**Repent and Live**

Based on [Luke 13:1-9](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Lk13.1-9)

Preached on February 28, 2016

Lent 3

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In the Small Catechism, Martin Luther writes a summary explanation of the 10 Commandments. He says, "**God threatens to punish all who break these commandments. Therefore, we should fear His wrath and not do anything against them. But he promises grace and every blessing to all who keep these commandments. Therefore, we should also love and trust in Him and gladly do what he commands.**" Do you believe this?

When raising your children do you, did you ever tell them that God will punish them if they break his commandments? If not, why not? God clearly says he will. Exodus 20:5-6 says, "**I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers into the third and fourth generations of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.**" Thus saith the Lord. Do we say this word of the Lord? Do we believe it?

Today's lessons all have to do with the need for repentance. Ezekiel says, "**When the righteous turns from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it. And when the wicked turns from his wickedness and does what is just and right, he shall live by this**." *Oh well, that's just the old testament. After Jesus died on the cross our sins were paid for and God turned from an angry God into a relaxed and peaceful God.* St. Paul writes in the epistle 1 Corinthians 10:1-13, "**We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the destroyer."** That's New Testament, folks...after Christ died on the cross and paid for the sin of the whole world, God still punishes sin.

First thing to remember is that the Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Hebrews 12:28 says, "**Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe. For our God is a consuming fire**." We need fire, without it we would die. Yet the old saying goes that if you play with fire you're going to get burned.

A famous lenten hymn sings of the cross of Jesus Christ in this way, "**Ye who think of sin but lightly Nor suppose the evil great, Here may view its nature rightly, Here its guilt may estimate."** One who commits sexual sin can easily say, "it's only skin." Someone who lies or deceives with words can comfort themselves saying "it's just words." **We are sinners, blind to spiritual things. We don't see the real nature of our sin until we see it punished by a God who stands in judgment over it.** In the wilderness, God's people grumbled, and he sent fiery serpents to bite them and many died. But many were saved when he had his servant Moses erect a bronze serpent on a pole, and as many as looked upon it were saved. So too we view the nature of sin rightly when it is punished by God on the cross of Christ.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is the teaching of the Law. It tells you what sin is, and that sin is deadly because God punishes it. And the Law of God is good and wise. It is given by God not to scare you or alarm you, but to tell you the truth. If you see someone in danger--say they stepped out into traffic and a car is about to hit them--you shout "**Watch out, turn around, get off the road.**" That's a warning. Your warning will cause them alarm and discomfort, surely, but it is meant for their own Good. But it is not meant to condemn, it is meant to save.

In the OT, God tells Ezekiel, "**So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand.**" This warning people of the danger and punishment of sin is a "call to repentance." It's a warning to watch out, turn around, get off the dangerous road. It is thought that because Jesus died on the cross for our sins that God doesn't punish sin. How silly, if anything the cross of christ proves that God does punish sin, it is the ultimate evidence of God's wrath against it.

**"But Pastor, we are all sinners whether we like it or not. If sin means we're going to be punished, who can be saved**?" The answer is this: no one can be saved by keeping God's Law. Your track record with sin and good works is entirely irrelevant to your salvation. This is because Christ died for your sins before you even committed them; before the foundation of the world he is the lamb who was slain for you. Some people will be granted eternal life in heaven, some will suffer eternity in hell; but what makes the difference is not how great of a sinner you are, but whether you turn to Christ for forgiveness.

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus levels the playing field. People were gossiping about some evil fate that happened to some Galileans. Evidently, the topic was that these ones who suffered such a tragic fate must have been real bad sinners. Jesus pipes up and says, "**Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but *unless you repent*, you will all likewise perish.**"

We tend to rank and quantify. A murderer is a greater sinner than thief. A thief is a greater sinner than a drunkard. A drunkard is a greater sinner than a gossip. And we compare and contrast sins, and especially repeat offenders, oh do we despise having to forgive the same sin more than once. But in truth, there is only one thing that distinguishes saved sinners from damned ones...and that is repentance. Jesus says, "**Do you think these Galileans were worse sinners, no. But unless you repent you will likewise perish."**

Ladies and gentlemen, it's not that Christ died for the saved...he died for the damned as well. It's not that saved sinners are baptized and take communion and hear sermons every week, and damned sinners don't...Christ teaches that the church is filled with both good and bad fish (Matt. 13:47-48). **It's not that saved sinners self-identify as Christians, and the damned do not. In today's world a man can self-identify as a woman but that changes nothing in reality. It's the same with a sinner who self-identifies as a saint, his own self-regard doesn't make it so.** No the one and only thing that distinguishes saved sinners from damned ones is repentance.

Now, someone might say, "**we're saved by Jesus and the gospel, not by repentance.**" This is true, but it's not an either or, we can repent because of Jesus, because he gives us his spirit, because when we repent he does not condemn us, but forgives.

And here's the wonderful thing about the cross of Christ, his gifts given us at the pulpit, altar and font. When prophets and preachers call people to repentance, they call them to turn away from their sin. Someone who preaches all Law, leaves it at that: "turn away from your sin." And if the hearer is convicted he asks, "**Okay then, what am I to turn to?**" And the God-fearing person knows all too well is that he is a sinner from head to toe. He knows that there is nothing good *in him* that is *of him*. And so he hears the law and panics like a pedestrian caught in the middle of heavy traffic. He says in anxiety, "**Turn away from sin? Sin is all around me. It permeates every thought, every word, every deed that I do. Turn away from sin? I'm always turning toward it, out of the frying pan into the fire.**"

The law preacher says "**turn away from sin**" and the hearer naturally then turns to Gods law. "**Have no other Gods, don't lie, don't murder, don't steal, don't covet.**" And these commands, though they are good and ought to be obeyed, they are unable to save. Because turning from sin to the law only increases sin (Romans 5:20). The law, apart from the gospel, only increases despair and offers no comfort only accusation.

But our God who is compassionate and merciful to save says: "**Repent... Only don't turn from sin to the law. Turn from sin to Christ, my son, the righteous one."** The gospel is that when you are called to repentance you are not called to more law, but to the Gospel. Repentance calls you to turn to the atoning death of Jesus on the cross.

After Judas betrayed Jesus, he knew he had sinned. So he brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders saying, "**I have sinned by betraying innocent blood**." And they answered him, "**What is that to us? See to it yourself**." Judas tried to repent and turn away from his sin. He went to God's ministers and the only thing they had to say was "**See to it yourself**." Judas turned away from his sin, but he didn't turn to Jesus, nor did the priests give him the gospel of forgiveness and direct him there. So instead of turning to Christ for deliverance, he turned to death which is now his god forever.

Without Christ, repentance is all law and a hopeless venture. This is why it is sheer evil to deny the real presence of Christ in holy communion, to regard preaching not as a proclamation but as a sales pitch, to treat baptism as plain water and not a pouring out of the spirit. Without word and sacrament, there is no Christ to turn to, because he's locked in heaven, chained to the right hand of the father. And the only ladder left to heaven is the Law and we can't climb it. No the Son of Man is Jacobs ladder upon whom the angels ascend and descend. And he is here for you and the whole church to turn to, in word and sacrament, until the end of the age.

God gives us his holy law so that we might not sin. It's not a scare tactic, it's not a bark without a bite. He tells us what sin is and expects us to recognize it and not do it because he will punish sin. God gives us his law for our safety, so that we might not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have somewhere to turn. **If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous** (1 John 2:1). Turn from sin and repent; turn to Christ and rejoice for he has forgiven you.