

Lent 3
March 7, 2010

Luke 13:1-9
387-337-397/389-379

“Unless YOU Repent...”

- I. The need to repent.
- II. The time to repent.
- III. The fruits of repentance.

Dear Christian friends,

It's pretty hard to miss the MESSAGE and the TONE in today's readings. In **all three** God makes real clear that He MEANS BUSINESS and we better listen to Him. It was HARD for the Israelites to miss that point in the OT reading (Numbers 16:23-40). **Korah, Dathan and Abiram had led a rebellion** against Moses and Aaron **even though** GOD HIMSELF had appointed them as Israel's leaders. **With their rebellion** Korah, Dathan and Abiram tried telling God, **“No, THIS IS HOW we're going to do things.”** God put down their rebellion in a way nobody could mistake. ***“The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them. The went down alive into the grave; the earth closed over them, and they perished.”***

In the **epistle reading** (1 Corinthians 10:1-13) Paul refers to various incidents in OT history. We only heard excerpts in our reading – you can read all of it in your devotions this week. The “Meditation” devotions this week look at them. Again you can't miss God's point. ***“God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.”*** Lest we think that was all “BACK THEN” Paul explained, ***“These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us.”***

Now we hear Jesus say, ***“Unless you repent, you too will all perish.”*** Jesus says that TWICE – He **wants** to make sure we get His point. So let's look at these verses guided by Jesus' words, “UNLESS YOU REPENT...” **See** 1)the need to repent, 2)the time to repent and 3)the fruits of repentance.

I. The need to repent.

“There were some who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.” This is the only information we have about this **incident**. Evidently some Galileans were down in Jerusalem worshipping at the temple. As they brought their sacrifices to the priests **some** of Pilate's soldiers killed them RIGHT THERE in the temple. WHY **they did** this we have no idea – we only know that it happened. From Jesus' answer it SEEMS that the people thought these Galileans MUST HAVE done something really bad for this to happen to them. For God to let this happen to them **right there** in the temple they must have really TICKED God off.

Now it's true that SOMETIMES you can connect a **particular punishment** to a **particular sin**. The person who abuses alcohol and ruins his **liver** and **health** – his SIN LED to his problem. The sexually immoral person who ends up with a disease or AIDS – his SIN LED to his problem. The child who defiantly disobeys his parents and gets grounded – his SIN LED to his problem. In cases like that you can EASILY MAKE the **connection**.

But not every sin has a DIRECT **consequence** and not every bad thing in life can be traced directly back to a **certain sin**. Jesus makes that point with another incident. ***“Those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them – were they more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?”*** We have examples from TODAY'S news. All those people killed in **Haiti** and **Chile**

with the earthquakes – or those two people killed by that **wave that slammed** into the cruise ship – did those people die because they were **“worse sinners – more guilty”** than everybody else?

Notice Jesus doesn't say they WEREN'T guilty at all – it's just they weren't MORE guilty – weren't WORSE than everybody else. Jesus' point is that EVERYBODY is **“a guilty sinner.”** Not only that – instead of these people talking about OTHER people's **sin** and **guilt** they needed to take a HARD, HONEST look at **their own** hearts and lives. Twice Jesus bluntly tells them, **“I tell you no** (no, they weren't more guilty – worse sinners). **But unless YOU repent, YOU too will all perish.”**

Many of the catastrophes – the hardships and hassles of life - are NOT DUE to a specific sin but SIMPLY BECAUSE we are sinners living in a **sin-cursed** world. ALL those **catastrophes** and **problems** of life – be they earthquakes, floods, droughts, fires, wars, diseases, accidents, financial disasters, etc. – they are all SOLEMN CALLS from God, **“Unless YOU repent, YOU too will all perish.”** All of them are powerful reminders that God MEANS BUSINESS – we all NEED to repent.

So the call rings out, **“Unless YOU repent, YOU too will perish.”** Repentance is literally a CHANGE of mind – a change of mind about sin. Our society – our **sinful natures** – tell us that ignoring and **disobeying** God's clear will for our lives – it's OK – it's NO **big deal**. Why sin can even be GOOD for you – it can be FUN. Then there are all the excuses – “EVERYBODY ELSE is doing it – nobody is perfect – God will UNDERSTAND.”

No, WE need to understand – understand sin for what it REALLY IS and what it really does to us and **our relationship** with God. Sin is rebelling against God – defying our Creator. AS A CHILD did you ever tell your parents, “You can't tell me what to do! I'll do whatever I want!”? You may have THOUGHT that – but there was no way you'd ever say that to dad – you'd GET KILLED, **so to speak**. So why do we think we can TALK TO GOD like that – “You can't tell me how to live my life!”? Yes God CAN – and He HAS with His **10 Commandments**.

