

35. The Gift of Time

Luke 13:1-9

Luke: A Walk Through the Life of Jesus

In this study, we will be continuing our “listening in” to a talk that Jesus gave before thousands of people outside the house of a Pharisee (Luke 12:1). This teaching is recorded in the beginning of chapter twelve and runs through to chapter thirteen, verse 9. In this teaching, Jesus spoke of always being ready for eternity and living a life rich toward God (12:21). He also spoke of the fact that all of us are on the road toward eternity and that we should get our lives right before God before we get to the end of the road (vs. 58-59) and face the court of God’s judgment.

During this time in history, there had been a terrible event in which many Galileans had lost their lives. This incident was in the forefront of the news of their day. Sensing that Christ was near the end of His talk, some who were present brought up this matter, hoping to understand why God would let such a horrible thing happen. We can all relate to the horror and dismay that is felt when tragic events occur for which there seems to be no reason. Not only had these Galilean Jews lost their lives, but also their blood had been mixed with the Passover sacrifice. The crowd wanted to know if those who lost their lives did so because they were hiding a sinful lifestyle.

Repent or Perish

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" (Luke 13:1-5).

Commentators believe that verse one refers to an incident reported by the historian Josephus. Although this incident is not found in Scripture, it is recorded by Josephus that when Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea (26–36 A.D.), had looted the treasury in the Temple to pay for an improvement to Jerusalem’s aqueduct system, the Jews had responded by instigating a riot.¹ In response, Pilate had his soldiers disguise themselves as pilgrims during Passover, when laymen could slaughter their lamb sacrifices themselves. At a given signal by Pilate, his soldiers uncovered their robes and fell upon the Jews with clubs, killing many Galileans that were at the altar, with their blood being mixed with their sacrifices.

The assumption was that the Galileans must have been terrible sinners because of what had happened to them. Jesus rejects this judgment of those who had died before going on to tell the crowd of thousands that, instead of judging others, they should examine their own lives, saying that unless they repented, they, too, will perish. Twice in the passage, Jesus talked about the need for the repentance of all men. Jewish belief held that victims of tragedy and misfortune were guilty of sins that they had tried to hide. Jesus refuted the idea that misfortune was only visited

¹ <http://christianity.stackexchange.com/questions/23873/who-were-the-galileans-whose-blood-pilate-mingled-with-their-sacrifices>

on those who were guilty of sin. He reminds us that we are all guilty and in need of God's mercy. We are all in the same boat when it comes to needing the forgiveness of God!

Question 1) How would you explain the reason for evil things happening to people, regardless of their own virtue or lack of it? How would you explain this type of event to others when facing traumatic events, such as acts of cruelty and terror that we have seen in modern times?

The prevailing opinion of the time was that, if you were rich, you were blessed of God. If you were poor, had experienced misfortune or tragedy, then it was believed that God was judging you ahead of time for your sin. When Jesus came across the man who had been blind from birth, his disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life" (John 9:2-3).

Life happens; stuff happens. We live in a sinful world, and we should not think that we are being punished by God when bad things happen to us. This is the message we find in the Book of Job. Job's comforters had said to him, "Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright destroyed?" (Job 4:7). Job was a lesson to each of us that bad things happen to good people. The Lord wants to see the right response in the middle of a trial. He knows all things, and there is not a sparrow that falls to the ground without His knowledge: "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father" (Matthew 10:29). If He knows what happens to sparrows, we know, too, that He sees and knows all that we experience on this earth.

Jesus uses a second illustration to provoke them (and us) to repent, i.e. the story that was also one of the news items of the day. The circumstances of this event have been lost to history. It concerns a time when eighteen people in Jerusalem were killed when the tower of Siloam fell. Siloam is a place in the city of Jerusalem where water from the Gihon Spring collected into a pool. Around 700 years before the time of Christ, King Hezekiah had dug a tunnel from the Gihon Spring, just outside the city walls, to bring the water inside the city to the Pool of Siloam. If you ever get the chance to visit Jerusalem, a walk along Hezekiah's Tunnel is a must! It is inspiring to know that you are treading where King Hezekiah, and Jesus himself, had once stood. The Pool of Siloam was where Jesus sent the blind man to wash and be healed (John 9:7). If at any time the city of Jerusalem was attacked, they would always have water.

