

Repentance Unto Life

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to chapter 13 of Luke, and I just want us to think over, as we have been doing as we're going through this gospel, just as it were an overview.

I want us to look at these verses from verse 1 to verse 17. There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish, and so on.

As we know, tragedy is one of the very difficult things for us to cope with in life, and one of the very difficult things for us to understand. And I suppose it's true to say that this side of eternity, there are many things that we will never, ever, ever fathom or understand.

There have been tragedies. Some of you in here have suffered personally from tragic events. Your hearts are still sore and broken from them, and you're still not able to understand, and you probably never will in this life.

[1 : 23] These things are very difficult. They're very personal and very difficult to bear with and equally difficult to understand. Now, we know that there used to be an idea held that tragedy and catastrophe was somehow tied in or as a result of great wickedness.

But the Bible dispels that very, very clearly and shows that is not the case. For instance, when you go to the book of Job, Job suffered catastrophically.

There was one blow after another, one bereavement after another, one pain, one tragedy after another. And his friends were persuaded that although Job was outwardly a very upright man, they were convinced that privately and secretly he was living a double life and that he must be the biggest hypocrite going.

As we know, the Lord was working in Job, and the Lord, of course, vindicated Job and showed just what a righteous man he was. And down through the years, we've seen these mysterious things happen.

And Jesus is dispelling this very notion right away because he's showing that the Galileans who were murdered and the 18 on whom the tower in Siloam fell were no worse or better than any other people.

[2 : 53] Now, there's no question, but there are times, and the Bible shows us that, that there are times when God's judgment will fall upon a people.

And the Bible shows how God's judgment has actually fallen upon nations. But this, our understanding of that has come because God has revealed these things to us.

It is not up to us to make these assessments. We are not the ones who are able to say, well, this has happened because of such and such a thing.

Once we do that, we are guilty, just like Job's friends were, of coming to sometimes to wrong conclusions. If tragedy, if calamity only happens because of God's displeasure, and if only good were to come because of God's pleasure, then that would certainly leave us very confused.

Because when you think about it, some of the masters of genocide, think of the like of Paul Pot, one of the most evil men in this world. He died of natural causes, I believe, in old age.

[4 : 09] Some of the great saints have died young, have died tragically. When you go through the Bible and you see just the way some of the prophets, some of the apostles, and even Jesus himself suffered so dreadfully at the hands of men.

So God's ways certainly are mysterious. And so Jesus straight away here is dispelling the notion that when tragedy comes, that it is some sign, some indication of something being seriously wrong or that it's coming in judgment.

Jesus uses this opportunity of homing in individually with people the need for repentance in light of the fact that we are all going one day or another to die.

You see, these people were focusing on the deaths of others. Jesus, as always, deals personally. And he turns it round. And he's saying, all right.

But he said, I'm going to tell you one thing. These people who died, they were no worse than others. But what I'm saying to you is, you repent and prepare for death.

[5 : 24] And that's one of the ways that we are to prepare for death, is by repentance. Because a day is coming. There is, remember, to be a final judgment. There has to be.

Even natural reason itself would say to us, there has to be a judgment. When we see so much in this world, yes, there's so much that is good and wonderful.

But there is so much that is wrong. There is so much in the way of oppression. There is so much in the way of injustice. You say to yourself, there has to be a righting of the wrongs.

Well, God says there is going to be. There is going to be a final judgment. And the judge will judge everyone with an unerring accuracy.

There will be no miscarriages of justice there. It is an appointment we all have to keep. It is a meeting we cannot avoid.

[6 : 25] And Jesus is here showing the importance of repentance. That repentance, as we know, is as necessary to us as faith. And indeed, faith and repentance are inseparably bound.

And because of that, you and I, everybody needs a Savior. We need to believe and we need to repent.

And when we believe, we come. When we come to Jesus, who do we come to? We come to a Savior. What does a Savior do?

A Savior saves us. What does he save us from? He saves us from our sins. That's who Jesus is. That's the name that he was given.

His name shall be called Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins. So that straight away we see that if we need saving, then we're fundamentally wrong.

