

Luke 13:1-9
December 1, 2019

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: What is repentance? [Let people engage - **repentance** is not an act separate from faith, but saving faith includes and implies the true change of heart/mind]

Q: What does it mean to be a “fruitful” Christian? [Let people engage]

1. The Fruit of Soul-winning - Prov 11:30, Jn 4:36
2. The Fruit of Spiritual Growth - Ro 6:22 Mt 13:23
3. The Fruit of the Spirit of God - Gal 5:22-23.
4. The Fruit of Surrender and Supplying Others’ Needs. - Ro 15:26,28.
5. The Fruit of Service to Christ - Colossians 1:10
6. The Fruit of Speaking Praises to God - Heb 13:15
7. The Fruit of Serenity or Peace - John 14:27
8. The Fruit of Shunning Sinfulness & Shame - Matthew 3:8
9. The Fruit of Submission and Obedience to the Lord - John 15:10

Transition: In Luke 13:1-5 two disasters are mentioned and Jesus uses these to direct His hearers’ attention to a far greater disaster that they all faced if they refused to repent. This lesson may cause us to ask, “How can I know that my repentance is genuine? If repentance spares me from perishing eternally, I want to know that my repentance is real.” The test of true repentance is fruitfulness, which is expressed in the parable of a fig tree. Let’s read the text.

BOOK:

Repent or Perish

13 1 Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. 2 Jesus answered, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? 3 I tell you, no! But **unless you repent, you too will all perish.** 4 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? 5 I tell you, no! But **unless you repent, you too will all perish.**”

6 Then he 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. 7 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?’

8 “‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. 9 If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’” (Agrees that results are FINAL!)

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

Observation V.1 on Pilate - The first illustration Jesus uses to warn these people about perishing is about the massacre of Galileans by Pilate. Pilate was notorious for his treachery and vile treatment of people. His treatment of the Jews and Samaritans drove these people to rebellion several times. They hated this man with despicable disdain. Josephus recorded several of the collisions between the Romans and the Jews. At one Jewish Passover he related how three thousand Jews were butchered, and the temple courts were filled with dead corpses. On the occasion of another of these Jewish feasts, two thousand perished by being slaughtered. Luke records the death of Galileans at the hand of Pilate here. Galilee was a hotbed for fanatics that strived to overthrow the Roman occupation of Israel. Galilee was not under Pilate's jurisdiction, but when these Galileans came to Jerusalem, Pilate had them killed.

Observation V.4 on Cause of Tragedies - The implication is that their sin had nothing to do with their specific fate. It was simply their time to die, for sin results in physical death for everyone. Notice that Jesus did not ask if they were sinners (that is assumed) but whether they were greater sinners than all other Galileans. It was their **greater** sin to which Jews ascribed their tragic fate, not to the fact that they were just **sinners**. The implication is that the Jews knew they were **sinners**, but they were just not as "bad" a group of **sinners** as those who they thought were punished by God for their **greater** sin. Jesus will correct their faulty theology. It is not **greater** sin that calls down God's wrath (X-Ref Ro 1:18-note "already revealed" is literally "already BEING revealed" - even now), but **ONE** sin that kills a man, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all." (James 2:10).

The notion that personal disaster is the result of personal sin was deeply rooted in the consciousness of the Jew; see, for example, **Job 4:7; 8:20; 11:6; 22:5-10; John 9:2**. Jesus not only refuted it but also emphasized that without genuine conversion no one is saved; all perish.

Q V.7-8: If the man in the vineyard asked Jesus, "What are the reasons you would cut down this fig tree?" If you were Jesus observing the tree, what do you think you would say? [Let people engage]

This may be regarded as the language of justice and mercy, of law and grace. Some Reasons why it Should be Cut Down:

- (1) It was the EASIEST WAY of getting rid of it.
- (2) It had had SUFFICIENT TIME for trial.
- (3) It showed NO SIGNS of improvement.
- (4) It had never done ANY GOOD.
- (5) It was filling a place that might be BETTER OCCUPIED by another.
- (6) It was having a BAD INFLUENCE on others. A "cumberer."

