

UNLESS YOU REPENT

This morning I am going to speak the subject of repentance. If you have gotten involved with the NTS (New Testament Studies) we are doing, you will immediately recognize this as a subject brought up several times in the assigned reading for this past week. It is found in the beginning of chapter 13, which we will come to shortly. It is found again a couple of times in chapter 15 in connection with the lost sheep and the lost coin, and it is found yet another time in chapter 16 in the story which Jesus told involving the poor man named Lazarus and a rich man who died.

Unfortunately, this is not a subject that arouses much interest. I'm not sure of all the reasons for that, but it seems to be true. Possibly many people do not understand what it is. They may not understand why it is something they should be interested in. Not knowing much about it, they may just not give it a whole lot of thought. Whatever the reason, enthusiasm for this subject is generally lacking.

I think that's interesting because if we take the Scriptures seriously, this is a very important subject. We might even call it a critical concern! It certainly is a Biblical one. The word "repent" is found about 10 times in the OT, but for the most part, it is something that the NT stresses.

It is the message preached by John the Baptist. **Matthew 3:2** tells us that John came preaching "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" A few verses later, he told the multitudes who were coming out to see and hear him, "*Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.*"

Calling people to repentance is also something that Jesus preached with great vigor. **Matthew 4:17** tells us, "*From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'*" Then in **Matthew 11:20**, we read, that Jesus "*began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent.*" **Luke 5:32** says Jesus said, "*I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.*"

When Jesus sent out the apostles, on what we call the "limited commission," they too were calling people to repentance. **Matthew 6:12** says, "*So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent.*" Following his resurrection and prior to his ascension Jesus gave the apostles what we call the "great commission," telling them, "*that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*"

And so that's what the apostles did. We find it in their message on the day of Pentecost. When multitudes were convicted of putting their Savior to death, they cried out, wanting to know what they could do about it. **Acts 2:38** says the apostle Peter told them, "*...Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*"

Acts 5:31 and 11:18 speaks about repentance being given to the Israelites and granted to the Gentiles, meaning that through the gospel of Christ God was giving them the opportunity to repent rather than perish for their sins. In **Acts 17:30**, the apostle Paul, speaking to a group of Greek philosophers in Athens said: *“the times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.”*

The apostle Peter writes in **2 Peter 3:9**, that *“the Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”*

Ten times in the book of Revelation people are called on to repent, including this one, found in **3:19**: *“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.”*

Those and many other passages just like them fill the pages of the NT, but the ones that I most want to direct your attention to this morning are the ones found in our reading this week in the 13th chapter of Luke. If you brought your Bibles, please open them to verse 1, and let's read together through verse 5:

There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. (2) And he answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? (3) No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. (4) Or those eighteen 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? (5) No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

One day, as Luke relates it here, some people came to Jesus and told him about a very gruesome event. Just why this came up we are not told. It would be as if someone were to approach you today and want to tell you all about the killings that took place recently out in Connecticut. Apparently some Galilean Jews had gone to Jerusalem to worship God in the Temple. While they were in there, King Herod sent his soldiers in to kill them, and so their blood was all over the altar and the temple along with the blood of their sacrifices.

Undoubtedly Jesus knew what they were thinking; why they had brought that up. In their minds, the horrific way these people died was proof positive that they were grievous sinners, never mind that they had come to Jerusalem to worship God. What Jesus said in response must have set the people back on their heels. He said, *“Do you think that those Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered in this way?”* And then he answered his own question with an application to those who had come to tell him about those things. He said, *“No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”*

And then he told them about another situation where eighteen people had been killed when a tower fell in on them, and again he asked, *“Do you think they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem?”* And again he answered his own question, and again making an application for those who were listening to him: *“No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”*

My goal this morning, and it is not a pleasant one, at least not in the doing; hopefully it will be in the effect, is to help you really come to grips with what Jesus was saying there. *“Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”* You see, in those few words are some terrible implications; the kind that sort of hit you in the gut. I am sure the people who came to Jesus that day did not expect to hear anything like that, and in a very short period of time, they found themselves, as you will, standing at the most important crossroads of their life.

I am going to begin with the word “perish.”

