

“Unless You Repent” | Luke 13:1-9
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(Discussion questions on page 9)

Please grab a bible and turn to the reading, Luke 13:1-9, so that you can follow along with me, to make sure what I am saying is trustworthy and true.
It can be found on page 872 of the pew bible. On in the back of your bulletin.

As you turn there, let us pray.

Intro

They say, they being me, they say it was brisk fall morning, when a young professor strode across the town square. He had agonized for days, and all the previous night, into the early hours of the morning, over a paper he had been writing. He was certain that the system was broken and he wanted everyone to know. He had already mailed the paper to his superiors, and now he was making it public.

His hands were sweaty, his knees were weak, and his arms were heavy, as he carried his paper in one hand and a hammer and nail in the other. He slowly walked up the stairs, and then hammered his paper to the door of All Saints' Church.

This young professor, was Martin Luther, and the paper that he wrote was his 95 theses, which some believe marks the beginning of the reformation, on the 31st of October in 1517.

The first of his 95 statements, reads:

“When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, “Repent” (Mt 4:17), he willed (that) the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.”

Sermon Structure

Well, two weeks ago, on the first Sunday of Lent, John reminded us that the glory of this world leads only to dust.

Last week, Sam encouraged us to agonize to enter through the narrow door. And that though the door is narrow, it does not mean God’s grace, mercy, or love, are small or narrow in any way.

This quite neatly leads us to the question; how do we enter through that narrow door? What should our striving and our agonizing look like?

Well spoiler alert, the answer is repentance!

We see this in our Luke passage this morning and we are going look at this passage by first thinking about our need for repentance in verses 1-5, and then we will ponder the parable of the fig tree in verses 6-9, then think more broadly and practically about what it means to repent.

1. The Reason for love
2. The Rule of Love
3. [Comments]

Context

But before we get there, let me give you a little bit of context for our passage this morning.

The broader context of this passage is that the gospel of Luke is 1 of 4 biographies of Jesus. It is in the New Testament, which is the second section of the Bible, coming after the Old Testament, which focuses on God's chosen people Israel.

In the Old Testament, God promises that one day he will send a messiah, a savior who will rescue Israel and the world, from all their enemies, both physical and spiritual. In the New Testament we learn that this savior is Jesus. And he brings this salvation through his death and resurrection.

As we zoom into our passage this morning, we meet Jesus, before his death and resurrection, as he is teaching throughout the land of Israel. Even though this is before he is brutally killed, his crucifixion looms large in his mind. He has already told his disciples that that is where he is headed and soon he will start making his way towards the place of his betrayal.

This is probably why Jesus responds the way he does, when in verse 1, we read that some people came up to him to present him with some news.

1. Point 1 - The Reason for love

This brings us to our first point, "Unless you Repent!".

Let's look at verses 1 through 5 again, and how Jesus responds to these people,

¹There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ²And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? ³No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. ⁴Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? ⁵No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

What does the text say?

Except for what we read in this passage, there isn't anything else known about these two incidents.

But what we read is that apparently there had been two tragedies occur recently. The first tragedy in verse 1, was a terrible incident where some people from Galilee, which is in the northern part of the kingdom of Israel, had come down to offer sacrifices at the temple. These

people were killed by Pontius Pilate, who was the Roman governor of Judah. Presumably they were killed so violently, that their blood got mixed in with the sacrifices that they were offering at the temple.

The second incident, in verse 4 was a natural disaster, when a tower collapsed and killed 18 people.

We can quickly judge these Galileans as deserving of this punishment, thinking that they must have been worse people than us or that they must have done something for this to have happened to them. I know I have been guilty of that.

Pulled Over

How many times have you driven past someone who was pulled over by the police, and thought, “ha-ha got ‘em”! “I wonder what they did this time?” They must have done something wrong for them to get pulled over.

Bad Parents

Or have you ever been talking to a parent that has misbehaving children or older children that have gone off the rails and thought to yourself (probably whispered to your spouse or friend) they must be bad parents. They must have done something wrong for their kids to turn out like that.

