

Time To Repent

Luke 13:1-9

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I'm going to read the entire nine verses of Luke 13:1-9. Luke says, "There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered and said to them, 'Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things?'" Notice Jesus asked a question. Jesus was asking, "Do you think these Galileans were big sinners because they suffered this tragedy?"

Jesus continues, in verse 3, "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

Verse 6, "He also spoke this parable: 'A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, "Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?" But he answered and said to him, "Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.'"

Look again at verse 3: "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." Then look at verse 5: "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

Vance Havner, who Billy Graham said "was the most quotable preacher in America," said this about repentance: "Repentance is almost a lost note in our preaching experience, and the lack of it is filling churches with baptized sinners, who have never felt the guilt of sin or the need of a Savior." That's so true. One of the things the Bible is full of is the doctrine of repentance, but very rarely do we hear sermons preached about this important doctrine.

Now we come to the end of the long discourse that Jesus gave beginning in chapter 12, verse 1. In this chapter, there were two groups that Jesus addressed: He addressed His disciples, and He addressed the crowds. At the end of chapter 12, He called for the crowds to turn to God, get right with God, and turn to their adversaries and settle with them rather than going to court. Otherwise, they would be thrown into prison and wouldn't come out until they paid their full debt. So He was talking about the judgment of God.

As far as the teaching on repentance goes, Jesus wraps it up in Luke 13:1-9. So His whole, long discourse was one unit of Scripture, and He wraps it up with the subject of repentance.

The Old Testament prophets preached repentance. That was their number-one theme to Israel—repent and turn back to God. And in the New Testament, John the Baptist also preached repentance: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matthew 3:2). Jesus came

preaching repentance; we see that in our text. The apostle Peter, on the day of Pentecost, preached and said, “Repent” (Acts 2:38), and turn to the Lord. Of the seven churches addressed by the Lord, five of them were called to repent (Revelation 2:16 and 3:3). So it’s no surprise that Jesus is addressing the subject of repentance in our text.

There are two sections to Luke 3:1-9. In the first section, verses 1-5, Jesus speaks of the necessity of repentance; and in the second section, verses 6-9, He speaks of the evidence of true repentance.

First, let’s look at verses 1-5, where Jesus is speaking about the necessity of repentance. He talked about the temple calamity, in verses 1-3. “There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.” Jesus was speaking to the crowds here.

He started preaching to His disciples and ended with preaching to the crowds. He closed chapter 12 by telling the crowds they should agree with their adversary while on the way to court, to settle out of court. Otherwise if you go to court, the judge would find you guilty, you’d be thrown into prison until you paid your debt. So He was talking about getting right with God and about the coming judgment.

Then someone or some people in the crowd, hearing about this judgment, spoke up and told Jesus that there were some Galileans, which were Jews living in Galilee, the northern area of Israel, “whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.” Jesus was a Galilean; He was from Nazareth, which is in Galilee around the lake of Galilee. These Galileans were slain by Pilate, and he mingled their blood with the sacrifices.

The only place we know about this incident is in Luke. These verses in Luke are not found in the other Gospels. This incident was about Pilate, the governor, who had the Galileans killed—he doesn’t tell us how many—evidently while they were in the temple in Judea while they were offering their sacrifices.

All we can piece together, knowing they were rebels against Rome, is that they were in Jerusalem at the Passover in the outer court, where there is a laver of brass where they would have offered their sacrifices and were probably starting to chant slogans or something against Rome, or doing something to rebel against Rome. So Pilate, on the ready, sent his soldiers in with swords and slew them as they were doing their sacrifices to the Lord. It most likely was on Passover, because it is the only day on which laymen were allowed to offer sacrifices to the Lord. So this tragedy or calamity happened to a group of people, who were murdered as they were worshipping God.

Evidently Jesus detected the real motive and thought behind their question. So He answered them, in verse 2, by asking them, “Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things?” He was spot on. Jesus knows our hearts, our thoughts and our motives. He hits the nail on the head.