What did Jesus mean when He used that word, “perish?” And of course, sometimes that word is used to simply convey the idea of dying physically. That isn’t the way that Jesus used it here because He implies that if people do repent, they won’t perish, and we know even penitent, godly people die. So, “perish” here must mean more than simply dying. I take Jesus here to be speaking about the punishment that is going to come following the final judgment.

Those Galileans experienced a horrible end and unless you repent, you will also experience a horrible end. Think about this word “perish” a little more. In **John 3:16**, it says, *“For God so loved the world that whosoever believes on him shall not perish but have everlasting life.”* **John 10:28** teaches the same thing: *I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.*

Jesus contrasts perishing with eternal life. What is the opposite of eternal life? **Matthew 25:46** gives us the answer. He had been talking about the last judgment and he said, *“And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”*

When Jesus talked about people perishing, he was talking about a punishment that is without end that begins after the final judgment. **Hebrews 9:27** says, *“It is appointed unto men once to die, and after that comes judgment.”* After the judgment sinners will begin to experience punishment in an everlasting fire that was prepared for the devil and his angels. That is how serious sin is. And guess what? We all sin. We all sin every day, and Jesus said, “Unless you repent you will perish.

Let’s look next at the word “all.” Jesus said, *“Unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”* I think most people have a hard time buying into that; of believing that. They have been conditioned to think and believe—wrongly of course—that God is so good, so loving and kind, so merciful and forgiving that in reality only a few people will really suffer eternal punishment. To think anything else just doesn’t fit their preconceived beliefs about God.

Now, it is true that God is good. God is gracious and forgiving, but did you hear Jesus? He said, *"Unless you repent you will all likewise perish."* The sad, disturbing truth is, very few people are going to ever do that. We know that because Jesus said that. In **Matthew 7:13,14** he said,

"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. (14) For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."

That isn't how most people see it. They think God is going to save the many and only a few will be lost. Jesus taught the exact opposite, didn't he?

The reason why Jesus taught this is because everyone sins. We know what Romans 3:23 says. We know what our own experience tells us. And we know that wages of sin is death, and what Jesus was saying here in Luke 13 is that you don't have to be the worst sinner in the world to deserve everlasting punishment. You began to deserve that the moment you committed your very first sin.

If we had received immediately what we deserved when we first sinned, we would have died immediately and gone straight to a place of eternal torment. Some people question that. They wonder about that. How can one sin be so bad as to deserve eternal punishment? How can one little cancer cell cause such havoc and heartache? How can one little lie ruin someone's whole life? How can one little bullet, fired in one little moment of anger end someone's life forever? The truth is you and I are not equipped to judge the seriousness of even one sin. We need to take God's word for it. This stuff is serious!

The fact that we are still here, still sitting here with yet another opportunity to believe and repent and obey is due not to our sins not being all that bad, nor is it due to our goodness. We are still here due to God's goodness and His patience. Remember? Remember the words of Peter I referred to earlier? Peter said, *"the Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."*

Jesus was teaching that all of us are extremely sinful. Not innocent children of course, but everyone who has reached that age of accountability is sinful. Sin separates us from a holy God. Sin earns for us its wages, which is death—Romans 6:23. Not just physical death, but eternal suffering. And you see, that's every one of us. We are ALL guilty and we are ALL in need of repentance, and if we don't do that, we are going to perish!

Do you know what is amazing to me anymore? It isn't that great calamities come upon some people, but that over and over again God patiently gives us another opportunity to repent. We shouldn't be shocked that guilty sinners are going to suffer eternally, but that God is so slow to anger that He often waits for years, and often in vain for people to do what? To repent of their sins!!!

Do you understand? Do you understand that YOU are going to suffer everlasting punishment if you do not repent of your sins? Do you understand that everyone you know, everyone you have ever known, or ever will know are going to suffer everlasting punishment if they do not repent of their sins! Are you okay with that? Do you understand that your neighbor is going to perish, your children are going to perish, your parents are going to perish, the people you work with or go to class with are going to perish if they do not repent of their sins?

This is not some little problem we have here! This is HUGE! If there was a disease, like the AIDS epidemic that struck some years ago, that threatened to kill most of the population of the world, do you think people would think that unimportant? But what can AIDS or some other disease do to you? The only thing it can cost you is your earthly life. Jesus said, "*Do not fear what kills the body and after that can do nothing. Fear what can cast both soul and body into hell*" (Luke 12:4–5).

