

CAPITOL STUDIES

MAY 21, 2025 • WEEK 19



LUKE FOR LEGISLATORS

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Theme Verse

Luke 19:10

For the Son of Man has come to **seek** and to **save** that which was **lost**.



Repent or Perish



IN RECENT YEARS, WE HAVE BEEN STUNNED by the Maui fires taking over 100 lives in 2023. We were saddened to hear of the attacks on Israel, with more lives lost and people captured. In 2004, there was the tsunami in the Indian Ocean which killed over 200,000 people. Now, we get regular reports on the horrors of war in Ukraine and Russia.

“On a personal level, many of us struggle with private tragedies—loved ones who die untimely deaths, accidents that leave devastating consequences, children who suffer from birth defects or serious diseases. Naturally, we always ask, ‘Why?’ Why did this have to happen to this person? Perhaps the victim was a good, loving person. Meanwhile we hear of scoundrels who live in relative happiness and prosperity. We question God’s goodness and fairness. Sometimes we even doubt His existence. It’s the classic philosophic problem of evil: How can an all-good and all-powerful God allow good people to suffer and wicked people to prosper?”¹

Some of these same, difficult questions were asked of Jesus when He walked on this earth. Our text today tells how He answered.

Pastor Arin Hess

Chaplain, Capitol Studies



INTRODUCTION

As Jesus journeys closer to Jerusalem, a darkness begins to fall. The presence of evil is clear. The number of miracles decrease. Chapter 13 begins a subtle shift from Jesus as the worker of miracles to a teller of parables. It would appear that the lower miracle count is directly related to the lack of faith among those in Jerusalem and the surrounding area.

I. PERSONAL REPENTANCE

Luke 13:1-3

Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. ²And Jesus said to them, “Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? ³I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”²

Pilate was a weak, wicked man. This account is entirely credible. The details may be obscure, but the general picture is clear enough. Some Galileans had offered sacrifices. If they were Jews, they must have done so at the temple in Jerusalem. Perhaps they were involved, or were perceived to be involved, in some wing of the nationalistic Zealot movement, and Pilate saw them as a threat. He had them slaughtered, and their blood mingled with the blood of the sacrificial animals they themselves had brought. If the mingling of blood is literal, this means that Pilate had them slaughtered in the temple courts—sacrilege mingling with slaughter.

“When this incident is brought up to Jesus for his comment, He launches out in a direction that must have astonished His questioners. Perhaps some expected Him to denounce Pilate; perhaps others wanted Him to comment on the Zealot movement; a few may have hoped He would offer a few pointed denunciations about these rebels getting what they deserved.”³ Jesus does none of those. Instead, He asks, “Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this fate? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

Luke 13:4-5

Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? ⁵I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

Perhaps because of the political sensitivity of the first event, Jesus turns to a different tragedy. Eighteen people died when the tower of Siloam collapsed. Again, He emphasizes the main point: **everyone is a sinner, destined to die, in need of repentance.**

“Jesus wanted His listeners to accept three changes in perspective. First, the world is full of suffering—not because God created it that way, but because humanity corrupted the world with sin (Gen. 3:14-19; Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:21). We should stop blaming God as though He is



responsible for the problem of evil. Second, we perpetuate the problem of evil through continual sin. The vast majority of the world's suffering—disasters and diseases notwithstanding—could be reduced to virtually nothing if all people everywhere stopped sinning and followed the Lord's kingdom guidelines (6:27-38). Third, evil is not 'out there'; it lives in the heart of every person. If God were to eradicate all evil, all of us would disappear from the face of the earth to face the just penalty of our sin."⁴

II. TRUE REPENTANCE

"Repentance is a thoroughly Biblical concept, but it comes into prominence in New Testament teaching. Both John the Baptist and Jesus Himself began their ministries with this proclamation: 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand' (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). The apostles continued this emphasis; when those who heard Peter's Pentecost sermon asked what they should do, his first exhortation was 'Repent' (Acts 2:38). Clearly, therefore, repentance is an essential part of the process by which we are saved. But repentance is not a one-time event—the Scriptures are clear that a believer is a repenter, one who must constantly engage in repentance for his or her inevitable sins.

"The Greek word that is translated as 'repent' in our English Bibles is *metanoia*, which literally means 'to change one's mind.' Based on this fact, some say that repentance simply means changing one's view of Jesus, coming to recognize that He is truly the Son of God. But repentance in the Biblical sense goes much deeper. It happens when the Holy Spirit pierces a person's being to the very core, turning his life upside down. From the depth of his heart, the person resolves to leave his sinful lifestyle and seek pardon for his sin. Thus, to repent is to turn sharply away from pagan living and to flee to Christ, resolving to live in obedience to Him. This is exactly what David does in Psalm 51."⁵

Was there a time when you "changed your mind," when you began to live differently, when you saw that your life needed to honor Jesus? From what kinds of things did you turn away? When death comes, we will all perish unless we have repented. The context here is the final judgment.