In the Jewish mind—as it is in many people's minds today—when something bad happens or a calamity befalls a person, they believe it was because that person had sinned. “I’m not a sinner; nothing bad has happened to me,” but they are sinners, so God was punishing them or judging them. This is not so farfetched today; people get the idea that they must have done something wrong.

Remember Job, who had all these trials come into his life, and his three, so-called “friends”—we don’t need friends like that—showed up and said to Job, “Confess your sins! What did you do wrong?!”

It’s like you have some disaster happen in your family and your best friend shows up and says, “Okay, what did you do wrong? God is judging you!” Well, thank you very much! How rude is that?!

But that’s what someone in the crowd was surmising. And Jesus knew it. So He put an end to their philosophy of bad things happen to bad people, good things happen to good people and if you have a difficulty, it’s because there’s something wrong with you.

John 9 is another example in the New Testament. There was a man who was born blind, and Jesus was going to heal him. So the disciples asked Him, “Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (John 9:2). But how do you sin, if you’re born blind?! They believed in prenatal sin. Or maybe your parents did something bad, so now your child is born blind.

When something goes wrong, you shouldn’t immediately think that God is punishing you for some sin or that it is a direct result of some sin in your life or your parents’ lives. Sin and death came into the world because of the Fall in the Garden of Eden. We live in a fallen world. There are times that God will allow things to go wrong in our life to chasten us in order to correct us and bring us back to obedience to Him. But there is not always a direct cause-and-effect relationship when something bad happens to someone you know.

You shouldn’t judge them. You shouldn’t judge God. You shouldn’t conclude that “You must be a really big sinner, or your car wouldn’t have blown up on the freeway yesterday!” Cars blow up. Even Christians’ cars blow up. “I have this theory that Christian cars blow up more than non-Christian cars.” No; Christians suffer just like anyone else.

Wednesday night, when that Jewish couple was shot and executed outside the Jewish museum in Washington, DC, they were Messianic Jews. They believed in Jesus. They were a brother-and sister-in-Christ. And they were wiped out.

You think, Why?! Lord, why wasn’t it some wicked person?! Why would You let that happen?! We don’t know, but we do know that we live in a fallen world.

Jesus was basically not getting into a philosophical conversation of why bad things happen to good people. But how do we know what is “bad”? And how do we know what a “good” person

is? We say, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" Number one, what's a "bad" thing?

Joseph was sold by his brothers as a slave in Egypt, and years later his brothers stood before him. He said to them, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20).

So what you might call "evil" God can bring good out of it. Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

I don't know why God would allow those two, precious people, who are believers in Yeshua, to be killed outside that museum in Washington, DC. But I do know that we're all going to die someday. Unless we repent and get right with God, we will all perish and go to hell.

Jesus says in verses 3 and 5 of our text, "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." In the Greek, these verses are in the present-imperative tense. That means it is a command in the present tense, but it is an ongoing, continual, habitual command to be repentant of your sin and turn to God.

What is repentance? In the Greek, it's the word "metanoia." It literally means "to change your mind." Change your mind about what? Let me give you three things: first, you change your mind about your sin and about you. You say, "I am a sinner." The Bible says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3:10). That's why I said that there really are no "good" people; we've all sinned.

What we should be asking is, "Why does anything good happen to me? Why don't I die on the freeway? Why haven't I had cancer? Why didn't I crash in an airplane?" Because God is good, loving and patient. He has given you time and opportunity to repent.

So the word "repent" means "to change your mind." But that doesn't mean that you just feel sorry or that you just are sad or that you do penitence. That's not repentance. What it means is that you change your mind about your sin. "I am a sinner before a holy God." "He who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

The second thing you change your mind about is Jesus. You believe Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus came from heaven and died on the Cross in my place to pay for my sins, and He rose from the dead so that I could be forgiven.

