



## Sermon from March 23, 2025

Third Sunday in Lent [Luke 13:1-9]

### "The Christian Life: A Call to Continual Repentance"

Soon and very soon we're going to see the King, whether Jesus returns in our lifetime to judge the living and the dead or should our Lord tarry when we die only to face the final judgment. As we are reminded in Hebrews 9:27, "Each person is destined to die once, and after that comes the judgment,"

To quote from the late comedian Flip Wilson, Here comes the Judge, Here comes the Judge. And knowing our Lord may return any moment and the fact that as mortal beings all of us are just one missed heartbeat away from dying and facing the final judgment.

Every day, in fact, every moment, ought to be a time to examine ourselves and be ready for the final judgment by continuously repenting of our sins and receiving our forgiveness in Jesus, to ensure we don't harden our hearts like the Israelites did who failed to enter the promised land.

Lest we forget our identity as royal citizens of heaven, and end up being conformed to the peasant-like, sinful patterns of this world rather than being transformed by the renewing of our minds through God's Word, thereby losing our saltiness and possibly even our salvation, such as Judas Iscariot, the Nicolaitans, the Balaamites, Jezebel of Thyatira, Hymenaeus, and Alexander, as well as countless others who have fallen away from the faith once received.

Likewise, Luther reminds us to remember our baptism daily, that the old Adam in us should be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance, and die with all sins and evil lusts, and, in turn, a new person daily comes forth and rise from death again to live forever before God in righteousness and purity.

In Ecclesiastes 7:2 Solomon tells us that it is better to spend your time at funerals than at parties. After all, everyone dies—So the living should take this to heart. As a reminder to keep in mind his inspired words at the end of this same book, when he writes,

"Here is the conclusion of the matter:

Fear God and keep his commandments,  
for this is the duty of all mankind.

For God will bring every deed into judgment,  
including every hidden thing,  
whether it is good or evil." (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

And so when we observe the deaths of others in the news or in the obituaries, it ought to serve as a wake-up call to remind us of the big picture of how brief this life is compared to eternity and the importance of being prepared to face the final judgment. By holding up the mirror of the law of God's Word showing us our sins, so that we would repent of any sins in our lives, turn to Jesus for forgiveness, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, resolve to follow Jesus, the world behind me, the cross before me, no turning back.

And live with eternity stamped on our eyeballs, as we seek to store up treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. And rather than living as if the person who dies with the most toys wins, we are reminded of the inestimable worth of our souls, as well as the souls of others. For what good will it do for you to gain the whole world and lose your soul?

Hence, our Lord emphasized when some came to Him with news of a gruesome event that Pilate had slaughtered some of the Galileans along with their sacrificial animals in the temple, saying, "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish"!

For rather than explaining the reasons behind this tragedy, and attempting to darken the counsel of His



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... we preach Christ crucified  
1 Cor.2:23



Heavenly Father's Sovereign will, Jesus totally redirects their question to use this tragedy as a reminder of the final judgment. And to further emphasize his point, Jesus brings up another disaster—a tower collapsing and killing eighteen people, with the same message: "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

For as Jesus said to Peter, when he asked about the fate of John, "If I want him to remain until I return, what is that to you? You follow Me!" For the Christian life is not about making self-righteous comparisons to others who are presumably less sinful than we are; it is about continual repentance that we might be found ready for our Lord's return or should we die, lest we perish for all eternity in hell without escape

The prophet Ezekiel was appointed as a watchman over Israel, and His job description was pretty simple: to sound the alarm. If he warned the people and they ignored him, their blood was on their heads. But if he stayed silent, the guilt was his. And so in the same way the Church is to have a prophetic role in this fallen world as God's appointed watchmen in these end times by sounding the alarm for all to turn from their sins and live before it's too late.

Sadly, however, the church has too often failed to fulfill this prophetic role in this wicked and faithful generation we find ourselves living in – by allowing people to live in unrepentant sin and in some cases, even welcoming and approving their sins under the guise of love. On the other hand, too often the Church has been quick to condemn by pointing fingers at others rather than back at ourselves. And instead of removing the plank in our eyes, we've been quick to remove the speck in other eyes. For Judgment begins in the house of God. And the reality of our sin is far worse than we'd like to admit.

