

**Costly Discipleship**  
**Luke 13:1-9**  
**June 28, 2020**

It is rare for Jesus to use recent national events to springboard into a spiritual discourse, with the people that have come to hear him. But Jesus does just that in his speech to a crowd in Luke 13:1-9. In fact, his beginning address sounds something like a journalist or network news piece. It has become obvious to interpreters throughout the years that Jesus is addressing the crowd about a national crisis, and the possible coming of future crises in Israel. The presence of Rome has caused pressures within the populace, which has caused dissention throughout the nation. Politics has become a nasty pastime, and will eventually weaken the resolve of the people, contributing to the cause of the fall of Jerusalem, that took place between 66ad to 70ad.

Jesus' purpose in all this was to warn the people that the unfortunate events that happened in Israel, the killing of Galileans by Pilate and the falling of a tower that killed many in the region, were just the beginning of trouble and they needed to repent and follow God. Without repentance there is no way the nation can come together and find its way to survive the coming trouble. While he addresses this concern, he also takes time to chastise those that think the people who were killed in Galilee and Siloam were worse sinners than others. This suggestion stems from a long, but faulty understanding that bad things happen to bad people. This judgmental belief simply leads to greater strife and dissention in Israel. It is a wrong-headed belief that hinders our view of life and God.

Here is the way the first six verses of the address of Jesus and the Parable goes:

*At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup> He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way, they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?" <sup>3</sup> No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. <sup>4</sup> Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem?" <sup>5</sup> No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."*

Jesus had just been talking to them about repentance and the coming calamities that are going to come. He was worried that they didn't recognize the seriousness of the time, and consequently not recognize that they all need to repent. Just then someone from the crowd steps out and mentions the horrible atrocity that happened to some Galileans, who came to sacrifice near the temple. In dramatic fashion they said that when Pilate killed them, he mingled their blood with the blood of the sacrifice. It was a horrible event. But Jesus' response was strange. He told them, "Do you think these people killed by the temple, were any worse sinners than yourselves?" Then he told them they must repent or they could perish in the same way.

Jesus must have seen in their comments something about this killing, that betrayed a strong hatred for the Romans, but at the same time still carrying that old belief that Job's friends suffered under. If something horrible happens to you it is because you have sinned. Jesus dismisses this, as he turns to chastise them for not taking their own spiritual life very serious. Unless you repent, ask for forgiveness and start living through the grace of God, you stand a chance to fall into the same situation. And then will your friends say of you, "He must have been a horrible sinner."

Jesus is trying to straighten out their perspective. The spiritual life is about compassion and mercy, that comes from God. Unless we repent of our hate, revenge and small mindedness, we will have no way of living a costly life that can really help humanity. It is as if he saying that this horrible event that happened, while tragic, is only part of the suffering of life. **Costly discipleship is hard work, but necessary if the world is going to find any hope of redeeming itself from its violent habits.**

The second tragedy that arises from Jesus' address is the tower that fell on 18 innocent people and killed them. Jesus tells the crowd the same thing as in the killing of the Galileans, "Do you suppose they were any worse sinners than other people there?" And then he tells them to repent. But again, from what. It seems to me he wants them to repent for being so small minded, and narrow in their understanding of God. God is about mercy, and we must be about mercy. That is our costly discipleship.

The final address to the crowd, which is a parable goes like this:

*<sup>6</sup> Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. <sup>7</sup> So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' <sup>8</sup> He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. <sup>9</sup> If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"*

Like many of Jesus' parables, they are the interpretative key to the discussion he was just having, before he tells the parable. Last week we saw this in the Rich Fool. Here it is again in the parable of the Barren Fig Tree. While his discourse with the crowd on the matters of the tragedies in Israel's national history, he seems stern and unbending. He hits them with a heavy dose of repentance, and warns them that if they don't watch out, they could experience similar tragedies themselves. But here in this parable we find a different perspective of God, coming alive amidst the crowd. Instead, of cutting the Fig Tree down, because it wasn't producing fruit, the tenant farmer pleads with the owner to give it another year. I will tend it, fertilize it and water it, to see if it can come alive. The owner agrees.

Here we have the compassionate and patient God who is willing to wait for life to come back into us again. Instead, of presenting a panic of expediency, Jesus presents a God who is patient with them, while they get themselves together. But it can only come through the costly discipleship of grace, repentance of mercy. In other words, God is in

the business of second chances. Take this opportunity to change your life, and let the spirit of God cover you with grace.