

Repent or Perish

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[0 : 00] Turn in your Bibles to the Gospel of Luke, chapter 13. Luke, chapter 13.

We'll be reading the first nine verses. Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?

I tell you, no. But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those 18 who died when the Tower of Siloam fell on them, do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?

I tell you, no. But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Then he told them 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. 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.

[1 : 30] Cut it down. Why should it use up the soil? Sir, the man replied, Leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it.

If it bears fruit next year, fine. If not, then cut it down. Thanksgiving is over, and now it's Christmas.

Sunny 101.5 is playing all of your holiday favorites. So I'm no Scrooge, and so I've been listening, obviously. And there is always one song, though, that stops me in my tracks.

And you know how it goes. So this is Christmas, and what have you done? Another year over, and a new one just begun.

It stops me in my tracks because it takes me back to a 20-something-year-old young lady working at a grocery store, I think in the meat department.

[2 : 42] And she's not here today, so I'm going to talk about her. It takes me back to Michelle Westner. God has welded her and that song in my head so that whenever I hear that song, I think of her.

Because she was working, and it came on the radio, and it stopped her in her tracks. So this is Christmas, and what have you done?

What have you done, Michelle? Another year over, another year over, and you aren't saved. Another year over, and what have you done?

Michelle has parents that love her. Michelle has parents that took her to church year after year. She has everything that many of you have or had.

Parents who cared about her. Parents who took her seriously. Parents who took her soul seriously. She knew the gospel from infancy.

[3 : 53] She knew the gospel that would make her, the scriptures that would make her wise for salvation. She had a church, this church, that loved her. God had wrestled with her.

God had shown her what she should do. And what had she done? Nothing.

Another Christmas here. Another year over. And what had she done? Nothing. Nothing. No fruit. No repentance.

No faith. No love. No life. She had been saying what some of you are saying, that it was going to be next year. Next year. But at work that day, with the radio on, God laid bare that lie.

She was past high school. She was past graduation. She was past 20. She was past all the dates that she had put into her mind, where she said, that is the time that I'll repent.

[5 : 02] I'll believe then. And God had been so good to her. He had been, he'd given her everything that she needed. And, but here she was. And so the song was, so this is Christmas.

What have you done? She was the fig tree in, in the story that Stan read for us.

Given, given every advantage, protected, cared for, fertilized, tended, the sun and the rain of God's blessing had fallen on her life.

And, and there was no fruit. Again, no faith, no life, no love. She wasn't pointed away from God. She was just living her life and time was getting on.

And the ax was at the root of the tree, but God had a warning for her. And it came through John Lennon and Yoko Ono, that another year is over.

[6 : 04] Another Christmas has come. And what are you going to do? When are you going to bear fruit?

Now, she was in the story and you are all in the story and I am in the story. So what is the story all about in Luke 13? We have, we've had it read.

If you've been here over the last several months, this little story has been read, I think three times to you now. So, so what is this story about?

Well, first of all, we need to realize that Jesus is, is talking to his contemporaries. He's talking to the people in front of him. He's talking about the whole nation of Israel because Israel is, is the first fig tree.

These people had come to Jesus at a loss and really saying, what is this all about? When these Galileans, they had been sacrificing in the temple and they had done something to make pilot angry and he had killed them and mixed their blood with the blood of their sacrifices.

[7 : 11] And the thought was, wow, they must've done something really bad. To have that happen to them. So part of the idea is, Hey, they're really bad, but Hey, we're pretty good.

That's what they were thinking. So nothing like that. See, nothing like that has happened to me, but Jesus says, no, not at all. Do you think they were any worse sinners than any of the other Galileans?

And his answer is no, but unless you, all of you repent, you too will all perish. Then he brings up another, the other gossip of the day, the other talk of the day, this tower in Salome had fallen and killed these people.

And he asked, are they any more guilty than you? And the answer is no, no, but unless you repent, you too will all perish.

And then to drive home the point, he tells this story, this little parable. And I think no one knew the Bible like Jesus did. No one knew the old Testament like Jesus did.

[8 : 17] And so when he comes to tell them this story, it jogged his mind about something that he had read. And he knew from Isaiah chapter five, I'm not going to ask you to turn there, but in Isaiah chapter five, the Lord comes to Israel and he says, Israel, you're my vineyard, my loved vineyard.

Now you don't usually love your garden, but maybe you do. And if you love your garden, you know what God is talking about. He's saying, I dug it up. I cleared all the stones.

