

Luke 13:1-21

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Date: 05 June 2016

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[0 : 0 0] Go ahead and take a seat. Well, friends, our Bible passage tonight is Luke, chapter 13, verses 1 through 21. That's page 872 in the Pew Bible, if you want to follow along there.

Luke, chapter 13, verses 1 through 21, page 872. Let me read this for us.

There were some present at that very time who told Jesus 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. 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. But unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

[1 : 1 3] 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 fig 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 manure on it.

Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good. But if not, you can cut it down. Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath.

And behold, there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for 18 years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, Woman, you are freed from your disability.

And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight. She glorified God. But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, There are six days in which work ought to be done.

[2 : 2 9] Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day. Then the Lord answered him, You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it?

And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan bound for 18 years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day? As he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame, and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him.

He said, He said, What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden, and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.

And again he said, To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? It is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour until it was all leavened.

Let's pray together. Oh Lord, as we have sung just now, here is our heart.

[3 : 56] Speak what is true. Lord, that's what we ask tonight, that you would indeed speak, and that our hearts would be open to hear what you're saying, and that we would be able to say in response, Take my life.

Father, we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. So in our time together tonight, I want us to consider Jesus' call to repentance.

We see it there in verse 3 and verse 5, right? But it's actually, this call to repentance, it's actually a constant theme throughout Jesus' ministry. In fact, according to Matthew and Mark, the other two synoptic gospels, this is how Jesus sums up his preaching and teaching.

This is his message. In Mark, Jesus says, the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the gospel. That's Mark 1 15. And in Matthew, it's even more concise, even more to the point.

Repent, Jesus says, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. That's Matthew 4 17. And even here in Luke's gospel too, we see that repentance is a part of the core of Jesus' message.

[5 : 06] If you go to the end of the gospel, after his resurrection, Jesus commissions his disciples to spread the good news of his saving death and resurrection. And that good news entails, Jesus says, repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

That's Luke 24 47. So clearly, if we're going to understand Jesus, and if we're going to understand what it means to follow Jesus, we have to understand this thing called repentance.

So I want to spend some time tonight zeroing in on this core aspect of Jesus's message. We'll think about what repentance is, and then we'll look at some motivations for repentance, why we should repent that we find here in Luke 13.

And then finally, we'll talk about how we can actually do it, how we can actually repent. So that's sort of where we're going tonight. First, let's think about what repentance is.

What does Jesus mean when he says that we must repent? You know, it's not all that obvious today what Jesus means, I think.

[6 : 10] In fact, I think a lot of people, when they hear the word repent or repentance, basically think that what Jesus is calling for is for us to just clean up our act morally.

Right? You're doing wrong things. You need to start doing right things. You're living an irreligious life. You need to start living a religious life. That's what we think repentance means.

But, you see, just cleaning up your act morally is not actually what Jesus or the Bible means by this word repentance. Repentance, the kind of repentance that Jesus is talking about here is not primarily about your external actions.

biblical repentance has more to do with our hearts, you see. It's a change of heart that then leads to a change of life.

Yes, but first and foremost, it's about a reorientation of the heart. You know, when the Old Testament prophets spoke of repentance, they used a very simple and common Hebrew word, a word that just meant turn or even return.

[7 : 25] The people had been chasing false gods. They had been loving things that weren't gods at all. They had replaced the one true God in their life. And God, through the prophets, called his people to come home, to return to him with all their heart.

That was repentance for the prophets, to turn, to return. And in the New Testament, the word for repentance means something like a change of mind or a change of heart.

It's this inner redirection, a re-centering almost. And that's why Jesus, in verse 1 through 5 of our text tonight, says that everyone needs to repent.

Now, that message would have shocked Jesus' original audience as much as it shocks you and me today. Here in our text, people come to Jesus telling him about a tragedy that's happened.

Pilate, the Roman ruler in Judea, has had some Jews from Galilee killed, apparently, in the temple in Jerusalem while they were offering sacrifices. That's what it means that he mingled their blood with their sacrifices.

