

Repentance

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 August 2026

Preacher: Joshua Winters

[0:00] Sunday we heard Jesus say some of his most unpopular words to a crowd of many thousands in Luke chapter 12. So as Jesus speaks to the crowd of many thousands, there were some people there.

And these people bring up in the conversation something that had happened. There were some men from Galilee and Pilate, the Roman governor in Judea, had mixed the blood of these Galileans with the sacrifices that they were offering.

And ever since Luke recorded this, many have wondered about this incident. We want to know the details. What did these Galileans do that Pilate decided to kill them?

And many have proposed and suggested all sorts of different scenarios. Even Josephus, the famous Jewish historian who lived in the late first century, proposed five different events which these people might have been referring to in the crowd.

And truth be told, we don't know just what happened between Pilate and these Galileans. But one thing that digging around in the history books does reveal is that there was no shortage of violence between the Roman government and the Jewish people living in that region.

[1:59] The tensions were very high and many Jews lost their lives to the Romans. So all we have for certain is what we read here in Luke. It would seem that some men from Galilee were offering sacrifices or about to offer sacrifices.

And most likely this would have been at the temple or on the way to the temple in Jerusalem. And Pilate mixed their blood with the blood of the animals that they were offering.

At the very least, this obviously means that Pilate killed them. We don't know if they were executed in the usual way by crucifixion. Or whether they were just sort of cut down by soldiers where they were.

The part that really stands out is that their own blood was added to the blood of the sacrifices. On a spiritual and religious level, this is shocking.

It seems to be an especially heinous act, profaning and desecrating the temple sacrifices. And so Jesus responds to these guys telling about this in the crowd.

[3:16] Jesus answered, Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans? Because they suffered this way.

So Jesus' response here is kind of telling. You know, after hearing about the shocking death of these Galileans, many people didn't know what to think.

Some came to the conclusion that these Galileans must have been especially wicked that God brought this judgment on them.

Maybe they thought God used Pilate to kill them because of how bad of sinners they were. Perhaps they had done something especially evil, and that's why God brought about this especially dishonorable death for them.

Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? Says Jesus. I tell you, no.

[4:24] But unless you repent, you too will all perish. So Jesus basically says that the death of these Galileans in this shocking way was not because they were worse sinners than the average person.

And he turns it right back to the people in the crowd. He says, All of you will also perish unless you repent.

Sometimes we look at tragic things that happen in the news, and we're quick to assume that God is bringing judgment on the people of that place because they are especially sinful.

When we read the news articles, maybe we're even looking for some glaring sin that those people committed. Were they known for being sexually immoral? Or for their hypocrisy? Or were they known in that place for persecuting Christians? And the assumption we sometimes carry when we do this is that God usually only brings disaster on people because of their sins.

[5 : 35] But Jesus says, No. No. No. All of you. And remember, He's speaking to a crowd of many thousands.

All of you are guilty enough to deserve what happened to them. And if you do not repent of your sins, what happened to them will happen to you.

You too will perish. Let this be a warning to us not to assume we are better or more righteous than others who are struck with disaster.

We are not. Well, Jesus reinforces this with another example, a second example in the next couple verses.

Verse 4. He says, Or those 18 who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them? Do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?

[6 : 42] I tell you, no. But unless you repent, you too will all perish. So this was another tragedy of the times.

18 people were killed in this accident when the tower of Siloam fell on them. And just like with the first example, historians haven't found any additional info by digging into things about this incident. Perhaps one of the reasons is work-related accidents happen all the time. Even more so in the ancient world where safety was often a secondary concern. But people sort of came to the same conclusion, some of them anyway, when this accident happened.

Oh, those guys who were killed in this tragedy, they must have been especially guilty of some sin. God was punishing them since they died in this very tragic and public way.

And Jesus again says, No. Those guys weren't any more guilty of sin than the rest of the people living in Jerusalem. They weren't any more guilty of sin than all of you are.

[7 : 58] Unless you repent, you too will perish. So Jesus confronts the crowd and us with this uncomfortable truth that we are all, every one of us, sinners, deserving of death.