LOOK:

The fig tree parable has an application to individuals and to the nation of Israel. God is gracious and long-suffering toward people (2 Peter 3:9) and does more than enough to encourage us to repent and bear fruit (Mt. 3:7–10 - John the Baptist had laid his axe to the root of the tree -Mt 3:9). 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 long-suffering of the Lord, for the day of judgment will finally come. (God expects us to bear fruit for His glory. Instead of asking, “Why did others die?” we should ask, “Is it worth it to God for me to be alive?”)

The bottom line: There can be no genuine conversion without genuine repentance. A heart that has never turned to God and from sin, has never experienced regeneration and is still dead it trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1). As the Lord looks at our life right now, does He find any fruit?

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 223-225). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

As Jesus continued His journey toward Jerusalem, He encountered four situations involving questions that had to be answered. "To question a wise man is the beginning of wisdom," says a German proverb. Not everyone who questioned the Lord did so from a right motive, but that did not stop Jesus from teaching them what they needed to know. As you study His replies in Luke 13, you can learn more about Him and His ministry, and also more about living the Christian life so as to please Him.

A Political Question about Justice (Luke 13:1-9)

Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, did not get along with the Jews because he was insensitive to their religious convictions. For example, he brought the official Roman ensigns into Jerusalem and infuriated the Jews who resented having Caesar's image in the Holy City. Pilate threatened to kill the protestors and they were willing to die! Seeing their determination, the governor relented and moved the ensigns to Caesarea, but that did not stop the hostilities.

The atrocity mentioned in Luke 13:1 may have taken place when Pilate "appropriated" money from the temple treasury to help finance an aqueduct. A large crowd of angry Jews gathered in protest; so Pilate had soldiers in civilian clothes mingle with the mob. Using concealed weapons, the soldiers killed a number of innocent and unarmed Jews, and this only added to the Jews' hatred for their governor.

Since Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, anything He said about Pilate was sure to get there before Him. If He ignored the issue, the crowd would accuse Him of being pro-Roman and disloyal to His people. If He defended the Jews and accused Pilate, He would be in trouble with the Romans, and the Jewish leaders would have a good excuse to get Him arrested. Our Lord moved the whole issue to a higher level and avoided politics completely. Instead of discussing Pilate's sins, He dealt with the sins of the people questioning Him. He answered their question by asking a question!

To begin with, He made it clear that human tragedies are not always divine punishments and that it is wrong for us to "play God" and pass judgment. Job's friends made this mistake when they said that Job's afflictions were evidence that he was a sinner. If we take that approach to tragedy, then we will have a hard time explaining the sufferings of the Prophets and Apostles, and even of our Lord Himself.

"How would you explain the deaths of the people on whom the tower in Siloam fell?" He asked. "That was not the fault of Pilate. Was it God's fault? Shall we blame Him? The eighteen who were killed were just doing their job, yet they died. They were not protesting or creating trouble."

When the blind English poet John Milton was old and obscure, he was visited one day by Charles II, son of the king that the Puritans had beheaded. "Your blindness is a judgment from

God for the part you took against my father,” said the king. Milton replied, “If I have lost my sight through God’s judgment, what can you say of your father who lost his head?”

Jesus went on to show the logical conclusion of their argument: if God does punish sinners in this way, then they themselves had better repent because all men are sinners! The question is not, “Why did these people die?” but, “What right do you have to live?” None of us is sinless, so we had all better get prepared.

It is easier to talk about other people’s deaths than it is to face our own sin and possible death.

The American publishing tycoon William Randolph Hearst would not permit anyone to mention death in his presence, yet he died. I asked a friend of mine what the death rate was in his city, and he replied, “One apiece.” Then he added, “People are dying who never died before.”

