

TO REPENT OR NOT REPENT? THAT IS THE QUESTION – LUKE 13:1-9

PASTOR COLIN RIEKE ~ MARCH 8, 2015

Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. ² Jesus answered, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? ³ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. 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? ⁵ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.” ⁶ Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. 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?’ ⁸ “‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. ⁹ If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’”



This is the day the Lord has made let us rejoice and be glad in it,

The day began like any other. Mattathias got up early in the morning, ate breakfast and dressed in his priestly garb. He set out for the temple to help with the morning sacrifice. Along the way, he met another priest who asked him if he heard about the insurrection which started in Galilee. “Yea, there were some of these Galileans who were like, ‘we don’t want this stinkin’ Roman government any more, we are Israelites!’” Mattathias knew the story of insurrection well. His parents had named him after the famous Maccabean ruler who caused trouble two centuries ago. Apparently, the Jewish idea of freedom didn’t die with them. Mattathias wasn’t against the idea of freedom, he just knew the Israelites would be free in God’s time, not in man’s time.

Mattathias arrived at the temple and went about his daily routine. But just as they were offering the morning sacrifice, the sound of hurried footsteps echoed through the temple grounds. Six men, raced around the corner and into the temple, close on their heels was a garrison of Roman soldiers. “Not in the temple” Mattathias thought, and yet it happened. As the men reached out for the horns of the altar the Roman soldiers pulled him away. There was resistance, and then bloodshed, and soon, it was all over – the insurrection, and the lives of the six Galileans who were some of the instigators.

It would have been a story similar to this that was well known on the street corners and in the coffee shops of Jerusalem. Galileans, known for their liberalistic leanings, had suffered a terrible fate in the temple of all places – the dwelling place of God with his people. No doubt there was murmurings not only against the Roman government, but maybe even about these Galileans. Did they do some terrible thing that God punished them in this horrible way – a way that made them unclean as they passed on into the afterlife?

It’s not unlike the questions which we pose of God when something terrible happens, whether a natural disaster or manmade. “Why would God



allow this?" We ask. Or we think that those people must have done something bad to deserve that punishment. Some probably are asking that when we hear about the violent actions of the terror organization ISIS. We can think God is punishing us because we don't have a job, we lost a spouse, or came down with a terrible disease.

But then we look at Jesus response to such tragedy. He did not respond with an answer to the question of "Why did God allow this to happen?" But rather directed the attention to a different question, a different perspective, a different tragedy. For the real tragedy is an unrepentant sinner. TO REPENT OR NOT REPENT? THAT IS THE QUESTION. Because:

1. Repentance is necessary

2. Repentance bears fruit.

(1)

Maybe you think it's a dumb question, TO REPENT OR NOT REPENT? Don't all Christians know that they ought to repent? Well they should know that, and I believe many Christians do. But what people know, and what people do, can be two very different things. I can know that it's good for me to eat healthful and get exercise, but just knowing that isn't going to help my body. Likewise for a Christian, just knowing we need to repent isn't enough, it's putting it into practice. And this morning, Jesus lets us know the importance of putting this lesson into practice. This stone of repentance is vital in building up our faith and trust in our Lord and Savior.

Maybe if Jesus is telling people to do something, we need to understand what that is he is telling us to do. "Repent" can be one of those words that the church throws around and expects everyone to know, and because of that, they really don't explain it. Repentance is more than just saying "sorry" for something you've done. Repentance is a turning around, like one of those U-turn signs you see on the road. Repentance is a turning away from sin, and a turning around to God.

Jesus used this time as an opportunity to teach about repentance. Jesus was met by some people who were wondering about something. They were wondering if this group of Galileans had done something that God would give them such a gruesome death. Jesus added to the mix a group of individuals who died when a tower accidentally fell on them. The idea of karma was as alive and well in Jesus' day as it is in our day today. And while there can be direct consequences for our actions, there doesn't always have to be Jesus says. Instead of asking the question "Why did God allow this to happen?" Jesus lets us know the value of repentance. It isn't just some people who need to repent, it's all people. Because the issue isn't what kind of a death we are going to die, it's the fact that we are all going to die – so stop the comparisons.

These comparisons are so easy for us to do as Christians, we make them naturally. We compare ourselves to our siblings, we compare ourselves to our co-workers, we compare ourselves to other Christians. Sometimes our comparisons make us feel good, sometimes our comparisons make us feel worthless. We compare ourselves to the ISIS terrorists in the Middle East, and we feel pretty good about ourselves. Or we could compare ourselves to a supermodel or Mother Theresa and see how unfit and unholy we are.

