



JESUS AND REPENTANCE

Part 56 of Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Luke 12:49-13:5 | January 02, 2011

Luke 12:49–13:5

⁴⁹ “I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! ⁵⁰ I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! ⁵¹ Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. ⁵² For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. ⁵³ They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

⁵⁴ He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, ‘A shower is coming.’ And so it happens. ⁵⁵ And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat,’ and it happens. ⁵⁶ You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?

⁵⁷ “And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? ⁵⁸ As you go with your accuser before the magistrate, make an effort to settle with him on the way, lest he drag you to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer put you in prison.

⁵⁹ I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the very last penny.”

^{13:1} There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ² And he answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? ³ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. ⁴ Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? ⁵ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

INTRODUCTION

All right Mars Hill. This sermon is going to cost you. This is going to be a hard one. It's going to be an hour of real emotional investment. I'm going to ask you not to check your iPhone app, return your e-mail, surf the Internet, text. Just hang with me for an hour. My hope is that as a result of God's grace, this hour together would have a massive impact on every hour that God would give you to live for the rest of your life.

Jesus, the most loving person who has ever lived, is going to have some hard words for us and for you today. We find them in Luke 12:49–13:5 in a section that is about Jesus and repentance. And so if you would find that place in your Bible and give me an hour of your attention, I'll pray for us and we'll see what he would have for you.

Lord Jesus, I thank you that you're a truth teller and a grace giver. That you tell us the truth so that we might know exactly who we are and exactly what is before us and exactly what is asked of us. And we thank you that you're a grace giver. Your grace forgives our sins and it empowers an obedient life. And so Lord Jesus as we open the Bible to hear your words, things that you while on the earth said, it's a sacred thing. We don't take it lightly or for granted. We ask, Lord God, for the emotional and mental energy to consider every word of Jesus, in whose name we pray, amen.

PASSION

We'll start in Luke 12:49–53 where Jesus talks about passion. Here's what he has to say. He says, quote, “I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two, and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law,” kind of saw that one coming, “and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.” Division, Jesus says, is a mark of his ministry.

And he talks here about fire. What in the world is Jesus talking about? When Jesus speaks of fire, he's talking about passion, enthusiasm, zeal, commitment, devotion. People will talk about having a fire in their gut for something. Being fired up for someone or something. Fire here speaks of the Holy Spirit giving us the kind of passion that Jesus had. Jesus was God become a man during his earthly life, now he's returned to his heavenly kingdom. And while on the earth, he was filled with a fire, a passion, a zeal, a commitment, a devotion. And he says that his passion is ultimately to complete his mission.

His mission was to live without sin and to die on the cross in our place for our sins that it might glorify the Father and do good for us. So that then he could baptize us, following his resurrection, with the same kind of fire. Jesus does just that. He goes to the cross, he suffers, he dies, he rises. He conquers our enemies of Satan, sin, death, hell, and the wrath of God. He ascends back into heaven and in the sequel to this book of Luke, the book of Acts, penned by the same author, the Holy Spirit descends upon the church, and resting above the Christians are something like flames of fire. That as the Holy Spirit indwells us, we become set aflame with a passionate love for Jesus. It's a fire that burns within us. That's the metaphor.

And so this passion, this flaming fire of devotion, it leads to both excitement and endurance. We're excited about Jesus and the things of Jesus. And there is an endurance. There's a long life of obedience, and devotion, and commitment, and followership toward Jesus.

DIVISION

But, Jesus warns us, not everyone will respond favorably to our passion. That, in fact, we will have, as he says, division. That as we are devoted to Jesus, some are opposed to Jesus. As we are devoted to a lifestyle that honors Jesus, some are opposed to our lifestyle that honors Jesus, and we are not to be rude. We are not to be mean. We are not to be self-serving or haughty or proud or religious. But invariably, you need to know that if you are passionate about Jesus, you will experience division, conflict, and strife in your life. It's inevitable. Jesus experienced it and so will you.

And he says that this will include conflict with your family. That is some of the most painful, difficult, complicated conflict that there can be. With your parents, with your siblings, with your own children. That's what Jesus says. How many of you have found this to be true? The more devoted you are to Jesus, the more complicated some of your relationships become with those people who are closest to you. Family, friends, coworkers.

See, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, the life. No one comes to the Father but through me." There's only one way of salvation and that means that all other religions are wrong. Jesus also spoke of hell more than anyone else in the whole Bible. Hell is real and lots of people are going there. Jesus often had arguments with religious people because he thought religion was ridiculous. He also told sinners to repent of sin and to stop in a life of disobedience and folly.