[8 : 38] They were worshiping. He had them cut down in the middle of the act of worship. And the people come to Jesus wondering, Jesus, did God allow that to happen to them because they were especially bad sinners?

Was that some sort of form of divine retribution against them? And what does Jesus say? No. You cannot draw a straight line between tragedy and personal sin like that.

That's not how the world works. In fact, he says, they weren't any worse than anyone else. But then, Jesus draws almost the opposite lesson from this than we would expect.

Instead of saying, that was a tragedy, it's sad, it's something to mourn, but you know, sometimes bad things happen to good people and we just have to soldier on.

Isn't that how you and I often respond to tragedy? How does Jesus respond? What lesson does he pull out of this? Jesus says, no, you see, we're all bad and we all need to repent.

[9 : 55] Now note, Jesus is saying this not in a room full of tax collectors and sinners. He's not saying this in a crowd of sort of what we would think is obviously bad people.

He's talking to a group of good, Bible-believing Jews. In today's term, he's talking to a bunch of church-attending, basically good, moral people. And he says, you need to repent.

And doesn't that tell us that repentance is about something deeper than our external actions? Even good people, according to Jesus, need to repent.

Why? Because even good people can have their hearts, their lives, centered on something other than God, you see.

It's entirely possible to live a self-centered life and be very moral, good, and even religious on the outside. Imagine two buildings.

[11 : 08] One building is very poorly constructed. It's just sticks and rocks kind of just patched together. The whole thing looks really shaky and about to fall down. And here's this other building that's beautiful.

It's made of brick and columns and it's solid and it's not going anywhere. Very different buildings on the outside. But then look down at the foundation of those two buildings and you notice that both are built on nothing but a pile of sand.

The pile of sticks and the stately brick colonial home. Both resting on something that's just going to wash away. And you see, friends, it's the same with our lives.

someone can have a really good looking life on the surface but if the foundation, if the center of that life, what drives it, what motivates it is still just self or anything other than God, then it's not really any better in the long run than that pile of sticks, is it?

It's all going to come crashing down and wash away. And so this call to repentance that Jesus issues is not, you see, necessarily a call to start doing more good works but to put your life on a whole new foundation.

[12 : 42] To center your life no longer on yourself, no longer on your own reputation or your own good works but to center your life solely on God and on His Son, Jesus Christ.

In other words, it's a call to stop trying to run your life your own way, to turn around and to entrust your life to God, to surrender to Him and to His Word.

That's what repentance is, a change of heart, a change of allegiance, no longer being your own king but letting God be the king of your life. And now why?

Why ought we do this? Well, here's where we get into our text tonight. We see two reasons. The passage before us tonight has two halves, verses 1-9 and then verses 10-21.

And this first half clearly teaches us that we ought to repent, we ought to hand our lives over to God because danger is coming. Repent because danger is coming.

[13 : 46] Jesus says it quite clearly. Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Jesus is saying that one day God will judge the world with perfect justice, you see.

And on the one hand, deep in our hearts, part of us thinks that that's really good news, right? After all, there's so much evil and suffering and wrong in the world and God's coming judgment tells us that God is not going to let those things continue forever.

He's not going to let evil and wrong and oppression and injustice and murder and hatred and sex trafficking and all the things that aren't right in the world. He's not going to let that continue. He's going to put it to an end.

He's going to judge the world in perfect justice and restore things the way they were supposed to be. And yet, that perfect justice that God is going to bring will be cast over every part of God's creation, you see.

Nothing will be left unturned. And that means every human heart as well. You and me and everyone.

[14 : 59] We will all stand before the God who created us and we will all give an account for the life that we've lived. And then Jesus gives us a picture to help us grasp the reality of what he's saying.

Imagine, Jesus says, a man who owns a vineyard and in the vineyard is a fig tree and he rightfully comes looking for fruit. Which is to say, of course, God has the right to come and require something of us and call for an account.

