

# Repent or Perish

## Luke 13:1–9 (ESV)

**OPENING ILLUSTRATION:** I surrendered to ministry in 1995, and soon after, the little church where I was raised, Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church, invited me to preach my first sermon. The text I chose was the one that is before us today, Luke 13:1-9.

**CONTEXT:** Luke 13 begins a transition in Christ's ministry. Most of what we will see throughout the remainder of the book happens in a very short time. Luke 13-18 are mostly short segments of teaching from Christ's mouth. If you have a red-letter edition, you will see that it reads almost like an unbroken sermon.

But, this is basically Luke's collection of the things Jesus taught, all compiled into a few chapters before the Passion Week. Chronologically, we are very near the end of Jesus' earthly ministry.

### TEXT: Luke 13:1–9 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> “There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup> And he answered them, ‘Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? <sup>3</sup> No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.’”

History doesn't record the exact nature of this event. But a few things we can glean from what Luke gives us:

- **OBSERVATION 1** - It appears that a group of men from Galilee, in the North, had made the journey to Jerusalem, in the South, to make sacrifices. For some reason, they had fallen out of favor with Pilate, the Roman Governor of Judea. While they were sacrificing, Pilate had them slain. So that is what seems to have occurred.
- **OBSERVATION 2** - This allows for a bit of character development. You see, this reveals something of the nature of Pontius Pilate, whom Jesus would stand before very soon. But remember, when it came to the crucifixion of Jesus, Pilate seemed to be very conflicted. But this text reveals that the conflict didn't emerge because Pilate was timid or kind-hearted, because on this occasion, he was so cold-hearted and brutal that he would slaughter these men AS THEY SACRIFICED. The fact that it was not mentioned in secular history indicates that this sort of thing must have been the standard operating procedure for Pilate.
- **OBSERVATION 3** - The fact that this seemed to be on everyone's mind reveals something about human nature. We are far more interested in facing the death of others than we are our own death. When some great tragedy occurs, it will be a part of the news cycle for weeks or months... we will examine it, we will look at it

from every angle - but how slowly we are to consider our own impending death with the same rigor.

You see, nothing is more certain than the fact that you are going to die!

**That great theologian Shel Silverstein put it this way:**

“So you're takin' better care of your body  
Becoming more aware of your body.  
Responding to your body's needs.  
Everything you hear and read about diets,  
Nutrition and sleeping position and detoxifying your system,  
And buying machines that they advertise to help you exercise.

Herbs to revitalize you if you're traumatized.  
Soaps that will sanitize.  
Sprays to deodorize.  
Liquid to neutralize acids and pesticides.  
Free weights to maximize your strength and muscle size.  
Shots that will immunize.  
Pills to re-energize you.

But remember that for all your pain and gain  
Eventually the story ends the same...

You can quit smokin', but you're still gonna die.  
Cut out cokin', but you're still gonna die.  
Eliminate everything fatty or fried,  
And you get real healthy, but you're still gonna die.  
Stop drinkin' booze, you're still gonna die.  
Stay away from cooze, you're still gonna die.  
You can cut out coffee and never get high,  
But you're still gonna, still gonna, still gonna die.

The Bible says in **Hebrews 9:27**, “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment”.

It would appear that with all of the advances made in medicine, we are turning the corner on death... but the fact remains that DEATH HAS NEVER BEEN MORE EFFECTIVE than it IS NOW:

- 3 people die every second,
- 180 people die every minute,
- 11,000 people die every hour,
- 260,000 people die every day
- 95 million people die every year

**Billy Graham said,** *“The statistics on death are staggering... 100% of those who have lived in the past two thousand years have died.”*

But the Scriptures never call us to look at death hypothetically or statistically, but God, through His Word, calls you to examine it **personally**...

<sup>3</sup> **“No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”**

That word translated, “LIKEWISE” in the GREEK is the word ὁμοίως [homoios / hom·oy·oce/]. It doesn't mean in the exact same way; it means in a comparative sense. In other words, Jesus isn't saying that if you don't repent, Pilate is going to come after you also. Jesus is saying, there is a fate awaiting you that is similarly tragic to that of the Galileans, and the only hope you have is that you REPENT.

THEN, in verse 4, Jesus mentions another tragedy they all would be familiar with.

<sup>4</sup> **“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?”** <sup>5</sup> **No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”**

Again, this is one of those events we know little about. Apparently, a tower was being built near Siloam's pool. During the construction, 18 people were passing by, when tragically the tower fell and they all perished.

