

## The Experience of Every Christian Life - Part 2

### Producing Evidence Of Spiritual Life

Luke 13:6-9

Well, last time we were together I began with some what I call essential life wisdom distilled in three words. Do you remember what they were? Pull the rip cord is what I said. Pull the rip cord that is of course if you're sky diving you better pull the rip cord or you will die. And that's what I threw out to you and you all rolled your eyes at me and said, "What a stupid thing for you to say, cause of course if you're sky diving you have to pull the rip cord, that's obvious, that's self evident." But then we opened our Bibles to Luke 13, we looked at the first five verses, we looked at Jesus talking not about rip cords but about repentance and his words seemed even more urgent and more important. And he said twice in verse 3 and verse 5, if you don't all repent you will all perish (01:17)

Repent or perish. And we said now when it comes to repentance and life, that's not self evident. You can share that with your neighbors and coworkers and they're like, "Duh, of course I know that." No, they may have heard that kind of thing at church but that's not self evident to them. Well, I hope after studying the first five verses of Luke 13 there was a bit of a sense of how important and urgent that was, and that is indeed something we ought to have much more important and significance weight added to that in our thinking, that yes, you're right, repentance is essential. (01:50)

Well, then I got to thinking in this week, how terrible would it be to be sky diving and to think that we've pulled the rip cord when in reality we just reached up and pull the string on the hood of our sweater, or the strap on our helmet, or maybe some dangling thread on my shirt. And I didn't pull the rip cord, I just thought I pulled the rip cord and again you roll your eyes at me and say, "How stupid, that's ridiculous." Because if you did or did not pull the rip cord it would be overwhelmingly obvious because there would be some parachute like things that would happen and it would be unmistakable whether you did or you didn't pull the rip cord. (02:30)

But of course we're not talking about rip cords we're talking about repentance. We're not talking about sky diving, we're talking about life. And when it comes to life and repentance the real question then would be, what are the unmistakable signs that you have pulled the rip cord? And much like repentance and perishing, repentance and evidence is not always that obvious. That's why in the next section that we look at this morning in Luke chapter 13 verses 6 through 9, Jesus then goes into something that should be very familiar to us, an analogy. In this case it's a somewhat developed parable that he tells us about the evidence of repentance and things we'll see if in deed you have pulled the rip cord because it is something that Satan works hard to make you think you've done when in reality you haven't. (03:13)

Now, I know you think you've heard sermons like this before from me if you've been around for a while but how important is it that all of us can sit here today, to hear a sermon at church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, our little corner of the world and have absolute certainty that we pulled the rip cord. The one that will keep us from perishing not biologically but the thing called the second death, man that is important. I better make sure I know that, not just for me but for the person that stiff arms me and says, "Well listen, you don't need to share the gospel with me, I'm saved." And you say, "Well, have you repented of your sins and put your trust in God?" "Aww, sure I have." We ought to know what the unmistakable signs of repentance are all about. So let's take a look at this parable of Christ, verses 6 through 9 this morning and let us understand what exactly it means to have evidence that we are new creatures in Christ because we've repented of our sins and are no longer headed toward the second death. (04:06)

Verse 6, and he told them this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard" – this is not just he's going through some area and there happens to be some wild figs tree. No, this is a man with a vineyard and he plants it and of course he wants to see some fruit on that fig tree. – "and he came seeking, there it is, fruit on it and found none." And there's the analogy by the way, fruit, we hear it all the time. Matter of fact, John the Baptist, repent and bear fruit in keeping with repentance. I mean that's a very common analogy, but my problem with this whole thing is that that concept is so imbedded in our language as Christians that often times we don't even know what we're saying. I mean we're stuck in that level of analogy we don't really think, if I had to say, "What is the fruit of repentance?" but

you can't use the word fruit, well then you've got to start defining exactly what we mean by the evidence of someone who has a repentant life. Now, that gets a little harder. Never the less in this particular parable the owner of the vineyard says to the vinedresser, the one that takes care of it all. "Look, for three years now I've come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none." So what do you do? Well, he's got an order from the vinedresser, cut it down. Why should it use up the ground? If I have something here that's suppose to bear fruit, it doesn't bear fruit, looks like it should bear fruit, but it doesn't bear fruit, it's dead, well then, it shouldn't take up any real estate in my vineyard. He answered him, that is, the vinedresser answered the vineyard owner. "Sir, let it alone this year also. I know you've looked for many years for fruit on this, you don't see it, but let me work on it. Let me dig around it, let me put the fertilizer around it, the manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good, fantastic, but if not, then you can cut it down." (05:49)