Now if you actually believe this, and articulate it, someone's not going to like it. Someone with your last name is not going to like you. So what do you do? What do you do? And for how many of you, this has been a real, painful experience, this is not just a theological treatise. This is an emotional cost. It's hard. It's hard to stay passionate, zealous, fired up toward Jesus.

CRITICISM AND OSTRACISM

Sometimes those we're in community and relationship with—and this can be the full gamut, from those who are very religious to those who are very anti-religious—they tend to both oppose gospel-centered, grace-loving, Jesus-following people. They will express their division, their hostility, their animosity, with two things: criticism and ostracism. Criticism, they will say some negative things about you, perhaps even to you. They will criticize you or ostracize you. They don't call. You're no longer included in those conversations. You're not invited to those events. "Hey, how come I didn't know?" "Oh, we didn't invite you." "Oh. "It looks like my place has shifted in the relationship and the community in the family." I've been in this job long enough to see painful, innumerable examples of exactly what Jesus is saying.

Now Jesus is telling us this not to discourage us, but to instruct us and inform us and prepare us. "This is how it's going to be." I know of devoutly religious families in other nations committed to other religions who have literally told their children studying here in the States and attending Mars Hill who have become Christians, tell their own children, "You're not allowed to come home. We never want to see you again. We've disowned you." I know that at least one person at Mars Hill, while still alive, in another nation their devoutly religious family held a funeral and declared them dead because they had converted to Christianity.

I know of some people who are afraid to return home because their family is not beyond what is called an honor killing. If they return home they will be deemed an infidel and killed because of their love for Jesus. These are people who will never see their family again unless their family repents and becomes Christian.

I know of people whose family has turned their back on them, who criticize them. I know personally hundreds of single people whose own family is making fun of them for trying to stay pure until marriage, wanting to get married instead of just living and sleeping together.

I know hundreds of women whose own family has really opposed them and mocked them and maligned them because they have children or they want to be mothers and they want to have a family.

I know families in which the parents have really pressured one of the children who is a Christian to tolerate other religions and diversities and, "Can't you just keep it to yourself?" and, "Isn't faith a private matter?" What they're essentially saying is, "We will welcome you providing you don't bring your friend Jesus with you. If you bring your friend Jesus with you, then feel free not to come and feel free not to speak." I've had some people in this church actually told by family members, "When we ask you how you're doing, we don't want to hear about God, we don't want to hear about church, we don't want to hear about ministry. Talk about something else. We don't want to hear it."

And under these circumstances Jesus is forewarning us that this fire, this zeal, this passion, well, it would be like certain people are just always trying to throw water on your fire. The goal is to get your flame to be as small as possible, perhaps extinguish it altogether. How many of you, right now, there are people in your life, it's just a bucket of water? Every chance they get, it's criticism, ostracism. Should you say or do anything wrong, they immediately jump on the opportunity to point out your hypocrisy. Jesus tells us that to become a Christian is to be set aflame with a never-ending passion for God and the things of God and that those who do not share that passion will invariably keep trying to put water on that flame.

And this is a sobering word. It should not be a discouraging word but it's a sobering word. To really contemplate what cost you're willing to pay to maintain a red-hot devotion to Jesus. Some of you already have settled for a very small flame of passion for Jesus. You've tried to find that sweet spot to where all your family and friends affirm you, maybe Jesus still accepts you. The flame is not out but it's as small as possible. And maybe it's private and not public.

HOW TO KINDLE SPIRIT-FIRED PASSION

How do you keep yourself hot? Motivated? Passionate toward Jesus? I would submit to you that a regular practice of the spiritual disciplines is the way. I'll give you an example. I'll give you a short, brief list as it were. Some of you would ask, "As my passionate commitment to Jesus may be waning in certain seasons," and we all experience this, "What is the secret to sort of reignite that flame of passion toward God?" Well, the truth is there's no secret. There's just habitual obedience in a number of areas.

1. COMMUNITY

And it starts in community. Now I don't know about you. I was a city boy, raised in the city. Didn't camp. I didn't know how to make a fire. And then Gracie and I were married between our junior and senior year of college. We rented a basement apartment for \$250 a month. And we couldn't afford the electric heating bill because we were college broke. There was a fireplace so we decided, "We'll make fires and that will heat our home." The problem was I didn't know how to make a fire. One of the first fires I tried to make, I put a log in, surrounded it with paper, I set it on fire. The paper burned, the log laughed. And there was no fire. So I got lighter fluid. Incentive. Motivation. Like the Holy Spirit, just put that on the flame. But eventually I was out of lighter fluid and the log still wasn't on fire and continued laughing at me. Then I realized, "Oh, I'll need a little kindling."

