

Text: Luke 13:1-9 (Pew Bible pg.1032)

Title: “Repent ... Now!”

INTRODUCTION

Well this has been an extraordinary week of ministry for our church. Last Thursday night we had the Men’s Wild Game Dinner. We had nearly 400 men present, and almost half of them were guests. And when the Gospel was shared we had 16 men indicate that they had prayed to receive Christ. This morning at 5:30am our church led out in the Cowtown Marathon pre-race worship service and we had hundreds show up for that. Now ladies, it’s your turn to INVITE. The Ladies Brunch with Mary Jo Sharp is next Saturday. Come and enjoy the fellowship and bring a friend. Today is the last day to get tickets in the Welcome Center.

As a pastor I know that many of you come to church each week beaten up by the world you live in the other six days a week, and you need encouragement and comfort. And my spiritual gifts make me want to give that encouragement and comfort. However, I’m aware that the greatest peril you may be in today is *not* that you work for a cranky boss, or that you live with an insensitive spouse, or that you can’t pay your bills. Instead, the greater peril is that you or I might have come to a place in our lives where we have grown calloused towards God ... living with huge pockets of disobedience in our lives ... pretending to be one thing, but we’re really not what others think we are. And the greatest need when we get into that condition is not to be *comforted*, but to be *confronted*. Jesus is gracious and merciful to get all up in our spiritual business as He did one day with some people in Jerusalem. Turn to Luke 13. Jesus often used something called “parables” or life stories to illustrate the message of truth He was communicating. We’re looking at some of the life stories of Jesus in Luke’s Gospel. Read Luke 13:1-9.

Two words summarize what Jesus is teaching in this passage: “Repent ... Now!”

Please don’t tune out here. I know the image that comes to your mind is some guy standing on a street corner with a sign that says, “Repent. The End Is Near!” Or you may think that repentance was something people do when they get saved, but not after that. I want to correct that misconception.

The fact is that Jesus used the word “repent” often. It means to change your mind about the direction you’re going. But let me give you a fuller definition (worship folder):

DEFINITION: Repentance is the holy disgust of our sin that leads us to depend on God to forgive and change us.

It’s not just feeling bad about sin. It’s not just regretting that we got caught, or that we have to experience the consequences of our sin. It is a genuine disgust with our sin because it’s an affront to God. And repentance isn’t just reforming ourselves and getting rid of our sin in our own strength. Repentance always involves a change in the direction of our lives, but we cannot do that on our own. Only God can forgive, cleanse and change us. Praise God, He has provided a way for us to be forgiven and for our lives to be changed through the death of His Son on the cross.

So repentance is for all of us:

- Repentance is for people far from God. And they need to hear the message that they need to repent. So often we leave this out of the Gospel message. But the Bible says...

Acts 3:19 - Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

- Repentance is also for believers. Believers need to repent. We see it frequently in the Bible. For example, in the Revelation we have seven letters that Jesus addressed to churches in NT times. And three of the letters contain calls from Jesus for church members to repent.

Revelation 3:19 - Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.

So the first thing I want you to notice from the Scripture this morning is...

1. THE NECESSITY OF REPENTANCE (Luke 13:1-5)

It's necessary for all of us. Now in Luke 13, some people came to Jesus with a piece of news:

Luke 13:1 - Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.

We know that Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor over Judea who ordered the death of Jesus, was brutal. And on this occasion Pilate slaughtered some Jewish people who were making their offerings at the Temple in Jerusalem. And Jesus knows exactly where these people were going with this information.

Luke 13:2 - Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?"

You see, this was the typical Jewish way of looking at tragedy. Surely these people were extraordinary sinners, and that's the reason they met with such a dreadful death. And Jesus goes on to say...

Luke 13:3 - I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.

That's an odd response to these people. But remember, Jesus knew exactly what they were thinking.

Just notice that Jesus doesn't say, "Unless you repent, you too will all *die* (like those Galileans that Pilate killed)." No Jesus said, "You will all *perish*." He's talking about something worse than physical death. Then Jesus goes on to say...

Luke 13:4 - Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?"

Now this may have been an accident that occurred while this tower in Siloam was under construction. And the prevailing attitude among the Jews was that these people must have been extraordinary sinners because they died like they did. But once again Jesus shoots right through that thinking:

Luke 13:5 - I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”

Now the point is not that these Galileans slain by Pilate, or these people who had the tower fall on them were extraordinary sinners. Actually they were ordinary sinners like everyone else ... and death came to them suddenly, unexpectedly and quickly. They were not prepared.

You read about people who are killed by violence every day. And people are killed in accidents every day. Anyone can die at any time. If those Galileans had known what peril they were in they would have taken actions to protect themselves. If those who were crushed under the falling tower of Siloam knew what peril they were in ahead of time they would have taken precautions to protect themselves. And if we only knew what peril we are in apart from Christ, and that death can come upon us suddenly and unexpectedly, and if we knew that the only thing that can protect us from the peril of God’s judgment is to repent and believe ... then we must repent now.

You see Jesus is speaking to people who have heard His message and seen His miracles, but have not repented and turned to God in faith. They had heard Jesus say:

John 3:16 - “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Death can come suddenly. Your life can be snuffed out in an instant. And if you don’t repent, something worse than physical death will come upon you ... you will perish ... the opposite of eternal life is spiritual death. But also when a person believes and repents it leads to spiritual life ... eternal life.

So that’s the necessity of repentance, but the other part of Jesus message is...

2. THE URGENCY OF REPENTANCE (Luke 13:6-9)

Repent now! To underscore and throw the spotlight on the urgency of repentance Jesus tells this parable:

Luke 13:6 - Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any.

