

To God Alone Be The Glory

One of the hardest things in life to say is, “I’m sorry.” Now, of course, if you are feeling snarky, you might be thinking, “No it’s not! See? ‘I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry.’ It’s not hard to say.” But you know what I mean. To say “I’m sorry” when you’re not really sorry (not yet anyway), but you know that ‘sorry’ is expected—that’s tough. Just listen when people are attempting to apologize and don’t really want to. They pull all kinds of tricks. They may hem and haw, “You know what I’m thinking, don’t you? I don’t really have to say it, right?” Or they may say, “Sorry,” but then they act all upset with you for days as if you have to pay for extracting such an expensive word from them. Or they may take a sweet tone and say something like, “I’m sorry my words hurt your feelings,” which can mean, “I wish you’d get a thicker skin! You’re so sensitive.”

Isn’t it interesting then that Jesus doesn’t command us to say we are sorry. No, JESUS SAYS, REPENT. Do you remember the definition of “repent”? The New Testament Greek word for “repent” literally means “to have a change of mind.” You’re going along through life as content as a kid carrying a candy cane. You’ve been allowing yourself to do something wrong, and pity the poor peon who

pesters you to repent. That would mean you actually have to acknowledge that what you’ve been doing is wrong. That would mean having ‘a change of mind’ about your sin, turning away from the sin and no longer doing it. “My, my, but there’s a lot to this repentance stuff.” Yes, and we’re not done yet. To repent also includes faith. When we repent, we not only turn away from sin, we also turn to our gracious God, who holds out full forgiveness for all sin through Jesus’ blood, and with the hand of faith we receive God’s verdict of not-guilty.

Guess what? We’re still not done with our biblical definition of repentance. Genuine repentance, you see, always produces ‘fruits of faith.’ What do I mean? Well, because you, a repentant believer, are so thankful to God for his free gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation, your new-self actually wants to do the opposite of the sin you were doing before. How about a dramatic example? Consider Zacchaeus (Luke 19). He had been cheating people in his role as chief tax collector. But when he was brought to faith in Jesus, he went from greedy to generous. He immediately donated half his possessions to the poor. He also changed from stealing to ‘repaying with interest.’ How much interest? Four hundred percent of what he had forced from people! | How about some examples from our lives? Let’s say you

used to worry. But because you're grateful for forgiveness, you now ask God daily to help you trust him completely. Let's you broke something belonging to someone else. You mended it or replaced it. If you used to poison the minds of people by pointing out particulars you didn't like, but now you look for anything good to say something nice about. If you were giving in to temptation (porn, too much food or alcohol or caffeine), you now put some distance between yourself and the temptation, and you are figuring out why you seek happiness in things rather than finding fulfillment in God's mercy. You even call on a trusted Christian brother or sister to help you with accountability. * This is what Jesus means when in our text for today JESUS SAYS, REPENT.

“Hey, preacher, aren't you taking this repentance stuff a little too seriously?” No. When JESUS SAYS, REPENT, he makes clear that **It is absolutely necessary**. Just look at today's Gospel. ¹*Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.* Here's what we think happened. Some apparently-God-fearing-Galilean-Jews had gone to the temple to make their required sacrifices to the Lord. Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, apparently suspected these Galileans of some subversive activity. So his soldiers went in and killed these

Galileans right there in the temple. Some of their blood got mixed with the blood of the animals they were sacrificing to the Lord. In that culture: terrible! The temple probably had to be closed for purification. Oh, the disgrace of being involved in making the temple unclean!

Apparently the people who brought this story to Jesus thought, “They must have had it coming.” That's the way our sinful flesh likes to think. If something bad happens to so-n-so, it's probably some sort of cosmic karma bringing a wicked attitude or deed full circle. “They had it coming. I've seen the way they live. I'm glad I'm not like they are.” Of course, that's kind of negative. People these days prefer to look at things from the other side: “If nothing really bad happens to me, it is a sign that I am living a good life; I am a good person. I must be doing something right to deserve this.” (e.g. Sound of Music song) “Nothing comes from nothing. Nothing ever could. So somewhere in my youth or childhood I must have done something good.” That's the way our sinful flesh likes to think.

