

Our Lord Says to Us - Repent or Perish

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Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

God has made each one of us, and each one of us is a little different than one another. No matter what language you speak, where you grew up or live, people are different. Young, old, tall, short, skinny, not-so-skinny, everyone is a little different from their neighbor. Yet, as I shared this past Wednesday, we've all been infected by sin. And because of sin in our lives, we all die. I think that it was Ben Franklin who once said, the only thing certain in life is "*death and taxes.*" It seems there's no escaping it...But this morning in our Gospel we hear Jesus say - in effect - Repent or Perish. What does He mean by that?

Jesus was in the region of Galilee, making His last trip to Jerusalem, before His crucifixion. And He had been talking about judgment and had shared with His hearers that it's better to make peace with your accuser quickly before things get out of control. As people were considering His words, there were some there who were concerned about a tragic event. You see, some Galileans had been killed in the temple by Pilate. Their blood had mixed with the blood of the sacrifices. And quite possibly, they wanted Jesus to get even with Pilate for doing something that was such a blatant irreverence to that which was holy.

Since many at that time would have reasoned that it happened that way because those Galileans had sinned. After hearing them recount the story, Jesus said to them, "***Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other***

Galileans because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

They weren't somehow worse sinners because of what had happened. Rather, everyone should take what had happened to heart and repent of their sins. And so, He went on to reference another incident when the tower of Siloam fell and 18 people were killed. Were they worse sinners than others living in Jerusalem at the time? Again, He said, ***"No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will perish."***

Today, many don't even see the need for repentance. They hear the word "sin" and think that it's an outdated idea spoken in church, it doesn't have a place in today's world. People hear the word sin and immediately think that someone is judging them. And while they might try to treat their sins by declaring them to be a sickness that needs to be treated, sins just can't be covered up. Because in the end - sin is a sin is a sin. And ***"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."*** (1 John 1:8)... Jesus reminds us to repent of our sins or perish.

Worse than that is not recognizing or admitting our sin, thinking that we can live a life that's good enough. That by doing so, it will all balance out in the end, and God will overlook our sins. After all, as some people reason, they haven't actually killed anyone or robbed a bank. So what's the problem? But then again, when is it ever good enough? It isn't and never will be with us. Because all sins are equal in the eyes of God. Whether they are or not, they are committed by thought, word, or deed. It only takes one, and you're guilty of breaking all of God's law. James 2 v.10 says, ***"...whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."*** Jesus says to repent of your sins or perish.

Bobby Fischer was once a world-champion chess player. There's a story about him when he was a young boy. One day his

mother took him to a museum, and among the many paintings in the gallery, one of the paintings caught his eye. It seemed to captivate him....It depicted a picture of a man slumped over a chessboard. There weren't too many of his pieces left, so the man was staring down at the chessboard looking for another move. But it seemed as if he couldn't see a way out. And when that happens in chess, that's called checkmate and the end of the game. The man looked as if he was ready to concede. And his opponent, who was sitting across the chessboard smiling, was Satan...

Bobby stood staring at the painting, even when his mother began to look at the other paintings. And when it was time to go, she said, *"Come on, Bobby, we have to go."* But Bobby didn't budge. He continued to stare at the painting. So finally, his mother said to him, *"Bobby, we have to go now. Come on!"* *"But, Mom,"* said Bobby, *"he has one more move!"*

While the painter intentionally left the option for everyone to see, not everyone who saw the painting was able to understand. Bobby did because he was a chess prodigy at the time and the painter was trying to share that there's an option available to us even in the face of our fiercest opponent, Satan. And that move to make isn't by our own "good" works or obedience, but rather, it's because Satan can't checkmate God. And Jesus is saying to us, repent or perish because each day is a day closer to the time for us to go.

So, Jesus went on to share the parable of the barren fig tree. It's planted in a vineyard but when the owner comes by looking for fruit there is none, at least none to speak of. Seeing none, the owner wants to cut it down because what good is a fruit tree if it doesn't produce fruit? It's just taking up space and nutrients in the soil. But it's the caretaker who intercedes on the tree's behalf, at least for another year. Just like our Lord Jesus has interceded for us.

Out of His great love for us, He gave Himself for us on the cross, that through His death and resurrection we might be forgiven and have new life. Jesus makes it possible for all who believe in this time of grace to repent AND LIVE! Because the Lord knows that we sin each day. And yet, He graciously offers us His forgiveness, patiently looking for us to bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And while some of us may have a longer time of grace than others, and God is patient with us, there is a limit to His time of Grace. Because Jesus said that He will return on the Last Day when there be no more second chances. And today is the day of the Lord's salvation.

Having been saved by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus, we're privileged and blessed to be able to live in this time of grace. We pray – thy kingdom come – and look forward to His return. And by His Spirit and His Word, we've come to know and believe that our salvation doesn't depend on us being good enough. Rather we simply live out our baptism each day, knowing that our eternal salvation depends completely on the redemptive work of our Savior. Because, while the time of grace is limited, God's grace and forgiveness is unlimited.

While there can be many differences between people, we're all alike. Young, old, tall, short, skinny, not-so-skinny, everyone commits sin and because of it, deserves nothing but death and eternal punishment. And yet, our Lord Jesus Christ, in His infinite love and mercy, has stepped in for us. Today He says to us, repent or perish. That daily, we might turn to Him in repentance and celebrate our time of grace together. Not just sharing the fruits of His Spirit, but also looking forward to that day when He will come again and we will be with Him forever.

In Jesus' name, Amen.