Again an analogy about fruit bearing needs to be carefully understood with the realities that they represent. And because in this text it's only a parable we have to go outside of this text to begin to understand what those realities are. And while it's hard to explain the fundamental reality of a repentant life without analogies then we'll find them throughout our cross references that I want you to look at this morning. We still have to understand what we're looking for in our lives. What are the unmistakable signs of this? And also others that we care about, we better make sure we've seen the evidence of repentance. So, let me turn you outside of this text to Ephesians chapter 2, which I think is a good text for us, we'll look at 10 verses, I'll read through it with a little bit of commentary here and some illustration and maybe we can come to the conclusion of, yes, here's what it is. Now, once I toss out the first point this morning you may think well you kind of bagging on the illustration, which I'm not. I'm not bagging on the analogy of Christ, it's a good one, Paul uses it, John the Baptist uses it, Jesus uses it. But we better sure we understand the reality of it and I'm going to give you a point and you're going to say, "Well I hope that doesn't have an analogy." And it doesn't have an analogy in it. This is not symbolic language but you are going to accuse me of being hyperboles. It's overstated; I mean it's a superlative. But let me have you write it down, and then we'll look at the passage you've just called up, Ephesians chapter 2, and let me put it down this way. When it comes to repentance what are we looking for? What does it change? Number 1, you ought to expect repentance to change everything. (07:13)

### 1. Expect Repentance to Change Everything

Well, no analogy there but it seems a little too broad. Really, everything? Let me prove to you why I put it this way and why it's not an overstatement. Repentance leads to salvation that salvation is such a radical change I think I can put it in these terms safely, it changes everything. Verse 1, Ephesians chapter 2, and you were, Paul says to these Christians in Ephesus, dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. Let's pause there. The first analogy is something about death and sin which is going to be contrasted, drop down to verse 5 with being now alive even when we were dead in our trespasses he made us alive with Christ. Verse 6, he raised us up with him. So we've got dead and then alive and if you ask me the question what is the difference between a dead body and a living body, I hope you would allow this phrase, everything. Even though that's hyperbole, I mean everything. I mean this body may have had 10 toes and 10 fingers but a dead body and a living body, radically different things. I mean that is such a systemic, wholesale, radical dramatic difference, there's really no comparison. (08:36)

And the picture here is lost people before they've been made alive they are dead and that illustration should be one that helps me think, wow, what ever repentance does, what ever at least humanly speaking effects in terms of the change between Non-Christians and Christians. It is so systemic, it is so wholesale, it is so radical, so dramatic you could say a life that's not a Christian verses a life that is a Christian is so amazingly different, that you could say it changes everything. (09:03)

Now I want to try and prove that by reading through this and thinking it through and illustrating it for you. The first thing here in verse number 1 is that it says that deadness, we were dead in the trespasses and sins in which we once walked. Right there we already have a problem with people understanding the difference between Christians and Non-Christians. We look at the distinction between someone who's not saved, not converted, not regenerate and one who is and we say, "Well, it's described here as trespasses and sins." They were dead in that activity of living in their trespasses and sins and you think, well, I wasn't all that bad. Or I know Christians that aren't all that bad, I wouldn't characterize them as being involved in trespasses and sins. (09:43)

Well, here's the fundamental problem with that. We misunderstand sin. At least we don't understand it fully when we think of sin only as behaviors as opposed to a state of being. This is important to catch. Sin is not just the things we do; it is something that we are, that distinction critically important. If you think in terms of sin only as did that person commit a sin? No, that wasn't sinful. Did that person commit a sin? Yeah, I think that is sinful. Was there a trespass there? Yes, he's trespassing there but I don't think that guy is trespassing. Now you're thinking of sins only as actions and words and thoughts. Those are the kinds of things that I think we can rightly say, "Well, when the Bible talks about sin, that's certainly a big part of it." But in another sense starting in the very beginning of the first sin in the whole Bible in Genesis chapter 3, well it was a sinful act that brought about a sinful state. And if you don't understand that then we don't understand the fundamental predication, the foundation of our theology that the problem my Non-Christian life had before I became a Christian was not just that I did sinful things, it's that I lived in a sinful state. Let me rip off Dave Needham's old illustration and recast it for you with a little twist and a little elaboration to illustrate it this way. (10:58)

You're a judge. You work in a very beautiful paneled, majestic courthouse, in a big city, a big county. You have your robes the regalia of your majesty as a judge, you're adjudicating authority in the courtroom and you go to work everyday in that big mahogany tribunal, and there you are. But you're also a wood worker. You like to make things in your garage, you've got all your tools out there including a lathe, you've bought some expensive wood and you make in your garage at night a beautiful gavel. You know the gavel the judge brings up to the bench. You make one of those. You pick out the wood, you make it, you craft, it you shape it, you make it fit perfectly in your hand, you sand it, you finish it, you stain it, you lacquer it, you get it all done and then you bring it to work. And you sit there, in that bench as the main man in that courtroom and you've got in your hand this gavel that you've custom made for yourself and you sit there with that gavel as an extension of your authority and your majesty and your power and all the glory of your job and there you have it. And then in my illustration, for some reason we'll discuss later that gavel is removed from your hand and that gavel now, goes about and does various things within the courtroom that it was not designed for. (12:09)

