowledge that we re-
pent, gave cause for our voices, is yet to reek the 
very crime of which we have confessed. Insin-
uation against conviction; for the very confession our 
repentance, though it will neither insure our doi-
ing right, nor secure for the neglect of it; certainly 
implies our knowledge of having done wrong; and just 
as much as it fails of having any effects on our 
lives, so far it falls short of being any repentance, 
but in name, or is worse than no repentance at all. — Mercy is promised, not to him who confes-
ses & profanes his name, but to them who confessed & 
profited. Wherein intends to attest these 
reasures, does in fact. maintain & defend them, however po-
tentially his help may press for them. I am per-
tinent to that right is not sufficient to dispense allowance and 
expulsion desires to be extinguished by a new transplant 
over them. We may even pour out our hearts in con-
fession of our unworthiness to God; & yet it is every 
possible that we may raise our voices on the 
as strong a tone as as been a whisper. For the voices as 
ever. Under the shade of the altar of God’s house, 
we may humble ourselves, & feel for the moment 
the most sincere & lovely grace for guilt, & yet it 
the most sincere & lovely grace for guilt, & yet it 
may be, we shall loose the sanctuary, & go out 
the battle & business of the world, & there 
be all the malignant passions, & desire press 
healing propensities, where we had before. There 
is great dangers that we should apprehend ourselves 
that a few moments of pious feelings will be suffi-
cient to make our names stand firm in the book.
of God's remembrance; but a moment, it is an hour of holy excitement, it will not stand for a hope of sin.

The only way in which we can show that we have sincerely repented, is by having need of most certain it is, that if the seed be planted in our hearts, it shall, in the language of our Saviour, bear forth fruits meet for repentance. And we should not forget, that as more sorrow will be of no avail, so neither will partial reformation in imperfect information, whether the defect be with regard to the kind or duration to have there is great need of caution, for men aspire follow the spirit of repentance. For men, who suppose that every transient dream of purity in the flame in which the Holy Spirit descends, if thought for it not the main circumstance of resting on them, yet to them it seems to fascinate the conscience. Therefore those who think that when they have given a portion of their thoughts and affections to duty, they have done enough to manifest their repentance, is that the rest may be reserved for guilty pleasures and passions. Nor this half-way reformation is not the fruit of true repentance; it shows that although we may be sorry for our sins yet we are not sorry enough to part with them altogether. And only, practical, hearty reformation is the perfection of sincere repentance.

We have thus briefly spoken of the nature of repentance: we have seen that it begins in sorrow for sin, proceeds in reformation from sin; neither of these parts should be wanting. For they form that union which alone is acceptable in the sight of God.

My text is. I need not tell you what motives and all have its repentance, if we grant, as we certainly must, that no man delighteth in sin even to its followers, of course, that every one is concerned to keep the solemn seclusion of his repentance; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. - My text is. Let us therefore trust ourselves alone with our consequences. Yet them, tell us, where we have err'd, if where we should be from. The return of the prodigal son, we are told, made his father's heart leap for joy, so let every return to our S. F. P, he hath promised the never
fully receive us to the arms of this house. Let us go
to the throne of grace by way from the heart, "let us be
merciful to our inns". And when we return to
the world, let us show that the spirit with which
we have imbued our tempers is still chiselled abroad upon
our deeds. It is only by sincere thorough reformation
that we can hope to make repentance acceptable.
In the last day, the question will be, not, how many
confessions we have made, or how many tears we are
shed, but, how many acts of virtue we have sub-
stituted in the room of our vices, how many bad
practices we have quenched, how many corrupt pro-
sessions we have subdued. If our repentance does
not lead us to the obedience of servants in answer,
it will not conduct us to the inheritance of sons
in the world to come.

April, 1820.

At home, April 23d, 1820. - Preston.
At Mr. Garrett's, Feb. 16th, 1821 (Friday lecture).
At home, July 21st, 1822. afternoon.