Repentance is facing up to **our sin** and its CONSEQUENCES. God has every right to MAKE OUR LIVES now a **living hell** – and they are nowhere close to that **no matter what** our problems may all be. God has every right to have the earth **“swallow us up”** and take us to hell JUST AS it did to Korah, Dathan and Abiram. We're JUST AS BAD and guilty as they were. Far worse than to be killed in an **earthquake** is **“perishing”** unrepentant and ending up in hell's eternal punishment. That's the ALTERNATIVE – the only alternative – to repenting. It's either repent OR **“perish”** eternally.

God has every right to do that to us yet **“God is not willing that ANY should perish but that ALL should come to repentance.”** God has every right to do that to us – yet here it is Lent. We are following God's own **“beloved Son”** to Calvary and the cross. WHAT GRACE! The very God we have **ignored and defied** took it UPON HIMSELF to do everything to **save us** from our sin and guilt. Jesus lived a life holy and perfect in every way and He gives us all the credit for it. The death and hell **we had coming** is exactly what Jesus endured on the cross **in our place**. Jesus sacrificed His own life to **pay** for all our sins. Jesus shed his precious blood to **“cleanse us from all sin.”**

Repentance is a turning FROM our sins and TO Jesus our Savior. Repentance is dropping the excuses and clinging to Jesus and His cross. Repentance is FACING UP to our sin and guilt and then finding our forgiveness – finding peace with God and eternal life in heaven – finding it IN Jesus and all that He's done for us.

“Unless YOU repent...” See now...

II. The time and fruits of repentance.

To bring home the point of the TIME for and the FRUITS of repentance Jesus uses one of His **favorite ways** of making a point – He tells a parable. A parable, **remember**, is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

In this parable **“a man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard.”** This is not a WILD fig tree growing out in the **middle of nowhere**. This is a fig tree planted in a garden – a fig tree carefully tended – a fig tree planted with a PURPOSE – to **get some figs** from it. But every time the man **“went to look for fruit on it he did not find any.”** This went on for **“three years.”** Finally the man had had ENOUGH. He tells the gardener, **“Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?”** The gardener replies, “GIVE it one more year. I’ll give it some EXTRA **care** and attention. **‘If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’**”

Again it’s hard to miss Jesus’ point. God is SO VERY patient with us – but there is a LIMIT to God’s **grace** and **patience**. There comes a time when God says, “ENOUGH already!” For this tree it was ONE MORE year. For you – for **me** – ONLY GOD KNOWS how much more time remains.” **Only God knows** if we’re talking years – or **perhaps** only DAYS or hours or minutes left. **Repenting** is NOT something to be put off to **another** day. We honestly don’t know if we HAVE **another** day – and to be caught unrepentant is to **“perish”** eternally.

“Unless you repent, you too will perish.” Literally Jesus says, “Unless you BE repenting – continue to repent.” Repentance is not a ONE SHOT – a ONCE in a lifetime thing. Repentance is DAILY – on-going – LIFELONG because of the simple fact that every day we sin. Despite our best intentions to **“deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow”** Jesus through life we daily fall into **all kinds** of sin. Rather than WALLOWING in our sin or just shrugging it off there’s that daily call, **“Unless you repent, you too will perish.”**

“If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, cut it down.” REAL repentance produces fruit. **Real** repentance is words backed up by ACTIONS. The **“fruits”** of repentance are not hard to figure out. WITH GOD’S HELP and power we strive to turn FROM whatever the sin is to the **appropriate, God-pleasing** action.

Some EXAMPLES. If I’m repenting of CHECKING OUT pornography on the internet I stop going to those sights and try to live a “pure and decent life.” If I’m repenting of idolatry – NOT ALWAYS PUTTING God **first** in my life then I re-arrange my priorities that that God really does come first. If I’m repenting of grumbling and complaining I STOP doing that and instead strive to be **grateful** and **thankful**. The fruit corresponds to the sin we’re repenting of. To say we’re SORRY for something – to ask God to **forgive** us – but then KEEPING ON doing just that – that makes a mockery of repentance. That only proves our repentance is EMPTY WORDS – **not** a real change IN our hearts.

“Leave it alone for one more year. If it bears fruit, fine! If not, then cut it down.” Did the tree finally bear fruit OR was it eventually cut down? We’re not told. Jesus doesn’t want us WONDERING about **what happened** to the tree. Jesus wants us CHECKING OUT **our own** hearts and lives. Jesus wants us TAKING TO HEART His call, **“Unless YOU repent, you too will perish.”** Looking at these verses it sure is hard to MISS Jesus’ point. Amen.

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