

PARABLES OF JESUS

REPENTANCE AND THE PARABLE OF THE BARREN FIG TREE, LUKE 13:1-9

A. The need for repentance (1-5)

1. Jesus was informed of a recent incident in Galilee (1), *There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.*
 - a. Some Galileans had been in Jerusalem offering sacrifices at the Temple.
 - 1) It was probably during Passover since that was the only time non-priests could offer sacrifices.
 - 2) Pilate, the Roman governor of the province, may have killed them beside the altar in the temple courtyard.
 - 3) There are no extra-biblical references to this event.
 - b. Why was this incident brought to Jesus' attention?
 - 1) Maybe, people were struggling with how to reconcile such a terrible event with their conception of God.
 - a) Theodicy is the study why God allows good things to happen to bad people and bad things to happen to good people.
 - b) British writer J. R. Ackerley wrote to a friend, *I am halfway through Genesis, and quite appalled by the disgraceful behavior of all the characters involved, including God.*
 - 2) Some may have wanted to discredit Jesus before the Roman occupiers.
 - a) Religious leaders were having trouble finding ways to turn people from Jesus.
 - b) They may have hoped that Jesus would make trouble for Himself by accusing Pilate of a horrible deed.
2. Jesus responded by teaching on the need for repentance (2-5)
 - a. He spoke to the incident in Galilee (2-3), *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.*
 - 1) Common teaching was that bad things happen to bad people. Those Galileans must have been great sinners.
 - 2) John 9:1-3, *As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.*
 - 3) Jesus repudiated this view by declaring that everyone is a sinner, so everyone needs to repent or face judgment.
 - 4) Calamities are physical events in a spiritually fallen world, not punishment on specific individuals.
 - b. He gave another illustration from an event in Siloam (4-5), *Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.*
 - 1) Another calamity had taken place in Siloam.
 - 2) Eighteen people were killed when a tower fell on them.
 - 3) Jesus instructed them again with another rhetorical question and gave the answer, No, they were not worse sinners.
 - 4) Jesus' instruction was that everyone needs to repent or face the judgment of God.

B. Jesus tells a parable concerning repentance and God's grace (6-9)

1. A man had an unproductive fig tree and he wanted to cut it down (6-7), *And he told this parable: A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, 'Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?'*
 - a. A man planted a fig tree in his vineyard and expected it to bear fruit but he found none.
 - b. He told the vinedresser to cut it down because there was no fruit for three years.
 - c. A barren tree is cause for concern.
 - 1) It yields no fruit.
 - 2) It fills space which a fruit-bearing tree could occupy.
 - 3) It needlessly takes resources from the ground.

2. The vinedresser asked permission to cultivate it one more year before cutting it down (8-9), *And he answered him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'*

- a. The vine dresser asked for another year for the fig tree.
- b. The fig tree should be cut down if no fruit is found at that time.

3. Understanding the parable

a. The fig tree served as an emblem of the Jewish nation, note Isaiah 5:1-7.

1) God is the owner of the vineyard

2) Jesus is the vine dresser.

3) Thomas Constable, *God expected to find the fruit of repentance in Israel but found virtually none. He had not found fruit in it for a long time, so He planned to judge it because it was not fulfilling its purpose.*

b. Repentance is evidenced by fruit, Matthew 7:15-20, *Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.*

c. The parable of the fig tree illustrates the care God shows those He has placed in His family.

1) We have all we need to bear fruit.

2) God is longsuffering.

d. God was gracious with Israel and gave it more time to repent.

1) Thomas Constable, *The implication seems to be that Israel was in this grace period during the ministry of Jesus. His ministry stirred up the nation and infused elements that should have resulted in fruit. Israel's response to Him would determine her national fate. Therefore repentance was crucial immediately since the grace period was relatively short.*

2) John Martin, *A visible change must be seen in the life of one who claims to trust the Messiah. If there is no visible change that person, like the figless fig tree, is judged.*

3) Judgment on Israel took place in 70 A.D.

4) This parable was not only an indictment against the nation of Israel but all who reject repentance.

C. A description of conversion where repentance and faith come together.

a. It demands repentance

1) Change of mind concerning

a) Sin, personal guilt

b) God, the One who justly demands righteousness

c) Self, defiled and helpless

2) Change of feeling, remorse

3) Change of will, desire not to sin

b. It demands faith

1) Intellectual, accepting truth of message

2) Emotional, acknowledging personal need

3) Volitional, choosing to receive Christ

D. Biblical truths concerning evil

1. God is not the author of sin.

a. The sinfulness of man was a choice, Genesis 3:1-7.

b. *Evil is that which God does not will.* Emil Brunner (20th)

2. God overrules sin for good.

a. Joseph and his brothers, *As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.* Genesis 50:20.

b. *God is so powerful that he can direct any evil to a good end.* Thomas Aquinas (13th)

3. God saves from sin.
 - a. Sin was man's choice but only God has the solution, His Son, 2 Corinthians 5:21
 - b. God is a fellow sufferer with mankind of evil in this world.
4. God resolves the issue of evil.
 - a. *Evil often triumphs, but never conquers.* Joseph Roux (19th C.)
 - b. There will be a time of judgment and evil will be no more, Matthew 13:49.
5. Why bad things happen to good people (Christians)
 - a. For instruction, Hebrews 5:8, *Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.*
 - b. For preparation, 2 Corinthians 4:17, *For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,*
 - c. For perspective, Romans 8:18, *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*
 - d. For perfecting, 1 Peter 1:6-7, *...you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

CONCLUSION

- A. Calamities occur because we live in a sinful world, not because those affected were greater sinners.
- B. Everyone needs to repent.
- C. A visible change will be evident in the life of a repentant person.
- D. God is longsuffering but judgment will come.

