

## Sayings of Jesus 5 – Unless Ye Repent

**Reading: Luke 13:1-5** “..... *but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.*”<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction:**

This lesson is the last in the current series of lessons where we have been looking at various “sayings” of Jesus. The aim has been to determine what these sayings mean for us as Christians in practical terms. This week’s lesson comes from what Jesus says in **Luke 13:3** and **5**.

To put what Jesus said in these verses into context, we need to look at what was said in the previous verses in the chapter.

Some people had come to Jesus and told Him about how Pilate had mingled the blood of some Galileans with their sacrifices. There is no other historical record of this event, other than what we read here in the scriptures. However, the bible record implies that Pilate had killed<sup>2</sup> some (presumably) rebellious Galileans while they (the Galileans) were offering sacrifices to God. The blood of the Galileans would then have mingled with the blood of the animals being sacrificed. For a Jew, to die in such a manner, with this mingling of the blood, was a terrible “way” to go. It appears (from what Jesus said in verse **2**) that the Jews who approached Jesus with this story had assumed that the Galileans must have been terrible sinners in order to have met such an end.

But Jesus makes a couple of points in verses **2** and **3**. Firstly, the manner of a person’s death does not necessarily indicate the level of their faithfulness or sinfulness<sup>3</sup>. But secondly, and more importantly, if people do not repent of their sins, then destruction awaits them.

Now in the immediate context, Jesus may have been referring to the destruction of Jerusalem and the calamity that would fall on the Jews in AD70 because of their rebelliousness. But there is a more important spiritual application that Jesus was referring to; the need for the sinner to repent lest they perish by being condemned to Hell on the day of judgement (implied in **2 Peter 3:9**; **Revelation 21:8**).

So what do we mean when we talk of repentance? What does it involve? And how is it seen (or demonstrated) in practical terms?

In this lesson, we will aim to answer these questions.

## **LESSON**

### **1) The process of repentance**

#### **a) Knowledge that what was done (or not done) was wrong**

For a person to repent, they first need to know that there is something that they have done (or not done) that requires repentance. Now sometimes, sins are committed knowingly, *i.e.* the person already knew that they were doing the wrong thing at the time they did it. But at other times, the sin may have been committed in ignorance, *i.e.* unknowingly (*e.g.* **1 Timothy 1:13**).

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<sup>1</sup> All Biblical quotes are from the New King James Version Bible (NKJV).

<sup>2</sup> Pilate himself may not have done the actual killing, but rather, ordered it to be done.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Stephen was a righteous man (**Acts 6:8, 10; 7:55**), but he was stoned to death (**Acts 7:59-60**), the same type of penalty that was to be applied to those who offered their children to the false god, Molech (**Leviticus 18:21; 20:2** *e.g.* **Jeremiah 32:34-35**).

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So the knowledge, or awareness, that repentance is required may come from various sources.

- it may come from the person's own prior knowledge, as mentioned above.
- it may come from the person's conscience as they later consider what they have done (or not done).

Note: The conscience, on its own, may not always be a good guide.

– e.g. **1 Timothy 4:2**.

- it may come from some other person who points it out to them, or reminds them, that they have done the wrong thing. This was what the apostle Peter did during his preaching to the Jews in **Acts 2:14-36**. Another example is found in **Acts 8:18-23** when Peter rebuked Simon the sorcerer when the latter thought that he could purchase the gifts of the Spirit with money.
- or, it may be that the person discovers for themselves (after the fact) that what they did was wrong.

Whatever mechanism is used to alert the sinner, the basis for determining whether something is right or wrong is God's Word. The scriptures guide us into all truth (**John 17:17**; **2 Timothy 3:16**), and whatever we do in life, there will be something in God's Word that will apply to it. It may be an explicit teaching, such as **Ephesians 4:31**;

*“Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.”*

Or, it may be a general principle, such as **Matthew 7:12** - what we call the “Golden Rule”;

*“Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, ..... “*

Therefore, the first step towards repentance is knowledge that what was done (or not done) is contrary to what the Word of God requires of us. This knowledge may also include what needs to be done with regard to “*works befitting repentance*” (**Acts 26:20**) – but more about that later.