So let's call these kinds of spiritual disciplines, these are kindling. This helps to stoke a fire and keep it going. And what I learned very quickly was, you need to stack the logs together, right? And once you stack the logs together with the right kindling, once you light the kindling then the kindling heats up into a set of coals and then the kindling as coals starts to heat up the logs. And then the logs, if they're appropriately stacked, they burn off of one another. You get a fantastic flame that burns for a long time and generates a lot of sustaining heat. And your wife will snuggle with you. That's what I learned about making a fire.

The Christian life is like that. The spiritual disciplines here, it's like kindling. It gets the fire started. Turns into good, hot coals to keep it burning. And community is stacking the logs together. It's Christians in relationship, in friendship, in what we call community groups, stacking together. Saying, "You know, all by ourselves, eventually, perhaps not long at all, a single log ceases to flame." How many of you have noticed this? You could take a flaming log that's red hot underneath, fully heated up, remove it from the stack, isolate it. Before long it's down to embers, it's smoldering, it's dark. And the flame is extinguished.

You, friend, are like that. You will continue to burn if you have enough kindling and community. Without kindling there won't be coals to keep you hot. Without community eventually you will be extinguished. Your passionate zeal and devotion to Jesus will wane until it ends. And how many of you this has been your story? The hottest seasons of your life with God have been those in community and the coldest seasons in your life spiritually have been alone? It's true for us all. It's why God said, "It's not good to be alone."

2. SCRIPTURE

And so the kindling, Scripture, it's reading the Bible. It's how God talks to us. It's also reading good Christian books that help us understand the Bible.

3. PRAYER

It's prayer, which is talking to God. Maybe even about the fact that you're alone. Or there's a lot of water on your wood right now.

4. WORSHIP

It includes worship, which is a lifestyle, but it's also coming together on Sunday as the church and it includes singing. And the way we've even organized our service, I'll admit, it can be awkward and you have to grow into it. Because I will rebuke you for an hour and then expect you to sing joyfully. It's because, for us, a rebuke, a correction, an instruction, is not a condemnation, it's an invitation. It's God saying, "This is a problem. I'm here. Let's work on it." And singing and responding is running to God, saying, "Thank you for being willing to help me. I am willing to have your help right now." And so there's a sense of passionate urgency.

5. GIVING

It includes giving because as Jesus has already said in Luke 12, where your heart is your treasure is. If you want your heart to be toward God and the things of God, then give your money toward God and the things of God and your passion will follow.

6. SERVING

It includes serving. Finding people and places in which you could be of assistance and make a contribution and help. "Who can I help? What can I do? Where can I serve?" And that helps us to grow in our appreciation that our God is a humble God and Jesus is a God who serves us.

7. OBEDIENCE

This includes obedience. This is doing what God said even when you don't feel like it. I had this situation with Gideon last night. He's four. I said, "Gideon, you need to sit there and eat your dinner." He said, "I don't feel like it." I said, "Well, I didn't say that I want you to feel like eating your

dinner. What did I say?" He said, "You said to eat my dinner." Okay for some of us that's as simple as it is with us and God. God says, "Obey me." And we say, "I don't feel like it." And God says, "You can still obey me." And obedience keeps us from harm. Obedience keeps us from danger. And sometimes in the act of obedience our heart comes around and we feel differently.

8. EVANGELISM

And lastly it's evangelism, which is talking to non-Christians, building relationships with non-Christians, loving and serving non-Christians. If you're not a Christian, we love you. We are so honored, sincerely, and glad you're here. Everything on the Web site's free. Download anything that looks good. Get a free copy of the Bible. We're glad to have you. We love you.

And for those of us who are Christians, being around non-Christians helps to remind us that to be separated from God and his people and to grow cold and to live as if we didn't even belong to or know God, well, that's not something that our deepest desires really long for. Do you remember what it was like to be a non-Christian? Can you imagine what it would be like to live life apart from God and his people?

URGENCY

So number one is passion. Number two, Jesus speaks of a sense of urgency. In Luke 12:54-59, "He also said to the crowds, 'When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, "A shower is coming." And so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, "There will be a scorching heat," and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time? And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? As you go with your accuser before the magistrate, make an effort to settle with him on the way, lest he drag you to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer put you in prison. I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the very last penny.'"

