

Sermon: You Must Bear Fruit!

Text: Luke 13:1-9

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Luke 13:1-9 (NIV) ¹Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. ²Jesus answered, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? ³I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. ⁴Or 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? ⁵I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.” ⁶Then 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. ⁷So 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. ⁹If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.”

Introduction: Virtually from the very beginning mankind was told to be fruitful (**Gen. 1:22, 28**). Throughout the O.T., Israel is talked about in terms of her responsibility to produce fruit. **Isaiah 5** talks about “God’s Chosen” in terms of a vineyard. In today’s lesson, Jesus indicates that one of the continuing requirements in his messianic kingdom is to bear fruit. The parable in today’s text also takes place in a vineyard. The primary fruit looked for by Jesus is that of “repentance.”

In an effort to define his kingdom and how one can belong, Jesus gives his audience:

I. A Truth Declared (vv. 1-5a)

To set up the context for the Kingdom’s requirements, it is as if Jesus were in a press conference fielding questions about all the apparent inconsistencies in life. There are questions like “why” and “how.” We have all asked them or will in the future. What was God thinking when...?

The comments and questions the crowd asked revealed their frustration of not understanding God, but at the same time realizing that:

A. Life is fragile.

Can you imagine how these Galileans must have felt when they heard that the “hated” Pontius Pilate had committed yet another disrespectful act? It had already been ten years under his cruel supervision. Now, he had slaughtered some of their very own just as they were offering sacrifices in worship of God. Jesus’ audience may have even known the families. Quite a transition isn’t it - to be with God one moment, in his house of worship, and then really with God in the next. Some have suggested this murderous event was fueled by Pilate taking Temple monies for a municipal water project, God’s money. It is also believed that this incident may have taken place during Passover one year before Jesus’ death.

Attacks against worshippers even in America are all too common. You may have heard that on **February 14, 2010** - in Richmond, California - Three hooded men walked into Gethsemane Church of God in Christ and opened fire and then fled the scene, as the singing of the choir was replaced by frightened screams. The two victims, a 14-year-old boy and a 19-year-old man, were hospitalized. A little over a year ago you might remember the news of **March 8, 2009**: (CNN) — The pastor of a Maryville, Illinois, church was shot to death during a service Sunday in front of horrified church members who then tackled the gunman, state police said. Fred Winters, the pastor of the First Baptist Church, was shot and killed during the 8 a.m. service, and the attacker and two church members suffered knife wounds in the attack, authorities said. The gunman entered during the service and walked up to the pulpit. Winters and the gunman apparently exchanged words before the 27-year-old man fired four shots, hitting the pastor’s Bible and then the pastor, said Illinois State Police Director Larry Trent.

On **January 12th of this year** over 220,000 souls were lost in Haiti after a massive earthquake struck the island. Not only Haitians were killed, but also Americans who were there, not for Spring Break, but to help in the name of Jesus.

Why does God allow this kind of thing to happen?

B. Life is dangerous.

You must have realized by now that “life is dangerous.” The other question posed to Jesus is about the collapse of a tower in Siloam that killed eighteen. We have no historical record of either of these events, but they must have happened. The tower may have been a part of a fortification or security to guard the precious resource of water. We do not know for sure. We do know this “accident” caused funerals to be arranged, and changed the lives of all the affected families forever.

There is so much news, even today, that we do not hear or witness, both accidents and murder happen all the time. Many of us have taken falls and injured ourselves. The famous diet doctor, Dr. Atkins did not have coronary heart disease or a heart attack. He died of an accidental death, after slipping on the ice in NYC.

Anyone can be at the wrong place at the wrong time and die after being perfectly healthy. God's world is a dangerous place. Though, it is eternally more dangerous if you have not repented, Jesus said.

Because there was so much misunderstanding about how God thought and what he requires of us, Jesus wanted:

II. A Lie Debunked (vv. 1-5a)

One of the lies that continues to be spread even today is:

A. Sin brings earthly punishment.

It was commonly understood that if you were a "sinner" that God not only would not bless you, but he would severely punish you. Some would say: "he had it coming;" "he got what he deserved."

You can go back to the early accounts in the OT. Because Job suffered such tremendous losses of family dying, wealth disappearing, and health failing, his friends just knew he had to be covering up a secret life of sin.

Even in the NT in the gospel of John, Jesus' disciples wanted to know the reason for a man's blindness - and you hear the question: **John 9:1-3 (NIV)** ¹As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.

Also God does not try to manipulate favor, or force people to follow Him. Listen to Jesus' words from Matthew's gospel: **Matthew 5:45 (NIV)** ...He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Jesus wanted to make it clear that bad things happen to *everybody*, and they are not always a direct result of sin. Sin and suffering are not always connected. We do, though, live in a world of sin. The fact "that Jesus of Nazareth, Lord and Christ of God, suffered at the hands of lawless men should have buried forever the connection that argues that those who suffer are the worst sinners." - Craddock, *Luke*, p. 168

Jesus was sinless and the best example of what man should be like.

The other side of this lie that needs debunked is that:

B. A righteous life guarantees your safety.

Some people still believe this myth. God has never promised this - as illogical as it may sometimes seem to us. We can hear **Psalm 1** in our ear and misapply its principles to our earthly life under the “new” covenant.