According to Leviticus 19:23–25, fruit from newly planted trees was not eaten the first three years, and the fourth year the crops belonged to the Lord. A farmer would not get any figs for himself until the fifth year, but this man had now been waiting for seven years! No wonder he wanted to cut down the fruitless tree!

The parable has an application to individuals and to the nation of Israel. God is gracious and long-suffering toward people (2 Peter 3:9) and does more than enough to encourage us to repent and bear fruit (Matt. 3:7–10). 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 long-suffering of the Lord, for the day of judgment will finally come.

But the tree also reminds us of God’s special goodness to Israel (Isa. 5:1–7; Rom. 9:1–5) and His patience with them. God waited three years during our Lord’s earthly ministry, but the nation did not produce fruit. He then waited about forty years more before He allowed the Roman armies to destroy Jerusalem and the temple; and during those years, the church gave to the nation a powerful witness of the Gospel message. Finally, the tree was cut down.

It is significant that the parable was “open-ended,” so that the listeners had to supply the conclusion. (The Book of Jonah is another example of this approach.) Did the tree bear fruit? Did the special care accomplish anything? Was the tree spared or cut down? We have no way to know the answers to these questions, but we can answer as far as our own lives are concerned! Again, the question is not “What happened to the tree?” but “What will happen to me?” God is seeking fruit. He will accept no substitutes, and the time to repent is NOW. The next time you hear about a tragedy that claims many lives, ask yourself, “Am I just taking up space, or am I bearing fruit to God’s glory?”

Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 240)

c. *Jesus’ teaching on perishing* (13:1–5).

13:1–5. Jesus taught the crowds that calamity can happen to anyone because all are human. Jesus cited two common instances about destruction. The first concerned some Galileans who were killed by Pilate while they were offering sacrifices. The second concerned 18 seemingly innocent bystanders in Siloam who were killed when a tower ... fell on them. Jesus’ point was that being killed or not being killed is no measure of a person’s unrighteousness or righteousness.

Anyone can be killed. Only God's grace causes any to live. This point is brought out in verses 3 and 5—unless you repent, you too will all perish. Death is the common denominator for everyone. Only repentance can bring life as people prepare to enter the kingdom.

d. *Jesus' parable of the fig tree* (13:6–9).

13:6–9. To illustrate His point Jesus taught in a parable that if fruit does not show in one's life, judgment will come. A fig tree requires three years to bear figs, but since this one did not produce, the owner said, Cut it down. His vineyard keeper asked him to give it one more year. This parable illustrates the point made in verses 1–5 that judgment comes on those who do not repent. Here Jesus took the thought one step further and noted that fruit must be present (cf. Matt. 3:7–10; 7:15–21; Luke 8:15). A visible change must be seen in the life of one who claims to trust the Messiah. If there is no visible change that person, like the figless fig tree, is judged.

Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). Faithlife Study Bible (Lk 13:1-9). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

13:1–5 Continuing the theme of judgment from ch. 12, Jesus uses two calamities that befell certain Jews to illustrate the fate that awaits those who do not repent. This material is unique to Luke's Gospel.

13:1 at the same time Refers to the time of Jesus' discourse in ch. 12.

whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices Refers to the killing of Galilean pilgrims as they were offering sacrifices in Jerusalem. Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judaea from ad 26 to 36, apparently ordered their deaths. No other details are known, as these verses give the only account of this incident.

13:2 these Galileans were sinners worse Jesus' rhetorical question reflects the belief—common among first-century Jews—that physical affliction was caused by sin (compare John 9:2). Jesus counters this assumption in the next verse.

13:3 No Jesus asserts that the Galileans' deaths were not the result of excessive sin.

unless you repent you will all perish Jesus uses this incident (and that mentioned in Luke 13:4) to illustrate the necessity of repentance.

13:4 the tower in Siloam Siloam was located in the southeastern corner of Jerusalem, and the tower may have been an original structure from the city of David, as described by the first-century ad Jewish historian Josephus (Josephus, Jewish War 5:145). Like the report in v. 1, this is the only account of this incident.

do you think that they were sinners worse See v. 2 and note.