Jesus herein speaks of two things: the weather and judgment. We'll deal with weather first. Jesus is saying that some people are far too concerned about the weather. Now think about it. Nothing has changed. When you get a phone, the one app you don't even need to download is the what app? The weather app. They just give you that one because they know everyone wants it. The rest you have to choose for yourself. That one everybody gets. Why? Because everybody wants to know the weather. Why? Why do people want to know the weather? In that day they would track the wind and they'd look at the clouds and that was their version of the weather app. They're trying to figure out what the weather's going to be like. Why? Because you want to prepare for the future.

And what Jesus says is some of us are almost obsessively interested in the weather in anticipation and preparation for our future, and we don't even get ready for eternity. Are you going to heaven or hell? You say, "I don't know. But I know what the temperature will be tomorrow." It is okay to know what the temperature will be tomorrow, but that is not the most important future you need to prepare for. Forever is a long time. Heaven and hell are real. You will die and live forever somewhere. And so you need to prepare for eternity.

And isn't it true that so much of our life is filled with inane, mundane conversations about the weather? I mean, we have the most ridiculous conversations about the weather because we're nervous and we don't know what else to talk about, right? People say the craziest things. I mean, "Well, it's very hot out today." "Is that why I'm sweaty? Oh. Thank you. That explains a lot. I am sweaty and I am hot. Perhaps because it is hot. You're a genius, yes you are." "It's very wet outside today." "That would explain why I'm wet. I was inside. I was dry. And then I went outside and I got wet. It could be because it's wet out. That could be it." "Oh, are you ready for the winter?" Nobody ever asks, "Are you ready for hell? It's going to be hot. You might sweat. There's no flip-flops." Forever's a long time.

We tend to divert our attention. We tend to distract ourselves from thinking about long-range planning for an eternal future by short-term planning for an immediate future. Some of you check your weather app more than you check your heart. Some of you are prepared for the seasons with your wardrobe but you're not prepared to stand before God and give an account and live forever somewhere. It's true, isn't it? So what Jesus says is if you're someone who's trying to figure out what to wear tomorrow, don't overlook forever.

DO NOT DELAY

Then he talks about judgment. Here's the hard, cold, sad, truth: You're going to die. We all sin. The wage for sin is death. We all die. That day will be our proverbial day in court. You're going to stand before God and give an account for your whole life. We're all guilty. Our thoughts, our words, our deeds, our motives; what we have done, what we have failed to do, will all come to accuse us, testify against us, ultimately leading to our eternal condemnation, sentencing to hell. I want you to emotionally feel that reality.

And what Jesus is saying is if you're going to get prepared for the weather, get prepared for the judgment. Whether it's hot or cold tomorrow is not nearly as significant as whether you go to heaven or hell forever. So get ready for that day in court, that day when you stand before God.

And he uses this interesting parable or analogy. Let me apply it to you personally and individually. Let's say that you have committed a horrible crime. You have done something atrocious. And you are guilty. And everyone knows you're guilty and the evidence is incontrovertible. You hire the best attorney and you ask, "What can I do?" And he just tells you, "Nothing. Prepare yourself for sentencing. Get yourself emotionally ready for the consequences. You're going away forever. There's nothing I can do for you. You're guilty. Everyone knows it. Nothing will change it. This is a doomed case." I want you to feel that.

Imagine, as your day is approaching, and the weightiness of your transgression has settled into your soul and you've got your sleepless nights and your panic-filled days. And then suppose, according to Jesus' analogy, you get a letter in the mail. And you get that feeling in your stomach because the

return address is the person that you committed the crime against. "Oh man, dare I even open it. What might they say?" You open it up and there's a letter. And it starts with, "I love you. And I'm worried about you. And our day in court is coming. And I know what's going to happen to you. And so I have decided I would like to pursue you and forgive you and cancel any punishment or debt or obligation that you have toward me. And I'm worried about your emotional well-being so I'd like to build a friendship with you and help you recover from this. And I think there's a way for your future life to not look like your past life. My guess is right now a lot of your family and friends have disowned you, so I would like to be your family and your friend. And so I'd really like to meet with you before we go to court because once we stand before the judge and the gavel is hammered upon the desk, there's no turning back and there's nothing we can do. But it's not too late. Let's meet. Let's reconcile. Let me forgive you. Let me bless you and serve you and help you. And this is so important to me that I'll meet with you whenever works for you. I've cleared my whole schedule and whenever you're ready, I'm gonna come and meet with you. You don't even need to come and meet with me. I'll come and meet with you."

Can you imagine receiving that letter? "Are you kidding me? I'm going to get my life back? My enemy is going to become my friend? They're going to cancel all my debts? They're going to give me a whole new life." That's Jesus' analogy and let me tell you something. This [*holding a Bible*] is that letter. This is that letter. This is that letter.

