

# Repent

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning, church. We are picking up our series in the Gospel of Luke, looking at chapter 13 today, verses 1 through 9.

That's page 819 in the Pew Bible. Let me invite you to turn there with me as we look at this next section in the Gospel of Luke.

Let me read chapter 13, verses 1 through 9 for us. There were some present at that very time who told him, that is Jesus, about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus 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.

Or those 18 on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you.

[ 1 : 14 ] But unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. And he told this parable. A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none.

And he said to the vinedresser, look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this tree and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?

And he answered him, sir, let it alone this year also until I dig around it and put on manure. Then, if it should bear fruit next year, well and good.

But if not, you can cut it down. Let's pray together. Father, we ask this morning that you would give us ears to hear and hearts to receive what you're saying through your son this morning.

Lord, we need a word from outside of us to tell us what is good and right and beautiful. Lord, we need a word from outside of us to rescue us.

[ 2 : 28 ] So, Father, would we hear your word this morning? And would you get the glory? We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, the theme of our text this morning is repentance.

And in particular, Jesus teaches us two things about repentance in this passage. The first thing we see is that the need for repentance is universal.

And the second thing that Jesus teaches us is that the time for repentance is now. We see the first in verses one through five.

The need for repentance is universal. Now, to understand what's going on in this paragraph, we have to see the context. In fact, we won't really understand what Jesus means by repent unless we take a step back and catch the larger story.

About a week ago, I watched the new Avengers movie. What was it called? Infinity War. Has anyone seen that? And if you've seen that, you know that the opening of that movie starts with like Thor's missing an eye.

[ 3 : 38 ] His brother gets killed. There's this purple guy who's just wrecking havoc in the universe. And I haven't seen some of the other movies of the Avengers series. So, I had absolutely no clue what was going on.

You know, when we come to a passage like this, it can feel a bit like that. We hear these commands, but we don't know the context. So, we need to take a step back and catch the larger story.

At the end of chapter 12, if we just look at the literary context, starting in verse 49, Jesus has been teaching that in his ministry, in his presence, the great time of crisis, of division, and decision has come for Israel.

Will they accept him as Messiah, as King, or not? The signs are all there, his teaching, his miracles, but are they willing to pay attention and read those signs?

That's the point of verses 54 through 56 of chapter 12. Are they willing to open their eyes and see who Jesus really is, just like they're willing to read the signs of the weather?

[ 4 : 50 ] Then Jesus concludes with an illustration in verses 57 through 59. He says, if you were on your way to court and you had to settle things with your accuser before going to the judge, before getting thrown into prison, you would settle things before you got there, right?

Jesus' point is that God's judgment is coming, and it's time for his audience to make things right while they still can. Of course, the idea of God's judgment isn't exactly a popular idea.

I get that. But, you know, it's helpful for us to see that the reality of judgment and the need for repentance is something that Jesus himself taught.

You know, this isn't an idea that some particularly sinister Puritans came up with in the 17th century. This isn't something that medieval theologians concocted in their monasteries.

The idea of God's judgment isn't something that the apostle Paul invented, though we like to blame him for a lot of our issues with religion. No, it was Jesus himself who spoke more than anyone else in the Bible about the reality of divine judgment and the need for everyone to repent.

[ 6 : 09 ] But it's even bigger than that. You see, the context of Jesus' call to repentance is the whole sweeping biblical story itself.

What we're listening into here in this passage from Luke 13 is the crux of the entire message of the Bible.

That message, that story that the Bible unfolds for us, that there's one true God, a God of holy love, who created absolutely everything, who created everything to display his glory, and created everything to participate in his joy.

Do you sometimes catch the sense of glory and joy at times in creation? Do you get a whiff of that wonder in the world around you?

And the biblical story says that God created humans, God created you and me, to actually occupy a special place in creation. That amidst all of the wonder and beauty that God created, he made humanity in his own image, to reflect his glory in a unique way.

[ 7 : 38 ] And more than that, to be vice regents in God's good world, to be as it were sort of stewards or under kind of rulers, to cultivate and steward creation under God's good rule.