But Jesus doesn't go there, he doesn't answer them as we would expect, instead he holds a mirror up to us, and he asks us, What makes you think you deserve any better than these people?

No, I tell you, unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

What does the text mean?

Well what does Jesus mean by this?

What does it mean that if you don't repent you will likewise perish?

Well let's engage our prefrontal cortex, a little bit, and think about what Jesus could be saying here.

- I. It can't mean that unless you repent you will be killed by the state during worship or be crushed by a falling building. Because history teaches us that many repent-ers and many non-repent-ers have died in many other different ways.
- II. It also doesn't mean that if you do repent, you will never die. Again, history teaches us that we all die.¹ Every single person dies. Repentance does not fix this problem.

¹ except maybe for Enoch who was not (Gen. 5:24), or Elijah who was taken on chariots of fire (2 Kings 2:11), and Melchizedek (Heb. 7:3).

Jesus is using these deaths as a metaphor for judgement day. What he means is; just as these people met an unexpected, horrific, and tragic end, in the same way, there is something just as unexpected, just as horrific, and just as tragic coming for you, if you do not repent.

Think about the word perish. Where have you heard that before?

Maybe John 3:16,

¹⁶ *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not"*

What?

perish but have eternal life."

Jesus is saying the opposite of that verse here. That unless you repent, your end will be God's rightful judgement and punishment. Where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. If you do not repent, you will not have eternal life, but rather, eternal destruction.

How does the text apply to us?

Even though Jesus was speaking to these people some 2000 years ago, his words still apply to us today. He didn't just mean them, he meant all people, everywhere.

So, are you aware of your need for repentance? That the Galileans and the 18 killed by the tower of Siloam what not any worse sinners than you! And that if you don't repent, you will likewise perish.

Are you aware that you, yes even you, member of the Falls Church Anglican, you have a sin problem.

In the first book of the Harry Potter series, Harry Potter and the Philosopher's stone, young Harry finds the highly sought-after Philosopher's stone which has the power to give the holder immortality and also to turn any metal into gold. By finding it, Harry spoils the plans of the villain Voldemort.

Dumbledore, the headmaster of Harry's Wizarding school, Hogwarts, warns Harry about the powers of this stone, saying,

*"As much money and life as you could want! The two things most human beings would choose above all —the trouble is, humans do have a knack of choosing precisely those things that are worst for them."*²

Dumbledore is absolutely right! That knack we have, is the result of the sin, which distorts our hearts and clouds our minds. Instead of listening to, loving, and obeying the one who created us and who loves us; we turn away, and we run as fast as we can, in rebellion against him. Just like my 4-year-old, who struts away from me with a cheeky grin on his face, <strut like

² J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*.

Jonathan> fully aware he is doing the wrong thing. We all choose what is the worst for us, strutting away from God.

Each and every one of us is guilty of turning away from God, and breaking his law. Maybe you haven't murdered anyone, praise God! But all of us have broken that first commandment; You shall have no other gods but me.

How? You ask.

We have all put ourselves in the place of God.

Whenever I choose not to love my wife, my children, or my neighbor, I have chosen to put myself in charge, and think that I know better than God. Implicitly, I have decided that selfishness is better than God's call to self-sacrificial love.

But sin is more than just doing wrong. Breaking rules is just a manifestation, the outworking of the sin within us. Sin is an attitude we have against God. It is whenever we trust anyone or anything more than God.

No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

[T] Well, if we are all deserving of God's rightful punishment, why doesn't he just wipe us all out immediately, like he did in the flood? This brings us to the second half of our passage and our second point, the Urgency of Repentance.

2. Point 2 - The Rule of Love

The reason why God doesn't just wipe us all out, is because of his patience. In his abundant grace and mercy, God is patiently giving us time to repent.