Other places in the Bible state it really clearly. One that we're very familiar with, Romans 3.23, For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

And then there's Romans 6.23, which is often quoted with it. And it states clearly, just as Jesus did, that what we deserve for being sinners is to perish.

For the wages of sin is death. That's what we all deserve. That's what we all will get, says Jesus, unless you repent.

repent. Well, what does it mean to repent? If you've been a Christian a long time, which I know there are definitely some in this room who have, you're super familiar with this.

[9 : 18] You know what this means. But if you're just exploring Christianity or you're younger, maybe you're not as familiar with this. The word repent means to turn.

And the way it's used in the Bible includes two elements. We are called by God to turn from and we are called to turn to.

Let's just see this, a couple examples of this for ourselves. Let's look at a few passages from the prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel 14.6. God is speaking through Ezekiel.

He says, Therefore say to the people of Israel, this is what the sovereign Lord says, repent. Turn from your idols and renounce all your detestable practices.

As God calls them to repent, He calls them to turn from the sinful things they have been doing. The worshipping of the idols. Stop worshipping the idols.

[10 : 26] And we see in this passage along with that part of repentance is renouncing the detestable practices. So repentance includes giving up our sinful ways.

It includes confessing or declaring with our mouths that those ways are wrong and rejecting them. another passage just a few chapters later in Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 18 verse 30. This is God speaking through Ezekiel again. Therefore, you Israelites, I will judge each of you according to your own ways, declares the sovereign Lord.

Repent. Turn away from all your offenses. Then sin will not be your downfall. Here we see it again. Repentance is a turning from, turn from all your offenses, all your sins. And one more in Ezekiel as well, 33 verse 10.

[11:31] We saw this passage last Sunday. Son of man, say to the Israelites, this is what you are saying. Our offenses and sin weigh us down and we are wasting away because of them.

How then can we live? Say to them, as surely as I live, declares the sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live.

Turn. Turn from your evil ways. Why will you die, people of Israel? There it is again.

Turn from your evil ways. So that's the first element of repentance. When Jesus says, unless you too repent, or unless you repent, you too will all perish.

He means unless you turn from your sins, from your wicked ways, renouncing them, you will perish. but we also see in the Bible another element of repentance, that it doesn't just mean turning away from, it also includes turning to.

[12:44] Look at what the apostle Peter said to his fellow Israelites in Jerusalem in Acts chapter 3 verse 19. He said, repent then and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.

Actually, the word used here, turn to God, not just implies turning to, but turning back to God, or returning to God.

Here we see that repentance is not just about us stopping the bad things that we've been doing, and renouncing them. It is that, but it's also a relational thing, where we come back to relationship with God, and we seek to be reconciled to Him.

Another example of this element of turning to is Acts 26 verse 20. This is the Apostle Paul, explaining in court what he has been up to.

He says, first to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I preached that they should repent and turn to God, and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds.

[14:11] here we kind of see both elements of repentance in one verse. Paul says they should repent, meaning turn to God.

That's the relational part. And he says they should demonstrate the genuineness of that, that change of heart by their deeds, by turning away from their sinful actions, and replacing them with the right actions, the things God has commanded.

And so all of this is what is meant by Jesus when he says, unless you repent, you too will all perish. Unless you turn from your sinful ways, renouncing them, and turn back to God, you will perish.

And I emphasize both of these elements of repentance because so often we just think of repentance as being about turning away from sins. And it is that.

But God calls us to repent not just because he wants us to stop sinning. That's not the main or the only goal.

[15:31] He calls us to repent because he wants a restored relationship with us. us. He wants to fix that broken relationship between him and us.

We talk often about how God is eager to forgive us of our sins. Well, it's not just because he has to or because he's merciful, but he actually desires a restored relationship with us.

And just like with human relationships, a relationship that is broken cannot be restored just by changing the behavior that broke it.

You must also go to that person and admit the things that you've done wrong and say sorry and ask for forgiveness.

This is what Jesus has come to call all people to do, to repent, to turn away from sins and to turn back to God. And he's calling us to this so that we might know God and have a relationship with him and enjoy him.

[16:50] Well that brings us to another, I'm going to call it dimension of repentance that we see in the Bible.