[7 : 26] From A to Z, we are wrong in our life. From start to finish, we are wrong because of sin. And if we are wrong, then we need to repent. And that's why we go to Jesus.

We're going to Jesus by faith, repenting of our sin. And may I say to you, to anybody in here today, if you have never seen the precarious position that you are in, if you're here without Jesus, if your life is not committed to Jesus, if you have not trusted Jesus as your Savior, I would love to think that you still are able to see how precarious your life is.

Because if you were to be taken out of life today, without Christ as Savior, then you have no advocate. You have no Savior.

You are on your own. You will go out into eternity all on your own. You will face judgment all on your own. You have nobody to stand for you and to plead for you.

There is no intercessor. You are on your own. And you will have to bear the punishment of your sin upon yourself forever and ever and ever. That's what the Bible shows us.

[8 : 41] And if you've never come to see that, I would say to you, please today, ask the Lord. Open my eyes, Lord, to see. Help me to understand. Help me to see my need of the Savior.

Have you seen your sin? Have you seen sufficient of your sin to drive you to a Savior? Now, of course, there are different levels of recognizing sin.

There are some people who see their sin, but they don't repent about it. People like Pharaoh, for instance. Pharaoh was aware that he had sinned. Told Moses that he had sinned.

But his sin didn't count for anything. His sin, he was only sorry for his sin in the way that it was affecting himself. You know, there are some people, and that's as far as their sorrow for their sin will go.

Because it's spoiled their life. It's messed up their own life. And they're sorry about that. It's a selfish sorrow. It's not true repentance.

[9 : 45] Even Judas, we believe that his sorrow, and it was a great sorrow, his sorrow, though, was a sorrow that led to death. But here, true repentance is a repentance that brings life.

And that is what we need to discover, is this genuine sorrow for sin. I would hope and pray that you all know what that is in your own heart and life.

And I would say that even today, if you don't, make sure that you do. In other words, you go to the Lord and say, Lord, please give me a tender heart.

You know, naturally, we're hard as nails. Some people may appear to be more flexible, to be softer under the word than others.

And that may be true. But underneath, we are so resistant to God. There is a hardness that only God's spirit can penetrate.

[10:59] And that's why I would say to go to the Lord and say, Lord, please make me soft under the preacher. Give me a willingness, this willingness to repent.

To have this sorrow for sin. So what is this sorrow for sin? Well, there's many things we can say, just two or three very briefly. It's a sorrow for sin. As sin itself.

Not just one or two things that we have done that maybe we're ashamed of. It's a sense of how our very life dishonors and wrongs God.

It's a kind of sorrow that David had. We read about in Psalm 51. Yes, he had been guilty of murder. He had been guilty of adultery.

And he had hurt many people. But he's saying, against thee, thee only, have I sinned. David is so conscious of how personal his whole being, his sin is before God.

[11:58] And this true sorrow for sin is a sorrow that goes deep. It's not a superficial thing. It's not a wee tear and then that's it.

Oh, that's me. I'm okay. It's kind of like Peter. Peter went out and he wept bitterly. It went right down into the very depth of his being. There was an anguish caused by it.

It wasn't superficial. It was deep. And it's lifelong. In the believer, it's lifelong. That doesn't mean that we're moaning and groaning and despondency or anything all our Christian days.

But it means that throughout our Christian life, we will have a constant awareness of our sin before God. And a constant need of going back for cleansing.

Yes, there's a once and for all forgiveness. And I just thank the Lord for that. Where we are brought from darkness to light, from death to life. But we need the ongoing cleansing.

[13:00] And we're going back again and again and again and again. And we're saying, Lord, forgive me. Lord, I'm sorry. This repentance unto life, as our catechism so powerfully tells us, is turning away from sin with grief and with hatred and endeavoring after new obedience.

So there's a twofold part to it. There's a turning away from and there's an endeavoring after. And of course, this repentance is a fruit. And it's fruit that the Lord is looking for from our lives.