Put a book marker there I hope you recognize from my discussion of sin throughout the months and years if you've listened to me preach. One of the ways I like to describe it is sin is having things not the way they ought to be. Right, the opposite of sin is things the way they ought to be. And here you have a gavel that now is in a state of not being what it ought to be. Now, within the state of not being what it ought to be it begins to do things in varying places at times very destructive things. Like the gavel kind of if you can imagine this in a cartoon land we're living in this illustration. It hops over and starts you know banging jurors on the head. [Hammering sound] And then at other times it goes over and it goes to the door and the hinge of the door where that pin tends to creep up and it's knocking that pin back down in the hinge of the door so that the door into the jury room is nicely secure and fixed. Now you can sit there and think if we had two different gavels doing two different things, outside the hand of the judge. One is going to be saying I'm doing something very constructive over here in the corner of the courtroom, and the other is doing something very destructive and beating people up in the jury box and you can see how one gavel would look down it's big nose at the other gavel and say, "How morally inferior is that gavel over there that's causing such destruction in the corner of the courtroom." And you know what? At one level, in terms of discussing sin, you'd be absolutely right. And let me just make it a personal statement. I much rather all the people of this world that are not reconciled to God, I would much rather them do constructive things in this world with their lives than to do destructive things. And you should all smile and say, "Amen to that." Yes, you are right. I mean not say it because I know you're not an interactive church, but you would nod your head approvingly in Orange County, and say, "Yes that would be good." I'd much prefer my non-Christian neighbors go to work and constructively contribute to society even though they don't know God, love God, serve God or live for God. I'd much rather have them do that than be in some street gang and do all this terrible destructive things in society. We'd all want that. (14:13)

But if you ask the question, are they, much like these gavels, doing what they are designed to do? You would say, "No." Why? Because they are not in relationship with their maker. They're not in connection with their maker. The word for that in the Bible is reconciliation. We're made by God, sin has separated us from God, that is a state in which we are born, therefore sin is not just an action it is a state of being, it is not just what we do, it is what we are, and even if your life is constructive or destructive in society what you need is reconciliation with your maker. And until you're back in the hand of the maker you are not doing what you were called to do, and I'm not saying in terms of activity, I'm taking in terms of relationship. I'm talking in terms of purpose. So in that regard, no matter what the



gavel is being used for in the courtroom, really, it's going to change everything if that dead to the judge gavel gets back in the hand of the maker and becomes alive to God. That's different. Now, if the maker wants to go and do some things that are constructive, I suppose that's fine, because the maker and the created are now back in relationship and they have that relationship and that is what God intended and so God then uses that gavel as an extension of His glory, his majesty, his purposes in that courtroom however he chooses. (15:37)

So all of us even if you don't have a sorted background in your testimony you were dead, separated from God, in the trespasses and sins in which you walk, some were constructive in terms of societies assessment and some were destructive perhaps, some of you choose the goody goody two-shoes route and some of you were the rebellious route, but fine, great. All of us were there. We followed the course of the world and sometimes the world will applaud us just the way we want in our upbringing to be the rebels or to be the good kids, whatever it is, we follow the course of the world. And we also, believe it or not, we're in that, following the prince of the power of the air. Who's that? Satan. You didn't even want to say it, the spiritual enemy of God, which is not trying to get you to wear skulls on your t-shirt and go to thrash metal concerts and bite heads off of chickens. That's not Satan's plans for you. I know sometimes we think that, if you're not at the concert screaming, "Hail Satan." Well, then you're not doing Satan's work. But here's what Satan wants, he just wants you detached from your maker. (16:38)

That's the idea. He can keep you preoccupied with being in the corner of society, being constructive and having everybody give you awards for being a great contributor, he'll have you do that. The goal is to have you follow whatever the course of this world is so that you are dead to God. That's what he wants and he will continue to keep you there no matter how he does it. His goal isn't for you necessarily, whatever the means, the goal isn't for you to get to one corner or the other of society in terms of their assessment. The goal is to keep you from reconciliation to God. And before we were Christians he was succeeding, following the course of the world. We followed the prince of the power of the air which is now at work in the sons of disobedience because no matter how good an act might be as judged by society if it is not in connection with God it is in a sinful state; therefore it is a sinful act. That is why all our acts of righteousness are to God filthy rags. Why? Because there is not reconciliation with God. (17:37)

Verse 3, among whom all these people in the world we were like them, we all once lived in the passion of our flesh. And it may be that the passions of our flesh, encourage us to hang out with this culturally acceptable society constructive group, or maybe we were the rebels and we were in this other group but no matter what, we lived out the passions of our flesh. We did what pleased us, carrying out the desires of the body and of the mind. Whatever we decided, whatever we thought was right, all of these things we did because the reference was myself. I became the decider of what group I wanted to fit in with, what I wanted to do myself. I am the middle of all this. That's Satan's goal just keep me in the center, keep me to be the one I'm out to please. Unfortunately when you're detached from God and not reconciled we are by nature then, just by definition, organically we are children of wrath. We are going to be the ones, if we're sons of disobedience in verse 3, well then we are destined to pay of our own sins and God to mete out his exacting justice in our own life, just like the rest of mankind. (18:40)

