

# Answering the Voice of Regret

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[ 0 : 00 ] I was walking through the graveyard near my house this week, and I saw off to my left, and! And I pulled up short, I really lurched to a stop. It's not the first time I've seen that!

I've read that, not at all. Our daughter Elizabeth, Elizabeth Barrett. I started going to school with Elizabeth in kindergarten, and in old clippings, my family have gathered, there's a picture of the kindergarten roundup, and we're all at the Argus School Library. I think we're in our pajamas, and Elizabeth is there. So am I. About nine or so other children.

And I'm there, and she's there. And she rode our bus, the bus that I rode to school. When she needed to ride a bus, she rode that bus with us. She didn't have to ride the bus that often, because her mom was a third grade teacher. My third grade reading teacher. And in November of our senior year, her dad died all of a sudden, and I went to the funeral. A lot of us did. And we stood around that grave. And then after that, we went to Pizza Hut. And I never said to Liz, I am so sorry for what happened to your dad. I'm so sorry. I never asked her the rest of the year, how are you doing? I never did any of those things that I could have done or I should have done for a girl, for a high school girl who lost her dad in high school. And I thought of that as I just stood there looking at the stone, thinking about that. And all that came back to me this week. That stupidity. That selfishness. We weren't best friends by any stretch, but I graduated with a class of 49. We knew each other. It wasn't like it would have been strange or anything like that. But thinking of all that stupidity and immaturity and self-centeredness. And she had lost her dad when she was in high school. And it really never occurred to me to say something to her. And so I was thinking a lot about those things and how I treated people in high school. And, you know, self-centered and thinking about fun and all the rest.

[ 3 : 03 ] And she had to be hurting during that time. So, regrets. Regrets are real. Regrets are real. And that's what I want to talk about this afternoon. Regrets. Because we all have them. And regret can be a very powerful, suffocating blanket on our soul.

Regrets are real. So, Psalm 42, which is sort of the framework of these afternoons that we're having together of, why are you so downcast, oh my soul? And we would answer, oh, it's my past.

It's the wasted years. It's the things that I did. Years of neglect. Years of sin. Years of immaturity. Years of not growing. Years of going my own way. And it's what I did. And God saved me. But there's no way of undoing. There's no time machine that undoes the past. And I might be forgiven, but I'm still struggling with the guilt and the shame of it. Regret.

Regret. So, I've talked about different voices the last, or in the last, and recently. The voice of self-hate. The voice of an uncertain future. And I think regret has its own voice. And it's a strong voice. A loud voice. And regret likes us to go fishing in the past. It takes us out on that boat and it pulls up all the shameful, wasteful, sinful, immature, stupid things that we did in the past. Wicked things. Evil things that we did in the past. And puts them on us again. And we carry them around. And it says, carry this all around. And we do. And soon our hearts are dragging. And regret has a loud voice. But God's voice is louder. God's voice is greater. And so, why are you so downcast, O my soul? Put your hope in God. Put your hope in God. There's hope in God for dealing with regret.

[ 5 : 27 ] For I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God. And so, Psalm 42, Psalm 43 tells us that, yes, regret might have a loud voice or whatever is making us so downcast. But our Savior, there is a Savior, and His voice is louder. His voice cuts through the tone of regret. And His truth cuts through the strong web of regret that can lie on our souls. And so, we might walk with a limp for the rest of our lives for some of the things that we've done. But we walk. And our voices are not as strong as they are going to be. But yet, the Lord can put a new song in our hearts and in our mouths. And so, how does God help us? What does He say? And we don't have a lot of time this

afternoon. And so, really, I only can be suggestive. And really, you're going to have to take these things and work them out for yourselves.

And so, I want to encourage you to not stop with just the listening. Write them down. Work them out. Paul said to Timothy, reflect on these things and the Lord will give you insight into all of this. That's my word to you. Reflect on these things that I say and the Lord will give you insight. And so, I want to give you four encouraging facts. Four comforting facts. Four comforting things to think about. And we want to take them from 1 Corinthians chapter 15. And so, if you have your Bibles, turn there to 1 Corinthians chapter 15. And we're going to read a short passage here where Paul deals in sort of an offhand or tangential way with regrets. And it shows us how he dealt with his past in some ways. So, 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verse 3. And I'm going to read through verse 11.

