

Because of Jesus: It Is Not Too Late

By Pastor Kurt Hoover

Litany adapted from Psalm 63

Pastor: You, God, are my God,

All: earnestly I seek you;

Pastor: I thirst for you,

All: my whole being longs for you,

Pastor: Because your love is better than life,

All: my lips will glorify you.

Pastor: Because you are my help,

All: I sing in the shadow of your wings.

Pastor: We worship You Lord in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen

1 Cor 10:1-5, 11-13 For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. ² They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. ³ They all ate the same spiritual food ⁴ and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. ⁵ **Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them;** their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

¹¹ These things happened to them as examples and were **written down as warnings for us**, on whom the **culmination of the ages has come**. ¹² So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

Luke 13:1-9 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.’”

Do any one of you know somebody that deserves to have a tower fall on them? ...the world would be better off, maybe? Any public figures you can think of? Celebrities?

Jesus is talking to a huge crowd and it stands out to me that twice - after they bring up the grave sins of others, Jesus shifts the focus back upon the people asking the question.

Are some people more guilty then others?? ‘I tell you, no! [You are asking the wrong question] But unless you repent, you too will all perish.’

He is addressing a specific situation, a way of thinking, the excuses of the crowd, but let’s not be so quick to assume that we are not on some level doing the same things and there is some wisdom being spoken here that we should listen to as well.

What is repentance? When is the last time your repented of something? What does it look like to change your ways? Your way of thinking!... as well as your actions or habits. Perhaps the repentance you need most in your life is switching away from telling yourself the same old story about yourself and switch to a more positive view of the world.

What are the many ways in which we ‘repent’ with each other and with God?

When I was in High School, I figured out after my first semester with some C’s and D’s ...that I could get A’s if I just applied myself. I have a girlfriend to thank for that. She wasn’t my girl friend at the time, but we did go steady for like 3 years in elementary school.

For some reason I wanted to get a better grade in history class than she did, and our teacher would let you retake a test as many times as you wanted or even redo homework to the point that you could actually get more than a 100% in his class. I think we ended the year with 102 and 103%. I had the higher grade.

So, all I had to do was apply myself, do the homework, read the book ... even if it meant staying up late after wrestling practice and working at Happy Joes Pizza Parlor. Of course, this left one problem after my social life and studies I wasn’t getting enough sleep or eating very well ... really? what teenager knows how to take care of themselves? I was falling asleep in class all the time.

My solution was to chew gum to stay awake. And not just any gum but Big Red – Cinnamon Gum. I think Trident was the only sugar free gum back then and I figured I needed the sugar as well as the spicy gum to stay away. And it worked. I would go through 2 of the little packs a day, 2 sticks in Chemistry class (right after lunch) at least. I got to the point where I would just double up and eat two sticks at a time.

It worked fine ... That is until I got my next checkup at the dentist. I had 12 cavities all on the top, the chewing surface of my teeth. You should have seen the dentist reaction... There is no amount of teeth brushing that can keep up with chewing Big Red Gum all day long.

Now, Had I known ... of course I would have looked for another solution to my issue of falling asleep in class.

There were some warning signs along the way. Toothaches, food getting stuck, that plaque that build up on your teeth ... I vaguely remember looking in the mirror during that semester of Chemistry and recognizing a slight pink tinge to my teeth.

SO needless to say, I repented of my ways. I swore off gum completely and I thought a little more carefully about getting to bed on time, what I ate, especially at lunch before Chemistry class.

Now that is a pretty safe example of repentance. Can you relate? Can you look at the idea in a little more personal way? What are some things that you have repented of with a friend, your spouse, hard lessons learned? (long pause)

And is it Possible that Jesus is throwing out a warning sign for you this morning. Is it possible that Jesus is asking you to examine yourself and ...? repent before it is too late.

That is the point of the fig tree. The tree is the crowd and Jesus sees no fruit in their excuses, blaming others. Jesus is the Gardner pleading with God for one more year. And that last year represents the last year of Jesus ministry. And Jesus hopes to see something more than just leaves! Jesus hopes to see lives changed rather than the same old excuses and same old negatives stories bouncing around in our heads about who God is and who we are.

You are a child of God, His creation, His sacrificial Grace is enough for you, and because of what HE does in this world through you, You make a difference.

Jesus is pointing to the apocalyptic culmination of the ages that is about to happen ... and that if they miss what God is doing... if they reject Jesus, they may not get another chance. It will never be more obvious. The year is almost up, time to try something else.

It is the same thing Paul points out a generation later writing to the Church in Corinth. The Old Testament is filled with examples written down for our sake. It was too late for them, it is not too late for you!!

For this crowd this was a very real warning. They are focused on the sins of others, saying to themselves at least I am not as bad as so and so. I have nothing to learn, nothing needs changing in my life. Jesus knows that he is about to be crucified, and example for the world to see. Will the crowd be ready because after Jesus gives his life and the news starts to spread about Jesus resurrection and who this guy was and what it means for our relationship with God... Will the crowd be ready because after Jesus death and resurrection it may be too late for them?

But this is not just tragic news, in fact it is wonderful news. When do you want to find out that you have been driving the wrong direction? When do you want to find out that you have been hurting yourself? BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE! Which is exactly what Jesus is impressing upon them!

Which maybe what Jesus is impressing upon you once again this season of Lent! What story have you been telling yourself about yourself? Does that need to change?

Here was the issue and it is still alive and well in our world today. Rather than focus on ourselves we like to tell ourselves little stories about others, specifically those that are 'more

guilty' then we are. These thoughts bounce around in our heads.

It is said that we have about sixty thousand thoughts per day – most of them random, many of them negative, and all to many of them the same thoughts we had the day before. Basically, our brains are carrying on a repetitive, one sided conversation... we are living in an echo chamber of the thoughts we think are pleasing us. And Jesus says stop, repent, try something else!

We say to ourselves; 'I'm fine... at least not as bad as *so and so.*' Or worse yet, we get stuck in a victim mentality telling ourselves; '*so and so* and people like him are the source of all the problems in the world – They deserve to have a tower fall on them...' Jesus says 'knock it off, look at the man in the mirror, stop, repent, think about yourself and the world around you in different ways.

Maybe the Repentance you need is to stop blaming others as the crowd did.

Repentance ... What does it look like in your life? What are the many different ways we repent with each other and with God? It is not something you do one time before you surrender to God in your teenage years. It is a daily practice.

And here is the good news. You are not alone. As Paul says '*No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.*' He always leaves away out. He gives us warning signs along the way. Now is the time to repent, it is not to late!