

*People often hear the Bible’s message of “repent or perish” as if it is for others, but Jesus taught all are equally in danger of being “cut down” by God for not bearing fruit. However, God is patient and merciful, granting a certain amount of time to repent and turn to Christ before it’s too late.*

**Introduction** – Story of Brother Bob, the traveling fundamentalist campus evangelist who offended everyone with his offensive message of “repent or perish.”

## **I. To Whom is Jesus Talking?**

### **A. A legitimate question (Luke 12:41; cf. 12:1, 13, 15-16, 22, 54; 13:1-2)**

1. To the uncommitted crowds or his disciples? To Jews or Christians? To OT Israel or NT Church? To first century people or us? Is Jesus’ message to repent or perish for others or me?
2. Context begins at 12:1 and ends here at 13:9. Jesus alternates between addressing the crowd as a whole, individuals in the crowd, and his disciples. Yet there is overlap in Jesus’ intended audience. Even his disciples were occasionally unclear whom Jesus addressed.

### **B. God’s people: Israel old and new (vv. 6-9)**

1. This passage joins the old and new Israel. It points back to Isaiah 5, the Jews of the OT joined to their first century descendants as the generation who hears the last call to repent. It also points forward to the New Israel, the church of the NT joined to our first century spiritual forefathers—the disciples of Jesus (Romans 11; Galatians 6:16; Revelation 2-3).
2. Here Jesus is talking to old covenant Israel, warning them of the national corporate judgment that came first at the cross, then in A.D. 70 when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by the Roman army. By way of Luke’s audience, Jesus is talking to the church (new covenant Israel), warning individuals of the personal judgment that will come at death apart from personal repentance, and warning congregations of the corporate judgment that will come apart from corporate repentance. In sum, Jesus is certainly talking to you and me!

## **II. Why is This Message So Urgent?**

### **A. We tend to judge ourselves as less guilty in relation to others (vv. 2-5)**

1. All the other reasons flow from this one. Consider the two current events. Zealots would be moved by Pilate’s abominable massacre to violent self-righteous hatred. Pharisees would be moved by Siloam Tower’s fall to pious self-righteous condemnation. Neither Zealots nor Pharisees considered their own hearts.
2. Jesus redirects the crowd toward their own sins by denying that Pilate’s victims were especially sinful (cf. John 9:3). Jesus uses the example of the Pilate massacre to call their attention to the imminent need to repent or likewise perish. Thus the incident is an excellent example of how quickly death can come to any of us, and that all need to be ready to meet God.

### **B. We tend to believe if our life is going well God must approve of our life (vv. 1, 6)**

Jesus knows that we presume God’s favor. We are prone to see those who suffer and think, “They must deserve it, and because I don’t suffer I must not.” Job’s friends adopted this prosperity gospel (Job 4:7-8; 8:20; 22:5-10). Rather you should see a merciful God forewarning you, and take appropriate actions (repent, trust in Christ, and bear fruit).

### C. There will be a “last chance” to repent (vv. 8-9)

1. The vineyard owner is God the Father. The vinedresser is God the Son. The fig tree is Israel. In the parable, the owner complains to the vinedresser that for three years every time he comes seeking fruit from his fig tree, he finds no fruit. Therefore he orders the vinedresser to cut it down because there is no reason for a fruitless tree to waste the ground.
2. This means Jesus himself will come to Israel with the message of repentance, forgiveness, and the arrival of the kingdom of God—the gospel—delivered with a warning of imminent judgment. Israel has one last opportunity to repent (cf. Luke 13:34; 19:41-44).

## III. How Now Shall We Repent?

### A. Repentance: what it is and is not

Westminster Shorter Catechism 87. Summarized as confession (intellect), contrition (emotion), and change (volition). But a religious person thinks of repentance fundamentally as a way to earn God’s approval.

### B. The heart of repentance (vv. 1-5)

1. Marvel at the cost of forgiveness: Christ’s atoning sacrifice mixed with his own blood *for you*. Jesus’ sacrifice is the greater abomination. His blood is mixed with his sacrifice. Through the “abomination” of the Son of God voluntarily, passively slain for sins he did not commit, we may be forgiven, declared righteous, and accepted by God.
2. Abide in Christ for security: God the great refuge-fortress-tower fell on Christ *instead of you*. God the Father is like a tower for Jesus (Proverbs 18:10; Micah 5:2, 4a; Luke 2:40). Yet God fell on and crushed Jesus to death for us. Because he was crushed by God the Great Tower, we will find refuge and safety in God from our enemies.

### C. The fruit of repentance (vv. 6-9)

1. Context of Luke 12:1-13:9. Desiring God’s approval more than man’s approval (12:1-12). Cultivating a generous, compassionate life (12:13-21, 22-34). Remaining ready for the last day (12:35-59; 13:1-9).
2. Context of Isaiah 5, summarized as seeking justice and forsaking violence (5:7). Practicing redemptive business principles (5:8-10). Living humbly in the fear of the Lord (5:18-23). Loving God and His Word (5:11-14, 24).

**Conclusion** – “Repent or perish” is a message that is often delivered in an abrasive manner and even more often ignored or improperly received. But Jesus’ “repent or perish” message is full of urgency and delivered with mercy, compassion, patience, and love for people. Listening to Jesus is wonderful because his call to repent or perish is to choose forgiveness, security, and life through the one who loves you at the expense of himself. Repent or perish is a message for you because God the Savior is for you.