

“Unless YOU Repent...”

- I. The need to repent.
- II. The time and 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 really 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. **Korah, Dathan and Abiram** had led a rebellion against Moses and Aaron even through 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) up. The earth closed up over them, and they disappeared from the midst of the assembly.”**

In the **epistle reading** Paul referred to various incidents in OT history. Again, you can't miss God's point. **“God was not pleased with most of them. He had them die in the wilderness.”** Lest we think that was all “BACK THEN” Paul explained, **“All these things that were happening to them had meaning as examples, and they were written down to warn us.”**

Now we hear Jesus say, **“Unless you repent, you will all perish too.”** 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 and 2) the time and fruits of repentance.

**I. The need to repent.**

**“There were some present 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 worshiping 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. FROM JESUS' ANSWER it **seems** that people thought these Galileans must have done something really bad for this to happen to them. For God to let this happen 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 problems. The sexually immoral person who ends up with a disease or AIDS – his/her SIN LED to their 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 by bringing up another incident. **“Those eighteen who were killed when the tower in Siloam fell on them — do you think that they were worse sinners than all the people living in Jerusalem?”** We have similar examples in today's news. People who are killed in **tornadoes** or **floods** or **earthquakes**, etc., - did they die because they were **“worse sinners”** – more guilty than everybody else?

Notice Jesus DOESN'T SAY that they weren't guilty at all – it's just they weren't MORE guilty – sinners 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 will all perish too.”**

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, tornadoes, etc. – they are ALL SOLEMN CALLS from God, **“Unless YOU repent, YOU will all perish too.”** ALL of them are powerful reminders that God MEANS BUSINESS and we better take God SERIOUSLY.

So the call rings out, **“Unless YOU repent, YOU will all perish too.”** Repentance is literally a CHANGE OF MIND – a **change of mind about sin**. Our society and culture – our **sinful natures** – tell us that ignoring and defying God’s will for our lives is OK - it’s NO BIG DEAL. Why sin can even be GOOD for you – it can be FUN. Then there are the excuses – “EVERYBODY ELSE is doing it – nobody is **perfect** – the times have **changed** – God will UNDERSTAND.”

No, WE need to understand – **understand sin** for what it REALLY IS and what sin 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 would EVER SAY that to your dad – he’d HAVE KILLED you, **so to speak**. So why do we think we can TALK TO GOD **like that** – “God, 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. Far worse than being killed in an **earthquake** is **“perishing” unrepentant** and ending up in hell’s eternal punishment. That’s 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 innocent life to PAY for all our sins. Jesus shed His precious blood to **“cleanse us from all sin.”**

Repentance is a turning FROM our sin and TO Jesus our Savior. Repentance is dropping the **excuses** and clinging by faith 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 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 repentance and the FRUITS of repentance Jesus uses one of His **favorite ways** of teaching – He tells a parable - an earthly story with **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 vineyard – a fig tree carefully tended – a fig tree planted with a PURPOSE – to **get figs** from it. But every time the man **“came looking 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 produces fruit next year, fine. But if not, then cut it down.”**

It's hard to miss Jesus' point, isn't it? 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 – for our **children**, etc. – 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 in hell.

***"Unless YOU repent, YOU too will perish."*** Literally Jesus says, "Unless you BE repenting – continue to repent." **Repentance** is not a ONE SHOT – 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 produces fruit next year, fine. But if not, then 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 heart and life then I rearrange my priorities so that God actually does come first. If I'm repenting of grumbling and complaining I STOP doing that and instead strive to **be grateful** and **content**. 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 KEEP ON DOING just that – that makes a mockery of repentance and God. That only proves our repentance is EMPTY WORDS – **not** a real change IN OUR HEARTS.

***"Leave it alone this year. If it produces fruit next year, fine. But 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."*** It sure is hard to MISS Jesus' point! Amen.

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