Now that's the deadness to God, the separation from God, the state of sin, the practice of sin, whatever the variety of sin, but verse 4, God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, which is not an emotional feeling in the pit of his stomach, but a commitment to our well-being. A covenant decision and a promise to set his favor on us even when we were dead, even when we were separated, even when we are offence to him, even in our trespasses he then in that state of sin and amid those acts of sin, what did he do? Well, he made us alive, alive together with Christ because that was the merit that was needed, we can't have it on our own, we don't earn it, Christ earned it for us so we now are made alive. The difference between my Non-Christian life and my Christian life is I was dead and separated; now I'm alive and attached. Did I earn that? No, it's by grace that I've been saved. I've been plucked out of independence, I've turned from that independence, I've been now reconciled and associated in relationship with God and he raised us up with him – a little double entendre there – the idea of being in that dead state and now resurrected from that state, brought up in this case to God, seated with him in the heavenly places in Christ. Talk about the picture of being back in the hand of God, in connection with God. There it is, why? So that I can be forensically, relationally, legally connected with God? Well, that's only half of it. So that in the coming ages, verse 7, God might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus, all the love, all the benefit, all the inheritance, all the riches, all the favor God would like to pour out, and all the expressions of that favor to his own Son, he's seen us that way, and he's going to pour that all out on us. (20:29)

Then the verses you learned as a kid if you grew up in church, verse 8, by grace you have been saved, it's not your



doing, it's through faith. You've trusted in Christ's finished work and in his righteousness. And it's not of your own doing, you didn't do it, it is the gift of God. You didn't earn it, verse 9, it's not the result of works so that no one may boast. So we get that. The reconciliation back to God is a work of God, an act of God on the merit of Christ. Great. Then what? Now I'm in his hand. We get a little bit on that in this passage, verse 10, we are his workmanship, back to the garage and the lathe, he's made us, he's remade us by going out there doggedly and perseveringly seeking sinners and reconciling sinners to himself and now we're back in his hand, we are doubly his workmanship, workmanship in creation, workmanship in redemption, created in Christ Jesus for good works. (21:20)

Now let's do what's right, not for the constructive morality of our society but for what God defines as good. Things that by the way he's planned out and prepared and mapped out for us beforehand that we should walk in them. See the idea of repentance is not just like having a little meeting with an insurance agent to sign on the dotted line so I get my little policy so that I don't go to hell. The radical transformation of a life is someone that is not right with the living God. Repentance humanly speaking from my perspective on the timeline, I repent of my sins everything changes, I now am associated and reconciled to God and now my whole orientation of life, my whole definition of who I am, the whole way I see the world, the way I interpret the stimulus of this world completely different now, completely different. That's why speaking of verses we learned as kids, 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, therefore if anyone is in Christ – you're not attached to God in Christ, then what? You're a new creation, a creature; the old things passed away, new things come. (22:25)

Well, I kind of did grow up in that church and I did learn those verses and I was just a little guy and I didn't have an assorted background or dramatic testimony. I had to go to some other church to learn about that guy and as he stood up and gave his testimony, drug dealer and killed people and now he's saved and that's a real testimony. My testimony [blows raspberry], it's a dud. Well, I understand there are some testimonies that are pretty dramatic, much like going to the morgue and seeing bodies that are mangled. And I'm telling you, yeah I understand, one may look on the surface more dramatic when it comes back to life. But I'm telling you if you're at the morgue and a dead body that's been dead for years comes to life, it's a dramatic event. Don't tell me your conversion to Christ wasn't dramatic because when you were lost, you were dead to God. I'm saying everything changed at the moment of your conversion. And if it didn't, then what you're thinking of in terms of conversion was nothing more than you walking and aisle, signing up on the end of the last page of a tract, you know, throwing a pinecone in the fire, slipping up your hand, praying a prayer, doing something else besides biblical conversion, because trusting in Christ, repenting of your sins changes who you are from the inside out. (23:35)

That's a radical transformation, as much as a dead body coming alive. And so it may not work so well on testimony night because you can't talk about all the terrible things you did as a Non-Christian but that's simply a reference point of society judging how constructive or destructive your life was. The question has to be whether or not you are now alive in Christ, which changes everything about your whole identity. As a matter of fact two verses earlier in 2 Corinthians 5, verse 15 it puts it this way, which I think for you changes everything about every testimony you ever heard, if it's a real testimony, because it says he died for us so that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and rose again. There's not a testimony in the room if we open up the mic, we brought you up to give your testimony, not a testimony in the room if it's a real testimony that doesn't say at that point my repentance the whole reason for my living went for living for me to living for him. And it doesn't matter whether you had to change jobs because you were a drug dealer or whether or not you just maintained the same job and lived in the same house and kept a lot of the same patterns of your life. Well, that's a dramatic change because now you're completely under new management, living for a whole different reason. That is important for us to catch, so that you never minimize one testimony over against another. The reality of conversion that takes place at repentance is such a systemic whole life, radical change that it's dramatic no matter how the accoutrements or the details of that testimony get explained. We live for him and I wish I had time and I could speak all morning on the idea of all the implications of how that makes life look different, I'll just give you one example. (25:20)

Just one example, I can look at a million different things, here's one example how we interpret pain, let's just look at that. Non-Christians who do not live for God, they don't live for his glory; they don't live for an extension of his purposes in this world. They just live for themselves; they don't see themselves as slaves to Christ. They wake up every morning and say what do I want to do with my life, my body, my family, my stuff. They don't wake up as servants of Christ saying, what am I going to do with God's man today, how am I going to live for God's purposes today, where am I going to invest God's stuff today. They don't think that way. Non-Christians don't think that way.