In building his aqueduct system, it is possible that Pilate had so disturbed the foundations of the Siloam Tower that the tower collapsed, thus killing eighteen people. Jesus' point is that accidents happen, and it does not mean that those killed were more sinful because the Siloam Tower fell upon them. The Lord reminded them not to judge others, but to take a moral inventory of themselves. Where will they be in eternity? Each of us are to take an introspective look at our lives and determine if we are in Christ and will be with Him in eternity. Unless we repent, we shall all likewise perish. Although repentance does not seem to be a popular topic in churches today, Jesus reminds us that it is not an option, but it is a necessity if we are to have a relationship with God. The Lord is emphatic about this, wanting them to understand. Twice in verses 1-5, Christ uses the words, "But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

Question 2) What comes to mind when you hear the word “repent?” What does the word “repent” mean? How important to spiritual renewal and growth is continual repentance?

The Greek word used is *metanoéō*, which literally means “to perceive afterwards” (*meta*, “after,” implying “change,” *noeo* “to perceive with the mind”); it means to change one’s mind or purpose for the better. Repentance is not mere guilt, though guilt sometimes motivates repentance. Repentance is not remorse, for Judas was remorseful, but we never get the indication that Judas had a change of heart resulting in action. Judas experienced the emotions of regret and remorse, but he did not abandon his sin. He did not experience God’s forgiveness. I don’t think I am alone in believing that we will not see Judas in heaven.

When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he **was seized with remorse** and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders (Matthew 27:3).

Perhaps due to his practicing being a thief (John 12:6), Judas was a useful tool of Satan. The Apostle John writes that, while sitting alongside Jesus in the Upper Room at the Last Supper, He was possessed by Satan, “As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him (John 13:27). Although he was remorseful, we are never told that he repented and received forgiveness for his actions; whereas, Peter the Apostle, after his denial of Christ, fully repented and was forgiven.

Repentance means to turn from something to someone, *viz.* the Lord Jesus Christ. True biblical repentance brings change, i.e. change of mind as well as a change of direction in one’s life. Without a change of heart and action to go along with it, repentance is not present. Remorse, such as that which Judas exhibited, is being sorry, but that is not repentance. Jesus Himself said of Judas, “The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born” (Matthew 26:24). Repentance is being sorry enough to change. Becoming a Christian brings a change of mind and a change of attitude, and this produces a change in the whole focus of one’s life. When we fully understand that Christ died for our sin, we begin to see the ugliness of sin to a Holy God. How can we go on sinning when we know how it pains our Lord and Savior? “No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him” (1 John 3:6).

Desiring baptism and admission to the Lord’s Supper, the Communion table, in a town in Scotland, a young girl was being interviewed by the elders of the local church who wanted to be sure that she had experienced forgiveness of her sin and with it, new life from Christ, for they considered her rather young. First, she was asked. “Did you ever find out that you were a sinner?” “Yes,” she replied without hesitation, “I did, indeed.” The second question put to her was, “Do you think you are a sinner still?” she was asked. “Yes,” she said, “I know I am a sinner.” “Well,” the question came, “and what change has come over you?” “Well,” she said “it’s like this. Before I was converted, I was running after sin. Now, I am running away from it” There was in her both a change of attitude and a change of direction. ²

² A. Naismith, *1200 Notes, Quotes and Anecdotes*, Published by Pickering and Inglis, Basingstoke, Hants, England, 1963. Page 41.

Sin creates distance between us and our heavenly Father. Relationship is only restored through repentance and forgiveness of sin due to the work of Christ's bearing our sin on the cross. God wants each of us to enjoy walking in fellowship with Him, just as Adam walked with God in the cool of the day. We should not delay this issue, for our enemy, Satan, will surely use our procrastination against us: "You cannot repent too soon, because you do not know how soon it may be too late" (Thomas Fuller). If today, while reading this study, you find that you have not yet repented, why not turn around now? Come before the Lord Jesus and ask Him to take your life and your sin. Abandon yourself to the goodness and mercy of God. The only sin that God cannot forgive is an unconfessed sin.