We've sinned against God. We're all going to die and have our proverbial day in court. There's no hope for any of us. And Jesus says, "I'll die for your sin. I'll cancel your debt. I'll pay your obligation of death. I'll pursue you and love you as a friend. Please talk to me before it's too late. Please talk to me before you're standing before the judge on the day of eternal sentencing."

Jesus here is compelling you toward a sense of urgency. Some of you say, "That doesn't make any sense." We've had to learn a very important word in the Bible to explain this kind of action. It's called grace. It sounds almost too good to be true that God would do that. In Christ that's exactly what he does. That Jesus dies for our sin, that he rises as our savior, that he pursues us as friends. That he cancels our debt. That he changes our life. And he gives us a new life that never ends.

And some of you don't have any sense of urgency. The messing around with God, playing around with God, occasionally dropping into church or praying a little bit or reading the Bible but truthfully you haven't really settled things with Jesus. You're not really prepared to stand before the judge. Your accounts are not cleaned out. You've not really confessed your sin and repented of your sin and given it to Jesus and trusted in him by faith and worked on that reconciled relationship with him.

And what he would tell you is this, "Do not delay. Do not delay." That he's willing to meet with you right here, right now, today. Isn't that fantastic?

REPENT OR PERISH

Passion, urgency. For what? Passionate urgency for what? Jesus' third point is that our passionate urgency should be for repentance. He says it this way in Luke 13:1-5, "There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans," and Jesus himself was from the region of Galilee, "whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, 'Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No.'" Emphatically, "'No, I tell you; but unless you,'" what's the word? "'Repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No!'" Emphatically, "'No, I tell you; but unless you,'" what? "'Repent,'" there's our word again, "'you will all likewise perish.'"

Here's what Jesus says. Every human being has two options: repent or perish. Repent or perish. People don't even talk about repentance anymore. Preachers don't even preach repentance anymore. Christians don't even discuss repentance anymore. There are a few exceptions, but repentance is not popular. You know what is popular? Self-love, self-esteem, self-help, self-actualization, not repentance. "Repentance," Jesus says, "is the only alternative to perishing." What does he mean by perishing? Dying and going to hell to suffer eternally forever as a just consequence of sin against a holy and righteous God.

Now, in saying this, I know some of you immediately, you will think, "Ah, I don't know if there is a God. I don't know if there is a hell. I don't know if you're right." Let me submit this to you. If I am wrong and there is no God and there is no heaven and there is no hell and I from my heart of hearts love and serve Jesus, repent of my sin, and trust in him, I have nothing to lose and everything to gain. If you are wrong, you have nothing to gain and everything to lose. You have nothing to gain and everything to lose if in fact you are wrong. You're gambling with hell. You're gambling with God. You're gambling with your eternal destiny. Repent or perish.

Some of you say, "But there are pastors who affirm my lifestyle. There are churches who would tell me that all religions are the same and that all gods are the same and that all paths lead to the same place." And I would tell you, "Those pastors may be perishing." You can be a preacher and go to hell. You can be a pastor and go to hell. You can be a theologian and go to hell. You can be a writer, an author, a thinker, a scholar, and go to hell, if you don't what? Repent.

So this word is very important, is it not? Of all the words in our language, perhaps this word "repent" is among the most important and Jesus here uses it twice in five verses. And he's echoing the Old Testament prophets who repeatedly, emphatically, and clearly called for what? Repentance. Repentance.

Emotionally this is going to be very hard for you. Don't leave me emotionally. Don't check out mentally. And don't start thinking about all the people who need to repent because they've sinned against you. Think of your own sin first.

So many people don't even know what the word "repent" means. This hit me some years ago, I was writing for a major newspaper, a column that they'd asked me to write, and I was talking about someone who had become a Christian and they had repented of certain behaviors in their lifestyle.

And the editor for this faith-values-religion-spirituality section called me up and they said, "Pastor Mark, we need you to rewrite the story." I said, "Well, what do you need?" And they said, and they were not a Christian, they're very nice, they said, "We have no idea what you mean by the word 'repent' and our readers won't either." Wow.

The truth is, repentance is not a common word in our language. It's not even something that Christians use very often, and when we do, we oftentimes don't define it, we just use the word, not knowing what it means. It's a very important word. It means to change one's life course or direction. You're going towards sin. You turn around and go toward God. You're going toward death and you turn around and go toward life. You're going toward folly and you turn around and go toward wisdom.