Christians think that way and then when they encounter things like pain they don't think about it the way Non-Christians think about it. Non-Christians think about pain and like we would on a surface level, you get a headache, give me a Tylenol and hopefully it'll go away. (26:05)

As Christians though we've been taught by the scripture to think differently about it because we're God's man doing God's work in God's world and we're here to serve him and be an extension of his glory in this courtroom called earth. If that's the case then when something hurts, I'll give you two passages, here's the first one, Hebrews chapter 12 teaches us to look in our lives and see whether or not this is focused on bad fruit that needs to be turned into good fruit. It's called discipline. I see pain and I immediately should think well wait a minute, the Bible says that all these experiences of loving parental oversight sometimes when there's sin express itself, that love expresses itself, as painful discipline. And that pain in my life is suppose to, to quote Hebrews chapter 12, yield the peaceful – here's the word – fruit of righteousness. So God sees something bad on the limb and he does something to insert pain into my life so that I can address it, I can confess it and I can move forward. Now when Non-Christians encounter pain in their lives they just cry out to get it fixed, even religious people cry to God, God fix my pain. Christian people who are repentant and regenerate they say what Psalm 139 says, try my heart, seek in my life, know me, see if there any wicked way, is there something here you want to point out that's wrong. (27:23)

Two passages I said, here's the second one. We could talk about five categories I think of, responses to pain as Christians, here's the second one, these two are at the top. John 15, Hebrews 12, John 15. In John 15 to continue on with this analogy of fruit Jesus says changing the characters in a similar horticultural illustration, says let's change the characters around a little bit. We have the father is the vinedresser, I am the vine, you are the branch and the goal is for you to bear fruit. Now if you abide in me you'll bear fruit. Then he says this, if you don't abide in me you won't bear fruit and that branch cut off and thrown into the fire. There's the picture, there's the analogy. But then he adds this line, if the branch does bear fruit, my father the vinedresser will – here's the painful word – will prune that branch so that it'll produce even more fruit. Think about that. I'm a Christian I live for God, I'm attached to God, I'm abiding in the vine, I live for Christ, I am God's man. How am I going to invest God's life? How am I going to live for him? That's what I what to know, I'm concerned about God's agenda not mine, he's the reference point, not me. Great, pain in my life, do I see bad fruit, don't see a correspondence to that, next thing I think about, how are you trying to build more fruit in my life? How are you trying to produce more fruit in my life? The pruning of pain in my life should make me think, how can I parlay this to produce more fruit for the glory of God. (28:46)

Now think about that, that's not the way Non-Christians think. Pass me the, you know even if they call out to God, the divine you know ibuprofen and hopefully I'll feel better God. As opposed to wait a minute God has a purpose, he's sovereign, he oversees everything, nothing comes to my life, my town or my world without God's sovereign oversight therefore I'm going to ask the first two questions every Christian should ask when they encounter pain. Is, is there sin? And is there something you want to do in terms of training the pain in my life to become more useful. 2 Corinthians 1 is another passage saying the same concept. I go through this so that I might be more fruitful to God. That's just one example we could look at dozens, see of course everything is different. The difference between a repented person and an unrepented person is systemic, it is whole life, it is everything, it is dramatic. It is the way we've view the world, I mean the buzz word of recent times in Christian circles is, our worldview is radically altered. And I'm not talking about just how we look at politics and culture. I'm talking about how we look in the mirror everyday is radically transformed, my view of everything. (29:48)

So you pulled the rip cord everything changes, everything about you changes, the purpose of your life, the connection of your life, the relation of your life, the goals of your life, the interpretations of all the stimulus in your life. These are things that only begin to scratch the surface of what it means that you've got a fig tree that produces fruit verses one that does not produce fruit. A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard. He came seeking fruit on it and he found none. Verse 7 chapter 13, he said to the vinedresser, look for three years now I've come seeking fruit on this fig tree and I find none. What's the land owner, the vineyard owner going to say? Cut it down, I could have a fruitful plant there, I could have a fruitful fig tree there, I don't want this one it's not producing any fruit, cut it down, why should it use up the ground? Now some of you maybe home fellowship group leaders or some of you that prepare for church read the passage you look at your study Bible you get a commentary maybe on Luke you've been reading it. You're going to encounter the commentators and the Bible scholars, the seminary profs saying well this passage is about national Israel and they've got a lot of good cross references to go to, to make that point. The fig tree is the picture of Israel. Israel not expecting their Messiah and so he's threatening them, just like the cursing of the fig tree later in the life of Christ which is not recorded in Luke, but the idea of him doing that, this is a



national condemnation. And that's what's going on here so stop all you little preachers in your pulpit preaching like this is about personal fruit. This is about national fruit and even that three year thing well that could be symbolic of his three year earthly ministry so that's what we're dealing with. (31:23)

And if that's what you understand this passage to mean, you might distance yourself from the real conviction of saying now look at my life; am I bearing fruit for God? I don't want you to do that, even if I were to agree with your interpretation of this passage. I'm going to say this, what's true for national Israel is certainly true for every individual in this room so you're not off the hook there. And then I'm going to say this. It's funny how many commentators and seminary profs want to say that about this passage but they never quote the obvious cross references that clearly are not about national Israel but make the same exact point in inspired scripture that are trying to get us to look at our lives see whether or not we're saved pull the rip cord and are repentant. Let me give you one of those. (32:05)