After all, everything has been created by him. Every breath we take is given by him. Every talent we have, every moment we have is a gift from him. It's all his. We're totally dependent on him. And yet, when the owner comes and looks at the tree, he finds no fruit.

He finds nothing that bears the mark of loving submission to him as ruler, as king. And immediately, what do our hearts say when we're confronted with this reality of giving an account to God?

But wait, I've tried my best to be a really good person. I'm actually not that bad. Trust me. Immediately, our hearts want to justify ourselves, right?

[16 : 16] We come up with all the reasons why we weren't perhaps as loving or faithful or true as we know we maybe should have been. But you know, Lord, there were all these extenuating circumstances.

I was having a really bad day or a really bad month or a really bad year. We recoil at the fact and try to justify ourselves. And yet, doesn't the fact that we so quickly and so instinctively try to justify ourselves, doesn't that in itself tell us that we know we're not the way we should be?

We know we haven't let God be God and put Him at the center of our lives. We know that we've tried to be our own king and try to run our lives our own way. And you know, some of us trying to run our lives our own way have made a wreck of our lives.

And other people trying to run their lives their own way have actually made something of their lives. But Jesus is saying here at the end of the day, it's a house built on the sands that will fall. At the end of the day, it's a barren tree with no fruit.

Cut it down, says the owner. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground? Then another character enters the story.

[17 : 37] A vine dresser. A gardener. A worker. Let's give it one more year, he says. Let's loosen the soil around the roots so the water can get down into it.

Let's put some fertilizer down there. Let's give it one more year. Jesus is saying to his fellow Israelites here in this moment in history, this is it.

God's sending you one more chance to repent. And friends, he's saying the same thing to us. Here it is. God's extending you a season of mercy so that you can stop seeking your own agenda and your own kingdom and you can hand yourself over to God's own agenda and his lordship and his kingdom.

But we will not have forever, you see. God's perfect justice will come and we will give an account to God. And friends, if we have refused to surrender our lives to God, then that day of reckoning will mean danger for us.

God's purpose, cut it down. Why should it use up the ground? And brothers and sisters, friends, obviously this is a warning for all of us.

[18 : 59] Is it not? In love, Jesus is saying to us through this passage, unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. It doesn't matter how long you've attended church.

It doesn't matter how kind or moral or compassionate you try to be. It doesn't matter how much intellectually you know about Christianity or theology. What is the condition? Jesus says, unless you repent, you will perish.

Unless you admit that your heart and your life has been centered on something other than God and you turn and entrust yourself to him and to his son. that's the first reason.

Repent because danger is coming for those who do not. But there's another reason in our passage tonight why we ought to repent. Not only because danger is coming, but because deliverance is here.

in verses 10 through 17 we read of another healing that Jesus performs on the Sabbath. We've seen a few of these in the Gospel of Luke.

[20 : 11] Here is a woman bent over, unable to stand up straight and it's been that way for 18 years afflicted by a disabling spirit. But with a single word from Jesus immediately she's made straight.

Do you see the power of Jesus here? There's no struggle. There's no back and forth. What's held this woman bound for 18 years of her life, almost two decades, is done away with in a moment because Jesus is that powerful because he has that kind of command and control over the world, friends, that he made.

And like so many of Jesus' other miracles on the Sabbath, this one too ignites in controversy. Now, of course, there's no law in the Old Testament forbidding someone to heal on the Sabbath.

But what happened was is that some later Jewish traditions started gathering up and they started to view healing as a form of work. And so, unless it was something really, really life-threatening, healing was prohibited on the Sabbath.

Come back another day. And how does Jesus respond? Comes right out and says, you hypocrites.

[21 : 33] And then he does this little play on words. He says, you'll loose your ox or your donkey and give it water on the Sabbath, but you won't loose this woman from Satan's affliction on the Sabbath? You see, loose and untie are the same word in these verses.

