

24. Repent or perish

December 16, 2007

It was a bright Sunday morning in 18th century London, but Robert Robinson's mood was anything but sunny. All along the street there were people hurrying to church, but in the midst of the crowd Robinson was a lonely man. The sound of church bells reminded him of years past when his faith in God was strong and the church was an integral part of his life.

It had been years since he set foot in a church – years of wandering, disillusionment, and gradual defection from the God he once loved. That love for God – once fiery and passionate – had slowly burned out within him, leaving him dark, hollow and cold inside.

Robinson heard the sound of a horse-drawn carriage approaching behind him. Turning, he lifted his hand to hail the driver. But then he saw that the cab was occupied by a young woman dressed in a fine dress for the Lord's Day. He waved the driver on, but the woman in the carriage ordered the carriage to be stopped.

"Sir, I'd be happy to share this carriage with you," she said to Robinson. "Are you going to church?" Robinson was about to decline, then he paused. "Yes," he said at last. "I am going to church." He stepped into the carriage and sat down beside the young woman.

As the carriage rolled forward Robert Robinson and the woman exchanged introductions. There was a flash of recognition in her eyes when he stated his name. "That's an interesting coincidence," she said, reaching into her purse. She withdrew a small book of Hymn, opened it to a ribbon-bookmark, and handed the book to him. "I was just reading a verse by a poet named Robert Robinson. Could it be...?"

He took the book, nodding. "Yes, I wrote these words years ago." "Oh, how wonderful!" she exclaimed. "Imagine! I'm sharing a carriage with the author of these very poem!"

But Robinson barely heard her. He was absorbed in the words he was reading:

Come, Thou Fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace'
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it –
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, O take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above.

He could barely read the last few lines through the tears that brimmed in his eyes. "I wrote these words – and I've lived these words. 'Prone to wander... prone to leave the God I love.'"

The woman suddenly understood. "You also wrote, 'Here's my heart, O take and seal it.' You can offer your heart again to God, Mr. Robinson. It's not too late."

And it wasn't too late for Robert Robinson. In that moment he turned his heart back to God and walked with him the rest of his days.

God is full of mercy and abounding in love, His arms are not so short that He can not embrace you even though you might be far away from Him spiritually, His heart is not so narrow that He cannot forgive yours and my sins. This morning Jesus is teaching us to repent from our sins – any sin. Otherwise, our hearts will be hardened and wander and leave the God we love like Robert Robinson did.

A. ARE YOU BETTER THAN THEM

Luke 13:1-5 There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? 3 I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. 4 Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

Before the start of the earthly ministry of Jesus, Roman Governor Pontius Pilate wanted to build an aqueduct from the Pools of Solomon to the city of Jerusalem. To pay for it, he took money out of the temple treasury – the money that had been dedicated to God – and this outraged the people. When the Jews sent a delegation to beg for their money back, Pilate sent into the crowd soldiers dressed as common people, and at a certain signal they took out daggers and attacked the people asking for the money. Jesus graphically explained it by saying *"blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices"*.

In another incident, a tower fell on eighteen people in Siloam and they were killed.

Jesus cites two examples of disaster that were well known in His day. One was an evil done by the hands of men, and the other was seemingly a natural disaster.

We are often asked by non-Christians, "Why does God let the bad things happen to good people?" The great evangelist of yesteryear D.L. Moody said, "Why not?" What he meant is that there is not one good person to compare to God's righteousness and holiness.

Our standard of comparison is subjective – depending on whom we consider good or bad. In the mind of Ted Bundy who was a serial rapist and murderer of 29 victims, he would consider himself as a better person than Adolf Hitler who killed six million Jews. But to compared to God's standard, they are both equally murderers like anyone of us because in our hearts we, too, murdered others.

Jesus is making it clear to us that human tragedies are not always divine punishments and that it is wrong for us to "play God" and pass judgment.

Jesus went on to show the logical conclusion of their argument: The question is not, "Why did these people die?" rather, "What right do we have to live?" None of us is sinless, so we had all better get prepared and repent.

B. THE PARABLE OF FRUITLESS FIG TREE

Luke 13:6-9 He also spoke this parable: "A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. 7 Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, 'Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the

ground?' 8 But he answered and said to him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. 9 And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.' "

Of course, fig tree represents the nation of Israel. This parable reminds us of God's special goodness to Israel and His patience with them. God waited three years during our Lord's earthly ministry, but Israel did not produce fruit. He then waited about forty years more before He allowed the Roman armies to destroy Jerusalem and the temple. Finally, the tree was cut down.

However, this also applies to our individual lives. God is gracious and patient toward people and does more than enough to encourage us to repent and bear spiritual fruit. He has had every right to cut us down, but in His mercy, He has spared us. Yet we must not presume upon the kindness and patience of the Lord, because the day of judgment will finally come.

I can tell you this much: The judgement ax of God is against the bottom of the tree of America. She has been denying His presence in our country for over 50 years. He will judge this country severely.

Ask yourself: Am I just filling the space in the pew when I come to church or am I actively seeking God's instruction for the rest of the week? Am I doing what God is telling me to do from this Book, the Bible? Am I concerned about what others think about my faith in Christ more than what my God thinks about me? Am I thinking that God would give me more chances later? As I've said before, we should not presume that it will continuously go on.

