

Repentance

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Preacher: Rev Duncan Macleod

[0 : 00] Now let's turn together to the passage that we read in the Gospel according to Luke. That was our second reading, Luke chapter 13. And the section, the beginning of the chapter, verses 1 to 9.

When we were returning yesterday from camp down in the borders, I remember passing by a small town in the south of Scotland that I had heard much about in recent years, but had never actually seen with my own eyes till yesterday.

A small town associated with tragedy. The town of Lockerbie. The name Lockerbie will be forever, edged on the minds of all who know anything of what took place there when that ill-fated plane fell from the skies a good number of years ago now.

As the bus continued on the way north, I found myself thinking of the different reactions that people have had over the years to the Lockerbie tragedy.

And then before I knew it, I found that we were passing a second place also associated with tragedy of the worst possible kind.

[1 : 38] Not that many miles south of here, we have the town of Dunblane. And again, as with Lockerbie, the name Dunblane will be edged forever in the minds of all who heard of what happened there on March 13, 1996.

And again, I found myself thinking of the different reactions that there have been to that tragedy over this past year and a quarter.

And as I thought of Lockerbie, and as I thought of Dunblane, I thought of this passage that we're looking at this morning.

Because in this passage, Luke 13, reference is made to two other tragedies that happened long ago.

So, tragedies of which we know nothing other than that which is recorded here in this chapter of Luke.

[2 : 54] But tragedies that were obviously very much in the minds of the Jews in the days of Jesus. So much so, in fact, that Luke sees no need to elaborate on what took place.

But references made to the Galileans, whoever they were, whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. And references then made to the 18 who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them.

Just as with us, Lockerbie and Dunblane were associated with tragedy. So with the Jews, those two incidents were clearly, universally known and felt.

And it is from our look at what we're told here that we discover what the reaction was of the Jews to these incidents.

Clearly the Jewish people thought that these Galileans must have been guilty of something of it because of what happened to them.

[4 : 16] And clearly too, they did think, and this is why Jesus, I believe, says it, that the people who died in Siloam were more guilty than all others living in Jerusalem.

in the days of Jesus, tragedy was associated in the minds of the people with the judgment of God. And Jesus had to give the lie to that idea.

And that's what he does in this passage. Just as he does in another incident, which wasn't quite so tragic, but which is equally revealing.

in John chapter 9, do you know the story of the man who was born blind? Do you know the question of the disciples? Rabbi, who sinned?

This man or his parents? But he was born blind. And Jesus said, neither this man nor his parents sinned.

[5 : 22] Now Jesus isn't saying that the man wasn't a sinner. Jesus isn't saying that his parents were sinless. But what Jesus is pointing out is simply this.

That the fact that he was born blind was not as a result of any particular sin of which he or his parents were guilty.

And I fear sometimes that we are too ready to point the finger when tragedy occurs and jump to the conclusion that there must be some personal blame involved before God would allow this to happen in our lives.

It's certainly true that we can bring God's judgment on ourselves. It's certainly true that if we live our lives, for example, abusing our bodies, we can expect calamitous consequences in the end.

It is true that there are some tragedies that occur that can be associated with personal guilt. But it is completely wrong for us when something sad happens to conclude that it must be because of some particular sin.

[6 : 55] And this is the idea that Jesus is refuting so clearly in this passage that we're looking at today.

But it is more than refute the idea. Jesus in this passage teaches us some tremendous truths that we all need to take to ourselves.

He stresses this principle that the need of repentance is universal among men. It's not just some people who need to repent.

We all need to repent if we're to belong to the kingdom of God. The need for repentance is a universal need.

And the need is an urgent one. And these are the two main points that I want to try and highlight in the minutes that are left.

[8 : 03] Repentance is something that everybody needs to experience. we're all in the same boat.

Jesus makes this clear by the way he speaks to these people. He points the finger to the fact that they need repentance just as much as other people.

And this is the truth that the Bible wants all of us to take to ourselves. we may at times be inclined to imagine that others need to repent and we may be correct in that assessment.

But we must also realise that there must be repentance in our own lives. If we're not Christians unless we repent and believe the gospel we will be lost.

And if we are Christians if we know nothing of ongoing repentance in the sense of by God's grace turning away from that which we know to be sinful and pursuing after that which is holy we ought to question the reality of our Christian profession.

[9 : 32] We all need repentance in our lives. But when I say the word repent perhaps you think immediately of some funny looking character out on the street with a billboard that says repent or perish.

Or when I say the word repent maybe you only think of it in negative terms. Well I'm not going to point the finger at that character with the billboard.