And Jesus goes on to highlight that in the little parable that he tells us about the fig tree. About this barren fig tree. Now, of course, whilst Christ was speaking here, he was speaking primarily to Israel.

There was no place in all the world that had the privileges, that had the opportunities that Israel had. God's favor was shown to them down throughout the centuries.

And of course, the ultimate moment of favor was here. Because Jesus was living with them. He was mingling. He was walking. He was talking. He was teaching. He was healing. But the warning was this.

[14:17] With all the privileges and all the opportunities, if they didn't grasp them and take them and hid them and use them, then they would be destroyed.

And the Lord was looking for fruit. And what is true at a national level for Israel was also true at a personal level. And it's also true for us because as we look at this parable, remember the word of God is timeless.

And this word is for you and for me as well today. Here is this fig tree and it was planted in a vineyard. Not out in the wilds, but in a secluded place.

Where everything was carefully cultivated. It was in a garden. So there was shelter. There was good cultivation. There was a gardener looking after it.

In other words, every opportunity was given to this fig tree to produce fruit. That's why it was there in the first place. To produce fruit. And that's how it was for Israel.

[15:19] Israel were God's people. They were the nation that he had said they were his possession. And he was looking for fruit from them.

And just as we see it in Israel, we have to bring this into our own lives as well. Because we have tremendous gospel opportunities.

If you've grown up here, you, whatever else you have or don't have, one thing you've had, you have had awesome gospel opportunities.

We know our cultures maybe change slightly. We know our communities over the years change a little. But our gospel privileges are still enormous.

And if you've grown up in this island, then the years of your life have been years where there has been enormous gospel opportunities and privileges.

[16:22] That is not something that you can say, well, that doesn't really matter. It will matter hugely in your life. It will matter hugely in the judgment. These are great privileges the Lord has given to us.

Many people have not had them. You've had them. I've had them. What are we doing with them? Well, we see the owner of the vineyard keeps coming looking for fruit.

And here's this fig tree. And there's none. He's come this year. He came last year. He came the year before. These three years. Some people have seen these three years are significant of the eras of the law, the prophets, and then of Christ.

Others have seen it of the three years of Christ's ministry. Whatever it is, here is the point is that here's this fig tree in this vineyard.

Every opportunity is given to it to bring forth fruit, and it hasn't. And the owner of the vineyard says, look, it's a waste of space.

[17:27] In fact, it's more than a waste of space. It's taking up the good that others should have. Cut it down. Cut it down.

That was the owner's assessment of the situation. We're looking at this spiritually. What if? Not trying to be dramatic.

This is reality. This is life. This is how it is. What if God was saying that over somebody's life here? That year after year after year, looking for fruit.

And there's none. There was none last year. There was none the year before. All the privileges. All the opportunities.

This year, none. Cut it down. But then the gardener says, look, he says, please, give me one more year. Give me one more year.

[18:32] Don't cut it down yet. Give me one more year. And I'm really going to give my everything to this fig tree. I'm going to dig around it. I've got special fertilizer. I'm going to cultivate. I'm going to look after it almost like it's a little baby.

And I'm going to give my all to it. If after that, it doesn't bear fruit, cut it down.

What if, I hope that this is not the conversation that is taking place in heaven over you. What if the father was saying, all that this person has received, heard sermons of the law where he's been shaken?

Had they heard the sweet pleading invitations of Jesus and been moved? Providence shaken to the core and yet has remained untouched, unbelieving.

Cut down. And the great intercessor is saying, leave one more year. Leave one more year. My friend, this is serious business.

[19:49] It's serious business. These are solemn realities. And the only thing that I will say is what scripture itself says. It's high time to seek the Lord.

And then from verse 10 and just in two or three minutes, we have this woman being healed who has a disabling spirit. And it caused her to be bent over.

It was some type of degeneration of maybe of bone or a muscular paralysis. I'm not sure exactly. But she's had this disability for 18 years.

And you know, the wonderful thing is that we still find her in the synagogue. 18 years. She'll be one of these people who could barely make it. And yet she still comes to God's house.