This is what he's made us for. To bear his image in that way. Don't we kind of feel that responsibility today, even as we consider something like ecological justice, and humanity's unique role in caring for creation?

There's something that we know that we are responsible for, a part and above, and that has an impact on everything else. But you know, this picture of humans sort of ruling joyfully under God, their creator, of flourishing, of bringing praise and honor to him, that's not how things remained. And as we look out in the world, we see that's not how things are, right? Rather than glorifying God as God, humanity rebelled against God's good rule.

And in an act that the Bible pictures as an act of cosmic treason, we chose to be our own kings instead. And we chose to ignore God and the world God has made, and put ourselves in the center of things.

[ 9 : 00 ] And that is what the Bible means by sin. You see, sin doesn't necessarily mean doing lots of really bad things. You can actually be very, very moral, and still be living for yourself, rather than for God.

You can be a quote-unquote good person, and yet still be rejecting God's kingship. And the penalty for sin is death.

Just like a light bulb, being unscrewed from the socket eventually goes dark. So humanity, cut off from God, the source of all life and goodness and grace, so humanity, cut off from God, faces the dark of physical and spiritual death.

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and the wages of sin is death. And this is where Jesus' call to repentance comes in.

Repentance, you see, is not trying to clean up your act so God will accept you. Don't you see, if you're trying to earn God's favor through being a good person, then you're still trying to be your own king and your own master and run things your way.

[ 10 : 35 ] Because you're thinking you can fix the problem, and you can overcome the breach that's opened up between you and God. You can be the fixer. You can still be the king.

But that's not what repentance is. That's not what Jesus is telling us we need. Repentance doesn't mean reform your life.

It literally means change your mind. Repentance, it means admitting. You've been living as your own master, worshiping the wrong things, violating God's law.

And to repent is actually to turn. It's transferring your allegiance, your priority from yourself as king to Jesus as king.

It's willingly laying down your arms in the cosmic revolt and coming home to God. But here's the problem.

[ 11 : 41 ] When we hear Jesus' call to repent, to lay down our arms and receive him as God's rightful king, we can easily think that that call does not apply to me.

We don't think it applies to us. And that brings us back to the heart of Luke chapter 13. Jesus has just said that divine judgment is coming, but rather than consider what that means for themselves, some people in the audience bring up a saucy piece of recent news.

It's just blown up the Twittersverse in early Palestine. The news that Pilate, the Roman governor, who was a butcher and a cruel man, has just done something completely in character and murdered some Galileans in Jerusalem, sent his troops right in to kill them while they were worshiping and sacrificing in the temple.

And such a gruesome death, Jesus' audience thinks, such a gruesome death like that must prove that those Galileans were really bad sinners.

Right, Jesus? Isn't that the sort of judgment you're talking about, Jesus? Isn't it those sort of people who really need to repent? The ones who get what's coming to them?

[ 13 : 14 ] But how does Jesus respond? He reads right through. Do you think they were worse sinners because they suffered in this way?

No. You see, it was a commonly held belief in the first century that tragedy and suffering was a result of personal sinfulness. In other words, if you were a bad person, bad things happen to you. But Jesus completely rejects that line of thinking. He says these people did not suffer this way because they were worse than anyone else. But more than that, Jesus won't allow his audience to deflect their own need for repentance by pointing to some group of people over there who they think must be really bad because of what's happened to them.

You see what's happening here? It's as if the people in the crowd are actually saying, well, Jesus, we believe what you're saying about judgment. Surely there's going to become a time. The midnight hour is going to get struck when all of our masks come off, as Kierkegaard said, right?

We all know that at some point we're going to face our maker and the true selves are going to be exposed. Of course, we believe what you're saying about judgment, Jesus, but surely that doesn't apply to us. Surely you must be talking about those Galileans who got what they deserved.

[ 14 : 26 ] Now, I'm sure that you don't share the mistaken first century belief that suffering and tragedy only happen to those who deserve it.

That's a wrong belief and we should, along with Jesus, rightly reject it. But at the heart level, don't you and I feel that same tendency to deflect our own need to repent?

Maybe you think, well, I'm not that bad. I mean, I make mistakes, but I'm not as bad as those people. And for you, it's not the hapless victims of tragedy that you point to, no, but it's some other seemingly notorious group of people how we happen to define it today.