Really two dimensions. We could call it initial repentance or first repentance and we could call the other dimension ongoing repentance.

When the Bible speaks about us receiving God's salvation, we're called to repent and like we've been talking about, turn back to God and there is sort of a first moment in which we do that.

For the first time we acknowledge to God in prayer that we've sinned against him. And we say we're sorry, we ask for his forgiveness, we admit that his ways are good and right and that the way that we've been living is wrong, we believe, we accept his offer of salvation and for the first time we trust that what God has done through Jesus is what we need.

And when we do that for the first time we are then baptized just as the people were in Jesus' day, that's the outward thing that's done to express the heart of repentance.

[18:11] And we notice in the Bible that to those who have already done this for the first time, to those who have repented, Jesus speaks differently.

And God speaks differently. Look at what Jesus said just in the previous chapter to his disciples.

Luke 12, verse 32, he said, do not be afraid, little flock, for the Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.

In that one verse alone, there is so much comfort and reassurance. Jesus is not warning about fiery punishment or about perishing, but he's calling his true followers children of God.

Your Father, he says. And he's promising them that as children, they will inherit the very kingdom of God. And he says that God is pleased to give it to them.

And so when we truly repent, when we turn back to God for the first time, it changes our relationship to God forever. We're reconciled to him.

[19:37] That relationship is restored and there is no longer a fear of perishing or of fire or of judgment. The stuff that we heard about last week.

We confess our sins to him. We ask for his forgiveness. We believe in Jesus, the chosen one. And the Bible tells us that we are forgiven of all of our sins and we are welcomed into God's family.

Our relationship status with God goes from enemy to son or daughter of God. And right here at this point in the story, Luke 13, this is something that all of the true followers of Jesus have had to do.

They have had to repent for the first time. John the baptizer was the one that first called them to it.

And each one of them had a moment of confessing their sins and then being baptized.

baptized. And then after John, Jesus and his disciples, they've been going around and they've been calling people to repent everywhere they go.

[20:54] And baptizing people. And it kind of brings us to this question. Have you had that moment of first repentance?

of turning back to God, acknowledging your sins to him, asking for his forgiveness, being baptized in Jesus' name.

And if you haven't and you'd like guidance in this or to talk through it, you can come find me after the service or someone else here who you know has done these things, would be glad to talk with you about it.

It's a big step to take. And Jesus always encouraged people to sit down and to count the cost before making this decision.

Have you had your moment of first repentance? Now, for many of us here, we've done this.

[22:08] Some of us not too long ago, others of us decades ago. And if you've already had that moment of first repentance, then these words of Jesus ring differently.

We don't worry about ourselves, but our hearts are on those we love around us who have not yet repented. we don't fear that we will perish because we know that there's now no condemnation awaiting.

Jesus has already taken the punishment that we deserve on himself. Instead, we have our hearts and our eyes set on the glory that Jesus has promised to us.

we're looking forward to being raised from the dead by Jesus when he returns and to eternity with him in his kingdom. When we read these words, unless you repent, you too will all perish, we say, yes, Jesus, I know I'm a sinner.

I know I'm guilty. Thank you, Lord, that you have provided the way for us to be spared what we deserve. Thank you that because of you, we're no longer guilty or counted as guilty.

[23:36] And so for us who have already repented for the first time, we now practice what I'm going to call ongoing repentance. We only needed to truly repent once and to believe once in order to be saved.

but now that we've been reconciled to God, there is still need for ongoing repentance because we haven't been made perfect yet. We're still tempted and we still sin.

And so we still regularly must humble ourselves before God when we do those things and admit that we've done them and ask for his forgiveness. forgiveness. And God has promised that as many times as we do that, he will forgive because he's provided the full atonement that we need in Jesus' blood and because his love is so great.

God and so I want to just say a word to you who are children of God here today. Is there some hidden sin or struggle with sin that you've been holding on to for which you need to repent today? Jesus' command to us now is to be holy as I am holy. As we heard earlier, there is need after our initial repenting to show our repentance in our actions by turning away from the evil things that we have been doing or thinking or desiring or planning.