13:5 unless you repent, you will all perish See v. 3 and note.

13:6–9 This parable is found only in Luke, but it resembles Jesus' rebuke of the fig tree in the other Synoptic Gospels (Matt 21:18–19; Mark 11:12–14). The primary point of the parable, expressed in Luke 13:8–9, continues the theme of judgment.

13:8 leave it alone this year also Suggests a period of grace. The gardener advises the vineyard owner to give the fig tree more time; perhaps it can be nurtured, so that it will bear fruit.

Stein, R. H. (1992). Luke (Vol. 24, pp. 369-371). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Context

At this point Luke introduced two pericopes that continue the theme of 12:57–59 concerning the need to repent. The controversy story (13:1–5) and the parable (13:6–9) are unique to his Gospel. The first alludes to a recent incident in which Pontius Pilate had killed a number of Galileans while they were offering sacrifices in the temple. In addition, Jesus recounted another tragedy, the collapse of the tower of Siloam that killed eighteen residents of Jerusalem. Neither of these events is recorded elsewhere. Jesus pointed out that in both incidents the victims of these tragedies were not especially evil. The lesson drawn from these examples is the audience's need to repent, but how these illustrations relate to repentance is less clear. One possibility is that the fate of these people was meant as a warning that sudden death was a real possibility and therefore his hearers (and Luke's readers) needed to prepare by repenting (cf. 12:20). Another possibility is that these tragedies were meant to teach that unless Jesus' audience repented, they too would perish. That both groups were killed in Jerusalem may suggest to Luke's readers, who read this account after a.d. 70, that "you too will perish" (13:3, 5) had been a call for Israel's repentance. As they knew, this warning went unheeded and resulted in Jerusalem's destruction. This interpretation is supported by the following parable, which alludes to the coming judgment, the hostility of the unrepentant synagogue ruler (13:10–17), and above all by the lament in 13:34–35 (cf. 3:9). A final possibility is that the two incidents are meant to teach that Jesus' audience would indeed also perish unless they repented but that the death spoken of was spiritual and eternal. It would be understood that Jesus was using a real incident to illustrate a spiritual reality. Luke probably intended a combination of the last two interpretations, for the temple's destruction in a.d. 70 was both a temporal judgment on the nation and a spiritual one. As for Luke's readers, only the latter spiritual judgment faced them.

The parable illustrates this theme. A tree that has received special treatment from its owner has not borne fruit. Now he seeks to rid the vineyard of this worthless tree and plant something else that will use the space more profitably. The vinedresser, however, intercedes to give the tree one last opportunity. If it does not bear fruit in the coming year after additional care and treatment, it will then be cut down. The interpretation of the parable goes hand in hand with that of the preceding controversy story. It is therefore best to interpret it as symbolizing a last opportunity for the nation of Israel to repent before becoming subject to divine judgment.

Comments

13:1 Now. "Now" is literally at that very time (RSV). This word links the present material closely with the preceding incident.

Galileans. Elsewhere Peter (22:59) and Jesus (23:6) are called "Galileans."

Blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. They were killed as they were sacrificing. Therefore, this had to have taken place in the temple in Jerusalem, the only place sacrifices could be made. For "Pilate" see comments on 3:1. Attempts have been made to relate this incident to

some other recorded events, but it appears that Luke preserved an incident that was not recorded by Josephus or the other contemporary writers.

13:2 Jesus raised the question of whether this calamity occurred because the Galileans were especially evil, which fits the view of the day that such events were due to one's sins.

13:3 I tell you, no! Jesus, however, rejected such a direct association of suffering and sin (13:3, 5; John 9:3). Compare Luke 1:60; 13:5; 16:30.

Unless you repent. Although no doctrine of original sin is being formulated here, both Jesus and Luke assumed the universality of sin. For "repent" see comments on 3:3.