Remember that Jesus’ life stories were most always taken from experiences in life that just about everyone could identify with. And that is the case with this story. A farmer has a vineyard where grape vines grow, but he also has planted a fig tree in his vineyard where it would receive special care and cultivation in order for the tree to produce fruit (figs).

You should know that the fig tree in the OT was often a symbol of Israel. They had been planted by God's grace in a privileged place among all the nations. But the sad story is that God had come to announce to His people that their long-awaited Messiah and Deliverer had come in the person of Jesus Christ. But Israel had rejected the Messiah. There was no fruit on the fig tree.

ILLUSTRATION - So this farmer has planted a fig tree in his vineyard. He expected fruit. It wasn't shade or beauty, or landscaping ... it was for fruit ... for bearing figs. And their lives were like this artificial tree here on the stage. (A ficus tree is a variety of fig tree.) You see these artificial trees in buildings everywhere. We stick them somewhere to add a little color. But we would never expect to show up one day and find real figs hanging on the branches.

But when Jesus examined these people, He expected fruit.

Luke 13:7 - 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?'

So for three years the owner had come looking for fruit on the fig tree, and he found none. All the while, this fig tree was wasting the ground it was planted in. And so the farmer decides to cut it down. But the farmer's helper, whose job it was to tend to the vines and the trees thinks there's still hope for the tree to bear fruit. So...

Luke 13:8 - "Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it.

The caretaker said, "Give it one more year. I'll give it some extra attention. Let's see what will happen." So the caretaker was patient and merciful toward the fig tree. And God is merciful and patient with us when we don't bear fruit. But there comes a time when God's mercy ends and His judgment begins, and it's too late to repent. The person dies or Christ returns, then that person has to face the wrath of God

Luke 13:9 - If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.' "

REPENTANCE FOR A NON-BELIEVER:

Remember that repentance is *the holy disgust of our sin that leads us to depend on God to forgive and change us.*

This means you come to the knowledge with the help of God's Spirit that you stand guilty before God and you deserve to be separated from Him for eternity. But God loved you so much that He let His Son die in your place so that you can experience eternal life, not eternal death.

And repentance for you then means that you come to see your sin as God does ... you hate it and are disgusted with it. And yet you know you can't change yourself so you turn in faith to Christ for forgiveness and for transformation.

2 Peter 3:9b - He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

REPENTANCE FOR A BELIEVER:

Again, repentance is *the holy disgust of our sin that leads us to depend on God to forgive and change us.*

You see non-believers and believers repent of the same thing ... sin. But they do so for different reasons. As a non-believer I repented because I knew that I was in the very real danger of perishing ... of being separated from God for eternity in a place called hell because of my sin. But as a believer I repent for a different reason. It's not because I fear God's wrath because...

Romans 8:1 - Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,

There is an element of fear, however, in our repentance as believers. If we persist in an area of disobedience in our lives, God, our Father, is bound to correct us, like any good father corrects his children. And that disciplines is painful.

Revelation 3:19 - Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.

So for believers true repentance is the broken heart we have over anything in our lives that displeases or dishonors our Lord. And there is a sense of urgency to this because every day, every hour, every minute out of fellowship with our Lord is wasted and worthless.

Let me give you a simple gauge for your spiritual maturity. It has nothing to do with how much knowledge you have of the Bible, or what positions you hold in the church, or how many times you come to church every week. The best gauge I know for one's spiritual maturity is how long it takes you to repent.

EXAMPLE: Suppose you're reading in your Bible or listening to a message or a Bible study and you become aware that you are bitter toward something or someone. How long does it take you to deal with that before God? Now I'm not talking about superficial repentance where you say, "God, I'm sorry." But you really don't change your attitude about that bitterness. You still, deep down in your heart, are prideful ("I don't want to admit I'm wrong."), or self-justifying ("I deserve to be bitter."). I'm asking you how long it takes you to get to the place where you come clean before God: "Lord, that bitterness is ugly sin to You. I don't want anything like that in my life because it displeases You and dishonors You. So God with your help I'm letting go."

HOW LONG DOES IT USUALLY TAKE YOU TO REPENT?

Weeks -----→ Days -----→ Hours -----→ Minutes

What ends up happening for many believers is that they go along for months or years living in disobedience to God. God has been patient and merciful all along, but then His appointed time of

discipline comes ... and it's bad. This guy has been running from God for so long that when God finally deals with them it is a crisis.

ILLUSTRATION – It's like learning to drive a car. We go too long before making corrections. We veer off to one side or the other for too long, then we have to make huge adjustments with the steering wheel, and we just about throw our instructor out of the car. Or we don't maintain our proper speed and we're going too slow for too long, so we stomp on the accelerator and give our instructor a whiplash. Or we're going around a curve and we realize that we are going way too fast for the curve so we slam on the breaks, and just about throw our instructor through the windshield. This happens because we wait too long before making adjustments. As we become a better driver we make adjustments more often, but they're usually small adjustments before the situation gets so bad.

The same thing is true with repentance. We repent NOW, not waiting for things to get so bad that in order to get right with God it's a big crisis. We discipline ourselves to walk in such conscious communion with our Lord, that we realize immediately when we have an attitude that is not Christ-like, or we've said something before we measured our words, or we let our eyes glance in the direction of something that pulled our minds into lust or covetousness. And immediately we repent with a holy disgust for anything that doesn't please our Lord, and we depend on Him for forgiveness and transformation.

And this is the fruit that God is looking for in our lives.

Matthew 3:8 - Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

Luke 13:9 - If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.' ”

Now the parable is open-ended. We don't know what happened to the tree, do we? Did it bear fruit? Did the special attention given by the caretaker produce anything? Was the tree spared or cut down? We don't know. We cannot answer the question, "What happened to the tree?" The only question we can answer is, "What will happen to me?"