Repentance is not just something that you do to become a Christian. It's what you also do to grow as a Christian. Christianity is in some ways divided around something called the Protestant Reformation. Now, I don't mean to get into all the issues of Catholicism. I was raised Catholic. Altar boy, went to Catholic school for a few years. There are some Catholics who love Jesus. But I'm a Protestant and I agree with the criticisms of the Protestant Reformation against Roman Catholicism.

And the Protestant Reformation was an effort to correct or to bring to repentance some errors within the Catholic Church. And it culminated around a man named Martin Luther. He had previously been a Catholic monk and scholar and theologian. And then in studying the Bible he realized that the church had some false teaching and some bad doctrine and some error. And so he wrote something called the 95 Theses. It was basically 95 points of error that the church needed to repent of in order to be consistent with the teaching of the Bible. And he posted this on something called the Wittenberg Door. It was like a bulletin board in that day. It was where issues of culture and theology were posted for discussion. And that is seen by some as the opening salvo of the public issue of the Protestant Reformation. And the opening line of the 95 Theses of Martin Luther was incredibly important. And he said this, quote, "All of a Christian's life is one of repentance." The Christians are not the nicest people, the most consistent people, the most generous people, the most winsome people, but by God's grace we should be. The true mark of a Christian is repentance.

And so Jesus here is talking about the two options that are set before you today. Repent or what? Perish. And they come to him and they ask him questions. And he comments on two issues in the day because when we're not diverted with the weather, we're diverted with the news. And that tends to be all that we chat about. We ignore weighty, eternal things so we can talk about the weather and the news. And they bring to Jesus a noteworthy, newsworthy event in that day. These two events that Jesus speaks of are not mentioned anywhere else that we have in record historically. The only thing we know is what Jesus says, so the details are scant.

And the first is where apparently it was Passover season, when sacrifices were made because the wage for sin is death, and in the sacrificial system there would be a temple where God's presence was. And there would be priests who were like mediators between people and God, ultimately foreshadowing Jesus our great high priest. And they would bring their animals as substitutes symbolizing, foreshadowing, Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. The whole old covenant system was all foreshadowing the forthcoming of Jesus as its fulfillment. And the worshiper would bathe themselves, cleanse themselves, they would put on white, they would ascend up to the mount, singing songs of worship. They would bring their substitutionary sacrifice, which was an expensive gift. They would confess their sins to God. They would acknowledge that they were sinners. They would demonstrate their repentance by offering the animal that it might be slain, its blood shed in their place for their sins.

And he says that as these repentant worshipers of God were doing that, Roman soldiers apparently broke in and they slaughtered people who were worshipping so that their blood comingled with the blood of the sacrifices that they were offering. This would be akin to our own day, God forbid, that we were serving Communion at Mars Hill Church, we had the wine or juice, depending upon conscience, that represents the shed blood of Jesus, and as we were taking it showing that we belong to Jesus and we're humble by the grace of God and repenting of our sin by the grace of God, someone massacred members of our church and the Communion servers fell and the Communion wine spilled and the blood of the members comingled with the blood of the Communion wine. It's a massacre. It's a tragedy. It's a travesty. And they come to Jesus and they ask him a question about this.

And Jesus also comments about a second tragic event. Apparently a construction project, an accident, at the pool of Siloam. It was a sacred and holy place and Jesus is going to do miraculous ministry there before long. And apparently they were constructing, according to Jesus' words, a tower. So this is building some religious monument or building at a place that was well traveled by God's people. And as the construction workers are working, apparently the tower fell and Jesus tells us eighteen people died, tragically and suddenly.

And here's what happens, friends. We try not to deal with death. We try to ignore it. You can eat your vitamins, you can go vegan, you can buckle up, and drink bottled water. You're still going to die. You're all going to die. Some of you will die many years from now. Some of you may not make it through today. I hope that's not a prophetic word, but some of you may not make it through the day. And some of you will die tragic deaths like these people did. You won't see it coming and you'll die unexpectedly and suddenly. You are a sinner. Sinners die. You will die. And you don't know when.

And these people died tragically. And they come to Jesus with their question, "Why did this happen?" And this is what happens when tragedy comes. We try to not deal with death. We try to ignore it as much as we are able. Someone's sick, put them in the home, put them in the hospital, put medication in their body. Make them go peaceably. Make them go painlessly. We don't want to see it. When they do die, let's dress them up in nice clothes, put them in a nice box, make them look as if perhaps they were almost still alive. Let's grieve a little bit, shut the box, and move on. And then tragedy happens.