Look verses 6 to 9 again with me,

⁶And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. ⁷And he said to the vinedresser, 'Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?' ⁸And he answered him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. ⁹Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

What does the text say?

When you read this story at face value it can be a little confusing. Even an amateur gardener, like myself, knows that some fruit trees can take years to bear fruit, even up to 7 years.

The reputable H.G.T.V website tells me even some fig trees can take up to 5 to 7 years to bear fruit.

What is Jesus trying to say here?

It is helpful to remember that a parable is a short story with a moral lesson that uses imagery and metaphors.

Well, Jesus is not trying to give you gardening advice, but he is using this imagery to make a point. In this story the imagery is of a fig tree that is not producing fruit, which the owner wants to cut down. But the caretaker of the fig tree, asks the owner to have patience, and let the tree have another year to produce fruit. If nothing comes of his patience and nothing happens in the final year, then the caretaker will cut it down.

Now, unlike some of the other parables, Jesus doesn't explain what this parable is about. So we have to use the context of the verses surrounding it.

- He has just been speaking about repentance, so it probably has something to do with that.
- But if we zoom out a little more we see that from the beginning of the previous chapter, chapter 12, Jesus has been warning people about the future. He has been warning them that there will be a time, that no one is expecting, when God will come and deal with all the sin and evil in the world. The end is coming, and it is coming quickly.

If we hold these two thoughts together, we can see that Jesus is saying that that end is coming when God will cut down the trees that do not produce fruit.

Those trees that do not produce fruit share the same fate as those who do not repent, they will perish, they will be cut down.

But what we learn is that the reason God doesn't just cut us down now, is that he is being patient with us. He is giving us time to repent and turn back to him.

This parable is, as one theologian put it, "The image ... of judgement graciously held back for a time."³

What does the text mean?

God is giving us time. **We are living in that final year.**

The axe is laid to the root of the trees, but it hasn't come down yet.

God has graciously held back his judgement, and is patient in dealing with us, so that we might have time to bear good fruit. The fruit of repentance.

But notice the limited nature of this time. God's patience will not go on forever.

It might be a year, or it might be another 2000 years, no one knows the day or the hour when Jesus will return and when God will bring his justice upon sin and evil. We cannot be certain about the length of time from this parable.

But we can be certain about the end of that time. We can be certain that this will take place because God has told us again and again in his word, the bible, and through **the** Word, Jesus Christ our Lord. He has warned us the time is coming.

How does the text apply to us? - Urgency

³ John Nolland, Word Biblical Commentary: Luke.

Because of the certainty of the end, and the uncertainty of the when, there is an urgency needed in repentance.

Today is the day of repentance, for tomorrow may not come.

Tomorrow you may be cut down.

Or the door may be shut, and you will be left outside of the kingdom of God.

We are in the last days.

If you are not yet a Christian, do not let another day go by where you putt off dealing with your eternal destiny. This is not future Michael's problem. This is current Michael's problem. Do not put it off for later.

And if you are already a Christian, do not grow weary in repentance. Walk in repentance day after day after day, so that you do not drift away.

[T] – So, 1. We have a great need for repentance. And, 2. that need is an urgent need. This brings us to point 3, the practice of repentance.

[3. Point 3 - \[Comments\]](#)

What does it mean to repent? What does Luther mean that the life of the Christian is one of repentance? What does that practically look like?

The underlying Greek word means to have a change of mind. But just as with everything in life, it so much more complex than that.

Change is hard. In order to change your mind, you might have to admit that you were wrong about something. That can be a difficult pill to swallow. It requires humility, honesty and courage. It not only involves changing your mind, but also changing your heart, and your whole way of living.

This change of mind involves turning away from the world, turning away from sin and evil. The Bible will often call this putting to death the flesh, or putting off the old-self.⁴ It means getting rid of those bad habits, those sinful desires, and evil thoughts, that draw you away from the love of God.

Once you have done that, you now have to replace it with something else.