Repentance doesn't make comparisons. Instead of comparing ourselves to others, like the Jews of Jesus' day, Jesus says to worry about ourselves. We need to compare ourselves with the only thing that really matters, and that is God's Word. When we compare ourselves to God's Word and the standard he sets, it becomes very clear very quickly that we do not measure up. This is why repentance is necessary – for everybody

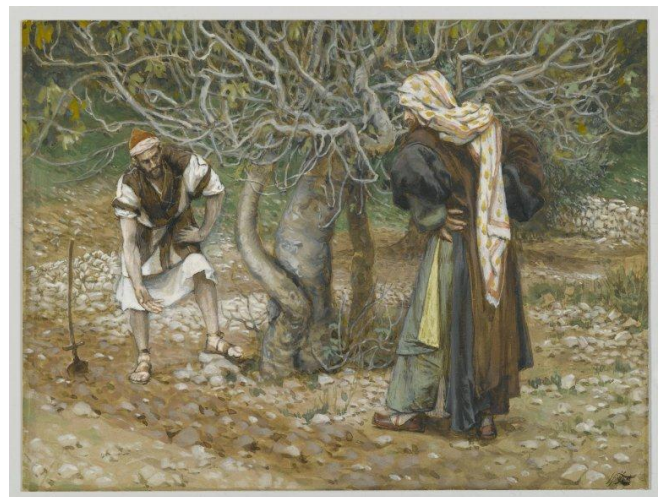
But let us not think that repentance is just something we do one time – maybe when we become a Christian, or maybe when we finally decide to turn away from a particular sin. People's idea of baptism may contribute to this thought that repentance is a one-time occurrence. But the Bible describes repentance in a different way. Repentance is a continual pursuit. This is why Martin Luther included in his description of baptism this about repentance: [In baptism] our Old Adam with his evil deeds and desires should be drowned by daily contrition and repentance, and die, and that day by day a new man should arise, as from the dead, to live in the presence of God in righteousness and purity now and forever."

And yet we should never think that repentance is some action that we stir within ourselves, or some action we take to merit God's favor – for that would oppose grace (God's undeserved love to sinners). Repentance is something that is brought about by the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that works faith in our hearts to believe – whether in the saving waters of baptism, or in the hearing of God's Word. And it is only in faith that we can even recognize we are sinners who have disobeyed God's command. But our turning away from sin does not make us perfect, it is rather letting go of the sin that condemns us, letting God grasp on to us. Repentance is necessary, but it is brought on by God.

(2)

So when we understand that the question is not about God's providence, but our repentance, we then must understand what repentance looks like. Maybe this is the point that many Christians become confused about today. Either they don't think that repentance has to look like anything, or they think that repentance has to look a certain way. Jesus describes what repentance looks like with the parable he told immediately following his insistence on repentance. Jesus is very clear that repentance bears fruit.

Jesus tells another agrarian parable to an agrarian society. A fig tree is planted in a certain vineyard, but after three years, there is no fruit on this fig tree. So the owner wants to cut it down. But the caretaker of the vineyard wants to give it more time to produce fruit. Even though many of us don't have vineyards that we tend, or fig trees in our back yard, I think we can understand the point of the parable. But to help you understand let me fill you in on some details that I found interesting. It was not unusual for a fig tree to be planted in a vineyard, but you would expect it to produce fruit. That is because a fig tree used a lot of nutrients from the soil. The other thing about fig trees that is interesting is they really don't need a lot of care, kind of like spider plants.



Jesus uses the parable about the fig tree in the vineyard to teach us about repentance. Now what did you learn? Last fall, my wife and I planted two fruit trees in our back yard. We didn't just plant them because we thought they would be pretty, we planted them because we wanted to eat the fruit that came from the fruit trees. We didn't expect to have to go out and lecture to the trees to produce fruit, we didn't expect to cheer for them to produce fruit, we expected with the proper care, they would produce fruit.

So it is with the fruit of repentance – it comes naturally. Nobody has to tell you to bear fruit, repentance automatically bears it. Does this mean fruits of repentance are always visible to everyone? No, but they are there. If they are not there, then comes the question about whether a person is repentant or not. It's true, the fruits of repentance are not what saves us, just like our faith doesn't save us. But what saves us produces these fruits. Jesus was very clear with this in John 15, **"I am the vine, you are the branches, if you remain in me, and I in you, you will bear much fruit, apart from me, you can do nothing."**

So it's a given that repentance produces fruit, but the specific kind of fruit we are not at liberty to say. Obviously different sins will merit different fruits of repentance. If there's a young couple who is living together before marriage, a fruit of repentance could be getting two different residences. This is a different fruit than someone who may put a quarter in a swear jar every time he takes the Lord's name in vain. Yet, those are both fruits. That's not to say every couple living together will show their fruit of repentance by getting separate residences, or everybody with the tendency for a dirty mouth has to put a quarter in a swear jar.

But to say that the only way you can show your fruits is in a way you dictate, then you have a problem. Why is it a problem? Because we live under the gospel, not the law. Anytime you tell someone this is how you should react to sin, before I'll forgive you, you are conditioning repentance, you're giving him a law to follow. Instead a believer will be led by his faith in Christ to produce a fruit that is in line with his life to Christ.

This is really all that Christ was trying to get at with his discourse on repentance. He wanted to take us back to the simple truth that we all need to repent, because we all sin. Our repentance doesn't cause us to be saved, but our repentance lets go of the sin that entangles, and allows us to cling to the Savior who came, lived and died for us. And clinging to our Savior, we are led to bear fruit. This is repentance. Amen.