It's his way of getting the gospel across and God may well bless his efforts. And I'm not going to deny that there is a negative element involved in repentance.

There must certainly be. There must be the turning away from that which we know to be an offense to God. That which is offensive to God must be offensive to us too.

But repentance has this tremendous positive aspect to it that perhaps we don't always bear in mind.

[10 : 45] Repentance involves a sincere seeking after true and loving obedience to God's revealed will for us. Jesus is telling us in this passage that we're all in the same boat and that we all need to repent.

And the second thing that I want to say is that Jesus is here telling these Jews that they're not allowed to jump to conclusions too quickly as to who needs repentance and who doesn't.

They were clearly suggesting that there were some who were more in need of it than others. And they were judging by the things that had happened to these people and they were judging by the way certain people lived and they were judging in an outward way.

And Jesus I believe is warning them against being superficial in their assessment of who needs to repent. Jesus is reminding them and Jesus is reminding us that we all need it.

And that repentance is something that must take place deep within the soul. He's making that abundantly plain.

[12 : 11] And something else Jesus is reminding us of here too is the fact that as far as providence is concerned God is sovereign and he knows what he's doing.

God is in control. His hand is at the helm and although at times tragic events we may just wonder whether God is there at all.

Jesus would have us know that God hasn't lost control and that God in allowing these things to take place may very well have an end in mind that is more glorious than we can begin to imagine.

Think again of that boy in John who was born blind. Think of the question who has sinned? So this man or his parents?

And think of the answer. I only gave you half of it the first time around. I give it in full this time. Neither this man nor his parents sinned said Jesus that this happened so that the work of God or you could say the glory of God's work might be displayed in his life.

[13 : 45] God was going to bring good out of evil. Now today you sit here, I stand here and you ask and I ask, how can God bring good out of evil? Where's the evidence of God bringing good out of evil?

And I believe the most spectacular evidence of all is to be found at the cross itself. Jesus being put to death was the greatest evil that man could ever be guilty of.

He was taken by wicked hands crucified there at Calvary. And yet it was all by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God.

It pleased the Lord to bruise him. God was going to bring good out of the greatest evil man ever did. And God did bring good out of it, the greatest good that even God himself could bring, the salvation of a vast multitude which cannot be numbered.

God brought great good, the greatest good God could bring himself out of the greatest evil that ever happened.

[15 : 04] And these incidents that these Jews are referring to here might well have been blessed to them who were asking the question as Jesus answered it and reminded them of their own need of repentance.

I believe that Jesus is telling us here that we must all begin with ourselves. We're so ready to think of others and to judge others, to jump to conclusions about others, that we must begin with ourselves.

I must begin right here at home with my own heart when it comes to the matter of repentance and so must you. Why? Because my need of repentance is just as great as you and our repentance.

The need is universal. And if our meditation today serves the purpose of making us examine our own hearts, then it will have been worth pondering on this passage.

We all need to look at ourselves in the light of what God has said to us. But there's a second main point that I want to highlight from this passage today.

[16 : 24] And it's a point that I think is highlighted in particular in the parable that Jesus then went on to tell. We've been doing a series of sermons and parables recently and this I think will be the last in this present series.

this. And I believe that in the parable that Jesus went on to tell he makes clear not only that the need for repentance is universal but that the need is urgent.

The urgency of it I believe is stressed. And there are three things that I just want to mention under this second heading.

As we look at the parable as we think of the urgency. We've already read the parable. I don't need to read it again. The first point I believe is this.

Is that we're being told here that God has a right to expect spiritual fruit in all of our lives. then we begin with the non Christian.

[17 : 42] You say how on earth can God expect to find spiritual fruit in my life when I'm not even a Christian? Well I believe that the more you know of what is involved in being a Christian and the more you are aware of spiritual fruit the more responsible you are before God for believing his gospel.

And I believe that faith is the fruit for which God is looking in your life this morning. Is he finding it? Is he finding faith in your heart?

Is he seeing faith in your life? He's got a right to find it you know. He's got a right to see it. Because he commands you to believe his gospel.

He tells you what's needed. He tells you that it is only through faith that you can be made right with himself. It's urgent.

You need to know this truth that salvation is for whosoever believes in God's Son. God's God's God's God's God's God's salvation intended for.

[19 : 11] Who's salvation? No great mystery about it. Salvation is for whosoever believes the gospel. Do you?

can you say having heard this gospel that God doesn't have a right to see you believe?

To expect you to believe? To ask you to believe? To command you to believe? Of course he does. He's got every right and he exercises that right by commanding you to trust.