In response, Jesus, the Son of God, pops up with what amounts to: “Your interpretation is all wrong.” ²*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. Do you understand what Jesus is saying? Our sins are just as bad as the sins of those who suffered a violent end. The Galileans who remained alive were just as guilty as those who were killed by Pilate. The sad truth is that everyone has it coming to them. I have it coming. You have it coming. All sinners, unless they repent, will meet with a terrible existence after they die. It is a tragedy when anyone refuses to repent, blocking the forgiveness Jesus won for all people on the cross. What if they die while they aren't sorry? It's not just "those wicked people" who need to repent. We all do. Jesus wants every violent death to remind us of this.

What about those who die accidental deaths? Jesus talks about them next: 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.* So, repentance is absolutely necessary. Jesus wants every accidental death to remind us of this.

All sin has consequences, but be careful about saying that so-n-so suffered a certain punishment for a specific sin. We don't usually know all the fact. Why we suffer hardships is only a minor point here. Jesus' main point is that everyone is guilty of sin, and if we

don't repent, we too will face an awful end, worse than what those in Jerusalem suffered.

Sounds like bad news. Why would anyone come to church repeatedly and listen to this? Because we know there is always good news to follow. **There still is time.** That's good news. If you're not dead yet, there still is time... but not unlimited time. ⁶*Then [Jesus] told 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. ⁷So 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?'"*

The fig tree was supposed to bear figs. The owner was right to expect fruit from it. Such patience he displayed toward the fig tree: three years of continual seeking! No wonder he was disappointed. So "cut it down." Do you get it? No one has unlimited time to repent. The owner of the tree was being just and fair. He did not reach a hasty decision. He wasn't throwing a hiss-hassy. It was time to remove the tree and make room for others that will produce fruit. See? We don't have unlimited time. Yes, God is longsuffering. But because he's just, God must eventually punish those who are not sorry. God is right to look for fruit from us. He is right to let people

die when he does not find the fruit he is looking for in them. What is this fruit? It starts with a simple, childlike faith that believes God loves us and has fully forgiven us through the Savior Jesus. Such a faith produces attitudes and actions that please God. There's the fruit.

This faith is a gift from God, as can be seen from what comes next. ⁸ *'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it.'* More beautiful good news! We have someone who intercedes for us! Someone who is willing to do everything possible to care for us so that we might become fruitful. This orchard hand represents Jesus Christ himself. Jesus is able to ask the owner of the vineyard for more time to work on us because he sacrifice himself on the cross for us. God's grace comes to us through his Son. This orchard hand digs up the weeds that are stealing the nutrients the tree needs for fruiting. "Yes, dear Jesus, strip away from us the things we hold more precious than God or his Word. I know it will hurt to lose the things and people I love more than God. But if that's the only way to separate me from my favorite sin, do it, Jesus. You already redeemed me by your cross. Now break me free from all my sinful habits."

But Jesus doesn't stop there. He puts fertilizer on us. The Greek word here is

"manure." I'm so glad we all live close enough to the farms to smell how manure stinks. But we put it on our fields and gardens anyway because we know the good it does. So if I say "God's Word is manure," you get that this is a complement. You get that we want to smell like God's Word. Let's not be like someone who's never been near a farm before: "That stinks; get it away from me!" God's Word is the only fertilizer that can make us grow faith. The Holy Spirit loves to work in us through the manure of God's Word. That's how he produces the fruit God is looking for on us fig trees.

"One more year," Jesus pleads with the Father. "Let me work on these people one more year to see if I can get them to stop letting sin rule their lives. ⁹*If they bears fruit next year, fine!*" All the years of unfruitfulness are forgotten by our gracious God as soon as he leads us to repent and produce fruit. Jesus never wants to see a tree destroyed (2 Peter 3:9, Lamentations 3:22-33).

But in saying "one more year," Jesus is communicating that his patience and loving care has a limit. Don't put off repenting as if Judgment Day will never come. The opportunity for repenting does finally come to an end. *"If it does not bear fruit after that, then cut it down."*