The third thing you should do is to turn from your sin and trust in Jesus Christ. Metanoia doesn't mean just to change your mind, but you keep going the same direction in your sin; it means because I change my mind, I turn around. I do a 180. I turn away from my sin and I trust Jesus my Savior.

So the process is acknowledging that I'm a sinner, Jesus is the Savior and I turn from my sin and trust Jesus Christ as my Savior. That's what you need to do to become a Christian. That's

what you need to do to get saved. That's what you need to do to get to heaven. You need to see yourself as a sinner before a holy God, falling short of God's standards. Jesus is your only hope. You reach out by faith and trust Him as you turn from sin.

Then as a believer, you have a lifetime pattern of confessing your sins. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." But don't get the idea that "Oh, I repented 10 years ago and accepted Jesus, so I'm saved. I got my 'fire insurance' and I'm not going to hell; I'm going to heaven."

If you are living in sin, if you are practicing sin, if you are professing to be a Christian but are living in sin, you need to question whether or not you really repented. Have you really repented? Have you turned to Christ?

I like what R. Kent Hughes said. Let me quote him. He said, "Repentance must happen in our souls, or we will perish in the judgment. If Jesus has not changed your conduct, if He is not continuing to change your conduct, you are very likely not a Christian. Repentance is the style of true Christianity. Repentance is not an option." So that means you live in a state of repentance. "I'm a sinner. Jesus is the Savior. I turn from my sin and follow Jesus Christ."

So there is the necessity of repentance. Unless we repent, we will all, verses 3 and 5, "likewise perish." Jesus speaks of the certainty of that calamity of perishing eternally in hell.

The second section of our text is in verses 6-9. Now we will see the evidence of repentance, which is fruit. If you truly repented, your life will bear fruit and won't be cut off. The context of these verses is that Israel is the fig tree, and they were given time to repent and turn to God but did not do that and produced no fruit, so they would be cut off and partially and temporarily laid aside until God gathered in the Gentile church. Then once again He would restore Israel to the promises given in the Davidic covenant.

Verses 6-9 is a parable. The word "parable" is the Greek word "parabole," which means "to lay alongside." It means an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It's not an allegory or a metaphor, so all the elements don't have meaning, but it is meant to teach one, main lesson.

"He also spoke this parable: 'A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none.'" A fig tree—depending on where it is planted, how often it is watered and what kind it is—will not necessarily produce the first year or even the second year. But by the third year, you should have figs, and if it doesn't, cut it down; it's not serving the purpose for which it was planted. So in our text, the man planted a fig tree in his vineyard. But we see a barren fig tree, in verse 6.

I believe that the fig tree represents the nation of Israel. Jesus was their Messiah, and He came to the nation of Israel. But they rejected Him, they didn't turn to Him; there was no fruit of repentance.

Now we turn to the bitter truth. Verse 7, "Then he..." the owner "...said to the keeper of his

vineyard, 'Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?'"

Then in verses 8-9, you have the borrowed time. We see the patience and long-suffering of God and the mercy of God while He waits for Israel to repent and produce fruit. Here the vinedresser is speaking to the man who owned the vineyard and the fig tree: "But he answered and said to him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.'"

So one year was the extended time, the borrowed time, to show mercy to this tree, referring to the nation of Israel. And the phrase, in verse 9, "if it bears" expects a "no" response. In other words, it's unlikely that it will bear fruit. And the phrase "if not" indicates that is the more likely outcome. "After that you can cut it down."

This is pretty simple. The fig tree is Israel. God planted it in the land. Isaiah 5 says that Israel is like a vineyard. God planted His vineyard, it had a winepress and He put a hedge around it. When He came to His vineyard, He expected fruit; instead, it brought forth weeds and wild grapes. Therefore, destroy it.

Be careful. At this point, some people read into this parable that God cut off Israel permanently, because she failed to receive Jesus as Messiah. They've developed a theology known as "replacement theology." They believe that God is already done, finished and through with the nation of Israel, and that God's plan and purpose today is all about the church. That's a dangerous theology; it's not taught in the Bible.

