

Luke 13:1-9

December 31, 2009 – NEW YEAR’S EVE

A New Year’s Repentance

✦ **Our personal need (vv.1-5)**

✦ **God’s personal grace (vv.6-9)**

In the name of Jesus, the divine Caretaker of our souls, dear children of our eternal God:

Memories, memories. Aren’t you glad yours is not as good as God’s? What if God had taken a roll of toilet paper at your conception and started writing down every sin for the rest of your life? What if at times like this our righteous Judge unrolled that dreadful record and made us look all the way down the aisle and out the doors? It would never end in church or in the rest of our lives. In fact, we see God’s mercy even in this: He never makes us look at the full record of our sins. The guilt would overwhelm us.

This bad news of the Law we do need to hear, as surely as the sick need to hear the doctor’s diagnosis in order to begin treatment. The Doctor of our souls cares so much that He sacrificed His own life to give us eternal life with Him. We don’t want to run from such a kindhearted Savior. What else can we do but bow in humble faith and receive God’s gift? Here’s **A New Year’s Repentance**. This is...

✦ **Our personal need (vv.1-5)**

We don’t really need another “New Year’s Resolution.” We tend to forget them. We even forget the Lord’s blessings year by year – how many sins He has forgiven us, how many diseases He has healed, how many times He has lifted us up from the pits and sent us soaring like eagles over the sadness and gloom of so many. Just look at the depression coming out of Denmark lately. You would think scientists would all be elated to find out that the “global warming” data was faulty, that maybe the world will last longer than a couple years. The sky is not falling. The polar bears are thriving while the ice expands, not far from the caribou herds growing larger next to the warmth from the Alaskan pipeline. Why keep pushing a lie when God is so good? Why blame God for suffering and not give Him credit for another year of sunshine and rain. The Creator has preserved the plants and our food supply. God not only knows **Our personal need**, He absolutely loves and cares for His enemies. **“He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”** (Matthew 5:45 NIV)

What we do need is help in our suffering. God knows this too. In fact, the first book of the Bible is all about suffering. As far as we know the book of Job was inspired about seven centuries before the Holy Spirit moved Moses to pen the Pentateuch. My son Joel read Job in third grade, then summarized the entire book as “one long argument.” Not bad for a third grader. The technical term is a “syllogism.” Job’s “friends” used each of their three turns to try to prove Job was guilty of some terrible sin. “That’s why God destroyed all Job’s wealth. That’s why God killed all Job’s children. Job must have done something really, really bad.” And the flipside was true as far as Job’s friends were concerned too. “We must be so much better than Job since we’re still healthy, wealthy and wise!”

Such were the arguments against God’s grace among Jesus’ fellow Jews. 2200 years after Job, they’re still asking Jesus about suffering. **“Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, ‘Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. 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? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.’”**

We don’t need suffering to make us despair or give self-righteous people more reason to be conceited. The word from God’s Word is *Repent or Perish!* That’s the way to look back on the year now

past. “Lord God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Forgive my open sins and my secret sins. Forgive the sins I know and the sins I do not know. Forgive the sins I did to please myself and the sins I did to please others. Forgive them all, gracious Lord, for Jesus’ sake.” (CW, p. 134) Forgive them all.

The earthly story with the heavenly meaning that follows in Jesus’ parable, shows us how much God wants to forgive. **A New Year’s Repentance** is God’s gift for **Our personal need** in...

✠ **God’s personal grace (vv.6-9)**

It always amazes me how skillful Jesus is as the Master Teacher to help us non-farmers understand such simple examples that the children could explain. Then Jesus 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. 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?’”*

Sometimes guilty depression comes down so hard us we feel as if they’re only taking up space. The Holy God notices this too. But in His grace and mercy, He does not condemn us. Instead God takes note of the problem and warns us about the consequence of an unfruitful life. Personally, as I look back on my own sinful carelessness at times, this concern of God is truly a blessing. Deliver me from willful sins lest I shame your Name in public and bring destruction on my family, my ministry and my soul. A yellow sign reading “Open Range” and showing a black bull can slow you down on a Nevada highway. So much better than the sudden stop of hitting one like my dear grandparents in a Volkswagen “bug” back in the early 1960’s. Black and blue is a blessing if you live to tell about it. God’s Word is like the new technology of a fighter jet windshield with night vision. I’m good for that. How about you?

But God’s not finished. Our heavenly Father, the owner, has spoken to His Son in grace. Now Jesus who is obviously the Caretaker speaks up for us much the way He pleads our case in the courtroom of heaven: *“‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it.’”* Literally, “I will dung it.” *“If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’”*

God’s personal grace gives us another year in which He earnestly commits Himself to producing fruit in our lives through His Means of Grace. The Holy Spirit is in on this too. He does not want us just taking up space either. He wants to give us such rich, full purpose in our lives that He can say, *“The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, ‘The LORD is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him.’”* (Psalm 92:12-15 NIV) Notice the emphasis on hearing God’s Word even in this Psalm from about a thousand years before Christ. The superscription reads: *“A psalm. A song. For the Sabbath day.”*

Along with God’s promise, however, comes the warning that our time of grace will end. We dare not trifle with God’s grace as if we might have plenty of time to repent tomorrow. Tomorrow may be too late. **A New Year’s Repentance** is a gift of God today. When Jesus saw the fruits that evidenced true repentance in Zacchaeus the tax collector, our Lord joyfully commented, *“Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”* (Luke 19:9f NIV)

What has God done with all our sins from this past year? Theologically, I could tell you again that He punished them on Jesus and washed them all away with His holy, precious blood. *“Their sins and iniquities I will remember no more.”* (Hebrews 10:17 TPA) More practically, we could say what God has always done with that soiled roll of toilet paper. He flushed it, friends. When you think of your sins, do like little kids in potty training. Hear the flush, put up your hands and say, “All gone!” Then coming from God’s house after Confession and Absolution, after receiving again His Holy Supper, be like a happy little kid coming out of the bathtub. Smile in the mirror and say, “All clean!” This gift is paid. **A New Year’s Repentance** is God’s gift in Christ Jesus, just what we need for a whole new life. Amen.

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