Again, Jesus says, this is headline news. You are all talking about it. You are all raising questions about it.

- Perhaps these 18 people were worse sinners than all the others because they suffered this fate.
- Perhaps God was judging the builders of the tower.
- Perhaps God was not there when it happened.

Isn't that the way it happens? When we hear of a tragedy, we immediately begin to analyze it, but analyze it in a very safe way. We keep our distance. We don't consider the fact that NOT ONLY COULD it happen to us, it is actually the most predictable thing in the world. You will one day die.

Death visits the elderly, the youth, the strong, the weak, the rich, and the poor. Strong young men die, and occasionally, small children drop their toys to wrestle with the strong arm of death.

In the last two weeks, I have preached two funerals - one a 25-year-old young man shot down in the heat of battle, the other a 91-year-old woman who simply stopped breathing. Death is no respecter of persons.

**The Psalmist said,** “There is but a step between me and death”.

When was the last time that you came face to face with your mortality? When was the last time you asked some hard questions about death?

### **ILLUSTRATION:**

There is a story frequently told in the Middle East as only they could tell it. The story is of a Baghdad merchant who sent his servant to the market to pick up some goods for him. While the servant was making the purchases in the marketplace, he found himself face to face with Death (the Grim Reaper, as it were). When he saw Death, he noticed that Death gave him a strange look that terrified him.

In great fear, he returned to his master and was told that Death had given him a menacing look and that he must have a horse to escape to Samara, a city some distance away.

The master quickly gave his servant a horse, then went to the marketplace to find Death. When he found him, he asked, "Why did you give my servant a menacing look?" Death replied, "I wasn't looking at him menacingly; I was merely surprised to see him here in Baghdad, for, you see, I have an appointment with him tonight in Samara."

**ILLUSTRATION:** In Roman times, a victorious general would celebrate his victory with a triumph through the streets of the town. It was a massive affair, people worshipping him as if he were a god. There was always a slave appointed to whisper a reminder in the ear of the victor - "Memento Mori" ("Remember your mortality").

In some ways, this is the job of every minister...to gently but clearly remind you that you have an appointment to keep with death. It is fixed, it is final, and it is forever.

*How are we to respond in light of our impending death? Jesus answers that question with a parable:*

Now, the first thing we should do in light of our impending death is...

## **1. Repent**

<sup>5</sup> *"No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."*

Repentance is a change of mind that results in a change in behavior.

- Belief gives birth to *thinking*.
- Thinking gives birth to *behavior*.

In other words, you behave as you believe because you believe as you believe.

Never try to correct your behavior directly. Get under your behavior, discover the underlying beliefs and the subsequent thoughts and perspectives that arise from your beliefs. Attack those. Then and only then will behavior change.

That is what is meant by the term - REPENT...*metanoia*, think differently.

Considering one's death has a sobering effect.

**That is why Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes 7:2 (ESV),**

2 "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart."

Funerals can cause us to face our death. Sermons can help us face our death. But frankly, we have developed the marvelous ability to quickly change the subject.

**ILLUSTRATION:** This past week, my grandmother passed away. Hundreds of people passed by to pay respects and to look upon the lifeless body of another human being. But some of the things people will say at a funeral really do stagger the imagination. One said, "I hate to say anything at a time like this... but what are y'all going to ask for her house?"

The pace of our culture allows little time to meditate on truth. But this is one of those truths you want to marinate on a while.

Take a long walk, find a private space in your home, get with God and ask yourself how you should believe differently, think differently, and behave differently in light of the fact that you will soon slip from this world.

*Repent...*

## 2. Bear Fruit

<sup>6</sup> "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. <sup>7</sup> 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?'"

In that day, a landowner would set aside a few acres of land that he would call his FRUIT FIELD. There, he would plant a vineyard and any number of fruit trees. He would appoint a vinedresser to work the land and make it fruitful. From time to time, he would come and check the land and see if it was bearing fruit.

In this story, he had planted a fig tree. Now, keep in mind, he has already allowed the tree to reach maturity and it appears that once the tree reached a size that it should bear fruit, it did not. So for three years, he patiently waited for the fruit, but to no avail.

Finally, in frustration, he said, "This tree is just taking up the soil... cut it down and plant another that will perhaps bear fruit."

Now, you see, trees have a purpose. The purpose of fruit trees is fruit. When a fruit tree doesn't bear fruit, it is simply wood waiting to die.