And yet, Jesus will not let us play the comparison game. Perhaps your outward life is more moral than another person.

Maybe you have it all together for the most part. Maybe your life is successful and things are going well. Maybe you haven't broken any laws. Maybe you haven't done anything that's sort of especially terrible in the world's eyes.

[ 15 : 56 ] But have you given to God the glory he deserves? God has given us every breath in our lungs, every talent and skill we possess, every opportunity we enjoy.

God holds us in being every moment. We are completely and utterly dependent upon him every single second.

And yet, most of the day, we utterly ignore him. We put our own desires and our own wants and our own agenda at the center of our affections and drive that ship exactly as we choose.

And then, if things don't go our way, we finally find the decency to think of God if only to blame him and question his goodness because things haven't gone the way we wanted them to.

I know this, friends, about you because it's true of me. I do the exact same thing. Though the outward degree of sin may be different from person to person, the inner presence of sin is the same for us all.

[ 17 : 19 ] We all need to repent because we're all sinners and unless you repent, Jesus says, you will all likewise perish. like a ship sailing straight for the cliffs.

Unless we turn and chart a new course and follow a new captain, we will all crash upon the rocks of God's goodness and holiness. Jesus is telling us loud and clear that the need for repentance is universal.

But that's not the end. Jesus goes on in verses 6 through 9 to tell us that the time for repentance is now.

Throughout this whole section of Luke, this whole middle section of Luke's gospel, Jesus has been pleading with Israel, with his own people, with the people of promise to turn back to God and acknowledge him as their Messiah before it's too late and to drive that point home, he tells a parable about a barren fig tree in a garden and there are three observations we need to make about this parable.

The first thing we see in this parable, friends, is that God is making time for us. The owner of the vineyard comes to his own garden and to his own fig tree looking for fruit and he finds none and then we learn that it's actually been three years in a row that the owner has been patiently waiting for this tree to bear fruit and still none.

[ 19 : 00 ] Surely the time has come to cut this tree down and plant something else in its place to make room for a more productive tree. But the vinedresser, the gardener comes and says, let's give it one more year.

we'll dig around it so water can get down to the roots, we'll fertilize it. And so together the owner and the vinedresser agree they'll extend one more year to this barren fig tree.

And you see Jesus' point. Right now God is making a time for us. He would be fully within his rights to call us to account right now.

And yet God still makes time. The apostle Peter writes this in his second letter. He says, God is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. patience. And this patience of God means that there's hope. The parable Jesus tells here holds out the possibility of fruit bearing, holds out the possibility of becoming a vibrant tree when before there's been nothing but a history of barrenness.

[ 20 : 35 ] There's hope that even if a life has been lived utterly fruitlessly to this moment, while God makes time, there's still hope for the about face of repentance and for the new spiritual life and vitality that God gives with repentance.

In other words, your past does not need to determine your future with God. There is a gardener who has done a costly work on your behalf so that you might come alive.

You know, in this story, the owner of the vineyard and the vine dresser of this parable, they make a costly decision, don't they? They make a costly decision to work and to dig up the soil around the tree, to spend time caring for this tree, to fertilize it, and perhaps even more, they absorb the cost of allowing this fruitless tree to remain and use up the ground when another more profitable tree could be put in its place.

It was a costly decision for the owner and the vine dresser to make time for this barren fig tree. But friends, how much more costly was a decision made between God the Father and God the Son to make time for us.

At the end of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, he would be faced by the most barren tree imaginable, a Roman cross.

[ 22 : 17 ] And rather than turn away, Jesus identified fully with us. By being nailed to the cross, Jesus would literally take the place of the fruitless and unrepentant.

Do you see it there? That utterly stripped down piece of wood and Jesus allowing himself to be pinned there in the place of the fruitless and unrepentant to literally take our place, to be cut down, to undergo the perishing we deserve so that you and I would never have to Jesus faced God's judgment for us so that we might receive God's favor.

Through the cross, God has made time in the most costly way so that everyone who repents and trusts in Christ can receive pardon and new life.