Hebrews chapter 6, turn there with me, Hebrews chapter 6. Hebrews chapter 6, just like Luke chapter 13 remind us that we shouldn't be taking up the precious soil in God's vineyard if we are not bearing fruit. As a matter of fact it's presented to us as scandalous, appalling. Take a look at how it's put here beginning in verse 7. Hebrews chapter 6 verse 7. For the land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it and produces a crop that's useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated. If that's the case, hey, receives a blessing from God, that's a good thing, that's the way it ought to be. Verse 8, but if that same land has been drinking in all that rain, has all those nutrients there in the soil if it doesn't bear any fruit, there's no crop that's yielded from it, but it bears thorns and thistles, well then it's worthless. There it is why is it taking up the soil? It's worthless and it's near being cursed. That's the contrast of verse number 7. I mean the soil that gets invested in and produces fruit well blessing from God. The soil that gets all that investment and does not produce fruit, well then it's much like that parable of the boss that's shrewd with his investments and saying, "You know I'm a hard man and I demand a return on my investment." I mean you're not producing it's worthless you're near being cursed. And in the end as John 15 says it's going to be gathered up and burned. (33:35)

Though we speak in this way yet in your case beloved, you Christians, we feel sure – here it is – we feel sure of better things -- things that accompany or belong to salvation. Now catch that and work your way backwards. If I'm a Christian, if there's salvation, if I've repented, then when God invests in me, there's going to be fruit. If God pours out his blessing in terms of nutrients and rains so to speak on my life, and in this context the preacher of Hebrews giving all this truth to them, then listen you're going to bear fruit. If you don't bear fruit and you've got thorns and thistles after the same kind of investment from God well then that's not what salvation is all about. I expect you to be bearing fruit, because fruit comes with salvation, salvation humanly speaking is the result of repentance. Number 2 let's put it this way, we need to see the scandal of faking it. (34:29)

## 2. See the Scandal of Faking It

The scandal of faking it. Repentance changes everything. You may sit among changed people and not be a changed person and you sit and do what they do. You sing the songs, you listen to the preacher, you dutifully write a few notes down. You go to a small group, all of that if there's no intrinsic or organic change in who you are, there's a scandal in that the Bible says. As it's put at the bottom of verse 7 in Luke 13, why should it use up the ground because God expects a return on his investment. (35:05)

Now I understand faking it makes it seem like everyone who professes Christ and does not possess a real conversion is intentionally trying to deceive people, and I'm not trying to say that. You can be a fake and know it and you can be a fake and not know it, would you agree with that? I mean think through the passage that speaks of that. I think of it in 2 Timothy, Paul says, you know "There are evil men and imposters. The imposters are deceiving and the evil men are being deceived." There's the connection there between some people that are not saved that are deceiving other people and you've got that in 2 Peter, you've got that in the book of Jude. They are there, waterless clouds, they are not converted, they put on a face, they're the hypocrites they know they're not with the crowd but they're among us, they are these blots at our feasts it says, the potlucks have these people at the church and they're not saved, and they know they're not saved and really they are there for their own advantage. But then there are a lot of people Jesus speaks of on that day in Matthew 7 who will say, "Lord, Lord". I don't think they're playing around when he says, "Depart from me." And they say, "WWWait a minute, didn't we?" See they were faking it and they didn't know it. Either way there's a scandal there. That's why for all the grief I get for doing it, to periodically come

back to you when the passages call for it to say, “Hey listen, are you sure you’re repentant?” I had someone after this sermon last night, oh, that’s what you guys are always doing at this church.” I don’t think anyone is going to rail on me a hundred years from now about the periodic sermon that makes us squirm a little bit about the pressure of examining ourselves to make sure whether or not our conversion and our repentance is genuine. Do you think I’m going to get a lot of grief a hundred years from now on that? I’ll get it a hundred days from now but I won’t get it a hundred years from now. (36:51)

Because even Paul is not ashamed to look at his preacher in Ephesus, Timothy, and really make some overtones and some overtures about his life and say you need to make sure you’re saved. All the great books, I think of Spurgeon lectures to my students starting off with, hey preacher make sure you’re saved. Richard Baxter with the great works to preachers, preacher before you get on the pulpit, make sure you’re saved. The greats have done it, the Bible has done it, God does it and he calls us to make sure our repentance is not fake, it’s not phony. The scandal of it is how much worse it is for someone who sits through years of sermons with all this talk about repent, repent, repent, get right with God, reconcile and they put on the show on the outside, either knowingly or just trying to fit in. My testimony is that way. I tried to fit in, do the right things, the cultural Christianity, you’ve heard me tell my testimony about Christianity from the outside in verses the inside out, big difference there. And I know we can do it sometimes unwittingly but you’ve got to sit here this morning and say listen it would be scandalous for me. And you know why? Because you’ve got an opportunity to have a connection with the living God that is transformative and instead you’re just going through the motions. That’s awful. (38:07)