I built a watchtower to protect it. I planted in it the very best vines, the very, very best grapes. I even dug out a wine press.

I was ready to, to, to take in the harvest. I was ready to drink the wine, the sweet wine that would come from you. And then I looked instead of a crop of good grapes, it was just rock hard, bitter, ball bearing grapes.

You see the similarities. Israel had been given every advantage, every advantage, every help. They weren't planted out in the wild.

[9 : 36] He didn't just like throw out the seed, put the vines out in the wild. No, he, he, it was on a fertile hillside and he had cleared all the rocks away. There's no rocks in the place.

He had planted good vines. He'd given Israel every advantage. They had Abraham as their father. The father of the faithful was their father. The friend of God was their ancestor and their example.

They had the word of God. Psalm one 47 says, he has revealed his word to Jacob, his laws and decrees to Israel. He has done this for no other nation. They do not know his laws.

So Israel had the prophets and they had the priests and they had the sacrifices that were all pointing to the savior. They had all these promises and the covenants.

They had the adoption of sons. They had been brought into the very family of God. And he had taken them out of Egypt with signs and wonders, things that had never been seen before.

[10 : 35] And they had been homeless and friendless and fatherless, wandering. And he brought them into his family and he had loved them and he cared for them.

The Messiah that would save the world was coming from them. And God says with a hint of exasperation, what more could I have done?

What more could I have done? And so now with the coming of the Messiah, now with the coming of the Christ, the final days had just landed on their doorstep.

It was on them. And he goes again and he goes to find fruit. Surely, if I send my son as the prophet, as the priest, as the gospel preacher, surely they'll find fruit there.

And there's nothing. He came to his own, but his own did not receive him. There was no joyful welcome from Israel when Jesus came. There's no wonderful acceptance.

[11 : 39] There was no love. There was no repentance. There was nothing. They went on their merry way. Like nothing had happened. Soaking up God's blessing and giving nothing back in return.

So Jesus says through the parable, you are down to your last year. You are down to the last year.

Bear fruit or get cut down. Repent or perish. Now it was Israel as a whole.

But you can't miss that we all fit into the story. We all are part of this fig tree because Jesus says two times, repent or you too all will perish.

He was eyeball to eyeball with people. It wasn't just talking Israel in the abstract. He was talking to Joes and Sallies and these individuals.

[12 : 44] You will perish. So this is about Israel. Yes, but it's about individuals. It's about you all individually. It's about you.

It's about me. You are the fig tree. God is looking for fruit from you. Now, you might not be very interested in him, but the story tells us that he is very interested in you.

You might not be aware of thinking about him at all, but he is thinking about you and looking to you. He's looking for repentance. He's looking for you to turn toward him and to live, to accept, to put away your old ways and to trust him, to walk with him, to live with him.

He loves you. He loves you as a creature. He loves you as someone he has made and he wants your heart. He wants you to run into his arms so that you would receive him as your savior, to say sorry, to turn and to live.

That's the fruit he's looking for. For you to turn from where you're going and start heading towards him. That's what the fruit he's looking for.

[13 : 57] And I just want to say, is that your harm? Is that bad for you? Does the Lord want something bad for you? No, that's your life. This is eternal life that they might know you, the only true God and the one whom you have sent, Jesus Christ.

And I just want to say friend or young person, God of heaven, the God of heaven wants your love. He wants your heart. He wants you.

He wants your love. He wants to live with you. He wants to give you life. He wants you to turn away from the sin that is destroying you and to take salvation from his hand.

Is that a bad thing? Jesus came that we might have life into the fullest. You won't be unhappier if you come to Jesus.

You will not be unhappier coming to Jesus. He won't ruin your life. He gives life. At his right hand are pleasures forevermore. That means there's pleasures now and there's pleasures that will never, ever be taken away.

[15 : 06] That is what the Lord wants from you. That is the fruit he's looking for, for you to repent and receive and accept that to come to him. And I just wonder, why, why would you make that wretched choice and not turn?

I don't understand. I do not understand. I do not understand not wanting eternal life. I don't understand not bearing fruit.

So just think of where you're planted. Just think of where he's planted you, all that you might be saved. All that you might repent and believe and be saved.