### **b) Sorrow at having done wrong that leads to a change of heart**

Simply having knowledge that what was done is wrong does not, in and of itself, constitute repentance. People can do the wrong thing, and know that they have done wrong, but still not repent;

e.g. **Matthew 11:20-21** - the cities Jesus rebuked, Chorazin, Bethsaida.

**Matthew 18:15-17** - the person not heeding admonition from brethren.

Therefore, there is more to repentance than simply having knowledge. The person also needs to have a godly sorrow at having done wrong, for it is godly sorrow that leads to repentance (**2 Corinthians 7:10a**).

People can have sorrow, or regrets, at having done the wrong thing. But that sorrow may simply relate to having been caught out and being embarrassed, or at having to face the consequences of their actions. This type of sorrow is a worldly sorrow, and does not necessarily motivate the person to change and live righteously (**2 Corinthians 7:10b**).

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Godly sorrow is the type of sorrow experienced by the person whose heart-felt desire is to live a life that pleases God (**Colossians 1:10**), but on this occasion, has fallen short (**Romans 3:23**). It comes from knowing that they have done wrong, regardless of the immediate outcome. It comes from knowing that they have engaged in unrighteousness (**1 John 5:17a**), regardless as to whether anyone else on earth knows about it or not<sup>4</sup>.

But it is also the type of sorrow that motivates the person to change their ways and resolve to do their best never commit the sin again. And that leads us to the third step in the process of repentance.

### **c) Change in action so as not to do the wrong again**

Thirdly, true repentance involves a change of direction in the person's thoughts and actions. The Greek word for "repent" is "metanoeo", which means "to think differently", "to change one's mind or purpose"<sup>5</sup>. In other words, a person's attitudes and actions are to be different from what they were previously. We can see this principle in **Ezekiel 14:6** when the prophet Ezekiel called on idolatrous Israel to repent;

*"Repent, turn away from your idols, and turn your faces away from all your abominations."*

The people had idolatry in their hearts (**Ezekiel 14:3**). Their repentance was to involve them putting away idolatry and turning away from any other thing that was abominable to God. They were, by implication, to turn back to the Lord their God, *i.e.* stop serving idols, and turn to the Lord and serve Him.

So for the penitent sinner, there is to be a change in direction – away from the things of the world and Satan, where the person gives in to their worldly desires and sins (**James 1:14-15**). The new direction is to pursue the things of God (**Colossians 3:1**); to think on those things that are good and noble and honourable (**Philippians 4:8**); and to strive to be more like Christ every day (**Galatians 2:20**). The following example from the New Testament shows repentance in action.

## **2) Zacchaeus, an example of repentance (Luke 19:1-10)**

This is not the only case of repentance found in the scriptures, but it does provide us with a practical example of someone bearing the fruits of repentance.

Zacchaeus was a tax collector in Jericho. His job was to collect the various taxes from his countrymen for payment to the Romans. Let me quote from "The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible"<sup>6</sup> regarding what it says about the typical tax collector in those times,

*"Their methods were necessarily inquisitorial<sup>7</sup>. That they often overcharged people and pocketed the surplus is almost certain."*

<sup>4</sup> No one else on earth may know about some of our sins, but God does – **Psalm 139:1-4; 1 Corinthians 4:5**.

<sup>5</sup> The New Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words", Greek word 3340.

<sup>6</sup> Volume 5, page 606, "Tax Collector".

<sup>7</sup> To be "inquisitorial" means to be offensively curious, prying. The inquisitor acts as both prosecutor and judge – ref <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/inquisitorial>

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..... *They (the Jewish tax collectors) were considered to be renegades, who sold their services to the foreign oppressor to make money at the expense of their own countrymen.*"

We read in **Luke 19:2** that Zacchaeus was "... a chief tax collector, and was very rich.". He had made a handsome profit for himself through the collection of taxes.

Now Jesus came to his house and stayed with him. We don't know the details of what Jesus said to him during His stay, but we do see that a remarkable change takes place in Zacchaeus's life. In verse **8** we read that Zacchaeus now decided to give half of what he had to the poor, and on top of that, if he had defrauded anyone, he would repay them four-fold.