[25 : 38] Is there any sin you know that God wants you to repent of today? We're just going to take a minute right now in the middle of the service to just pray. And I invite you to talk to God and if something comes to mind, talk to him.

may may follows up his teaching on repentance with a parable.

Verse 6. Then he told this parable. A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any.

So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down.

Why should it use up the soil? Sir, the man replied, leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it.

[27 : 13] If it bears fruit next year, fine. If not, then cut it down. So Jesus tells a little parable.

He gives an analogy of a fig tree, and of course here in Saskatchewan we don't really think too much about fig trees. So maybe if it helps, imagine an apple tree in an orchard instead.

But one thing we need to catch here is that this tree is growing in his vineyard, not in his backyard. We might keep an unproductive tree in the backyard simply because the tree is beautiful to look at. But a vineyard, just like a farmer's field, is land for the business and not for the beauty. The whole point of the vineyard or the orchard is to get the fruit from what is planted in it.

And considerable work is put into making the plants as productive as possible. And so if there's a tree in the row that's not producing any good fruit, then what should be done with it?

[28 : 26] It is, as Jesus said, just sort of using up the soil. It's taking up the space with no return, and it's using up the nutrients that could go to another tree.

The logical, sensible thing to do is to cut it down. And it's not like it's the first year that this tree was planted either, but it's been three years.

There should be some fruit by now. In the parable, the caretaker intercedes for the tree. Let's not cut it down just yet.

Give it one more year. I'll take special care of it. I'll dig around it. I'll fertilize it. Digging around it would be to loosen up the soil so that the moisture can get down to the roots more easily.

And if this next year we get fruit out of it, good. Problem solved. And if not, then you're right. Let's cut it down. That's the sensible thing to do.

[29 : 33] This is an analogy. And it suggests that God is patient. He's not eager just to cut us down at the first sign of trouble, but he is patient and willing to bear with people the extra year, even though there should be fruit by now.

This parable reminds us that God is watching us. He had checked on this tree, the owner, three years in a row.

And its fruitlessness didn't escape his notice. But even still, he is willing to let it go one year more and give it every chance with special care.

Think of this from the tree's perspective, if we could. This tree has gone three years with nothing for fruit on it. The time is short.

The stakes are high. And if with this extra time and special care, there is still no good fruit, then we can be sure that the tree is rotten, diseased, or dead.

[30 : 44] And the only right thing is to cut it down and give its place to another. Would you find fault in the owner of the vineyard for cutting down a tree that bore no fruit in four consecutive years?

Would you find fault in the farmer for burning the field that had sprouted late and was sickly with no heads of grain once the time for harvest had come? Would you find fault with God for purging the wicked from his world when they continue year after year to be unresponsive to his kindness and grace?

This parable is a reminder to us that if we truly repent, we will be changed on the inside. There will be life in us by God's Spirit and it will lead to good fruit coming from us.

Repentance leads to love coming from our lives to good works to good thoughts and desires and decisions and plans.

This parable is a reminder to us that if we have not yet responded to God's call to repent, there will be a day when he will cut us down and give us what we're due.

[32:12] I believe this is a warning to the unrepentant and a reminder to those who maybe have repented but are thinking that, you know, I can kind of get away with sinning right now.

It's no biggie. God will just forgive me. God is watching for the fruit. And if we profess faith in Jesus, we dare not try to play games with his grace.

We dare not try to use his forgiveness as a license to sin more. So have you come back to God for the first time?

And if you have, are you keeping that relationship with God well? By walking daily in repentance. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are merciful, that you are quick to forgive. And I pray that you would stir in all of our hearts, that we would confess any sins to you that we have been hanging on to and turn from them and walk with you.

[33:38] Thank you that you desire a close relationship with us and that you love us. Our hearts can't help but go to those in our lives that we love who have not yet turned back to you, Lord.

Or who maybe seem like they did at one time, but right now are not walking with you. And we ask for your grace and mercy in their lives right now. You know the very people we're thinking of, Lord. We also ask for boldness and graciousness not to be ashamed of these truths that you taught, but that we too would call people in our lives to this same thing, to repent.

That's the path that you've laid before us. Pray this in your name. Amen. Amen. Amen.