Living on Borrowed Time

This writer is very aware that he is living on borrowed time. As a commercial fisherman on the North Sea, towing our nets on the seabed, I have regularly caught and had to dispose of unexploded mines from the two world wars fought outside our home port of Harwich on the east coast of England. On top of that, I have had quadruple bypass surgery with complications, which were more dangerous to my life than the quadruple bypass surgery. I am packed and ready to leave this world, but I want to maximize the time that I have left! In a sense, though, all of humanity is living on borrowed time. God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (1 Peter 3:9). Each breath that we take is only because of the grace of God Who wants to give everybody an opportunity to repent and receive God's pardon for a life of sin. After twice telling the people that, unless they repented, they would all perish, Jesus told a parable to warn them, and us, that there is a time limit to God's offer of a free pardon:

¶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. ¶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?' ¶" 'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. ¶If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down' " (Luke 13:6-9).

Question 3) Whom do the characters in this parable represent? What does the fig tree represent?

In a sense, the fig tree refers to the house of Israel. In another sense, it refers to all of humanity. We are all in debt to God because of sin. Justice demands that the fig tree of our life be cut down, but the Gardener asks for one more chance. He pleads for more time. The only reason for this is the mercy of God. Time is a gift, and we need to treasure it and use it while we can!

The Gift of Time

Each moment of the day is a gift from God that deserves our care and attention. We are all stewards, responsible for the time we have been given. What we weave in time, we will wear in eternity! While we are on earth, our part is to improve the present moment. After we have made time for work, food, and sleep, how we spend our leisure time will show forth in eternity as to our being small or great in the Kingdom of God (Matthew 18:1-5). The best use of your time is to spend it in pursuits that will outlast our life in this world. Time can never be retrieved, only

used wisely, so ask the Lord to show you opportunities to spend your time by bringing forth fruit for eternity. Procrastination is one of Satan's favorite tools to keep your mind engaged on other things, rather than the needs of your soul. The word incision is to cut into something; whereas, the word decision is to cut away from (something). Make a decision to cut yourself away from anything that will keep you from wholeheartedly following the Lord Jesus. Benjamin Franklin once said, "Do not squander time, for it is the stuff of which life is made."

The owner of the vineyard and fig tree represents God the Father; whereas, the Gardener or Caretaker represents the Lord Jesus Christ. The Fig Tree represents Israel as it often did in the Old Testament (cf. Jeremiah 24:1-10; Hosea 9:10; Micah 7:1). The ministry of the Lord Jesus among them lasted approximately three years, i.e. the time when the Vineyard owner was looking for fruit. The cultivation period, the digging up of the soil around the tree, speaks of the pouring out of the Spirit and the Gospel growth in Israel for more than three decades before the final cutting down of the tree in A.D. 70, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and dispersed the Jewish population throughout the world.

The fig tree in the vineyard not only represented all those who were listening that day, but also those who would read His words later, including all of us who have heard the words of His Gospel! Your life is like a choice fig tree that God has planted inside His well-watered and cultivated vineyard. It is an *only* fig tree, and as such, it is placed in a chosen spot on a slope alongside the precious vines.

Unlike most other fruit trees, a fig tree will often bear some fruit in its first season, reaching its maximum fruitfulness in the third year. The Gardener has been personally patient and taken the time to cultivate and grow this precious fig tree. He has protected the fig tree from blight, mildew, and many different viruses, and as it grows, the large leaves of the tree now block out some of the vital sun's rays from the adjacent vines. The owner is very patient, but there is an end to His patience. In His love and mercy, He allows sin to continue, for if He were to put an end to sin, many of our loved ones for whom we are praying will be cut off with no hope. He is slow to anger, but there will come a time when He steps into time and punishes the guilty:

The LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; ⁷who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished (Exodus 34:6-7).