But the second observation from this parable is this, God has made time but the time won't be forever. The parable ends with another year being given to the fig tree but if the year ends and there's still no fruit that will be the end.

The time of God's mercy, the opportunity to turn, to repent, to receive Christ as king, this time for you and for me, it won't extend forever, Jesus says.

[ 23 : 57 ] Friends, Jesus is warning us not to presume on God's mercy and patience. Our end could come at any moment. Life is fleeting and fragile.

There are no guarantees that you or I will live out even this year. Does that sound a bit morbid to you? And yet, what good does it do to live in denial of the fact?

If you had a medical condition that threatened to take your life, you would want to know, right? So you could get your affairs in order before it was too late. Jesus is the great physician and he's telling us that our spiritual condition is just the same.

Sin will result in spiritual death. But if we turn to him, if we turn to Christ, we can be made right with God, our debt can be forgiven, and we can actually face death and judgment with confidence.

Friends, there's time. God's made time for you. But Jesus is very clear that time is not going to extend forever. The third observation to make about this parable is that it's open-ended.

[ 25 : 18 ] Jesus doesn't tell us whether the fig tree bears fruit or not, does he? And that's intentional, you see. The parable is meant to challenge us.

Jesus is trying to exhort us, to persuade us. He's trying to press home the question, what will you do? The owner has made time for you.

That time will not last forever. How will you respond? the parable is a bit of a cliffhanger, isn't it? How will you respond?

Will you acknowledge that as Jesus says, you too need to repent? Perhaps you're a person of high moral ideals. Perhaps you're here and you're a person of another faith altogether.

Maybe the idea of repentance hasn't seriously crossed your mind before now. Maybe you've never felt the need. But for just a moment, friend, consider the cross of Jesus.

[ 26 : 26 ] The cross of Jesus demonstrates both the unbelievable love of God and the terrible sinfulness of sin. The cross demonstrates the love of God because Jesus was willing and glad to come and die for you.

But the cross also demonstrates the sinfulness of our sin. Jesus had to die in order for our sin to be forgiven. If there was any other way to be reconciled to God, if there was any other path that could be tread, if there was any other way through the dilemma, why on earth would Jesus die if there was some other way?

Why would God send his son in this way? Surely we must need a radical redemption only Jesus can give and that's why Jesus tells everyone to repent and trust in him.

But what about you if you're a long time church attender? Maybe you've been coming to Trinity for some length of time and if so you've probably heard most of what this passage has to say along the way.

If you've been coming to Trinity maybe you've grown up here maybe this is your church where you've been coming your whole life maybe you've been coming here ever since you moved to town maybe you come because your spouse or your friend keeps dragging you along you've heard the gospel of Jesus preached you've heard the good news of forgiveness of sins and new life to all who repent and trust in Christ but let me ask you friend have you actually repented have you made the decisive turn or do you just come and participate in the service and make friends over coffee maybe even serve in a ministry all those things are good things but it's possible to do all that and still not repent repentance is a surrendering of the whole heart to Christ do you sit week after week under God's word without any real turning to him do you see any fruit any evidence of repentance in your life what does fruit of repentance look like here's how

[ 29 : 01 ] J.C. Ryle described it he said real repentance starts to look like this it begins with a knowledge of sin you see it you acknowledge it and it goes on to sorrow for sin you grieve it it leads to confession of sin before God you start to admit it and call out to God for forgiveness but then it starts to bear other fruit it starts to show itself before others by a thorough breaking off from sin you want to not just has your mind changed your heart changed but you want to change your life too it leads to a new direction and it results in producing a habit of deep distaste for all sin it loses the savor that it once had and above all repentance is inseparably connected Ryle says with a lively faith in the Lord Jesus it's a turning from one thing unto him has repentance begun to produce that

sort of fruit in your life has the about face from self to

God the surrender of your whole self to him begun to look like that there's a difference you know between merely professing Christ and really possessing Christ if you've been coming to church for some time can you say you really possess him maybe so maybe by God's grace you can point to the fruit of repentance in your life for many of you here I know that's true and if that is true in your own life then Christian thank God for it and go on repenting to the end of your earthly life perhaps one of the greatest signs that repentance is starting to take root is that you realize how much you always needed that you're never exempt even if you've been a genuine

