

“The Parable of the Fig Tree.” Luke 13 v 1-9.

Reading: Luke 13 v 1-9.

Hymns: MP 193, 385, 275.

Introduction.

This morning we are going to consider this incident in the life of Jesus as we find it in the first few verses of Luke chapter 13. The passage divides into two. The **first five verses** are a record of a **conversation** that Jesus has with some Jews who were discussing an event which was obviously common knowledge to everyone that day. **Verses 6-9** contain a **parable** about a fig tree, but we will come to that in due course.

Jesus often spoke to the people about the kingdom of God in parables, but first in this chapter we see Him using a discussion about a contemporary item of news. This was what all the people were talking about that day. This incident is not recorded anywhere else in historical literature, but the details certainly sound like they are true – they are not fake news.

1/. Pilate’s clampdown. v1-3. (read)

V1. Apparently, Pontius Pilate, the governor at the time, had clamped down on a group of rebels who were opposed to the Romans. It is possible that these men were among the followers of Judas of Galilee who is mentioned in Acts 5 v37. Pilate had killed these rebels, or terrorists as we might have called them to-day, but it was when he had done it which was so shocking and newsworthy. His soldiers had killed them while these Jews were sacrificing at the time of a festival. The details are quite gruesome, their blood being mixed with the blood of the sacrifices. Pilate was known for his violent and cruel putting down of any opposition. This terrible scene was the topic of conversation that day and the generally agreed conclusion was that God had brought death to these men because of some serious sin in their lives. This was the usually accepted opinion of the Jews at that time towards any tragic occasion. The unfortunate people were suffering because they were worse sinners than the rest of the people.

V2-3. Jesus does not comment on the circumstances or on the horrific nature of the justice metered out.

No, He addresses the perception of the people which concluded that serious sin had led to their deaths. **V2.** He asks the crowd, “Do you think these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans?” Now it is important to remember that there would be many Galileans in that crowd. The crowd would have said “yes” to that question, but in verse 3, Jesus says “I tell you, no! **But unless you repent, you too will all perish.**”

You see, people are often willing to talk about others who have sadly died, but less willing to consider how they stand before a holy God. What would be their fate if they were to be among those who lost their lives. Jesus, rebukes their understanding and turns the question pointedly back to each one personally – unless you repent, you too will perish! These Jews were part of a proud nation. They held their religion in high regard. But the question remained – what was their relationship with a holy God? Jesus considers this sad occasion to be a warning to all who were milling around discussing it. His desire is to use this tragic and much discussed event, to make them aware of impending judgment in their lives. Forget for a moment those who have died, the urgent question to His hearers is, “where do they stand before God?” This sad event was to be a warning to consider the state of their souls.

Remember, before Jesus started his ministry, John the Baptist had come calling upon the nation to repent because the kingdom of heaven is near. (**Matt. 3 v 2**). John’s role was to warn the people and to urge them to repent of their sins. Now let’s look at the other tragic event recorded in **verses 4-5**.

2/. The tower’s tragic collapse. V 4-5. (read)

The second incident that Jesus speaks of is a tragedy that is only recorded for us here in Luke’s gospel. It would appear that a tower probably at the corner of the city walls near to the pool of Siloam had collapsed and 18 men were killed. It is possible that this tower was under construction when an accident happened and it was the builders who were crushed to death. Again, the Jewish crowd would have interpreted this tragedy as being a judgement of God on those who were serious sinners.

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What does Jesus say? He again states the common view – “Do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?” That was what the crowd was concluding, but Jesus goes on. “I tell you, No!” Very emphatic and then our Lord repeats the earlier challenge. “But unless you repent, you too will all perish.” Again, our Lord does not discuss the sad event itself. He does apportion blame to the one ordering the tower to be built. There is no talk of health and safety. It is the significance of the event and the effect it should have on these people that He is concerned with. He says that this tragedy was not because those who died were worse sinners than those who do not suffer such tragedy. No, all the people of Jerusalem need to consider their attitude in particular to Jesus as the Messiah. Here is the kingdom of heaven at hand, they need to repent and believe.

Whenever we see repetition, such as this statement of our Lord being said twice, we must always take great notice of it. Here is a very important challenge to the people, and to us all this morning. For Jesus these tragic deaths were significant as a warning of the coming judgement on all sinners, unless they repent.

