

## Do We Think We Are Any Better Than Anyone Else?

Luke 13:1-21

Pastor Jason Van Bommel, Forest Hill Presbyterian

*"And he answered them, "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." - Luke 13:2-3, ESV*

The human capacity for comparing ourselves to others to inflate our own sense of self-righteousness is staggering. If you look hard enough, you can always find someone else who is worse or worse off than you, so you somehow justify yourself in comparison to another person.

This capacity of comparison and self-justification is so strong that you can even find it in prison. People serving serious time behind bars for felony offenses can still look down on others around them as worse criminals than they are.

In Jesus' day, many religious people believed that if something really terrible happened to you, it was because God was judging you for some gross, hidden sin. Jesus directly confronted this false thinking in an unusual but powerfully effective way. Rather than simply saying, "These people were no worse than anyone else; they were just victims of injustice or bad circumstances," Jesus turns the tables on His audience and tells them that these poor people were no worse sinners than anyone else and *"unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."*

Jesus wasn't just trying to be mean. No, He was getting to the heart of the problem and exposing the deepest needs of His audience. Self-righteous religious people are often in the most grave danger of all because they don't think they need to repent.

Jesus follows this teaching with a parable about an unfruitful fig tree. The point of this parable is that God is looking for the fruit of repentance in the lives of His people. He will not wait forever.

Jesus then confronts one of the central areas where God's people needed to repent: Valuing legalistic rule-keeping over human lives. A woman had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. When Jesus freed her, the religious leaders were more concerned about what day of the week it was than about this poor woman's life and freedom. Even more telling, Jesus exposes the fact that these religious leaders have no problem taking care of their own livestock on the Sabbath day.

*"You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?" (Luke 13:15-16, ESV)*

Jesus so clearly and consistently confronted religious hypocrisy, and we all need to hear His rebuke:

- Do we think we are better than other people?
- Do we believe we can repent and believe without showing any fruit of repentance in our lives?
- Have we been valuing rules over compassion?
- Are we treasuring our possessions more than people?

Jesus calls us to His kingdom, to redemption, to real life. But His call is not soft or easy, He will confront every shred of self-righteousness and legalism until we truly come under the reign of His grace in our lives.