And, of course, in the context, Paul is explaining and talking about the resurrection. For what I received, this is verse 3. For what I received, I passed on to you as of first importance that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. That he was buried. That he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures. And that he appeared to Peter. And then to the 12.

And after that, he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James. Then to all the apostles. And last of all, he appeared to me also as to one abnormally born. For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God.

[ 8 : 25 ] But by the grace of God, I am what I am. And his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them. Yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Whether then it is, whether then it was I or they, this is what we preach. And this is what you believed.

And the first encouraging or comforting fact that I want you to take away from this passage is that God chooses to save people out of their sinful pasts. God chooses to save people out of their sinful pasts.

No one forces God to save anyone, but God chooses to save people out of their sinful pasts. And you can hear Paul's regrets in this passage. So here he is talking about Jesus' resurrection appearances.

And so who did he appear to? Well, he appeared to the 12. Was Paul there? No, he wasn't there. And then he appeared to 500 others at the same time. And that's a big crowd. But was Paul there? No, he wasn't there. And then he appeared to James and then to all the apostles. Was Paul there? No. Where was Paul? What about Paul? Well, last of all, he appeared to me.

[ 9 : 56 ] Last of all, as one abnormally born. Paul was like a baby delivered in the 15th month of the pregnancy. Way past when a baby should be born. Abnormally born. Way past when he should have been born.

Everyone else was believing and seeing the risen Lord. Everyone else was following the Lord. Peter was preaching to thousands. Peter was seeing conversions in the city of Jerusalem. Stephen was dying for the Lord. James lost his head for the Lord.

And me, Paul says, what was I doing? Well, I was persecuting the church. They were dying for Jesus. And I was persecuting him.

And it gets to him. This regret has to have hit him. I don't deserve to be an apostle. I don't even deserve to be called an apostle. I persecuted the church.

Well, when did you do it? Well, when everyone else was seeing Jesus. When everyone else was believing and living for Jesus and dying for Jesus. When everyone else was living and dying for Jesus, I was trying to kill him.

[ 11 : 08 ] Well, look at verse 10. But. But. But. But. By the grace of God, I am what I am.

God saved Paul out of a sinful, shameful past. And so did you consent to Stephen's death? Consent? I approved of it.

Did you pursue them, Paul? Oh, pursue them? More than that. I wanted to hear them blaspheme. I wanted to hear them blaspheme the Lord's name.

But for this very reason, I was shown mercy. So then in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe and receive eternal life.

So did Paul have regrets? Yes. Did he have shame? In Romans, he talks about what did we gain from the things that we are now ashamed of? But God chose to save him.

[ 12 : 14 ] So our God is a God of grace. He saves sinners out of their sinful past. And so did we do things for which we are ashamed? Yes. Yes.

More than any soul could count. If we were to sit down and think of these things. But God, God saves sinners.

Those are the only people he saves. He saves sinners. So that's the first truth. It's an encouraging truth.

That those past regrets, those past regrets, does not decide whether or not we are saved or not. Second encouraging truth.

Well, whatever you are now. You aren't that now. Or whatever you were, you aren't that now. Whatever you were, you aren't that now.

[13:12] And so what does Paul say? But by the grace of God, I am what I am. So what was so important to Paul? What was the most important thing to Paul? Paul, not so much the past.

Not so much the past, but the present. By the grace of God, I am what I am. He didn't have some sort of parking brake on his heart that kept him stuck in his past.

He moved into the present of what God had made him. I am what I am. And so for my dear regretting friend. Say this with all sincerity and I say this with all sympathy.

Who cares what you were? What has God made you? What are you now? Who cares what you were?

Who are you now? The past is gone. It's done. It's over. We have that saying, there's no use crying over spilt milk. That is common sense.