The vineyard owner comes to the tree each year for three years, but now when the tree should be producing maximum fruit, instead, He is disappointed to find none. He has taken so much time, effort and resources to bring the tree to the point of maturity. Common sense dictates that, if the tree is not bearing fruit, then it should be cut down, for it is just using up the resources of the soil.

The Caretaker, a picture of the Lord Jesus at work in the vineyard of this world, is in a position where he can intercede on behalf of the fig tree. "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" (v. 9). This is mercy and grace. Each of us have been given time to bear fruit. We are only still alive because of the mercy and grace of God.

Question 4) What is the fruit that God is seeking? What does digging and fertilizing the soil around the tree represent? How does God cultivate our root system?

The fruit represents godly character for which the Father, the Vineyard owner, is looking (Galatians 5:22). It also represents the fruit of good works, which we do each day to bring glory to our King. In the separation of the sheep and goat's parable, those who are blessed of the Father are those who bore fruit in the kinds of work that they did while they lived in the world.

³⁴“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me’ (Matthew 25:34-36).

Day by day, our Lord and Savior uses circumstances that happen to each of us to dig up the dry hardened soil around the fig tree of our life (Hosea 10:12). In the broken-up soil, He lays down food that nourish the roots of our lives, our hearts. When the rain comes on the fertilized soil, this distributes new life to the roots. God seeks to cultivate the soil of our mind and heart with His Word. He uses the difficulties and the trials that we experience as triggers to bring forth Christ-likeness in us. The nature of Christ comes forth in us as we respond to trials and difficulties the way Jesus would. Therefore, it is so important for us often to be reading the Scriptures. How can we respond the way Christ would if we never meditate or learn of Him?

This is a parable of mercy. The tree deserves to be cut down, but the divine Gardener still has hope for it. He wants to give it one more chance. God looks for an excuse to delay judgment. There is a limit to the time we have been given to show forth the fruit of a changed life. In God's view, if there is no fruit, it is because we have not truly repented and received the new life that the Lord Jesus gives to the root of our lives. This reminds us of John the Baptist's message to Israel:

The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire (Matthew 3:10).

We do not know the day when God has determined that the axe shall be swung and the tree of an unrepentant life shall be cut down. Again, you and I are living on borrowed time. The time to repent is now; do not put off till tomorrow what you can do today: “Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). Repentance is not an option! God has not hidden the fact that every one of us knows and realizes that our death will come someday. For some reason, we are still alive. Christ has pleaded for us before the throne of God's majesty. If this message finds you unprepared for that day, why not respond to the message of God's Gospel now? Is it pride that stops you? Is it friends? How will you answer God when He says to you, “Why did you not respond to my offer of love and mercy?” God has not promised you tomorrow. He is looking for the fruit of Christ's love in your heart. Why not start on the journey today?

The death of Christ has no value to you until you repent and believe (Mark 1:15). The Gospel is so simple that even a child can believe. Christ has already paid the penalty of sin and freely offers the gift of eternal life to you. It was not cheap; it cost Him everything. His death on the cross was for you and in place of you. It was a substitutionary death. He took your place. What you deserve, i.e. the wages for an ungodly life, is death (Romans 6:23). This means not only physical death but also separation from God. Christ has willingly borne that penalty for you, and He now offers you a free pardon. He is the God of the Second Chance, so while you still have time, receive His loving gift of forgiveness of sin.

For God so loved the world that He **gave** His one and only Son, that whoever **believes** in Him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

Can you think of a definite time in your life when there was conviction of sin, repentance, and a change of mind and heart, and with it, a change of direction toward the Lord Jesus Christ? If not, today is a good day to stop on the road of life and receive the gift of new life and the forgiveness of God (Romans 6:23).

Prayer. Father, I come to You today, knowing that I cannot bear fruit by trying to live a moral life, thus hoping to make myself more acceptable. I abandon self and selfishness and come to the cross of Christ in order to die to self. Today, I choose to turn around, to repent, and to believe that You are my substitute for sin. Cleanse my heart and make me a new person in You. I want to be born-again of Your Spirit (John 3:3). Come into my life and live Your life in me and through me. Amen!

Keith Thomas

Email: keiththomas@groupbiblestudy.com

Website: www.groupbiblestudy.com