

*UNEDITED DRAFT*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Traveling to a family reunion. Construction set us off course and confused the GPS. We're we've gone 10 miles in the wrong direction. With every mile it gets harder to turn around and retrace all those miles making zero progress. Maybe there's a short cut. Maybe we'll find a road that loops back around. Finally we had to come to grips with the fact... it's time to turn around. In fact, life would've been so much easier if we had turned around much sooner. Every minute we delayed sent us further in the wrong direction.

Today we will be talking about repentance. Turn around and go the other way. We have an immensely difficult time admitting that we're going in the wrong direction. Oh, deep down we know it, but we're hoping maybe somehow this is going to get us to our destination anyway. Maybe an alternate route will somehow appear and I'll end up where I need to be anyway.

Today, the Lord Jesus is confronting you and me directly and telling us: It's time to turn around. Now! Today.

Luke 13:1-9

**13 Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. 2 Jesus answered, "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. 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."**

There are two options: repent or perish. If you are heading down the wrong road, you will not end up at your desired destination. So listen, because this is a profound truth that you will want to take with you and think about. You will be so impressed and awed by this bit of wisdom: **The path you are on determines the place you will end up.** [Repeat] Are you on a path that leads to heaven, or are you on a path that leads to hell. If you are on the wrong path, the time to turn around isn't on your death bed... it's not after you get past this season of life... or make a little more money... or after the relationship changes... or after you get a promotion. The time to turn around is right now. It's urgent!

Repentance is such a key word in Scriptures. Jesus spoke of it frequently and urgently. The prophets of the Old Testament also spoke of it frequently. Yet it's a word that is usually misunderstood by people today. A pastor once wrote an article for a newspaper, and in his article he spoke people who had become Christian and had *repented* of certain behaviors in their lifestyle. The editors contacted him after he submitted the article and asked him to rewrite it. Why? They didn't know what he meant by "repent" and they were sure the readers would not know either. So I don't want to presume that everyone here today knows what the word repent means, even though it's really important that we know this word!

The word is really not hard to understand. It means to change your direction. You are going toward sin and you change.. you turn toward God. You're going toward death and you turn around and you go toward life. You're going toward folly and you turn around and you go toward wisdom.

One of Martin Luther's biggest issues with the established church of his day was their misunderstanding of repentance. In fact their understanding of repentance continues in the church today. You fill up your sin bucket. You go to a priest and you confess your sins. Before him you empty your sin bucket and he tells you what to do to make up for it. You go out to go fill up your sin bucket again. Repeat. When Luther posted the 95 theses on the Wittenberg church door (the bulletin board for such notices), he had issues with the teaching and practice of the church. The first of those theses reads: "**Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when He said repent, willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance.**"

So rather than an occasional act in front of a priest, repentance is a continuous, whole-life thing. Periodic repentance, to use the driving analogy, would be like driving down the wrong road, realizing it, so you turn around and drive the right way for a couple miles, but when you feel better about going the right way, then you turn around and drive the wrong way for another 20 miles. Repeat.

No, when God calls us to repent, he wants us to turn from sin from to God and receive the full and free forgiveness of the Lord Jesus Christ. And then he wants us to live in that... to stay in that. He wants us to continue hating sin. He wants us to continue walking toward and with God. He wants us to continue to be in Christ and enjoy his forgiveness, life and salvation. God wills that our whole life be one of repentance, not just our church life. He wants us to be repentant 24/7, and not just for an hour or two on Sunday.

So, Jesus makes the point about the urgency of repentance. **the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.** And the tower that fell killing 18. The road ended for those people. What was happening in the lives of those whose lives suddenly ended? Suddenly, their time to turn around was over. Jesus encourages us not to try to figure out what those people did wrong, but to think about ourselves. WE don't know how much time we have.

We don't like to think about death. It's something we put out of our minds. It's something we desperately try to avoid. We buckle up. We take vitamins. Some might try to get some exercise. We contribute toward cancer research or heart research. All to preserve and extend our life... meanwhile we'll try very hard to avoid thinking about death.

But Jesus says we must think about it. You are going to die. I am going to die. Recent research indicates that the current death rate in America is... 100%. Everyone eventually dies. And when we see tragedies, when we hear a story like the man in Florida who was swallowed up into the earth when a sinkhole opened under his bed, God doesn't want us to ask the question, "I wonder what he did? Maybe he sinned like Korah, Dathan and Abiram like in our Old Testament lesson." No, Jesus says don't even go there! Instead, take these instances and repent. Let these serve as a reminder: It's Time to Turn Around! Today. Now. We need to come face to face with our sin, our guilt, its ugliness, the damage it has done, and the wrath of God it rightly deserves. Then what? Despair of self. Lay it out before God. Plead for his mercy. And listen. What does he say? He says, "I forgive you through the shed blood of my one and only Son, the perfect sacrifice, Jesus."

Let's look at the rest of the reading. Here Jesus adds just a little bit more so we can understand what true repentance is.

Not only does the path you are on determine where you end up. But your life will give indications of which path you are on. Your path affects your life right now. Your life will display the things that are along *that* path, not *the other* path. When God through his Word and the power of his Spirit convicts us of sin, and leads us to confess and be truly sorry, and when he shows us the salvation of Christ, and turns us around so we actually trust that Christ is the way of forgiveness, life and salvation... then your changed direction, your new way of thinking and acting, your turn

around... will be evident in your life. When you walk the path of God, to God and with God, God-things show up in your life. We call them fruits of repentance, or fruits of faith.

**6 Then he 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. 7 So 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?’**

**8 “ ‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. 9 If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’ ”**

God is incredibly patient. What he’s looking for is not lip service and an intellectual statement that Jesus is the Savior. He’s looking for a heart that hates what God hates and loves what God loves... a heart that finds sins ugly and abhorrent, and Jesus beautiful, saving and life-giving. If I love Jesus and the rescue he brings, and my life is set in a new direction, there will be evidence of it in my life! And because of God’s great love, he waits, he fertilizes, he cultivates, he waters. When you’re on a changed path, God expects to see a changed life. When you are connected to vine, he expects to see fruit on our branches. And he patiently waits and encourages it! He’s far more patient with unfruitful trees than you and I would be.

But we also must understand that his patience doesn’t last forever. True repentance is not something to delay.

Friends, our loving God has spoken to us today, and told us: It’s Time to Turn Around! I don’t want you to just dismiss this message. I’d like you to take this with you this week. Is there an area of your life that is unfruitful? Is there a part where you are unloving? Selfish? Impatient? Rude? Short-tempered? Lazy? Busy, but unfruitful? Lacking self-control? Take some time especially today and tomorrow to honestly evaluate your life and find the places where you may be driving the wrong way. Listen to God’s telling you: “You’re going the wrong way! Turn around now!” Filled with sorrow, confess. Return to the cross. Receive Christ’s forgiveness and change the way you think and act. This week in thankfulness to Jesus, let’s bear much fruit to the glory of God! Amen.