I have had people ask me the question: Why did God allow this terrible event to happen and then they give reasons why God should have treated them better. I go to church, I pray, I’m a good person... But that is not how it works, is it?

“Life in the kingdom is not an elevated game (*or even a strategy*) of gaining favors and avoiding losses. Without repentance, all is lost anyway.” - Craddock, *Luke*, p. 169

We cannot put God in our debt. No one is that good! In fact, Paul tells us:

Romans 3:10-12, 20-23 (NIV) ¹⁰As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹ there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. ¹² All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.” ²⁰Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. ²¹But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²²This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Of course, the idea that “living a righteous life can guarantee your safety” is debunked when good people die early of cancer, or in a horrific accident, or children are taken too soon. It makes no sense to believe it when Christian workers setting out to do good are martyred because of their faith.

Illus. Running a grief and loss support group, one wise widow said: “Some people say ‘why me?’ But I say, ‘why not me?’”

In a world that is so narcissistic and wrapped up in individual acclaim, we still need to remember that all this is not about us, but the One who made us. Everything we are and do is designed for God’s glory. When we only think about ourselves, there is:

III. A Need Demanded (vv. 5b-9)

Jesus twice repeats his demands and then tells a parable that stresses the consequence for non-compliance. Jesus says you must:

A. Repent or perish.

Let's talk about the concepts behind these two words "repent" and "perish." Repentance (*metanoia*) is literally a change of mind that results in a change of attitude and behavior. It is also a change of direction. Repentance comes after we realize through faith whose life it is we live and what our reason for living is (*raison d'être*). We live because of God, in Christ, and for His glory.

Darrell Bock puts it this way: "Repentance is not an emotion or a mere mental assent to a proposition. It is a reorientation to a new life. To repent is not merely to regret things we have done or to apologize for them or to recognize a wrong has been committed. To repent is to agree that a change of direction is required and then to respond accordingly." - *Luke*, p. 371

Let me put it in practical terms. Jesus was not being insensitive about the lives that were lost in these two events Luke shares with us. He was saying I believe that when loss happens our "first" thoughts ought to be how can this terrible event bring honor and glory for my Lord.

Illus. family in Monticello, IL - son who committed suicide brought help for others. Death of Marsha's husband brought stronger faith and a stronger witness. Repentance is really saying to God: You are Lord. You, first! I am in no way trying to minimize losses that are personal only to shine a light on how everything that happens both good and bad can bring glory to our Father in heaven.

The idea of "perish" is the kind of death that creates separation from God and puts us alone for eternity. That kind of condition starts here and now and continues forever *unless* we repent.

The parable that exists in **vv. 6-9** is simply an illustration for **verse 5**.

B. Those in the kingdom must bear fruit.

Bearing fruit is a tree's primary reason for living. There were OT rules for even when fruit could be eaten from a fig tree (**Lev. 19:23**). Mature fruit typically did not appear until after three years. The fourth year's fruit was to be given in tribute to God.

This particular tree in our story had never produced “any” fruit (v. 7). The owner (God in the parable) tells the man (Jesus) who was taking care of the vineyard to cut down the tree. In **verse 8** an extension of time and thus judgment is negotiated out in time on behalf of the tree (us).

Now, no one should take away from this that God is unrealistic or that Jesus is naive. This is a real picture of God’s grace and mercy and Jesus’ compassion.

However...“Luke does not destroy severity by infusing grace, nor does he destroy grace by infusing severity.” - Craddock, *Luke*, p. 167

II Peter 3:8-9 (NIV) ⁸But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Make no mistake the fruit God is looking for is repentance. The tree was given a year to produce fruit. Because life is fragile and uncertain, I do not know how much time you have if you have not yet repented. All I know is: until your time is finished, God is still waiting. If you have never repented, you are not in the kingdom and in danger of never being kept in God’s vineyard.

Conclusion: We all like to sing “Amazing Grace,” but sometimes we rely too heavily on God’s mercy when we certainly could do better in our following of Him. “The biblical truth is that useless things are removed. Salt that has lost its savor is thrown on the path.” - Dr. Bill Patterson, *Failure Doesn’t Have to Be Final*, found in “The Lookout,” p. 5, March 14th edition.

This tree was going to be given a second chance, every advantage and the best attention. We do not know how it will turn out for you. We do remember how it turned out for Israel, God’s chosen people, after they rejected their own Messiah. The parable is clear about one thing: Judgment is coming.

For years we observe Death; someday He will visit *us*! At the end point in human history this problem of suffering will be resolved. Those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ, even though they may have suffered terribly here will be rewarded and their suffering will end. But those who have not produced fruit in keeping with repentance will suffer throughout eternity. All second chances will have been withdrawn.

A theme found throughout the Bible is humanity's responsibility to his/her Maker. Just like "in the beginning" man is shown as being *planted* in a garden. Still today, the Owner of every garden and vineyard expects a harvest. Repentance is what God both wants, expects, and rewards. Fruit follows repentance like blooms in a desert after a rain. If we do not do what he requires, we will perish *without* Him. God wants you to repent before it is too late.

Will you repent this very day?