You too will all perish. Does the "too" suggest a tragic death, such as Jerusalem's destruction in a.d. 70, or perishing in the final judgment? Luke combined these two possibilities, as is indicated in the following parable and 13:34–35. The term "perish" is also found elsewhere (9:24–25; 17:27, 29; 17:33; 20:16), referring to perishing under God's judgment, although a tragic physical death may also be involved. The latter is symbolic and may be part of the former, even as physical death is generally symbolic and may be part of spiritual death (cf. Rom 6:23).

13:4 Were more guilty. "More guilty" is literally debtors above all. The term "debtors" is used here in the sense of "sinners" as in Luke 11:4b; Matt 6:12.

Tower in Siloam. This was most probably part of Jerusalem's wall near the pool of Siloam.

13:5 The repetition of Luke 13:3 adds emphasis to this thought.

13:6 Fig tree. For the presence of a fig tree in a vineyard, cf. Mic 4:4 (cf. also Isa 5:1–7). Does the fig tree in the parable represent "Israel" (cf. Hos 9:10, 16; Mic 7:1; Jer 8:13; 24:1–10), or does it refer only to the people in Jerusalem? The former seems likely in light of passages such as Luke 20:16; Acts 13:46; 18:6; 28:25–28. For Luke, Jerusalem represented Israel.

13:7 For three years. This should not be understood as an allegorical reference to Jesus' three-year ministry, for Luke did not explicitly teach that Jesus had a three-year ministry. "Three" probably should be understood as a round number indicating a "sufficient time" (cf. 13:21 [RSV] for a "sufficient amount" of dough).

Cut it down! The corresponding reality involves God's eternal judgment (cf. 3:9; Matt 7:19).

13:8 For one more year. The period of mercy and opportunity is extended but only for a limited duration (cf. Luke 13:34; 19:41–44).

Dig around it. The digging serves to loosen the soil in order to allow water to sink down to its roots and allow room for the roots to grow. If no fruit appears after that, it is clearly a bad tree (cf. 6:43–45; cf. also 8:14–15).

13:9 The lack of judgment in the present should not be considered a sign that all was well in Israel. It was a sign of God's mercy, not approval. Judgment, however, would not be held in abeyance forever. As in the time of Jeremiah, the people of Israel had before them "the way of life and the way of death" (Jer 21:8).

The Lukan Message

In this passage Luke continued the theme of 12:57–59 on the need to be reconciled to God. The particular expression he used to describe how this comes about is a favorite, "repent." John the Baptist's message (3:8) and Jesus' earlier preaching (5:23) is repeated, and it would be at the heart of the church's preaching in Acts as well. See Introduction 8 (6). In 13:1–5 the universal need for repentance is emphasized. It was not only Galilean sinners or victims of tragedy in Jerusalem who needed to repent; all of Jesus' (and Luke's) audience must repent lest they come under the divine judgment.

A second and related Lukan emphasis in this passage is the coming of the divine judgment. As in Jeremiah's time, so now God sent a prophet, his Son (and John the Baptist before him), to preach a message of repentance and judgment. There was still time, but the time was short. If the listeners did not repent, then judgment would come; and like the Galileans killed by Pilate and the Jerusalemites upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, they too would perish. This warning, along with the reference to Jerusalem (13:4), could not help but remind Luke's readers of the city's tragic destruction in a.d. 70. The exclusion of most Jews from God's kingdom, a theme repeated continually in Acts (13:46–47; 18:6; 28:26–30), would also be understood. Despite the respite from judgment, Israel brought forth no "fruit in keeping with repentance" (Luke 3:8). Jesus foresaw that his preaching, like Jeremiah's, would also fall on deaf ears, and so he grieved over Israel (13:34–35; cf. 21:24). The axe, already at the root (3:9), would be swung and the fallen tree thrown into the fire. Clearly Luke understood the events of a.d. 70 as the fulfillment of this divine judgment. Yet Luke also wanted his readers to understand that what happened to Israel was also a warning to them. After hearing the word, they too had to bring forth fruit (8:12–15) lest their own repentance be in vain.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Lk 13:1-9). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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