Friend, if a tree has a purpose and is held accountable to that purpose, how much more do you have a purpose? The Lord created you, the Lord sent Jesus to die for you, the Lord drew you unto Himself. Why? Because he wanted to take a sinner like you and turn him into a fruitful tree in God's vineyard.

He wanted you to make a difference in the world, to change your family's legacy, and to lead people to Jesus Christ....how is it going?

### **Matthew 7:16–20 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> “You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup> So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup> Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup> Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.”

This is something we desperately need to be reminded of in the South.

**Most heresies are misapplied truths.** You see, we know that we are saved by grace through faith alone. Jesus did the work, all that we contribute is the sin that he so graciously forgives. BUT, if we take that to mean that a person can be saved and not change, not bear fruit, we are terribly mistaken.

You see, Biblically, when you come to faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in your heart. Do you expect me to believe that the very God who stepped out of nowhere onto nothing and with a word created the entire universe... took up residence inside of your very soul... yet NOTHING changed?

### **ILLUSTRATION; GOT RUN OVER BY AN 18-WHEELER**

*Imagine I came in here late today, and one of the deacons came up to me and said, “Brother Zach, why are you late today?” What if I said, “I’m sorry, but as I was heading to church, I saw something in the road on 8th street, and I got out to look at it, and as I was looking, a huge 18-wheeler ran over me so I’m late. You say, that’s absurd. You couldn’t be walking. You would be drastically changed.*

*If that is true because of the power of a diesel truck... do you think less of the God of the Universe?*

### **1 John 3:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> “No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.”

*Repent, bear fruit....*

### **3. Don't Presume on God's Patience**

<sup>8</sup> “And he answered him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. <sup>9</sup> Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’ ”

There was an agreement struck between the husbandman and the land owner... let me give it one more shot.

This verse gives HOPE and A WARNING.

You see, this verse indicates that there are two possibilities behind the fruitless tree:

1. It's a bad tree and cannot bear good fruit.
2. It hasn't been properly cared for.

I have observed in 30 years of preaching that if you take a genuinely converted person and plant them in a church that does not preach the Bible in a way that they can understand it, that person will not bear fruit.

Take that same individual and place them in a Bible preaching church, and their fruit will be so plentiful that it will appear that they must have recently gotten saved.

No, he was a good tree, but he didn't have good soil.

It is concerning if a man can attend a church that preaches the Bible but continually lives like the world.

You see in this text what a church is to be about - the individual bearing of fruit.

But never forget there is one who prunes.

#### **John 15:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> “Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”

#### **Luke 3:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> “Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

**THE REALITY OF YOUR CONVERSION IS DEMONSTRATED NOT BY YOUR  
PROFESSION OF FAITH BUT YOUR PRODUCTION OF FRUIT.**

His patience and long-suffering are tremendous, but they are not infinite.

- I wonder if the Spirit of God passed over some of you during COVID and said, perhaps this will get her attention.
- Maybe someone in your circle of influence suddenly died, and the Spirit said, “Surely this will bring some repentance.”
- Then last year, as so many in the church took their faith seriously and we began to grow and expand at an unprecedented rate... perhaps the Spirit said, “This will awaken him to the reality of eternity.”

Oh, but I wonder if today, this sermon is for some a last-ditch effort. Perhaps the Holy Trinity said, “Let’s give him one more chance...if he bears fruit this time.. well enough, but if not... cut him down.”

### **CONCLUSION/INVITATION:**

**ILLUSTRATION:** I love life. I love living. I love the fact that my heart is beating, my blood is flowing, and my lungs are functioning.

Have you considered this morning that your heart is working properly? The heart is one of four, what the doctor calls, “involuntary organs” in your body that must be functioning in order for you to survive. Involuntary means that your brain is pre-programmed to send signals on a regular basis to your heart muscle so that it will contract.

When I was in my mother’s womb, God caused that spark in my brain that sent a signal to my heart, and it began beating; now for 37 years, it has not stopped. The same is true for you; when you are a child on the playground, God uses the activity of playing to build a strong heart. As you play football or volleyball in school, your heart continues to grow and pound, and when you meet that special someone, your heart again races...however, one day it will stop, for good. And at that point, no one can start it again.

I want to submit to you today that it is impossible for you to have a robust appreciation of the NEW LIFE Easter offers... until you take a good, long, solid look.... at death.