And in this day it was the massacre of the worshipers and it was the death of the construction workers. They come to Jesus and they ask him questions. And the first thing that Jesus does is he refutes karma because karma is stupid and dumb and wrong. And it leads to cruelty and not compassion in moments of suffering. It just does. Karma teaches that good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people. And there are stupid

preachers, karma preachers, in that day who are saying, "Well, good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people and all the worshippers got slaughtered and the eighteen construction workers died. They must have been bad people. Thankfully we're alive. That means we're good people."

Is it true that good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people? Or sometimes do bad things happen to pretty good people? Now, we're all sinners, but in the case of those who were murdered worshiping, these are believers who are going to temple. They probably walked dozens, hundreds of miles carrying their sacrifice, underwent ritual purification, walked up the mount, went to the temple for the Passover, publicly confessed their sins, made a generous offering, and were asking God for forgiveness when they got murdered. That doesn't seem fair. That doesn't seem fair. That doesn't seem like they're the bad people. They're sinners but they're not doing anything wrong. They're doing exactly what God asked them to do and they got murdered while doing it.

What about the construction workers? They were serving God. This would be like us starting a campus and the volunteers all show up to prepare the building and the roof collapses in and eighteen volunteers get killed. You'd be very upset if some stupid karma preacher said, "Well, they must have been bad people because bad things only happen to bad people."

Who's telling us this? Who is? Jesus. Good person or bad person? Um, he's God. So let's say that in the good category there's actually one person. His name is Jesus. In the bad category there's everyone else. Does anything bad happen to Jesus? Yeah. The best person is going to suffer the worst fate. He's going to get murdered on a cross, betrayed by his friend, abandoned by his other friends, executed by his enemies. Jesus absolutely obliterates the folly of karma. The best person suffers the worst fate.

So the first thing Jesus says is, "When you see suffering, don't ask the wrong questions." Don't ask, "Why God? Why them? What happened? Are you not just? Are you not good? Are you not sovereign? Are you impotent? Are you evil? Do you not care? Do you exist?" When tragedy happens and death is absolutely thrust before us and we can't avoid it because it's in the news, we need to be careful not to ask the wrong questions.

We don't always know what God is doing. We live by faith, not by sight. We get some of our questions answered in this life but the Bible teaches elsewhere that we know in what? Part. We see? Dimly. One day when we're with Jesus on the other side of resurrection all the questions will be answered. We'll see it all clearly. We'll know it all fully. Until then, we live by faith, not by sight. God doesn't give us answers to all of our questions. He gives us Jesus. Someone who has suffered and died and risen to take away our sin, give us new life, and get us to the kingdom where it all makes sense.

Are you ready to die? You're going to die! Friends, you're going to die. Are you ready to die? So you say, "I will get ready." You do not know when you will die, so get ready right now so that whenever death comes for you, you're ready. And it's repent or perish.

And repentance is this. Repentance is because Jesus died for my sin, by faith in him, by grace from him, I can put my sin to death. You kill your sin as it killed Jesus. You don't minimize it. You don't hide it in shame. You don't excuse it. You don't tolerate it. You don't nurture it. You don't embrace it. You don't defend it. You kill it. Jesus died for it so that we might put it to death. That is repentance.

TRUE REPENTANCE

And repentance involves three things. I'll share them with you in closing. What is true repentance? It is confession, contrition, and change. It is the mind, the emotions, and the actions. True repentance takes the whole person.

1. CONFESSION

Confession is in the mind agreeing with God. What you previously did not consider to be a sin, as you read the Word of God, you realize it is a sin and you confess it. "You are right, I am wrong. This is unacceptable. It needs to die." It's the mind changing. "Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world. Be transformed by the renewing of your," what? "Your mind." Some of you need to read more Bible and listen to less culture and agree with God that the way you're thinking is unacceptable. It's inexcusable. It's intolerable. It's incorrigible. It's unhelpful.

And that leads to your mouth. And out of your mouth comes words like this: "I'm sorry. I'm wrong. It was evil. It's not your fault. There's no excuse. I have no one to blame but myself. I stole. I lied. I cheated. I committed adultery. I hurt you. I was bitter. I was angry. I was self-righteous. I'm guilty." Without adding the word "but." "But you deserved it. But I had a bad childhood. But I didn't know better. But I tried my—" No, no but! Just a period. No excuse making. No blame shifting. Some of, you so struggle to say those words to God and to those you've sinned against.