Speaking of corporate calls to look at this scandal verses individual calls to look at this scandal, I’ll just throw out this reference, Jeremiah chapter 2 verses 11 through 13. Jeremiah chapter 2 verses 11 through 13, and that’s where God says to his whole nation corporately, “What a scandal it is, the heavens should be appalled that here are my people with access to me the spring of living water but instead they’re out behind their houses digging wells and cisterns that can’t hold any water. It’s not real life, and they’re not abiding with me, they’re disconnected from me.” And in the community of the New Testament church it’s the same way. You can sit here and you can be part of our community, you can receive a lot of the blessing as the first six verses of Hebrews 6 say, you can receive a lot of that, and go through life with a lot of advantages being a part of a church. And in the end never have real repentance ever take place in your heart because you hear sermons like this and you stiff arm me. And it isn’t about me; you know that, I’m just a messenger. To look at passages and say, “Does the fig tree bear fruit?” Well, I’m going to church. I’m not talking about that. I’m talking about what Ephesians chapter 2 talks about, alive to God in Christ, living for him, not just going about the course of this world, the spirit of our time and the spirit of this age and the spirit that’s now at work in the sons of disobedience. See the scandal in faking it. I hope that’s not you. It was me for many years. (39:35)

Number 3, verses 8 and 9 in our passage, Luke chapter 13. After those stern words and they were designed to be by God and clearly the preacher is just trying to reflect the solemnity and the sobriety of those last words in verse 7, there’s something amazing that takes place in verses 8 and 9. He answered him, the vinedresser speaks to the landowner, the vineyard owner. “Sir, let it alone this year also, give it another year, let me work on it, I’ll dig around it, I’ll put on manure, I’ll put the fertilizer out there. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good, but if not, you can cut it down.” If I understand this right and in this case I’m in good company with most commentators, not always. But the players seem to be pretty easy to figure out in this text. If God is the owner of the vineyard, this has precedent in the Old Testament. And in this case the vinedresser, the gardener, is Christ and we are the tree, we’re not the branch this time, we are the whole fig tree, suppose to bear fruit. And you’ve got an interesting inner Trinitarian discussion going on here, do you not? The Father saying I gave them the truth they did not repent, time for them to be judged. And you have the mediator stepping in, the advocate saying well, wait a minute, I know they’re not repentant give them more time. Isn’t that an interesting picture? (41:03)

And it’s not without precedent in the Old Testament; Moses did the same thing as an intercessory for the people that complained in the desert. God said I’m going to, I’m just going to get rid of them all, I’m going to lay them low in the desert. Moses, No, no, no, God. Here we have the ultimate picture of advocacy and in this case it’s not toward Christians it’s toward pre-Christians. And we don’t even get the conclusion, does it, does it bear fruit or does it not bear fruit? It doesn’t tell us. Think about Christ advocating before the Father to say, give them some more time. Let’s keep cultivating, give them another sermon, give them a little more conviction, give them more truth, give them more opportunity, give them more time. You should be amazed, let’s put it down that way, number 3, you should be amazed at God’s patience and his grace. (41:50)





### 3. Be Amazed of God's Patience and Grace

You should be amazed at that. You should be amazed that God didn't take a whole world in chapter 3 of Genesis and just throw it all in the trash compactor. You should be amazed that God would ever have a person that could give a testimony that heard the Gospel, did not respond and eventually did respond. Think about that. And I'll bet if we open up the mic and called you up to give your testimony about your conversion to Christ if you're a real Christian, I bet there will be very few people in the room that the very first time that they clearly heard the Gospel they responded to it rightly. You probably shined God on, you pushed him away, you continued on headlong into your sin after knowing the truth and God was patient with you. And God the Father could have rightly in all of his justice said away with him, depart from me. Let's just get him off the planet right now, he's taking up space, he heard the gospel, he knows what it is, we're done. And you can see the amazing grace and patience, the long suffering of the triune God stepping in going give them more time, let me work on them some more. The dogged persevering tenacity of a God chasing down unrepentant sinners that's the picture here. That's amazing grace. (43:03)

I hope that gives you hope that it's not something you presume upon, we're warned about that by the way. Speaking of being presumed upon God's kindness in Romans chapter 2 verses 4 and 5. Don't presume upon his kindness, his forbearance, here's a great word. His ability just to sit there and put up with, don't presume upon his patience, his kindness or his forbearance. Knowing that it's the kindness of God leads us to repentance. If you've got more time, if you're sitting here feeling any conviction in the second point of this message and now we're in the third point, I just want you to breath just a thankful prayer that God would give you another day to respond to the gospel. (43:46)

Now you notice that the vinedresser in this passage, he's got a time limit on how long he's willing to work on this? Before he says to the Father, fine cut it down. But gulp in your throat, the pit in your stomach should be I don't know if I have tomorrow. That's why the scripture always says today, today, today, today. Today is the day of salvation. Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart. If there's any conviction in the second point that I do think I'm a fake, I'm a Christian from the outside in, I'm a Christian who is not a Christian because really for me it's about keeping up appearances. There's no organic change, that whole discussion of Ephesians 2, that's not me. Then I'm just saying God kept you alive until today so that today you could put your trust in Christ with a repentant faith. Today is the day for you. (44:37)

And if you are a Christian, I hope it does something about intensifying the thanksgiving you have if we were to open up the mic and it was your turn to step up and give your testimony about coming to Christ to say how amazing. Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I mean I hope you would have a profundity in real deep thanksgiving that though you ran away from God, he chased you down. (45:06)