"*Repentance* is a much-misunderstood word. 'Some people think repentance is an emotional experience enjoyed by strange people who like to cry in public.' This caricature involves well-trained men who lead their fellow Christians to weep and wail their way back to God. There is more to repentance than manipulated or even genuine remorse. Another well-traveled caricature identifies repentance with the ritual of penance, which begins with an obligatory 'confession,' followed by the mechanical carrying out of ordered exercises as a means of making restitution or paying the price of our sin in some sense.

"Neither of these caricatures are true repentance. Repentance begins with a change of the mind, but not in the contemporary sense of changing one's mind only to change it again. It is a change of mind that brings a change of actions. It is both *intellectual* and *volitional*—and then, though not necessarily, *emotional*. Repentance is a real turnaround of one's life in respect to sinful conduct.





“Repentance must happen in our souls, or we will perish in the judgment. If Jesus has not changed your conduct... you are very likely not a Christian. Repentance is the style of true Christianity! Repentance is not an option.”⁶

III. NATIONAL REPENTANCE

Luke 13:6-7

And He began telling this parable: “A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any. ⁷And he said to the vineyard-keeper, ‘Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?’”

As He has many times in His ministry, Jesus uses a parable to emphasize the need for repentance. He told the story of a fig tree. This fig tree represented Israel as a nation. This fig tree (Israel) had been planted by God, but it had not borne fruit. It was just taking up space. Thus, it was time for it to be cut down. Israel had rejected its Messiah, the Lord Jesus (Matt. 21:18–20; 23:13–19; 24:32–33).

“Normally, fig trees wring their existence from stony and inhospitable soil. This particular fig tree had been given unique opportunities. Everything was done to make it fruitful. Thus, God had dealt with the nation of Israel in contrast to the Gentile nations, which more or less were left to fend for themselves (Rom. 9:1–5). Israel had been blessed with God’s covenants and commandments. He had sent them patriarchs, prophets, princes, and priests. But unbelieving Israel refused to repent.

“So, God asked the vineyard keeper, who was Jesus, why the tree wasn’t producing fruit. Far from being useful, it was actually spoiling the good land around it. It was intended by God that the nation of Israel be set in the midst of the nations of the earth to be a testimony and a blessing to all mankind.”⁷ But, despite Jesus’ teaching and miracles among the Jewish people, no fruit could be seen.

Luke 13:8

And [the vineyard keeper] answered and said to him, “Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; ⁹and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.”

“But the tree also reminds us of God’s special goodness to Israel (Isa. 5:1–7; Rom. 9:1–5) and His patience with them. God waited three years during our Lord’s earthly ministry, but the nation did not produce fruit. He then waited about forty years more before He allowed the Roman armies to destroy Jerusalem and the temple; and during those years, the church gave to the nation a powerful witness of the Gospel message. Finally, the tree was cut down.

“It is significant that the parable was ‘open-ended,’ so that the listeners had to supply the conclusion... Did the tree bear fruit? Did the special care accomplish anything? Was the tree spared or cut down? We have no way to know the answers to these questions, **but we can answer as**



far as our own lives are concerned! Again, the question is not ‘What happened to the tree?’ but ‘What will happen to *me*?’

“God is seeking fruit. He will accept no substitutes, and the time to repent is NOW. The next time you hear about a tragedy that claims many lives, ask yourself, ‘Am I just taking up space, or am I bearing fruit to God’s glory?’”⁸

CONCLUSION

“Let’s call the vineyard owner ‘Justice.’ In order to enjoy figs, Justice reserved space for a fig tree, setting aside valuable real estate that could have been used to grow more grapes. A fig tree, unlike most fruit trees, frequently bears fruit in its first season, with full production expected by the third year of cultivation. So it’s understandable that Justice would consider cutting down the plant after three years of nonproduction. It was the logical thing to do. Justice said to Mercy, the vineyard keeper, ‘Cut down the tree’ (v. 7; cf. 3:9). Mercy replied to Justice, ‘Let me give it a little extra nurturing this year; if it doesn’t respond, then cut it down.’ ...Mercy has delayed justice to give all people an opportunity to repent. But... ‘for a limited time.’

“By God’s grace, evil people (i.e., you and me) remain alive. By God’s grace, we have the mental capacity to come to terms with what we’re hearing. By God’s grace, we can turn from sin and turn toward Christ. By God’s grace, we are given time for the fruit of repentance to emerge. But there will come a day when He will say, ‘Cut it down,’ and time will be no more. Eternity will dawn and the unrepentant soul must stand without Christ before God to give an answer for his or her sin.”⁹

Chaplain Arin Hess

FOOTNOTES

1. Steven Cole, “What We Should Learn From Tragedies?”, sermon preached on Luke 13:1-9, May 23, 1999.
2. All Scripture quotations, unless noted, are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, 1995 Update.
3. D. A. Carson, *For the Love of God: A Daily Companion for Discovering the Riches of God’s Word*, Volume 1, Good News Publishers, 2006, pg. 27.
- 4, 9. Chuck Swindoll, *Insights on Luke*, Zondervan, 2012, pg. 352-353.
5. Ligonier Ministries, “Repentance: A Vital Step,” <https://learn.ligonier.org/devotionals/repentance-vital-step>.
6. R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Crossway Books, 1998, pg. 312–315.
- 7, 8. Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Volume 1, Victor Books, 1996, pp. 224–225, emphasis added.





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