Christian for a long time friends our repentance will continue all the way into glory when finally we're made new in the very presence of our triune God but responding to Jesus' parable doesn't just mean acknowledging our need to repent it means seeing our need to repent now to really feel the urgency of it do you remember that scene from the screw tape letters if you're a CS Lewis fan early on I think the main character is sitting in the library I imagine him sitting in the in the Bodleian in Oxford staring up maybe he's in Radcliffe camera sort of admiring the glass window and suddenly has this thought oh my goodness God is real and I need to get right with him and it strikes the main character as the most important question in the universe but then he gets hungry and he has to go get something to eat by the time he makes it out to the street and sees the bus is going by and sees the new books he wants to buy oh he's on to something else but friends do you see the urgency of repentance why would you wait it's a very foolish thing to put it off you know some people think that they'll have their fun now and then when they're old they'll come to terms with

God but that is a very foolish agenda friends after all what makes you think that in old age you'll have any desire to come to terms with God and what guarantee do you have that God will allow you to tarry that long and moreover don't you see that a life lived for God in Christ is where your deepest purpose and joy is found repentance is a transformation from death to life from sleeping to waking from captivity to freedom from the dangerous rocks of the cliff ridden shore to the open seas of God's kingdom repentance isn't a turning into some sort of dark alley and biding our time it's stepping out into the light and finding the real reason for which we were made communion with God and a life lived as a part of his loving redemptive liberating reign in the world why on earth would you want to wait are there questions or doubts you still have about Christianity maybe that's what's holding you back then explore them without delay the stakes are too high to keep putting those questions off and maybe you need to consider whether some of your doubts and questions might better be explored inside the faith rather than outside of it you know you can learn how a bike a bicycle works by riding it just as well as by studying it some questions about Christianity may be better answered in a living relationship with Christ than far apart from him maybe you need to take a step and keep exploring that way but maybe it's not the questions or doubts maybe it's the cost of following

[ 34 : 46 ] Jesus that causes you to delay perhaps the idea of transferring your allegiance to Christ makes it seem like the very thought of that seems like you'd lose just too much friends reputation pursuits maybe maybe you feel like you'd lose a key part of your very identity in giving your life over to Christ and transferring yourself to him the cost seems too high but if that's true for you friend remember all that Christ has done for you if he gave up his own life if he climbed the barren tree for you then nothing we lose for him will compare to what we stand to gain God has made time for you his kindness is meant to lead you to repentance don't delay let's pray why don't we take a few moments in the quiet of this moment together just to reflect silently on what

God may have been speaking to our hearts this morning for some of us this morning it's a good opportunity to give quiet thanks in our heart that our eyes have indeed been opened and God has granted us the gift of repentance would you thank him this morning if that's you for some of us there's still things we're grappling with as we consider the claims of Christ I wonder this morning if you would ask God to help give you wisdom and clarity on some of those questions God's a speaking God Jesus says to ask and seek and knock and it will be opened to us would you ask him this morning I wonder if some of us are ready to make the decisive turn that

Jesus talks about in this passage if that's you maybe you could pray something along these lines father I see that I'm more flawed and I'm more sinful than I ever dared believe but I also see that I'm even more loved and more accepted than I ever dared hope father I turn from my old life of living for myself I have nothing in my record to merit your approval but now I rest in what Jesus did and ask to be accepted into God's family into your family father for his sake if you can make that prayer your

own this morning would you tell someone after the service maybe the friend you came with you can talk to me afterwards take a step of being known as a follower of Jesus father we pray that you would take all that we've heard this morning you would seal it into our hearts and above all Lord we pray that you would give us a deep gladness in Christ who has opened the door of repentance for us so that all might go in Jesus we give you praise and glory this morning for the great Savior and Lord that you are and we surrender our lives to you amen well friends one of the first public steps that we take when we've committed our lives to Christ is to make a public profession of faith in baptism baptism is a symbol of our union kingdom kingdom the organization to Creator is responsible to ourempel that has our ■■ in this entering place and another going next to your example is opening this morning