He's planted you in a country where the truth has prevailed for years and years and years. And so, young ladies, you weren't born in a predominantly Muslim country where you have to walk around completely covered, where you're blamed for the lusts of men.

young men, you weren't born there. You weren't born in a country where at 12 you could be married to some 40-year-old man. You weren't born in a country where your father or your brothers would rather stone you than to let you live if you do anything that would embarrass them.

[16 : 37] Young men, you weren't raised in that situation either. You weren't raised to treat women like that. You were raised to treat them as honorable, to care for them.

You haven't grown up in a culture of hatred and desperation and terrorism. We don't have a watchman at the door. We don't have anyone looking out for the authorities.

None of you have been eyeing the exits saying, okay, if the authorities come, this is where I have to go. You've never had to hide your Bibles.

Sarita lives in Nepal and she became the only Christian in her family. Her husband is a truck driver and so he's gone along a lot of the time and so she lives with her family, her father, and her own father discovered Sarita's Bible tucked under her pillow and it set him off in absolute rage.

He beat her with her own Bible and in his anger he kicked it and all the pages went flying everywhere and he ended up kicking her out of the house and he said, you can't come back unless you leave Jesus.

[17 : 59] That's not you. Is it? That's not you. Well, why? Why do you have freedom? Why do you have the Bible?

Why were you born in this country? It was so that you would bear fruit. You would bear fruit. So think of where God has planted you.

For many of you, maybe not all of you, but for many of you, you had moms and dads who loved you, who loved the Lord. and for many of you, you had moms and dads and grandmas and grandpas.

Timothy, Paul's protege, Paul's apprentice, he had his mother and his grandmother, but probably not his father. He's never mentioned and he was probably a Greek and he probably didn't want anything to do with it, but Timothy had a mom and a grandma who taught him the gospel from infancy.

So from the time he was two or three, he was hearing the stories of the Old Testament. He was hearing the gospel message. Timothy knew the scriptures.

[19 : 09] Now, some of you are more blessed than Timothy. You have moms and dads and grandmas and grandpas and grandmas and grandpas on the other side who love you, who have taught you.

You have parents that love you, who long for you to walk with the Lord, who have been teaching you and pouring this out and praying for you and they are crazy about you. And I could say this as a dad, as a parent, I defy you to find anyone who loves you on this earth like your parents love you.

The whole world and all your friends love for you is nothing compared to a parent's love for you. And we want you blessed in this life.

We want you to have wonderful jobs and wonderful families. We want you to do better than we did. But more than that, we want you to know Jesus, to surrender to Him, to repent, to believe, and for you to be saved.

We live this every day and we will die longing for this. Look at where God has planted you.

[20 : 27] Why? So you would bear fruit. fruit. The Lord is looking for fruit. We're looking for fruit. And so, this is Christmas. And what have you done?

What have you done? Look at where you're planted. You're in a church that is yearning for your salvation. You are in a church that is yearning for your salvation.

You haven't grown up in a church where the Bible is nothing, where God is little. We sang, our God is an awesome God. That is the heartbeat of this church.

God isn't little. We aren't all about entertainment. We're not perfect or anything like that. But, we do have an entire gardening staff. All designed to see you bear fruit.

Judy Withrow taught some of you the books of the Bible and the Ten Commandments when you were still learning how to talk. And every teacher along the way has played their role.

[21 : 29] of fertilizing, of digging up, of pouring the sunshine and the rain upon you. All that you could be, all that you could bear fruit. We haven't been joking around.

And I'll speak for the pastors. Pastor John and I, we aren't doing this for money. We're not doing it for fame. That's obviously not working out.

we're not doing it for popularity. We're doing it for your good. And we've warned you and we've pleaded with you and we've wooed you.

We haven't grown tired of telling you the gospel. We have not grown tired of telling you the gospel. Have you grown tired of hearing it? So just think of all where you're planted.

Just think of all the care God has given you. All the privileges and all the blessings. None of you have been homeless or hungry this year. None of you have been homeless or hungry.

[22 : 36] None of you have ever had to say, kids, there's no food tonight. There's no food tonight. I worked with a lady once who for a while lived on cigarettes and chewing gum.

And in the winter she was using her oven to heat her little trailer until her gas was turned off. And so when nighttime came, she put on as many clothes as she could and she put all the blankets on her bed and she put all the blankets over her head hopefully to stay warm.

That has never happened to you. Goodness and mercy have followed you all the days of your life.

Good things. Good things. More good things. More good things. And why? So you would bear fruit? He's trying to woo you?