Repentance involves, not only walking away from something but also walking towards something. Walking towards God in belief, faith, and trust. It is not enough to just stop doing bad things, you need to also start walking in the right direction.⁵

⁴ What the puritans would call mortification.

⁵ What the puritans would call vivification.

If you don't know which is the right direction, spend time with God in his word, the bible, and ask him in prayer that he might show you the right way to walk. And find some other Christians you know, and ask them to help you to walk in the right direction.

I have been reflecting on the nature of repentance in the back of my mind for a few years now. I have been thinking about how repentance should be our main response to sin and evil. Previously, and naturally, whenever I am confronted by my own sinfulness or shocked by the evil in the world, I would often turn to guilt and shame.

I would get downcast because Satan would whisper in my ear, that I was a horrible person and there was no way I could make up for how bad I was.

But the Spirit has been working on my heart. So that instead of feeling guilt and shame whenever I am convicted, I now seek repentance.

I still feel convicted, because that is the work of the Spirit in me, but now instead of going into a shame spiral, or getting angry and blaming some-one or some-thing else (though I still do this), I turn to God, I tell him I'm sorry and ask for his forgiveness. And I'm slowly getting better at it.

Repentance is more than just about feeling bad for breaking some rules. It is about realizing that you have hurt God, and damage the relationship you have with him. It is having remorse for the way you have treated him, and apologizing for it.

Our very own Deacon Bob Ragan, thinks of it like this, "repentance is when you no longer fear the breaking of God's law, and start to fear the breaking of God's heart."

Repentance is when your heart breaks over your sinfulness and, in humility, you ask God for forgiveness.

Conclusion

As Luther says, this is not a one and done type of thing.

For the non-Christian repentance is needed to receive the gift of salvation, and be brought from death to life.

But it is also needed to continue walking along the narrow way.

I pray that every one of us cultivates repentance in our lives, that we might continue to draw closer and closer to God. That there might be less of us, and more of him.

Let us pray.

Discussion Questions

1. How does Jesus respond to the people who tell him the news of the Galileans?
 - Is that how you would have expected Jesus to respond?
 - What do you make of his response?
2. What do you think it means that unless we repent, we will all likewise perish?
 - Do you disagree with the sermon (you are allowed to)?
3. What do you make of the parable of the fig tree?
 - Is there more to that parable?
4. What do you think it means to repent?
5. Have you repented of your sins and asked God for forgiveness?
6. Is repentance a normal practice for you?
7. What are some ways you cultivate repentance in your life? (see appendix below for wisdom on this)

Appendix – Wisdom on Growing in Repentance According to the Puritans

How to repent according to the Puritans:

- **“First.** *Sit with care, constancy, and conscience under the word of truth, and gospel of grace....*
- **Secondly,** *Study the nature of God ...acquaint yourself with his attributes, — his holiness, power, justice, mercy, and the like. Your souls will never be drawn from sin, or driven into a course of true repentance, until God becomes your dread...*
- **Thirdly,** *Sit close to the work of self-scrutiny....* The worst of men, by a short conference with their own soul, would soon see a necessity of repentance... Be serious in self-examination.
- **Fourthly,** *Sit loose to the world...* true penitentiaries (penitents) must be pilgrims in the earth.
- **Fifthly,** *See the shortness of life....* Hopes of long life, and thoughts of repentance at pleasure, help many a soul to hell....
- **Sixthly,** *Seriously expect approaching judgment...*
- **Seventhly,** *Seriously apprehend the possibility...* of pardon ...it is thing with certainty, if received with a prostrate soul, and sued out by serious repentance...
- **Eighthly,** *Soak the heart in the blood of Jesus—* Take every day a turn of meditation in Mount Calvary.... Be persuaded daily to contemplate the cross of Christ.
- **Ninthly,** *Speed will much facilitate repentance....* Linger not in what you will be rid of; for the longer you linger, you will be more loath to part...
- **Tenthly,** *Sue for it [repentance] at the hands of God.”*

(J.I Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 174-5)