It may well be that, previously, Zacchaeus had little regard for the poor – that he was more interested in accumulating wealth for himself. But now we see his repentance in action. He was going to give half of what he owned to the poor. In addition to that, if he had cheated anyone, he would pay them back four times as much. It is interesting to note that the Law only required him to pay back what he took, plus one fifth (*i.e.* +20%) – see **Numbers 5:5-7**. But Zacchaeus stated that he would pay back much more than what the Law required.

### **3) The result of repentance**

When the sinner repents, at least two very important things happen, apart from the sinner's change in attitudes and actions.

#### **a) The sinner is saved from destruction**

Giving in to temptation and letting sin reign in their life sets the sinner on the path to destruction ("death" - **James 1:15**). God does not want anyone to be destroyed, but He cannot be a just God and ignore unrepentant sin. This was what Jesus was warning His listeners about in our reading (**Luke 13:1-5**) when He said; "*Unless you repent you will all likewise perish.*"

But when the sinner does repent and seeks God's forgiveness, God will forgive them (**1 John 1:9**) through His abundant grace and mercy because of what Jesus has done for us (**Ephesians 1:7; 1 Timothy 1:14**).

#### **b) There is rejoicing in Heaven**

God wants, and commands, that every sinner repent, because He doesn't want anyone to be lost (**2 Peter 3:9; Acts 17:30**). And when a sinner does repent, we read in **Luke 15:10** that; "... there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents". This is because another soul has been rescued from the grasp of Satan. Another soul has turned away from the path that leads to death, and has turned to the path that leads to life (**Romans 8:6**).

### **Application:**

Repentance is not something that we do only once. It is something that we will need to do many times during the rest of your life – even as a Christian (*e.g.* **Acts 8:22; Revelation 2:5, 16**). We all have faults and failings (**1 John 1:8**). Some we may overcome quickly, others we may struggle with for a long time. And we need to remember that it is not just the physical things we do. There can

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also be thoughts in our heart and attitudes that need repenting (*e.g.* **Matthew 5:28**; **Romans 12:3, 16**).

One thing we notice about repentance from the example of Zacchaeus is this: repentance is more than just stopping to do those things that are wrong. It is also about going in the opposite direction (where possible) and doing what is good and right. For example, Zacchaeus wasn't simply going to stop defrauding people. He was going to recompense them for having wronged them. We see this same principle of "*stop doing the bad and do the good instead*" in the passages of scripture that are sometimes referred to as the "*put on – put off*" passages. For example, in **Ephesians 4** we read;

**25** "*Therefore, putting away lying (i.e. the "bad"), let each one of you speak truth with his neighbour (the "good")....*"

**28** "*Let him who stole (i.e. the "bad") steal no longer, but rather let him labour, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.*" (the "good")

**29** "*Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth (i.e. the "bad"), but what is good for necessary edification, ....*" (the "good")

**31-32** "*Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and evil speaking (i.e. the "bad") be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.*" (the "good")

When the Bible talks about "*fruits worthy of repentance*" (**Matthew 3:8**)<sup>8</sup>, this is the sort of thing it means – a complete turn-around from sin to actively pursuing righteousness.

Note: The temptations and sins that you wrestle with may be in different areas to the examples shown above. But there will be some areas of your life, and mine, that we need to work on.

We need to be eternally thankful that God does give us the opportunity to repent – that He doesn't just strike us down the moment we sin. But we must also be careful not to abuse this privilege or become complacent about sin. Remember, it was because of our sins that Jesus hung on the cross (**Isaiah 53:5**).

Therefore, we need to do all that we can to avoid sinning (**1 Thessalonians 5:22**). But when we do sin, we need to repent and seek God's forgiveness. God has exceedingly abundant grace and mercy to give to sinners who approach Him with a contrite heart (**Psalms 51:1, 17**; **1 Timothy 1:14**). And He will forgive you.

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<sup>8</sup> The apostle Paul, also, talks about "*works befitting repentance*" – **Acts 26:20**.