You'll release an animal, but you won't release a daughter of Abraham, one of God's chosen and beloved children. You're out of your minds. What's the Sabbath for, after all?

If you look back at Deuteronomy 20, or excuse me, Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, what was the Sabbath all about? It was about rest and deliverance. The Sabbath was a means of trusting, not in our own works, but in God as our creator and redeemer.

And the Sabbath was this picture too, you see. The Sabbath was this picture, a sign of a great day that was coming. A great day that was coming of true rest and true deliverance from all that afflicted us as human beings.

The day that Jesus says, I'm bringing right now. Jesus has come and deliverance is here and what the Sabbath was always all about is breaking forth right before their very eyes.

[22 : 50] Freedom from sin and guilt and shame. You see friends, this woman's physical condition is a mirror of all of our spiritual condition. Aren't all of us bent over by sin and by guilt?

And doesn't Satan, the accuser of our soul, want to come and just rub it in and keep us bound. But Jesus has come to conquer sin and to conquer death and to conquer condemnation and to utterly overwhelm the evil one.

To put an end to our sin and to silence his accusations and to allow us at last to be loosed from our burden and to be released from our sin and to be untied from our guilt and to allow us at last to stand up straight in the presence of God.

Friends, we need to repent. We need to turn to Christ because deliverance is here. Don't be like the ruler of the synagogue here. Jesus upsets his comfortable little Sabbath service, doesn't he?

We're going to read a little scripture. We're going to have a little talk. We're going to sing a few songs. It's all quaint. It's all comfortable. It's all controlled. And we all go home. The ruler of the synagogue, the synagogue was most often just a layman who presided over the affairs of the synagogue.

[24 : 14] He would organize and often teach in the services. Sort of the guy who kind of called the shots. And then Jesus comes in. And suddenly, instead of the ruler of the synagogue having his quaint little Sabbath service, all eyes are on Jesus.

All eyes are on him. The one with the power to actually redeem. And just like this ruler of the synagogue, friends, aren't we just like him that we don't really like to have Jesus at the center sometimes?

We'd much rather have all eyes on us. We want to be at the center. We like to stay in control. But we can't release any of our burdens.

And we can't untie the guilt that comes with our sin. Only Jesus can. And if we let go of running our lives our own way and we give ourselves over to him if we repent, then he'll bring that deliverance into our lives too, you see.

And like a mustard seed, it will seem so small at first. And so much of the world will seem to be unchanged.

[25 : 40] And yet Jesus says it will grow until it last. God's kingdom will be all in all. You know, we can look out at the world, can't we?

And we can doubt that deliverance has really come in Jesus. Jesus. But you have to understand what the kingdom of God is like, Jesus says. It's like a seed.

If I were to hold a mustard seed here in my hand, none of you would be able to see it. I would drop it and we would never find it on our brown carpet. It would be gone. If I had a little yeast in my hand and I blew it, it would disappear.

Jesus is saying the kingdom begins in an almost insignificant way. And isn't that true?

Jesus' first coming was not what anyone was expecting of the Messiah. This was not what they were expecting of God's in-breaking rule. This is not what they were expecting of God's kingdom.

[26 : 44] Jesus was not a military hero. He did not end all of their national troubles. He preached, he healed, he had a couple followers, he offended the religious establishment and he was crucified.

But, unlike all the other would-be messiahs whose lives ended in the same way, Jesus' claims were actually true. Jesus was God's son.

Jesus was God's king. Jesus was bringing in the kingdom. And to demonstrate that, to demonstrate that Jesus truly was God's king, three days after his crucifixion and burial, God raised him from the dead.

And now, friends, what do we see of that insignificant beginning of the kingdom? kingdom. Now, Jesus' kingdom extends across the world.

A few ragtag disciples, a bunch of fishermen and tax collectors, one woman healed on one Sabbath day. A bunch of tiny seeds.