Yet, our fallen nature clings to self-justification: "I'm not as bad as others.", as we downplay our sins while amplifying the sins of others. But Jesus won't let us go there. Instead, He cuts through our excuses, saying: "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." You see God doesn't grade on a curve. In Romans 6:23, He tells us that "The wages of sin is death", and all sin results in the same punishment, eternal separation from God.

My brother Fred calls it the tick theory when describing that we only have so many ticks on this earth until we die. And so, my friends, your clock is ticking. Therefore, I ask, are you ready for the final judgment? Is there any unconfessed sin in your life that the Holy Spirit is convicting you of to repent of that sin or sins and turn to Jesus for forgiveness?

Using the Ten Commandments as a guide:

1. Do you fear, love, and trust in anything or anyone above the Triune God?
2. Have you honored the Lord's name on your lips and in your life?
3. Have you gladly held God's Word sacred, listened attentively to the preaching of that Word, and made use of it in your daily life?
4. Have you honored and obeyed all the authorities placed over you?
5. Have you helped your neighbors when they were in need or did you pass them by?
6. Have you maintained the purity of your marriage and your sexual life in your thoughts, words, and deeds?
7. Have you stolen property or not helped your neighbor protect his?
8. Have you gossiped either by listening to it, or spreading it yourself?
- 9-10. Have you been content with all that the Lord has given to you?

I dare say all of us have sinned and fallen short of God's standard of perfection, and thus are deserving of God's wrath and punishment. Ah, but here's the Good News we find in this parable, Our God is slow to judge, not wanting anyone to perish. And so when Jesus tells the parable of the barren fig tree it's not just a warning—it is also a message of God's patience and mercy.



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The owner of the vineyard wanted to cut it down, for it had 3 years to bear fruit. But the gardener in the parable begged for one more chance, saying "Let me dig around it and fertilize it. Give it one more year." Echoing the heart of our gracious God. For though we deserve immediate judgment for our many sins, He gives us time, as He calls us to repentance, not to destroy us, but to restore us. To quote from our Old Testament lesson, He does not desire the death of the wicked, but that they turn and live. Our Lord's call to repentance is not just about avoiding destruction; it is about being made new in Christ.

In our Epistle lesson, we are warned not to be like the Israelites, who had all the blessings of God - they had passed through the sea, ate the manna, drank from the spiritual rock that is Christ Himself!—but many still fell in the wilderness because of their sin. Their hearts were hardened. They presumed upon God's grace rather than walking in repentance. Similarly, we are warned in Psalm 95:8-11, Today, if only you would hear his voice,

8 "Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah,[a]  
as you did that day at Massah[b] in the wilderness,  
9 where your ancestors tested me;  
they tried me, though they had seen what I did.  
10 For forty years I was angry with that generation;  
I said, 'They are a people whose hearts go astray,  
and they have not known my ways.'  
11 So I declared on oath in my anger,  
'They shall never enter my rest.'"

For Repentance is not a one-time event. It is a daily returning to Christ. Repentance is not merely feeling bad about sin. It is a complete turning away from sin and turning toward Christ. Therefore, we confess our sins, not to earn our forgiveness, but to receive what Christ has already won for us by His atoning work on the cross and conveyed through His Word and Sacraments.

Like the gardener digging around the tree and fertilizing it, God nourishes our baptismal faith through His Word and Sacraments. His Word convicts, comforts, and strengthens us. In our Baptism, we are washed and given new life. In the Lord's Supper, we receive Christ's true body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. True repentance bears fruit. We do not change to earn God's love, but because we have been loved by Him. We forgive because we have been forgiven. We love because we have been loved. We serve because Christ has served us.

Friends in Christ, today is the day of your salvation. The axe is at the root of the tree, but the gardener is pleading for more time. By God's grace, you are here today not by accident, and He's calling you to repentance, not to crush you but to restore you. Repent of your sins and turn to Christ. After all, He has already taken your sin upon Himself.

The cross stands as the ultimate declaration that God is both just and merciful, but His patience is not an excuse for you to delay but an invitation for you to come to Him today. In Christ, you will find life, forgiveness, and the joy of bearing fruit that lasts for eternity. What incredible comfort and peace of knowing that when we die, we will be with our Lord forever in paradise! And just think how patient God is not wanting any to perish, giving us another chance to live before him in righteousness and purity forever. So should you die or be alive when our Lord returns, you will be found ready for the final judgment!

Thus, causing us to see judgment day not as a day to dread but a day to look forward to with joyous anticipation. As we eagerly cry out, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus!" Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and mind in Christ Jesus. Amen.