[14:18] And Christian, you have the right to use that common sense. There's no good in crying over what was in the past. Because in God's economy, in God's salvation, the past in some ways becomes irrelevant.

And this is what I'm saying. I was born a Jew. I was born a Greek. Well, it doesn't matter. I was born a slave. I was born free.

It doesn't matter. Paul says neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything. Whether you started out in the Jewish religion or you started out as a pagan idolatry.

That doesn't mean anything. Well, what matters, Paul says, is not where you started, but what you have become. What have you become? What matters is a new creation.

What matters is what you are now. And what are you now? A new creation. So the old is gone. The new has come. The old you is dead.

[15:23] The old man is buried in Christ's tomb. Dead with him. Buried with him. And so why cry for him? That new man is alive in Christ Jesus. I am what I am by the grace of God.

And so Paul, Paul's example. Is to now you get on with your life. I am what I am. God has done something. He's given me a new lease on life.

And so we sing life is mine to live. One by his selfless love. And so regrets they do. They belong in the past. And when they rear their ugly head and they start yelling and screaming, you don't have to take the ticket and get on the train and go back to the past.

I am what I am. You're here. You're now. A new creation. And what are you?

Ransomed. Healed. Restored. Forgiven. Who are you? A child of God. Paul says a beloved child.

[16:30] A dearly loved child. The bride of Christ. The Lord's treasure. We even read it this morning. He took Israel to be his inheritance.

His treasure. The apple of his eye. Psalm 45 says, forget your people in your father's house. The king is enthralled by your beauty. Honor him for he is your Lord.

So all your past. It doesn't. It doesn't change. What you are now. It doesn't change what you are now. It didn't stop it from happening.

So honor your Lord. That's the second. The third encouraging truth. The past can't define your usefulness.

The past. Cannot define your usefulness. The past doesn't determine. How God is going to use you. Or decide to use you. The past does not determine.

[17:27] How useful you can now be. In the kingdom of God. And so this is what Paul says. Did he had these regrets? He had these things. For which he was ashamed of.

Things that. If he were to dwell on them. It would. It would. It would certainly make him downcast. I was persecuting. I was hurting Christians. They were living for Jesus.

And I was. Trying to kill them for it. But the past. Can't define your usefulness. So did any of those. Those regrets. Slow Paul down. He says, no.

I worked harder than all the rest. Yet not I. But the grace of God. In me. So who was working hard? Well, Paul was. But who else was working hard?

God was. The things that Paul did in the past. Did not determine. And say. Paul, this is how useful you can be. This is how hard you can work.

[18:23] No. Paul said. I worked harder than all the rest. And yet God was right there too. Inside of him. In him. Moving him. God was going to use Paul. You remember when he called.

Paul. He went ahead and. Talked to. Annias. Annias in Damascus. And he said. This is the man I've chosen. He's going to go to the Gentiles.

So there's no use crying over what I did. There's work to do now. And so brothers and sisters. We can't let our. Regrets. Destroy our present usefulness.

Let them drive you to work harder. Let them drive you to work harder. If you've lost time. Well now is the time to go. If you're on a road trip.

And you lose time. In the beginning. What do you do? You don't pull off the side. And say there's no point in going. You go. As fast as you can.

[19:24] You've lost chances to learn. Okay. Well God hasn't put you on the shelf. You have time now. Paul worked harder than all of the apostles. And so he had to make up for lost time. And I would say he made up for it.

The years that the locust had eaten. God gave them back to him. And so the past didn't make Paul less fruitful. God poured out his grace. And made Paul all the more fruitful.

And so. While he's saying. I don't deserve to be called an apostle. I'm the least of the apostles. We don't put him on the list at number 13.

Do we? He called himself the least of the apostles. But who here agrees with him? No. He worked harder than all the rest. Your past doesn't have to demotivate you.

Instead it can motivate you. And it motivated Paul. And it can motivate you. And he did a lot of worse things. A lot more worse things than you ever did. Now fourth and last.

[20:26] So it doesn't decide how useful you are. Number four. And last. And this is especially. For those. Who were not saved when they were young.