I implore you to read Romans 9-11. In Romans 9, God chose Israel. In Romans 10, God cut Israel off as a natural olive branch and grafted in the Gentiles, which are wild olive branches. But in Romans 11, God restores Israel. Paul says, "All Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26). So "Blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in" (Romans 11:25). God is not finished with the nation of Israel.

In 70 AD, Titus and the Roman armies destroyed the Jewish nation. They tore down the Temple. No more Judaism. The Israelites were dispersed throughout the world. But it was no accident that after 2,000 years of the Diaspora, on May 14, 1948, Israel was reborn and became a nation. So one of the greatest evidences of the truth of the Bible and the existence of God is the Jew.

By the way, theologically and doctrinally, why does antisemitism happen? Because the Jews are God's chosen people. They are an apostasy, are being separated from God, but they are still "the apple of His eye" (Zechariah 2:8).

And Biblical prophecy revolves around the nation of Israel. Not around the United States. Not around Gentile nations. Rather, around the people of Israel. So it is no accident that you're hearing all this about Israel, about antisemitism, about the hatred of the Jewish people. And it will increase and get worse to the point it will reach its apex in the seven-year tribulation.

But before that happens, the church will be “caught up...to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Then God will again begin to pour out His Spirit on the nation of Israel. And they will see Jesus coming back in the Second Coming at the end of that seven-year period. They will wail and mourn and ask, “What are these wounds between Your arms?” Then he will answer, “Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends” (Zechariah 13:6).

The promises that God made to Abraham and to David are unconditional. That includes the Palestinian covenant—that the land belongs to the Jews. God will fulfill that promise in the kingdom age at the Second Coming. All of this is linked together with God’s prophetic plan.

But here Jesus is just saying that “I came to look for fruit and found none.” True repentance in Israel would have been fruit in believing in Jesus. He’s the Messiah. He was raising the dead, healing the sick, giving sight to the blind. “No man ever spoke like this Man!” (John 7:46). But few Jews believed in Jesus.

In the last two verses of Luke 13, Jesus finally ended up weeping over Jerusalem. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house...” or the nation of Israel “...is left to you desolate; and assuredly, I say to you, you shall not see Me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’” That’s referring to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

So Jesus was rejected, the Jewish nation was cut off, but according to Romans 11, the Gentiles will be grafted in, and the Jews will come to faith in Jesus Christ.

It’s this simple: we’re all going to die. But we don’t know when. We might get raptured—I could dig that! We’ll go either by rapture or by death. Either way, the Bible says, “To be absent from the body [is] to be present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8). So we don’t need to fear death; if you’ve repented, if you’ve been forgiven, you’re ready to die. Someone once said, “You’re not ready to live until you’re ready to die.” I like that. When you’re ready to die, you’re ready to live.

We’re all going to die. It might be a plane crash. There was a plane crash in San Diego this week, and everyone on that flight died. People have been killed in the Gaza strip. Many have been killed in the Ukrainian war with Russia. We live in a world full of death.

But Jesus said that wasn’t the issue; the issue is if you don’t repent, you will eternally perish. That’s going to hell for all eternity! It’s inevitable that we’re going to die. And we don’t know when or how. But if we don’t repent, we’ll perish! It’s that simple.

So if you haven’t repented—that is, to change your mind and acknowledge you are a sinner, and what God says about you is true—you need to say that Jesus is the Savior, you need to turn from your sins and trust in Jesus Christ. You need to do that today.

You would be smart and say now, “Lord, I repent, I turn to You, I am a sinner, I believe, Jesus,

that You died for me, come into my heart, forgive my sins, I want to be ready to go to heaven.”

Once you do that, you are continually, habitually, constantly repenting over sin that will separate you from fellowship with God until you go home to be with Him.