Jesus said, "*unless you repent you will all likewise perish.*" Obviously then, repentance is something we need to think about a lot, and something we need to do even more. But just what did Jesus mean by this word "repentance?" Let me answer that by looking at a couple of things that it certainly does not mean, and then wrap up this lesson by looking at what it does mean.

Many people mistakenly believe that repentance is being sorry for something. But one can be sorry about something without repenting. It all depends on the cause or nature of the sorrow. In **2 Corinthians 7:10**, the Bible speaks about two different types of sorrow. One is called godly sorrow, and the other is called worldly sorrow. Notice what Paul says about godly sorrow. He writes: "*For godly sorrow produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.*" If repentance is produced by godly sorrow, then that tells you that it is not the same thing as godly sorrow. So repentance is not just being sorry for something.

Others think that repentance is what you do when you do something wrong. Some call it penance. It might be a self-imposed restriction from something, or doing something to make up for what you did wrong. But that isn't repentance. That's the "fruit of repentance." In **Matthew 3:8**, John the Baptist told some who were coming out to him that they needed to "*Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.*" That is, there are some things you do because you have repented; things that show or reflect true penance. But if you do something to show your repentance, then obviously repentance is something besides the things you do. Now it is important that we bear fruit in keeping with repentance because if a person says he has repented but doesn't show that repentance, it is doubtful that he really repented.

So, if repentance is not being sorry for doing something wrong, and it is not doing something to make up for doing something wrong, then what is it? It is critically important that we get this; that we understand it completely. Otherwise, we might not ever really repent of our sins, and what did Jesus say? He said, "*Unless you repent you will perish.*"

So what is repentance? The word," Greek scholars tell us, means having a change of mind. According to Vines Expository Dictionary, in the New Testament, it always involves a change for the better; an amendment of your ways, and it is always a change of mind with regard to sin. Repentance is changing the way you think and feel about sin. Whereas before you gave it little thought. Sin was not a big deal to you. It didn't particularly bother you; you didn't feel any compulsion to stop. In fact, for some sins you may have even gone to some length to justify them. You never realized how serious and consequential sin is. That is one reason why Christ came to die on the cross. In taking the punishment for our sins, He wanted us to get a good look at just how bad sin really is.

Because sin is so prevalent in our world and in our lives, we sometimes tend to take it for granted. We think that some sinning is natural, that it can't be helped, and that a few sins won't matter all that much! It is only when we stand and look upon the cross can we begin to realize just how horrific and destructive every sin really is. And it is precisely because we sin so easily, so often, and have such a lax attitude towards it that repentance is absolutely essential.

We have to always be changing our mind about sin. When we aren't living penitent lives, being conscious of our sins, then sin begins to harden us; it begins to blind us and to bind us. We become deceived by sin and then we are in danger of going to our grave with sins unforgiven because we never truly repented of them.

We can feel bad about sin, all day long. We can try to make up for sin by doing all kinds of good things, and we can do that all day long, but if we do not have a change of mind about sin, and especially our sins, as Jesus said, we are going to perish.

When Jesus talked about repentance there in Luke 13, he wasn't talking about something you did one time just before you were baptized. He was talking about something we must do again and again. Why? Because we keep on sinning over and over again, and there is no little sin.

Now the good news: We can repent! The Bible says, God grants repentance, meaning He gives us the knowledge and opportunity and the motivation to change our minds. And as Jesus implied, if we do repent, we will not perish. Just as John 3:16 says, if we believe we will not perish, so too, if we repent we will not perish. Of course we wouldn't repent if we didn't believe and if we truly believe, we will repent, and when we do, we find God like the father of that prodigal son, waiting to welcome us home.

Okay, so how do I want you to apply this morning's lesson? I want you to,

- realize and confess that whoever you are, you are a sinner.
- I want you to change your mind about your sins, that they are not just some minor thing. I want you to see your sins in the light of the cross.
- I want you to bear fruit in keeping with your repentance.
- If you have yet to obey the gospel, confessing the name of Christ and being baptized for the remission of your sins, then stop putting that off.

- If you have obeyed the gospel but have gone back to your old sinful ways, then recognize that the great deceiver has gotten to you again and that you are once again in danger of perishing.

If we can help you in some way this morning, please come and let us know while we stand and sing.