But were saved when they were older. The fourth encouraging truth is. It's not the time you come into the kingdom. It's that you are in the kingdom.

That is the important thing. It's not the time. That you come into the kingdom. It's that you are in the kingdom. That's the important thing. So Jesus told the parable.

And he said. This is what the kingdom of heaven is like. And then he explained. How a man went to hire people. To work in his vineyard. And he. He went out early in the morning. And hired some people.

And they worked in his vineyard. And he came out on each hour. And then he came out on the 11th hour. And was still hiring people. To work in the vineyard. And really the whole point of the parable.

[21:28] Was. That it's not the. Time when you came in. It's not how long you were in the kingdom. And how much work you did in the kingdom. The most important.

The siding. Important factor. In the whole kingdom of God. Is the grace of God. The grace of God. And the important thing is not.

That you. That when you came into the kingdom. But that you are in the kingdom. And if you are in. The kingdom. Then rejoice that you're in the kingdom.

Enjoy that you're in it. It's like. Not getting to the Super Bowl. Or some event. And it's not. It's like not getting to the Super Bowl. Until the fourth quarter. And would you. Fret and moan.

And say. Oh I missed the first three quarters. And now. And then you. You waste the last quarter. And be miserable the last quarter. No. You would sit there. And be thankful that you made it in. And all. And that you would watch the game.

[22:27] And enjoy it. So why let the past. Ruin. Your present. What's it matter when you came in. Isn't the important thing. That you are in. Sometimes. Talk to people. And they sort of belittle. Their conversion. Their salvation.

And they say. Oh. I was saved as a child. And I didn't do a lot of bad things. I wasn't that bad. My conversion isn't. That impressive. And I want to say.

Isn't impressive. God saved you. From a life of sin. That's glorious. Yes. Amen. But then others say. Well I wasn't brought in on the first hour. I was brought in in the eighth hour. I was brought in the ninth hour. And I've wasted. So much time. I wish it could have been earlier.

[ 23 : 31 ] I understand that. But God saved you. Maybe not from a life of sin. But he saved you. Out of a life of sin. And that is glorious too.

And that's. And that's the important thing here. It's not when you come into the kingdom. It's whether you're in. Has God poured out his love and grace on you? Then enjoy it.

He has his. He has his reasons for saving people when they're young. And he has reasons for saving people when they're older. Each of those people bring him a different kind of glory.

We'll rejoice that you get to bring him that kind of glory. And that's where I'm going to end with that question. Are you in? Are you in?

Are you in the kingdom? Have you listened to the voice and come into the vineyard? So Jesus is calling and he's saying come. Come in. And. Now why would you wait?

[ 24 : 38 ] That's my question. Why would you wait? Because let me tell you what's going to happen. If you wait. All you are doing is adding to the list of your regrets. All you're doing is wasting your time.

All you're doing is robbing God of the glory that he could have from you and salvation. All you're doing. Is taking away your own joy.

Adding to your own regrets. So get in now. The doors open now. Jesus is saying come in now. Be saved now.

Leave your life. Leave the world. Don't wait. And so grace has thrown open the doors of the kingdom. So the question is. Are you in? Or are you out?

And if you're out. Then get in. Let's pray. Heavenly Father. Thank you that. Whatever troubles our hearts.

[ 25 : 38 ] There is truth in your word to comfort us. Whatever. Troubles our minds. There is grace in our Lord Jesus to comfort us and to give us rest. Help my brothers and sisters to think about these things.

To reflect upon them and lead them in the truth. Holy Spirit instruct us all in how to deal with sinful pasts. To deal with regrets.

And let those things of which we are now ashamed of. Motivate us to work harder. To try harder. To struggle harder.

To learn more. To grow faster. Let those things to motivate us. Instead of shackling us with irons and chains and sadness and despair.

But let us rejoice in what you have done. And what you are doing. And who you are. Help us to move away from ourselves. And put more of our trust.

[ 26 : 44 ] All of our trust. On our Lord Jesus. And in your goodness. Pray this in Jesus name. Amen. Amen.