Paul felt that way in 1 Timothy chapter 1 when he gave his testimony. He says there in verse 13, you know I was a blasphemer, a persecutor of the church, I was an insolent opponent. The ESV translators love that word, insolent, a rude and brash opponent of the truth. He says, yet I received mercy, he gives the reason why two verses later, he says here's the reason, Jesus came into the world to save sinners, which I am the foremost and I receive mercy from God for this reason. Here it comes, so that in me, the foremost of sinners, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe on him for eternal life. So God picked the worse of his day, a guy who was on no one's, "I'm praying for him to get saved" prayer list. Think about that. Saul of Tarsus. The ultimate enemy of the church, chose him as the one he would doggedly persistently, tenaciously pursue for salvation and repentance, so that we would all sit here and read his letters, the instrument through whom the New Testament revelation came, a good chunk of it, to say, see how patient I am. (46:30)

I know we're always upset with God that he doesn't save everyone. Can you just be amazed for a while that he would save anyone? That's where you need to get. And say it's amazing how patient he is with sinners, rebellious people like us. And not only is he patient and we have no reason at all to cheer on our conversion or our repentance, none. Not only is it not of works, I mean the Bible is very clear, if we were to do everything exactly as God intended it to be, we ought to say I'm quoting now Luke 17, we ought to say we're unworthy servants we've only done that which we ought to have done. You do not think appliances in your kitchen for doing exactly what you paid for them, bought them and installed for them to do, you don't sit around, it's amazing how my wash machine worked this week. Praise the washing machine, right? You curse it when it doesn't do what it's designed to do. If we were to do



everything the way we were suppose to the first time we were told we ought to say we're unworthy slaves we're only done what we ought to have done. But God not only in his patience reaches out and saves people like us but when he does save us he throws a party, think about that. (47:43)

In Luke chapter 15 the story is told of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. The lost son, we call it the prodigal son, better to think of him as the lost son because the last line is he was dead and now he's alive. The most interesting thing about that is a man who sees his sin for what it is. Comes home, he's got his speech all prepared, I've sinned against heaven, I've sinned against you, I'm no longer worthy to be called your son just make me one of your hired servants, I don't need to come back as your son, with any privileges or rights or anything just let me come back in your house, I've sinned. Before he can get that speech out he comes near his house, the Bible says the father runs toward him, embraces him, kisses him, and as he starts to confess his sin, I've sinned, I've sinned against heaven, I've sinned against you, he can't even finish his speech and the father says, "Bring him a robe, but a ring on his finger, put sandals on his feet, go out into the pen and killed the fatten calf, let's celebrate, let's feast. My son was lost now he's found, he was dead now he's alive." The verse that sets that up is the last verse of the parable of the lost coin, for the woman is rejoicing calling her friends together saying, "I found the coin that was lost." And Jesus adds this commentary and so it is that there is joy in heaven over a single sinner that repents. I hope you've pulled the rip cord, I hope that you have repented of you sins. If you have it was a result of God's amazing grace and incredible patience. And if you are a Christian I hope you get busy about the work he's called us to do and that is to be his ambassadors in this world, the message of reconciliation needs to go to your neighbors, your coworkers, your family members and that you have hope that God is a patient God, not only has he saved you, he saved the Apostle Paul and he can save your neighbors and there's probably people on your "To-Be-Saved" prayer list that aren't even on there because you're not even thinking that big because you've minimized the patience and grace of God. Let's think a little bit bigger here, let's pray a little bit more ardently, and with faith and confidence. Let's make sure we're saved and let's get all these falling people around us to pull the rip cord too. Let's pray (49:58)

God help us please to celebrate your grace in a manner that is not like it seems so often is the case in our day taking some kind of credit for our conversion that we're smarter than our neighbors or more insightful than our coworkers. Let's be able to sing those words of John Newton with sincerity, amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost and now I'm found, was blind but now I see. All of that is of grace and it's so transformative that there shouldn't be any question to anyone listening to this sermon who can't right now tell, yes there are unmistakable signs of repentance it is a reworking a whole systemic change of who I am as a person. Oh of course we stumble and fall as James says we all stumble in many ways. I'm not talking about sinlessness here, I'm talking about the transformative regenerating work of your Spirit that redirects our entire life and begins to reshape how we even view the world or view ourself in the mirror. God but that's a long way from people who sit here maybe some hearing my voice thinking well to me it's just about keeping the rules so I don't have someone narc me at church that they recognize that whatever they've pulled on it certainly wasn't the rip cord of salvation it was something else. Let there be real repentance granted here in our church so we can get to heaven and have very few people that we lament that we worship next to in our home fellowship groups and end up hearing depart from me I never knew you. God let us never tire of hearing of your patience and your grace and for all those that are tired of looking at their own lives to see whether or not their faith is real I pray that you would give them the kind of profound gratitude that we should all have if indeed we recognize that you have granted us repentance and you have changed our lives, how grateful we should be, how profoundly thankful we should be. So God dismiss us now I hope most people here with a great assurance of their faith and a great thanksgiving for their salvation. In Jesus name. Amen. (52:04)