Jesus is urging them to stop judging others and sitting smugly back thinking all is well with them. Jesus says, No, consider your relationship with God. Have you got one? Do you see yourself as a guilty sinner before God and therefore in need of salvation? **Jesus says, “Repent before you perish!”**

Do these verses remind us of the events going on around us every day? It is so utterly sad to watch the news programmes which are full of statistics about deaths and the tragic circumstances of many of the victims. Often it is all rather far removed from us in the comfort and safety of our own homes. Unless, of course, we know someone who has died or perhaps have family working on the front line of the NHS. We could discuss the why’s and wherefore’s of how this has all come about, perhaps criticising the response of those in authority. But the stark message to us from the lips of Jesus this morning is: Are you prepared? Many are facing their Maker before their expected time. So are you ready to consider your possible imminent death, and then to give an account of your life to God?

Here is a warning to each one of us. Have our sins been forgiven? Do we have a right relationship with a holy God?

Is Christ our personal Saviour? Has He borne your sin and guilt away by His death on the cross?

The message of verses 1 to 5 of this chapter are very clear. Warning! You are in danger of perishing.

Repent and be converted.

As we see the tragic news about other men and women, let us consider where we are before God.

Now, let’s look at verses 6 to 9 where Jesus does use a parable. He is going to build on what He has already said to the crowd in the previous conversation by means of this parable about a fig tree. Let’s look at it.

3/. The Parable of the Fig Tree. Read v 6-9.

As always, Jesus tells a parable drawn from the everyday life for his hearers. We as 21st century readers need a bit more explanation to understand what He is saying. But the message of the parable is the same for those who first heard this as it is for us to-day.

Here is a landowner who has a vineyard from which he is expecting a harvest of grapes. This vineyard is cared for by a man who we usually call the vinedresser. He has also chosen to plant in amongst the vines a fig tree. Now, more commonly fig trees were grown along the roadside on any old piece of land. But this fig tree has been planted in good soil in the middle of a vineyard where it is very much cared for and looked after.

The owner visits his vineyard each year for 3 years, and each time he examines the fig tree expecting there to be fruit there hidden under the leaves. The figs cannot be seen from a distance because they ripen under the leaves, out of casual sight. So, you need to come to the tree and examine it, to search for the expected fruit. But verse 6 tells us quite simply that he found no fruit on it. No figs, no harvest. The owner is so disappointed after three years of no harvest that he tells the vinedresser to cut the fig tree down and let the vines have the room and the goodness of the soil. The fig tree was just taking up vital space and taking water from the ground, so cut it down. The time of judgement, of decision had come, “If no fruit, then cut it down.” It had been a reasonable expectation for the owner to receive a harvest.

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This fig tree had been cared for just as the vines had been cared for and should have borne a harvest for the landowner. But no fruit, no figs, no expected harvest.

The vinedresser, for whatever reason, intercedes on behalf of this fig tree. He pleads that the owner give it one more year. A year during which he would give it extra attention, loosening the soil around the roots, and applying dung to fertilise the ground. Another year of opportunity to produce what was expected of it – figs. The man says “if it bears fruit, fine! That will be good at last but if not, then I will cut it down.” So, more time is given for the expected result – figs but only limited time, a last chance. The parable finishes at that point, we are not told what happened the next year when the owner came back because that is not the point of the parable.

Consider this parable in the light of the whole passage. Jesus has twice called upon His hearers to repent or they will perish in their sins.

Now the call is for the **fruit of repentance** and for it to be seen, **now**. The first message, repeated because of its importance was “repent or perish”. The parable calls for repentance now, before it is too late. The clock is ticking down to the time of our deaths, that appointed hour is unknown to us but it is set by God and it may be soon or it may be later **but it is coming**.

So now is the time to repent and be saved. Now before it is too late. In chapter 3 and verse 8 of this gospel, John the Baptist also called for the fruit of repentance. Let’s just read that. **Luke 3 v 8 and 9.**

How prophetic those words of John the Baptist were of the coming of Jesus. The call to repentance was there, but also the warning as we have it here – “the axe is already at the root of the tree”. Those words of John the Baptist and here of Jesus, obviously were addressed to his immediate hearers. Here were the Jewish nation out of whom would be some who repented and believed. But for many they trusted in themselves, in their religion, in their good works and they rejected Jesus and called for His death on a cross. Their opportunity for repentance was now, soon they would set their faces against the Messiah who was sent into this world to save sinners. Soon they would be condemned and indeed this very city of Jerusalem would be utterly destroyed in AD70 with all who lived in it. The call of Jesus here in this parable was for them to repent and to do it **now** for the axe of judgement was at hand. Every tree that did not bear good fruit would be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Let us note **one or two other truths** from this parable. In considering this parable we can see the owner as being God the Father. The vinedresser is considered to be Christ. In this parable, the owner has a reasonable expectation for figs from the tree, a harvest of fruit. God has a just expectation that His creation will worship and love Him. He is a God of great patience, despite looking for this love and obedience year after year and finding only rebellious and sinful hearts in the people of this world. **His loving patience is amazing**. Indeed His patience becomes longsuffering with many of us. But God does set a day by which there must be the fruit of repentance, the day of reckoning. But notice the role of the vinedresser, of Christ. He intercedes for the sinner with His Father. He has shed His blood that man may come to salvation. Father, give them a little more time. **How often has Jesus prayed that to His Father on your behalf?**

