

Luke 13:1-17

“Don’t Waste Space In The Vineyard”

Step 1: discern the times in which you live. Step 2: decide to do the right thing based upon that which you’ve discerned. That’s the context we’re coming back into as we approach Luke Ch 13. Jesus has been talking about judgment; that we’re to make every effort to “settle out of court” we don’t want to stand before the Judge, because we’re guilty. We’ve all sinned, we all fall short of the glory of God and as humanity we’re all marching toward our court date. We read in the book of Hebrews, “...*it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,*” Heb 9:27 There’s no escaping it, we’re going to stand before the Judge...*unless* we opt to settle out of court; God has offered to settle accounts with us reconciling us to Himself through the Person of Jesus Christ Jesus was made sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. He paid the debt we owe and now God says that if we will by faith believe in Christ, receiving Him into our heart, into our life as our Lord and as our Savior He will release us from our sin debt (washing us as it were [making us white like snow] through the blood of Jesus Christ) and we can have peace *with* Him and receive the peace that comes only *through* Him. Here’s the point: if you don’t know Christ *settle the issue* expediently, immediately, don’t put it off another day let Jesus have your heart.

Ok, in that day, at that time they *were* a lot like we *are*. As long as the topic of judgment was on the table they had a question. What does disaster mean when it strikes someone’s personal life? Be it man made or natural disaster; why does it happen and what does it mean? Is *that* God’s judgment?

Vs 1-5

Look back at the 1st 2 Vs (read).

Let me tell you, that’s *exactly* what they supposed! Jesus points to 2 events that were well known at that time (in His day). One of which was a disaster/tragedy imposed/inflicted by man (Pilate), the other of which was a “natural disaster” (a tower that fell and killed 18 people).

Today Jesus might say, “Do you supposed that 2,752 who were in or around the twin towers when they fell on 9-11 were worse sinners than all other New Yorkers?” Or do you suppose the 160 who’ve died due to the F5 tornado that struck Joplin MO were worse sinners than everyone else who lives in Joplin?

Yet there’s this natural tendency in us as humanity to see cataclysmic tragedies as the judgment of God. A Tsunami strikes Japan or India and instantly people are speculating about God’s judgment. A hurricane wipes out a chunk of the gulf coast and God is judging America. Are these things the fruit, the fallout of God’s judgment?

It’s our tendency to think that catastrophic tragedy is undoubtedly God’s judgment, that bad things happen in our lives due to personal retribution from God against our sin.

It's in John Ch 9 where the Lord and His disciples pass by a man who'd been blind from birth and the disciples ask Jesus, "*Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*" John 9:2 Do you remember there in Acts Ch 27-28 when Paul was being transported (as a prisoner) to Rome yet wound up shipwrecked on the island of Malta? It was cold, wet and rainy so he gathered a bundle of sticks in order to add them to the fire and as fate would have it the bundle he gathered had a venomous viper tucked away in them so that when he went to toss them in the fire it launched out and fastened itself to his hand. Check it out: "*So when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, 'No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live.'*" Acts 28:4 But Paul just shook the thing off into the fire and they sat there waiting for him to swell up and die, but when he didn't they decided that far from being judged by God, he *was a god!* People are just weird, tragedy must be the punishment of God. That's the way *they* thought, it's many times the way *we* think, their question was: "Jesus, what do *You* think?"

I just love the way the Lord handles it; because instead of the denunciation, or condemnation of Pilate, Jesus turns the tables so that we're left to examine the personal position of our own heart and life before God. He says, "Do you think those people suffered such things because they're worse sinners than anyone else? No way, but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." What's that? Listen, follow the rationale. Jesus is saying that when tragedy strikes a better question to ask than, "Why were they allowed to die?" is "Why was I allowed to live?"

Because we're all sinners, so tragic (or what we might call "untimely") death isn't necessarily an indication of God's judgment and we're *definitely* not in a position to make that call. Because as soon as I determine that, that place, or those people were judged it elevates a sense of self righteousness in me; they were judged I wasn't; they must be doing something wrong I must be doing something right. What Jesus is saying is, "Hey, tragedy is the end of everyone who refuses to repent." Death is the common denominator amongst us all; the ratio is 1 out of every 1 people will die, no one gets off this planet alive; and since there is such a brevity, such a frailty of life, we need to be a people of repentance before God.

Because be it in the tragedy inflicted by Pilate, or the people who were just carrying on in life when the tower in Siloam fell upon them I'll guarantee you that more than likely none of them thought *that* day would be their *last* day. When the twin towers fell those people were just going to work. We were at church Sunday morning May 22nd 2011 and had no clue what awaited this city just a few hours later. Jesus is saying, "*Anyone* can die, so *everyone* should repent!"