God is seeking fruit in our lives. Do you have this?

Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

C. FALSE RELIGION IN THE SYNAGOGUE

Luke 13:10-17 Now He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. 11 And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up. 12 But when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him and said to her, "Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity." 13 And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. 14 But the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath; and he said to the crowd, "There are six days on which men ought to work; therefore come and be healed on them, and not on the Sabbath day." 15 The Lord then answered him and said, "Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it? 16 So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound--think of it--for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?" 17 And when He said these things, all His adversaries were put to shame; and all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him.

By the teachers who insist the false theology of demon possession of believers, this woman is often used as an example of believer's demon possession. According to 1 John 4:4, we believe that Christians cannot be demon possessed, not because they are good, church-going people, but because they are new creatures in Christ, and are off limits to demonic possession and control.

1 John 4:4 You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

For eighteen years, she was bound by a demonic spirit in this bent position. We must note in our hearts that not every sickness is controlled by demons. But in some cases, they are.

Instead of rejoicing and giving God the glory, the ruler of the synagogue became very angry. He did not even have the courage to express his anger to Jesus, so he scolded the congregation.

Actually the bondage of the ruler of the synagogue was worse than that of the woman. Her bondage affected only her body, but his bondage shackled his mind and heart. He was so bound and blinded by tradition that he ended up opposing the Son of God. Not a wise thing!

D. PARABLES OF AN OVERGROWN CHURCH

Luke 13:18-21 Then He said, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? 19 It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden; and it grew and became a large tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches." 20 And again He said, "To what shall I liken the kingdom of God? 21 It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened."

Some see a picture of the visible outward growth of the kingdom – the mustard seed – and the invisible inward influence of the kingdom – the leaven. But when we study the parables of Jesus in context, birds are consistently evil, the enemy of Jesus. This leaven concept represents sin.

A mustard seed produces a shrub, not a great tree. Jesus describes an abnormal - even monstrous growth. Apparently, this parable describes the kingdom community - the church that has become so large and established that it is permeated with sins within.

History abundantly proves the dangerous influence that false doctrines have had on the church. It has been shown in political intrigue, lust for power, intolerance, vain superstition, immorality and greed.

E. THE NARROW IS THE WAY

Luke 13:22-30 And He went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. 23 Then one said to Him, "Lord, are there few who are saved?" And He said to them, 24 "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. 25 When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you are from,' 26 then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.' 27 But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.' 28 There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out. 29 They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God. 30 And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last."

The ancient Israel scribes often discussed the question of how many people would be saved, and somebody asked Jesus to give His thoughts on the issue. Rather than being sucked into the endless argument, Jesus immediately made the matter personal. "The question is not how many will be saved, but whether or not you will be saved! Get that settled first, and then we can discuss what you can do to help get others saved."

We often are asked about the salvation of others – people in Africa or in Mongolia. But we should point out the real problem – their own salvation, "Are you yourself saved?"

The salvation way is narrow and there is only one door. Jesus declared, "I am the Way," in John 14:6. He also claimed that He is the door we need to enter in.

John 10:9 I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

Just about everybody I know wants to go to heaven. But many of them don't want to go through Jesus, because it requires the acceptance of the facts that we are sinners and we cannot go to heaven without Jesus. Some even go through the motions of religious experience and claiming that they are Christians.

But unless that person has an individual encounter with Jesus Christ, all the religion in the world means nothing to God. God will not recognize anyone's religious work as worth something without Jesus in the person's heart. The bottom line is "Repent or perish."

John 3:17-18 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. 18 He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

F. A THREAT FROM HEROD

Luke 13:31-33 On that very day some Pharisees came, saying to Him, "Get out and depart from here, for Herod wants to kill You." 32 And He said to them, "Go, tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.' 33 Nevertheless I must journey today, tomorrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem.

The Pharisees, scribes and Herod were good examples of the first who will be last. They had power and authority while they were alive, they now regret everything they did against Jesus.

The Lord Jesus was not afraid of danger. He followed a "divine timetable" and nothing could harm Him. He was doing the will of God according to the Father's schedule. It had been decreed from eternity that the Son of God would be crucified in Jerusalem at the Passover, and there was not a person in the universe who could hinder the purposes of God.

We should have the same mindset like Jesus. Until the work of the Lord in our lives is done, no one can touch us. But once the assignment from the Lord for us is done, let's not hesitate to go to heaven.

G. JESUS' LAMENT OVER JERUSALEM

Luke 13:34-35 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing! 35 See! Your house is left to you desolate; and assuredly, I say to you, you shall not see Me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

Our Lord's heart was grieved as He saw the unbelief and rebellion around Him, and He broke out in a lamentation over the sad plight of the Jewish nation. It was a sob of anguish, not an expression of anger. His compassionate heart was broken.

I have to wonder how many times I broke my God's heart because of my stubbornness and stupidity? I am sure that you all can agree that you have your own sin. The failure is not on God's part. The failure is on our part.

H. APPLICATIONS

- 1) Satan can put people into bondage, but true freedom comes from trusting Christ.
- 2) Since the longer we dwell in sin, the harder our hearts become, we need to make each decision right from the beginning. But when we sin, we need to make it right with the Lord right away by asking for His forgiveness for our sins.
- 3) If you are in sin, do not harden your heart. Make it right with the Lord by confessing your sins.