And fathers, husbands, let me say this. You are the family leader. You go first. You don't just demand that your wife and children repent. You repent first. Leaders set an example. I'll give you an example from the Driscoll home. Yesterday I was home with Grace and the kids. It was fantastic. We're all sitting around the table playing games. I don't really like games but I like Grace and the kids and they like games so I was playing games. I don't remember what game we were playing. I don't know how to play any games. I always lose. That's why they like me to play games with them. And we're playing the game, and as is usually the case where I get in trouble, I thought I was cute, and so I said something that I shouldn't have said. No, I didn't curse, but I said something I shouldn't have said. And immediately my adorable seven-year-old daughter, who absolutely loves me, and tucked me into bed last night by giving me a kiss and singing me a song that she wrote for me about why she loves her Daddy, she immediately said exactly what I had just said. And I looked at her and I said, "Honey, you shouldn't say that and Daddy shouldn't have said that. And Daddy sinned and Daddy was wrong. And kids, I apologize. And your Daddy's a sinner and, man, I should not have said that and by the grace of God I won't say that again. And I'm asking you not to say it because it's wrong and your daddy was wrong." The mind and the mouth confessing, "Guilty."

2. CONTRITION

Number two, it's contrition. This is your emotions and your expressions. How many of you, you will acknowledge your sin, but you don't seem really bothered by it? The truth is that if you don't seem troubled by it, destroyed, devastated, disturbed, people wonder if you really mean it when you confess it. I'll give you two examples, painful examples, extreme examples from counseling.

I'll never forget the day a husband and wife were meeting with me and he confessed to adultery to his wife with me present with them. And he said, "I'm sorry. I hate to break this to you. I committed adultery. I've broken our covenant." But the way he said it was like, "Pickles are on sale, two jars for a dollar." He just said it like that. Wasn't crying, wasn't disturbed, wasn't troubled. No contrition at all.

Separate occasion, a husband and wife, I was meeting with them, and she had committed adultery and she was going to confess it to her husband with me in the room to help them. And she was literally bent over. She was sobbing bitterly, breathing heavily. This woman had tears rolling out of her eyes. She had snot falling out of her nose. She told her husband, "I hate to tell you this. I have slept with another man. I have committed adultery." She actually hyperventilated and threw up. Even if you were deaf and didn't know what was going on in the conversation, just seeing her, you would know that she was devastated by something. That's contrition. That's emotion and expression. That's not just knowing that you are a sinner. That is feeling that you are a sinner.

3. CHANGE

And ultimately it includes change. It's all three: confession, contrition, and change. This is a change of will and works. You want to stop. You want to change. You want to learn. You want to grow. You want to be different. You want the future not to look like the past. You don't want to go back. By the grace of God, you want to keep going in a new direction of life with Jesus.

And this leads to new works. You work to make godly friends. You work to read the Bible and good books. You work to be humble. You work to be repentant. You work to show your love. You work to apologize. You work to be changed by the grace of God. You're always working on it. You're always working on it. Some of you just say, "I'm sorry," don't feel much, and do it again. That's not repentance.

Repentance... it's confession. It's contrition. It's change. And I'll close with this. It's a gift. Repentance is a gift. Friends, not everybody gets to repent. Non-Christians, you don't get to repent. You have to repent to become a Christian and then you can repent to grow as a Christian, but repentance is only made possible through Jesus. And apart from Jesus there is no repentance. There's only perishing.

For those of us who are Christians, what a great gift this is. Repentance is a great gift to give. Give the gift of repentance. Tell people who you are. Tell people what you've done. Tell God who you are. Tell God what you've done. And for this to be of any help to you, pick one thing that the Holy Spirit is right now impressing and highlighting upon you and apply the doctrine of repentance to that thing. The thing that's killing you. The thing that killed Jesus. The thing that you need to kill by the grace of God. Receive the gift of repentance and gift the gift of repentance. Free people from their self-loathing and blame and bitterness. Free people from their bewilderment and confusion. Repent. Own it. Take it off of their shoulders. Give it all to Jesus and let them go free.

Now is your opportunity to repent. The room will be silent and awkward. This sermon has been long. To some degree I'm sure for you it has been exhausting and uncomfortable and troubling. I love you and I want good for you and I hope that this hour would change every hour that God would give you for the rest of your life.

Father God, I pray against the enemy, his servants, their works, and effects. I thank you Lord Jesus that you have died so that sin could be put to death and that you have risen that eternal life could be granted. God, we confess, hard words produce soft people and soft words produce hard people. Jesus, we thank you for the hard words because they come from the mouth of the one who has loved the best and therefore are good. Holy Spirit, help us to receive Jesus' words and to obey them, that we might receive the gift of repentance and give the gift of repentance to others, not just once but every day. In Jesus' name, amen.

[End of Audio]

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.