And what about the Christian? What about the Christian who has trust? And I believe that God has a right to see the fruit of faith in every believer's life.

I believe that if the spirit is present in our hearts the fruit is something that God expects to see. Love.

[20 : 17] joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, or faithfulness, meekness, temperance, full control.

God is looking for such fruit. And if it's not there, we who profess his name ought urgently to ask ourselves is his spirit in our life at all?

Are we the Lord's? Faith without works is dead. God is looking for evidence.

But we're his if we profess to be his. And it's got every right. to look for it. Just as surely as this man in the parable who planted the fig tree went to look for fruit on the tree.

In the parable, the man found none. Is God looking at your life and at mine today looking for fruit and finding none?

[21 : 36] God forbid that it should be so and yet God knows that it's perfectly possible that that's the way things are. The second point I believe is this, that God's patience with lack of fruit has limits.

God's patience with lack of fruit is a limited patience. fear of fruit. This man went to look for fruit on the tree and found none.

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 big tree and haven't found any.

Cut it down, why should I use up the soil? God will not wait forever for you to believe if you haven't believed God will not wait forever to find fruit in your life that's why it's so urgent that if you don't believe you should believe now that's why it's so vital if God's spirit is striving with you let you yield because God says my spirit will not always strive with man God who's slow to anger certainly God abounds in love most assuredly God forgives sin yes but there's a time when he ceases to strive and his patience runs out how long has it been that he's been looking for faith for fruit in your life how long will he continue to look for it certainly the man in the parable seems to have had enough carried down been waiting three years maybe in your case he's been waiting 33 years or longer and if we're Christians we ought also to bear this truth in mind that God

God will not be patient with us forever if we're failing to produce spiritual fruit in our lives God may very well come to the point where he says about us why should that patient be left anymore I've given them all the opportunities I've done everything I could for them I've been looking for fruit since they first professed my name and I'm not finding any why should I leave them there any longer to use up the soil God has a right to see spiritual fruit in all of our lives God's patience with lack of fruit is a limited one I trust that we're realising how urgent the need for repentance is in our lives how urgent the issue is but I want to finish on a positive note because I believe the parable finishes on a note that gives us hope

[25 : 32] I want to finish on this note by stressing that for all that has been said up to now God in his mercy God in his love God in his grace is still giving us an opportunity here this morning to repent and believe if we've never done so before and to repent if we are his people of all that in our Christian lives are hindering the fruit that he has every right to harvest cut it down he says why should it use up the soil sir sir the man replied leave it alone for one more year just give it one more year and I'll do everything

I can to make sure that the conditions are conducive to fruit being produced I'll dig it round I'll dig around it and I'll fertilize but bear fruit next year fine but if not then take the axe to the tree get rid of it now I believe Jesus is finishing the parable on this note in order to stress that this is the way God was dealing with the people of Israel to whom these words were first addressed it was as if God was saying to them he's been you've had all the privileges you people and he's been patient with you all those years time's running out but in his mercy he's still giving you an opportunity to produce fruit in his mercy he is still withholding his hand from carrying out his prayers in his mercy he is still waiting as the hymn puts it he is waiting to be gracious that's the way things are at the moment is that the way things are with you today surely it is your very presence here proves that God is still giving you an opportunity that God is still in his mercy dealing with you that God is still waiting and if we're his people maybe we're realising how fruitless our lives are and perhaps

God is speaking to us in this manner today in order that we might realise how urgent how urgently required repentance is on our part so that we might return to the Lord be restored to him that spiritual results might once more follow in our lives too I'm going to leave it about we've seen the principle repentance is something that is universally needed repentance is something that is urgently needed we're all in the same boat we mustn't jump to conclusions by assessing things on the surface we're to realise that God is sovereign and that perplexing providences may and often do redound to our good and to his glory painful as they are and as they will continue to be for as long as we live we must all examine our own lives

God has a right to see spiritual fruit God's patience has its limits but God in his mercy is still today leaving us here and looking for fruit in our life we're not told what happened to this victory we're not told what happened at the end of the year and I believe we're not told for a purpose so that God may make all of us look at ourselves and realise that there are two possibilities the one being that we will continue as we are and not repent and be cut down and removed from

God and all that is good forever the other being that we will realise our need of repentance that we will return to the Lord and that he will rejoice over us with singing as he sees that fruit for which he's looking in our lives may that be true of each one of us here this morning for his glory sake amen bless our thoughts to us and produce that fruit in our lives which alone will redound to your honour and glory and praise for Christ's sake amen