Death can come with out warning to anyone. Sometimes people are the victims of the evil in others; other people die as the result of natural disasters. God's judgment (in those cases) really isn't the issue. The issue is: are *we* ready to meet our Maker at any given moment?

The way we "ready" ourselves is through repentance; what is repentance? Put simply it's a change of mind which constitutes a change of direction. Prior to repentance we are walking in a direction that's away from God; therefore it doesn't matter what steps we take regarding good works, religion or anything else it's still leading me away from God. But when I repent I have a change of mind, a change of mind concerning who I am and Who God is. I see myself for the sinner that I am; I see my need for a Savior and I change my mind. "I can't come to God or be accepted by God as I am, I need a Savior."

That's where Jesus comes in; so as I change my mind, that's shown in my change of direction. I turn around, now I'm no longer walking in a direction that's leading me *away* from God but now I'm following *after* God; He's leading me, guiding me, having *His way* in my *heart*.

Not only do I repent once and for all with regard to my sin, but I have a disposition toward continual repentance. Which is to say that I've repented of my sin; that which was keeping me from knowing God and following after God, but that doesn't mean I no longer sin; I may be clean by my feet still get dirty as I make my way through this world. I still need Jesus to "wash my feet". That's what Jesus is talking about here when He says we need to be a people of repentance. We're to have hearts made ready through repentance, (initially and then continually) that are ready to be taken from this planet at any moment; because it can happen to any of us at any time...

"Well, what does a repentant life look like?" In brief? It's a life that's bringing forth and bearing fruit (being productive) to the glory of God. Notice...

Vs 6-9

What does God want *from* your life, what is He looking for *in* your life? Fruit: here you are... here I am in the "midst of God's vineyard" today. God is here, and He's looking for fruit in our lives, tangible evidence that if you call yourself "Christian" that you are indeed a Christian. Do you know what the tangible proof is that an apple tree is in fact an apple tree? It produces apples...it brings forth (openly) the fruit that demonstrates (in reality) the kind of tree it is. Listen to me, so to with you and so to with me. Jesus said, "...*every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.*" Matt 7:17-18 Now let's not complicate the issue beyond that. A good tree will bring forth good fruit; if the outcropping or overflow of a person's life is of a sinful/rebellious nature; they are not a good tree (no matter how much you may want to see them in a positive light).

God desires fruit that accords (not with our nature) with His nature to be brought forth from our lives. That's the evidence that we're abiding in Christ and His word is abiding in us. In John's gospel Jesus said it like this, "*Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.*" John 15:4-8 So the Owner of the vineyard (God) is looking for fruit in our lives; a "return" (if you will) on His investment *into* our lives. Write it down, look at it later, Matt 25:14-28.

Well, with all this talk about God looking for fruit I suppose it begs the question, "What is that fruit?" What are we talking about, is this some sort of cryptic code that I have crack? What do you mean "fruit?" What is the evidence that needs to be displayed openly that testifies in reality that I am a Christian? Is it tongues? That's what some purport but guess what? It's not what the *bible* purports, you will never find anywhere in your bible where it states that the evidence of God's Spirit indwelling your life is that you speak in tongues.

What you will find is Vs like this, “...*the fruit of the Spirit is **love**,*” Gal 5:22 “*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not **love**, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.*” 1 Cor 13:1 and Of course the words of Jesus, “*By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have **love** for one another.*” John 13:35

Now, if the love of God is being poured *into* you, if it’s flowing out *through* you, that will yield certain results in our lives. The bible speaks of the fruit of righteousness, the fruit of giving financially, the fruit of our lips (giving thanks to God as a sacrifice of praise), the fruit of leading others to Jesus, of course there are general life characteristics (Gal 5), joy, peace, kindness, patience, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. The idea is that of the general productivity of a life lived abiding in Christ, being submitted to God who works *in* you both to *will* and to *do* for His good pleasure.

Notice also that God is patient with us, He gave ample time (3 yrs) for this tree to yield any fruit. In reality it’d been 7 yrs because the 1st 3 yrs they weren’t to harvest the crop, the 4th yr the yield was entirely God’s, then they could enjoy the fruit after that (the 5th yr) (Lev 19:23-25). So he’d been waiting for 3 yrs since he could partake of any fruit; it wasn’t happening. The tree was wasting space, simply soaking up the nutrients in the vineyard and yielding no fruit in return, it’s no wonder he wanted to cut it down.

But grace was extended, “Give it 1 more yr” the keeper of the vineyard said, “let me tend to it, take care of it, put some fertilizer around it, then if it doesn’t bear fruit you can cut it down.”

