

SERMON TEXT: Luke 13:1–9

SERMON TITLE: Unless Ye Repent, Ye Shall All Likewise Perish

Main idea: God alarms us by His wrath, and beckons us by His mercy—most of all at His cross.

¹There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ²And Jesus answered and said to them, “Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? ³I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. ⁴Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? ⁵I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”

⁶He also spoke this parable: “A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. ⁷Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, ‘Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?’ ⁸But he answered and said to him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. ⁹And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.’”

Introduction

How does God want us to respond to calamity? Plagues? Government oppression? Economic disaster? Or other calamities? It seems, from Jesus’s question in v2 that they assumed that what had happened to the Galileans was punishment for some specific sin of theirs. And we know that in both the Old and New Testaments, the Lord did threaten and carry out particular punishments upon His people at particular times. So, maybe we have wondered if when something hard comes upon us, whether that’s a particular *quid pro quo* for a particular sin.

But unless the Lord has threatened something particularly, we do not have good ground to assume a direct relationship. There are many reasons that believers suffer, including to increase God’s wrath against their enemies, to have fellowship with Christ, to know their own weakness, to be sanctified and prepared for glory, and even just to glorify God.

Yet while there may be many *reasons* for a particular calamity, our Lord here teaches one *response* that is necessary in *any* calamity. Repentance. Any of God’s judgments against anyone demand that each of us ask of ourselves the question, “Am I repenting, or am I perishing?” That is the binary option that the Lord Jesus presents us with in this passage. But He is not here coldly asking the question and leaving you to yourself. By His Word here, He reaches out to you to provoke You to repentance. He comes to your aid in multiple ways.

Here the Lord Jesus alarms you with God’s wrath, so that you might repent. And so we will see repentance as a response to God’s wrath.

Here the Lord Jesus beckons you with God’s patience, so that you might repent. And so we will see repentance as a response to God’s patience.

Here the Lord Jesus moves you to repentance by presenting Himself to you. And so we will conclude by seeing repentance as a response to Christ and His cross.

1. Repentance as a response to God’s wrath

- a. Every calamity, every death, is another rumble of the thunder of the wrath of God against sin. The Lord Jesus warns that Galileans being slaughtered and towers falling and crushing eighteen people are just hints of things to come. God created everything very good. There was no death. Then, sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin. Every sin is a reminder of that fall: the wrath of God is revealed against all unrighteousness. Every death is a reminder of that fall: the wages of sin is death. But sometimes, there is more than the rumble; sometimes God flashes the lightning; sometimes the Lord breaks out in more spectacular fashion to grab our attention (Ps 78; Jer 5:3–4; Amos 4:6–12; Haggai 2:17; Amos 3:6–8).
- b. The Lord Jesus focuses upon those in front of Him: “I say to *you*, unless *you* repent, *you* will *all* likewise perish.” What are your specific sins, personally? What are the specific sins of your own household? Not only the ones that make you feel badly, but the ones that you are ok with, and especially those that the Lord much stresses in His Word. Have you been taking this season as an opportunity to make inventory of your repentance, to renew your repentance? Men. Women. Children.
- c. The Lord Jesus systematically goes after the entire church: not just some Galileans, all Galileans. Not just Galileans, but residents of Jerusalem. Not just some inhabitants of Jerusalem, all inhabitants of Jerusalem. Everyone needs to repent in every place. What are the specific sins of your community? Of your nation? Not just the ones that they have been far to complacent with, but especially those that we don’t even mention anymore, whether because we’re ok with them, or even because we’re complicit in them?

2. Repentance as a response to God’s patience

- a. Here, Jesus focuses especially upon the church (vineyard, fig tree). But notice that the focus is not so much upon His wrath—we all know what would happen to the fig tree, but here He doesn’t even mention the fire. Here, the focus is on the patience. The extra time that our Lord gives us. The extra effort that our Lord puts into us. His desire to see us full of His own life and bearing His fruit. Note that He is the One who looks for His fruit, and Scripture is clear that not every church member bears it. There are tares among the wheat. There were reprobate (adokimos) in Corinth among the approved (dokimos), so that the apostle said “let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he falls.” The apostle John says “They went

out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.” We saw several such warnings in the book of Hebrews. Not every fig tree in the vineyard is alive; not every branch that appears to be on the Vine is genuinely grafted into the Vine; not every member of the body on earth is genuinely and spiritually a member of Christ’s mystical body. If this is true of New Testament churches among whom the apostles ministered, how must we then pay attention to such warnings today! This should terrify anyone here who has been just coasting along—satisfied to have some nice feelings about Jesus, to define for ourselves what makes a Christian life look or feel Christian, who has made rather little study of what the fruit is that the Lord looks for from us, who has been bothered rather little by whether or not that fruit is growing in/on us.