You know, there are some of the elderly are a rebuke to the young. In their faithfulness, their diligence, their all was there. If any person had a reason and an excuse not to be in church, it is them.

[20:54] And many people who are in full health and strength with all their abilities, all their energies, all their faculties. And church going is way down their list of priorities.

Well, the great thing for this woman was that all her years of diligence, one day it paid fruit. Because there was Jesus. And you know, this is a great thing.

When we absent ourselves, we miss this opportunity of meeting with Jesus. But anyway, Jesus called this woman over to her. And she goes over. And Jesus is going to deal publicly with her.

Because her ailment, we see here, though it was a physical one, was a satanic one. And again, I find that interesting because we tend to think that Satan attacks our minds.

And we're always praying, Lord, keep my mind. Keep my mind from the attacks of the wiles of the devil. Keep my mind.

[21 : 55] That's what we're praying. That our soul and our mind. How often do we pray that our bodies will be kept from the attack from the evil one?

Because it is very clear here that her physical condition, 18 years, confined and bound, no doubt in pain and agony, and it is satanic.

Because we find this here. That this ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan bound for 18 years.

And that brings me to see the way that Jesus works. Now, I know that we shy away from these healing ministries that so often we see. And they're unrightly in many ways so.

But I sometimes feel that we're a wee bit too hesitant in praying for a person to be healed. Because here we see very clear.

[23 : 02] See, if we're conscious that we're going through a period of real temptation and bombarded by Satan, we will pray for deliverance. Lord, take the evil one away.

Release me. Give me that. Give me freedom and liberty again. So we should for the body. And I believe that Satan will try and take out those who are working for the kingdom.

I believe it. Do we stand back and say, oh, well, that's just the way it goes? No. This is battle. This is warfare. We should pray. Of course it may not be the Lord's will that he will restore and heal.

If that is the case, then we pray for the grace to accept, to be resigned to God's will. But I don't know why it is that in other areas we will pray and pray, but often when it comes to illness and to healing, we sometimes say, oh, well, we'll just leave it.

Let us resign ourselves to God's will. Yes, of course we do. But I think that Jesus is showing us, and Jesus is the one who has come to conquer the power of darkness and Satan.

[24 : 12] And when Satan is the one who is at work, then we ought to be praying that the Lord will heal and the Lord will lift up and restore. As we say, it may not be God's will.

If that is so, let us pray for the grace to accept. And of course, when Jesus heals this woman, outrage. It's a Sabbath day. How dare he? And Jesus, once again, is almost floored by the hypocrisy.

And he's saying to them, look, here's this woman. Eighteen years she's been bound, paralyzed almost. And you're finding fault with me for releasing her.

And you will release your cow, your oxen. And you will take them with a rope and you'll lead them to the water. And you'll give them food and you'll take them walk and give them drink on the Sabbath day.

And yet you're finding fault with me. The Lord, remember, has given us the Sabbath. He's given us this day. Not so that we'll be bound and shackled.

[25 : 19] And that's what had happened to the Jews. Because they had piled law after law after law. So that the Lord's day, which was supposed to be a day of liberation and freedom. A day, a spiritual day.

To enjoy the Lord primarily. Had become a day that had become a burden. I think it was McChain used to say that the greatest witness to the Lord's day.

Is God's people enjoying the Lord's day. If our watching world sees how much this day means. And the delight that we have in it.

And the joy that we express. In knowing our Lord. And what is represented and found in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Let us not be bound by it, but enjoy it.

Jesus, the Lord, has given us this day. For our good. Physically. And mentally. But above all, spiritually.

[26 : 21] May we then thank the Lord of the day. For his goodness to us. Let's pray. Lord of God, we pray to watch over us and bless us.

We pray that the word of God may be our rule and guide. Forgive us, Lord, for anything that we have said amiss. And we pray to take the word that has been preached.

And the word that has been read. And we pray that that word will go into people's hearts. Bringing good. O Lord, we give thanks for this living river.

That water refreshes, cleanses. Do us good in every aspect of our lives. Take us all home safely.
And forgive us our sins.
In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.