But God does set a time when the offer of salvation is withdrawn and the axe is applied to the unrepentant sinner.

We should note something further from this concept of interceding. The role of interceding is not just done by the Lord. **Our Pastor intercedes** for you and I every day as the flock put into His care. The shepherd cares for and feeds the flock. But notice in the parable the one who intercedes does not just intercede, but he also digs and he puts in feed into the ground to encourage the fruit to come. Our Pastor does that each and every week as he opens up the scriptures to us and as he offers us the free gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ. He seeks to soften our hearts with the good news of the gospel and he feeds us the scriptures that we might come to repentance and faith. He intercedes, and he digs and puts in the manure!

But he is not the only person to intercede for us. We as believers are to **intercede for one another**. It is part of our role as the people of God to pray for the lost. We, too, are called to intercede for others but also to dig and to put in manure. How do we do that? By our words and our actions and by our love, we commend our Saviour to those around us whom we love and desire to see saved.

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Application.

John the Baptist called for the fruit of repentance; do you have it in your life? If you consider yourself to be a Christian then there must be the fruit of repentance in your life. What kinds of fruit are there from a true repentance? Well, have you turned away from your old life of sin and turned to God in love and obedience?

Do you read the scriptures eagerly, recognising them to be God speaking to you?

Do you pray to God for yourself and for others? Do you love to be in the company of believers and in the house of God as much as possible? **Are you a Christian, are you sure?**

Do you see these fruit in your daily life, or are they irrelevant to you? If there are no fruit, then like the fig tree, is there really any true repentance, any spiritual life.

Do you need to come again in true repentance and faith to Jesus asking Him to forgive your sin and to utterly change you?

Perhaps you know that you are not a Christian. How many times have you heard the gospel and rejected it?

How many times has Jesus come looking for the fruit of repentance, offering forgiveness and you have turned away? You have said in your heart, “not yet, I want to live my life my way. Not now, perhaps one day.”

This passage in the Bible speaks to you directly this morning and Jesus says “unless you repent, you too will perish.”

He says it again to you “unless you repent, you too will perish eternally”

This parable says to you, **now is the day of salvation.** Bring forth the fruit of repentance now, for you do not know how much longer God will be patient with you. The day is coming when the axe will strike the tree and you will fall, you will die.

This may seem sombre but this is life and death. We live in unprecedented times. Many people have died before their expected time. This virus is a killer, it kills your body. I cannot offer you a cure. But sin is a more dreadful killer, it kills the soul, it separates you from God for ever in hell. But I have a cure, I can offer you this cure. God loves you so much that He gave His only Son to die, so that you may live. Jesus is the cure for this killer sin. Jesus offers you eternal life with Him if you will just set aside self, recognise your need to have your sins forgiven and come to Him in repentance and faith.

Will you bear fruit today? Will the owner, God, come to you and look for the fruit and rejoice that He finds those wonderful fruit of repentance?

Conclusion.

Finally, I said earlier that these verses were **a warning.** What do you do when you get a warning light come on in the dashboard of your car?

You take notice because it says to you there is a problem – don’t ignore me, you need to realise that something is wrong. It isn’t wise to ignore that warning or this warning. That warning calls for action. You need to stop and perhaps check in the handbook to see what the warning light means; and then you have to find an effective solution to that fault which the warning light has drawn to your attention. That is common sense. We react to warnings. We do not ignore them. Don’t ignore this warning. You do so at your peril. Recognise the purpose of the warning – it is to tell you that something is wrong, seriously wrong. You have a problem and you need to seek out an effective answer to that problem.

A real solution, an effective resolving of the danger.

Don’t ignore the warning of the Word of God to you this morning. Come in repentance and faith to the One who loves you and died for you. Brother and sister in Christ. You have a mission to fulfil interceding for others.

You must pray and witness. Dig and apply manure. May God bring forth much fruit to His glory.