[28 : 04] And now, in every corner of this world that we live in, you will find people who profess the name of Jesus as Lord. The kingdom, friends, is growing. It starts small, it grows.

And one day, Jesus will return and his kingdom will be all in all. And that deliverance that we long for, that we wait for, that we're so struggling to see because it's not here, one day it will be complete and like leaven, it will work its way out through every aspect of life.

And all sickness and sin and death and disease and shame and jealousy and lust and all of that's going to be done. And in its place will be God's own glorious rule. So friends, repent and turn because deliverance has come.

The kingdom of God has arrived and one day it's going to be all in all and you are all called to be a part. Finally then, how can we repent?

We've seen what it is and why we should do it. But you know, what's actually going to dislodge us from our self-centeredness and turn us to God? How do we get unstuck from ourselves and come to embrace God as all in all?

[29 : 29] Well, friends, we've actually been talking about it this whole time. One way to see it is to see that Jesus here tells two stories about two trees, one utterly fruitless and another full of life and growing to be big enough to provide rest for all who come.

What's going to pull you out of that self-centered agenda that you live on? Seeing what Jesus Christ has done for you, you see.

See, at this point in Luke's story, at this point in Jesus' life, he's on his way to Jerusalem. Jesus is on his way to his own tree. He's on his way to the cross.

And on the cross, Jesus is going to be willingly cut down like a fruitless fig tree. He's going to die the death that you and I deserve because of our self-centered lives.

And he's going to satisfy God's justice for us. And he's going to unleash God's deliverance. And because Christ rose again, because he lives, because Jesus right now stands at God's right hand as king, right now by his spirit and in the proclamation of his word, Jesus himself, the risen king, is calling us to come, to turn, to repent.

[30 : 57] To see what he's done through the cross for you and for me and to come. the living Christ even now is summoning you to come and to escape from the danger and to know his deliverance.

Jesus would say to John many years later, I stand at the door and I knock and if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I'll come into him and eat with him and he with me.

Friends, Jesus freely grants repentance. Open the door of your heart to him. And friends, if you've done that, if you're here tonight and you are a Christian, what is this passage teaching us?

In many ways, it's teaching us to keep on doing just that. Jesus is going to keep on knocking on the doors of our life and like a seed, repentance is the continual act of handing over our life to him.

Whenever he knocks on another area of our life, we open to him and let him have his way. We turn from those self-centered pursuits and we embrace him as king.

[32 : 18] And that constant turning over of our lives to him, that is the continual life of a Christian. Christian. That's how we get into the kingdom and that's how we grow as his kingdom people, by letting him be king more and more and more in our lives and trusting that his grace covers all of our sins.

In just a second, as we come to the Lord's Supper, friends, this is an opportunity for all of us to do what this passage is telling us to do, to repent. If you're here tonight and you have not trusted Christ, then here is your chance to do so for the first time.

To step over the line and to take him as Savior and to trust him as Lord. And for those of us who have trusted him, this is our chance through the Lord's Supper to surrender to him more and more.

To hand over to him all those areas of our hearts that we want to withhold and to let him reign there as well. So friends, tonight, repent.

Give your life to him. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we confess that often it is so hard for us to do what you tell us to do in this passage.

[33 : 42] And so we need your spirit to come and to pull us and to change us and to get us to see all of you in your beauty and your glory, to see what you've done for us on the cross.

Lord, would you come and would you make yourself real to our hearts tonight and help us, Lord. Give us the strength to repent. Oh, Lord, help us to see how it is freedom itself to stop trying to live for ourselves and to live for you, the one who made us and who loves us and will never lead us astray.

And so, Lord, as we come to your table, would you feed and fuel the faith of those whom you have called to yourself, those whom have trusted in you. Lord, would we be strengthened to live our lives for you as we remember your death and resurrection for us.

And, Lord Jesus, for those who are here and don't know you, who are still considering you, Lord, would you draw them close to yourself? Help them, Lord, to come to faith in you, we pray.

In your name, amen. Amen.