Here’s the idea, not everyone will take advantage of God’s *grace* and repent, but God certainly gives everybody the *space* to repent. But there comes a time whereby it is what it is and if you don’t want to live *for* Him, you don’t want your life to belong *to* Him that’s fine He’ll honor that. What does that mean to you? Judgment; the tree is cut down...Some people believe that because God hasn’t dealt with them in their sin that they must be ok with God, or that God approves of it, or that at least He understands their position and that He’ll make an exception for them. The fact however is that God is patient with us; but a day of reckoning will arrive; it’s not a threat, it’s a gracious warning concerning the reality of what awaits the non-repentant so that you can choose soberly your course of action.

So I say again, here you are in the vineyard. God is seeking fruit from your life. Here’s the question, what does He find? Does He find fruit, or does He walk away empty handed. Perhaps you’re in the season of grace, God’s digging around you, seeking to tend *to* you, bring forth fruits worthy of repentance, don’t presume upon the grace of God...

I think it’s significant that the parable is open ended; what happened to the tree? Did it bear fruit, did the owner have it cut down, did the special care accomplish anything? We don’t know. We can’t answer for what happened in *that* circumstance, but we can answer where *our lives* are concerned. You see the question shouldn’t be, “What happened to the tree?” It should be, “What will happen to me?” I should be asking myself, “Is there godly fruit in my life or am I just wasting space in the vineyard?”

Now others might say that this parable has nothing to do with believers bearing the fruit of the Spirit, but unbelievers bearing the fruit of repentance; that God is waiting for them to turn to Him; He's being patient with them but a refusal to repent only leaves judgment. I believe there's application in either context. The point remains; God desires fruit from our lives. It's His vineyard, it's His right.

Maybe today Jesus is pleading for you, "Father, give them one more chance, one more conviction, one more scenario that brings them to the end of self. Perhaps then they'll yield, then they'll humble themselves and their heart will grow soft and open to You." Those pleas have moved the heart of God and here you are today... have ears to hear, repent of your sin and cease presuming upon God's grace.

Vs10-13

Couple of things we want to point out here. #1 We commend this woman for coming to church though she'd been afflicted with a radical curvature of her spine that kept her doubled over for 18 yrs. I've known people who won't come to church if they get a headache 18 minutes before they were going to leave ... □

Now we don't believe she was *possessed* (there's no exorcism that takes place), but it's obvious that she was extremely *oppressed*; Paul was given a messenger of Satan to buffet him (2 Cor 12:7). So though we don't believe the demonic can possess a believer it seems certain that they can certainly *oppress* a believer.

Now some people have an eye for detail, an artist can look at something and see color, shadowing, perspective. A doctor will note skin tones, what's happening in your eyes, a detective might note behavioral patterns. Jesus could see and sense those who were hurting; women were on the other side of the synagogue, she was bent over but He *saw her*.

Not just her condition physically, but what was happening in her inwardly; and notice she didn't ask for anything, she wasn't begging Him for a healing, He *saw her*, He *called her to Himself* and He set her free... "Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity." He laid His hands on her and *immediately* she was made straight and she glorified God. What's the point? The words of Jesus sets people free. How did she respond? She glorified God; I'll bet she did.

Vs14-17

As far as the ruler of the synagogue was concerned Jesus just broke the Sabbath (because to do anything that would promote healing they considered work) so rather than confront Jesus he rebukes the assembly. "Hey, come some other day of the week and be healed." Think of how absurd that statement is; as if healings were available any day of the week just come back tomorrow!... She'd been coming for 18 yrs and hadn't been healed yet, was he going to heal her? Uh, no!

So Jesus calls him out, "Who here wouldn't untie his ox or his donkey and free it to get a drink on the Sabbath? Yet this woman has been 'tied down' in bondage for 18 yrs, what day is more appropriate for her to find freedom, to be released and find rest than on the Sabbath?" You'll tend to your animals, but have no human compassion, that's called "Hypocrisy."

Now what were they going to say? What *could* they say? He was right, so they hung their heads in shame and the people rejoiced in the work of God...

Listen, don't be a barren tree, don't waste space in the vineyard. Allow the word of God to sink deep down into the soil of your heart and change your life. If God is dealing with you, extending grace, extending space to you that you might reconsider your life and repent of your sin than do so today; abide in Christ, that you might bear much fruit...

Prayer Points:

God we want to be fruitful; we definitely don't want to waste space in Your vineyard so do what You need to do that we might bring forth fruit to the glory of Your name. Dig *around* us, tend *to* us; and may You find hearts of repentance *in* us. Father being on the heels of tragic times in our own community we find the exhortation fresh for us. The call to consider the question of not why some people have lost their lives, but why have we been allowed to keep ours? Search our hearts, try us, know us, see if there be any wicked way *in* us and lead us in the way everlasting.

Perhaps the Lord is searching you this morning, you know He's been gracious to you, you're here, you're hearing this, you're receiving opportunity to respond to His grace in repentance. You've not given your heart to Christ previously but He's dealing with you today very directly. Let me encourage you to seize the moment, change your mind, turn toward the Lord, believe on Jesus Christ and be saved.