- b. The “three years” here is significant. The Lord Jesus spent some three years among the church on earth during His ministry? What did He find? What fruit did they bear? And from glory, Revelation 1–3 presents our Lord as walking among the lampstands, going in and out among His churches and observing what kind of fruit they are bearing. There, already, He has seen things for which He would judge them. Things for which they have now been judged, and today those churches are no more. But it was not so at the time. At the time, He was sending letters to their messengers (“angels,” in most of our translations, but preachers, really). At the time, He was pleading with them to return, pleading with them to repent. And so He continues to do today: our resurrected and ascended Lord walks in the midst of His churches—will you not give heed to Him? We are not here this morning merely to celebrate the resurrection event; we are gathered to the Resurrected One in the Resurrected One, and what does He see? We know what came of the people of Israel. We know what came of the seven churches of Asia (Western Turkey) in Revelation. We can even see now what has come of so many of the churches in Europe and America. What will come of our church? We do not know how much time we have left for fruit-bearing repentance, but it is clear from this text that the time is limited. God have mercy upon us! In wrath, remember mercy! Will the churches come through this unchanged for the better—or even changed for the worse? What will become of our church—who are studying several things that God takes very seriously, making the status quo ever more guilty and ever more dangerous? We do not know how much time we have left. But we *do know* that our Lord is being ever so patient with us. How beautiful He is in His patience! Oh that the RICHES of His goodness, and forbearance, and longsuffering would find their mark, and that His beautiful patience would lead us to repentance (Rom 2:4)!
- c. Not a legal patience, in which we have more time to show what we’re made of, but a gracious patience, in which He is working by His means in the midst of His providence to produce fruit in us. Isn’t He, right now, gathering us to Himself in the means of grace? Hasn’t He sung His Father’s praise in the midst of the assembly—admonishing us and urging us to be filled with His Spirit and richly indwelt by His Word? Has He not interceded for us and made His throne for us into a throne of grace? Is He not even now speaking to you from heaven that Word which works effectively in you? Yes, He has called to your attention the necessity of repentance, and if you ignore the call, you will perish in your sin. But, if you respond merely by determining to do better, you will not repent—you *cannot* repent—and you will still perish. You must look to Him in His means, trusting Him Himself to use them in His own power! And since He provokes us to repentance by the alarm of His wrath, and by the beauty of His patience, shall we not then considering the most alarming display of His wrath and the most beautiful display of His patience?

3. Conclusion: repentance as a response to the cross

- a. The cross is the greatest display of God’s wrath. The most alarming words, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me,” were followed by the most wonderful words, “It is finished.” The hell-fury of the wrath of God fell upon the Son of God; how dreadful! And that wrath was fully spent and consumed so that not of a drop of it was left; how glorious! If this is what fell upon the beloved and well-pleasing Son, when joined to sinners such as we are, what will fall upon us, if we die in our sins? That wrath which spent itself upon God the Son will never be satisfied if it is poured out upon you on the last day. Are you alarmed by Pilate, by Siloam, by COVID, by tyranny, by recession and depression? Be all the more alarmed by the cross of Jesus Christ!
- b. The cross is the greatest display of God’s patience. We hear Christ say, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.” He is the perfect picture of the Father to us. If we have seen Christ, there is nothing more of the Father for us to see. And His patience toward ignorance of those who were in the act of committing the greatest blasphemy possible and greatest murder possible is exactly a picture of the Father’s love toward us—Christ died for the ungodly; God demonstrates His own love for us in this, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that the ones believing in Him would not perish but have everlasting life. The answer to the horrible question, “Why have You forsaken Me,” is the answer to the most beautiful prayer, “Forgive them!” And indeed, He would forgive many of them. Many of them would hear, some seven weeks later, a sermon that concluded with condemning them for this murder. Many would repent. Many would believe. Many would be saved. Many of them are even now perfected in holiness, the souls of the just made perfect, in that glorious assembly that we join this morning! Behold the beautiful, saving patience of our Lord on His cross! Isn’t He, even now, in this passage, in this sermon, exercising the patience of Calvary toward you, as He addresses you from heaven? Is He not worthy of a complete repentance, opposing every thing that He hates and pursuing every thing that He loves, and a continuous repentance, bearing for our Master that fruit which He seeks? AMEN.