He's wrestled with your souls from time to time, hasn't he? He's made you feel the guilt of your sin. He's made you feel your need for Jesus.

[23 : 47] He's not been so far off. He's come close. He's wrestled with you like he wrestled with Jacob that one night. But you know what? It wasn't you holding on to him.

It was him holding on to you. It wouldn't let you go. So why haven't you totally written him off? Because he's wrestling with you. Why?

So you would come to him. So you'd be saved at last. That you'd live with him and love him and he would love you and you'd see the smile of his face.

So you'd turn from your sin and be saved. And there's been times not only that he has wrestled with you, but there has been times where he has spared you from death. Some of you could have and should have been dead by now.

death has knocked on your door and you heard it and the Lord said, go away. Not now. Not yet.

[24 : 49] Why has he been so patient with you? He wants you to bear fruit. He wants you to bear fruit. He's given you more time to repent.

Don't you see all these blessings? All this patience? All this sparing from death?

Don't you see it for what it is? It's a trail back to him. It's like Hansel and Gretel's trail of breadcrumbs back home.

Except it's not Hansel and Gretel, it's the Lord dropping these things so that you could follow all of these blessings back to him. To his heart. To him.

God has made a trail for you to get back home and it's a trail of mercies and he means you to follow all of those mercies all the way home. One after another. That mercy.

[25 : 50] That's what he's like. That mercy. Oh, that's what he's like. Oh, he's this kind of God and he's meaning for you to take it in and to see that is the good God that you have.

They're all road signs back to him and what you'll find when you turn to him. So follow all of his kindnesses back to him. He's done all this so that you would be saved.

To see you individually repent. repent. Now, as we come to this to the end, I just have I have two questions for you.

Two questions I want you to think about. The first question is from Isaiah chapter 5 and we've already have already brought it up. The Lord asked what more could have what more could I have done?

what more could he have done for you than he has done for you? Can you think of anything? He hasn't been kind to others as much as he has been kind to you and the Lord says, what more can I do?

[27 : 08] Look where I what are you waiting for? He's planted you in the vineyard. He's planted you in a protected place. He's dug up all the rocks. He's dug up your hard soil.

He sent rain. He sent sunshine. He's put fertilizer down. He wants to see fruit. He wants to see life. But until now there has been nothing. And my question is, is what more do you want?

What more do you want? What more could he do? God didn't spare his own son. but he sent his son to be crucified and his son was crucified.

And so when you those scenes of the crucifixion come before you, you have to see something of the heart of God. There is the lamb of God. He's bearing the sins of any and all who would come and trust him.

And he's bearing the son of God is bearing the rage of man and he's bearing the justice of God and God drives the sword of justice through his own son heart. My question is what more can he do?

[28 : 22] What more do you want? What's your answer going to be? Lord, you didn't do this for me? I don't know what you would say.

What more can you do? And that takes us to the second question. How does this parable end? How does this parable end?

A man had a fig tree. He planted it in his vineyard. For three years, he went looking for fruit on it. Until finally he said to the gardener, cut it down.

Why should it use up the soil? It's not bearing fruit. It's a waste. It's taking up space. Cut it down. And the gardener, with a lump in his throat, because he loves this tree, that's why he's going to bat for it, he loves this fig tree, and he pleaded, one more year, I'll dig around it, I'll fertilize it, and if it bears fruit next year, then good, if not, cut it down.

fine. But my question is, how does the parable end? Did it bear fruit, or was it cut down?

[29 : 50] We don't know. It doesn't say. And we don't know, and it doesn't say, because Jesus isn't the author of the end of the story.

You are. you are. How it ends is up to you. One year left, two endings, bear fruit, get cut down.

And so this is Christmas, and what have you done? Another year over, and a new one just begun. How is it going to be?

How is it going to end? Bear fruit or cut down? How does your story end? Let's pray.

God of salvation, the God who wrestles with men, men, there are some people in this room now that have a decision to make to receive the word or to reject it, to turn away from life and to receive death, or to turn to Jesus and receive life.

[31 : 23] I pray you as the Lord who wrestles with men that you would come onto the field, and that you would wrestle men and women and boys and girls, wrestle them into your kingdom.

You said you would make men willing in the day of your power. May this be the day of your power, that you set forth all your strength, and that you save the souls of someone here, the soul of someone here.

There is a decision to make, Lord. I pray that you would be merciful. Pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.