

FRUITLESS AND USELESS

Luke 13:1-9

This week I read the following statement:

"This year will undoubtedly go down in history as the year of calamities. . . . In reading the paper during recent weeks, . . . column after column has been devoted to calamities of a rather minor degree of horror, but which when added together are enough to astound the mind. . . . We have had not only one accident for every day of the week, but two or three; we have not simply been stunned with the alarming noise of one terrific crash, but another, and another, and another, have followed upon each other's heels

These words were spoken, not in 1992, but in 1861. By Charles Haddon Spurgeon. What catches my attention is that *he was wrong*. 1861 is not engraved on our minds as "the year of calamities." I doubt there is a person in this room who knows what events Spurgeon is referring to!

Let me read more: "Now, men and brethren, such things as these have always happened in all ages of the world. Think not that this is a new thing; do not dream, as some do, that this is the produce of an overwrought civilization, or of that modern and most wonderful discovery of steam. If the steam engine had never been known, and if the railway had never been constructed, there would have been sudden deaths and terrible accidents, notwithstanding. In taking up the old records in which our ancestors wrote down their accidents and calamities, we find that the old stage coach yielded quite as heavy a booty to death as does the swiftly rushing train; there were gates to Hades then as many as there are now, and the roads to death quite as steep and precipitous, and travelled by quite as vast a multitude as in our present time. Do you doubt that? Permit me to refer you to the chapter before you.

Amazing to look back at the lessons of history. Isn't it?!!

Why do tragedies catch our attention?

- Oakland fire
- California earthquake (San Francisco or Eureka)
- Chinese flood

In Jesus' day, people's attention was focused on a couple of recent tragedies.

JESUS IS ON HIS WAY TO JERUSALEM TO DIE (9:51-19:27).

- A. Demonstration of rejection 9:51-11:54
- B. Instruction in view of rejection 12:1-19:27

The decision to reject or accept Jesus will produce distinct consequences (12:49-13:9).

A WARNING FROM THE WEATHER--Significance of the times 12:54-56
They had better wake up and realize the significance of their days

A WARNING FROM THE JUDGE 12:57-13:9

They had better make the right decision while there is time.

That generation should be reconciled with their Opponent, or He will drag them before the Judge where they will be condemned (12:57-59).

Unless they repent and acknowledge Him, they will be destroyed.
That generation has produced no fruit and is about to be cut off.

If they do not change their minds and acknowledge Him they will be destroyed (13:1-5).

TWO TRAGIC EVENTS 13:1-5

The tragedy of **PILATE AND THE CROWD** ought to warn them.
13:1-3

Pilate, the Roman governor, didn't get along with the Jewish people.

He was insensitive to their convictions, and often deliberately provoked them.

E.g., he brought Roman ensigns, infuriating the people who resented Caesar's image in the Holy City. Pilate threatened to kill the protestors, who accepted that fate. Pilate backed down and removed the ensigns.

Pilate took money from the temple to finance an aqueduct. A crowd gathered in protest. Pilate sent "civilians" into the crowd with concealed knives. In the midst of the protest they pulled the knives and eliminated unarmed Jews. It ended the protest but stirred their hatred against Pilate.

This may be a distinct incident. The specifics are unknown from other sources. Some Galileans had gone to worship and were put to death while offering a sacrifice. Their blood was then mixed with their sacrifices.

Jesus didn't deal with the issue of Pilate's deeds.
He dealt with the needs of his listeners.

The Jews rigidly connected sin and suffering—like Job's friends did.

False concept: Personal calamity is caused by personal sin.

It is not true that "exceptional suffering is the result of exceptional guilt."

Jesus' reply: temporary exemption from suffering is a mark of God's grace.

All deserve such a fate because all have sinned.
All are guilty of disobedience and rebellion!

[Popular interpretation of the Guatemalan earthquake.

If we take the simplistic approach to suffering, then it's hard to explain the suffering of the prophets and Apostles, and even of our Lord.

These people were no worse than anyone else! **13:2**

The sin of all people is sufficient to provoke God's judgment.

We all deserve to die.

***13:3** – If they don't repent the result will be death. The promise was fulfilled at the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.*

THE COLLAPSE OF THE TOWER AT SILOAM 13:4-5

The first group of sufferers was Galileans.

They probably deserved it! Galileans were 2nd class anyway.

What about those who died at Siloam? They were from Jerusalem. They were no more deserving than others.

The message is repeated.

Another unknown incident. God's attack on the unrighteous? Is that why the 18 died?

Do you think they were worse than anyone else?

*Did they somehow deserve a more tragic fate than the rest? **13:4b***

***13:5** – Again, if they don't repent the result will be death.*

Wiersbe: "When the English poet John Milton was old, he was visited by Charles II, whose father had been beheaded by the Puritans. "Your blindness is a judgment from God for what you did to my Father," said the king. Milton replied, "If I lost my *sight* through God's judgment, what can you say of your father who lost his *head*?"

If God judges sinners this way, we better be careful; we all deserve the worst.

The question is NOT "*Why did these die?*" but rather, "*Why should I live?*"

Every person who sins deserves to suffer and experience God's judgment. If judgment has not fallen, God has given a merciful opportunity to repent and turn back to Him.

THESE TWO INCIDENTS CONFIRM TWO PRINCIPLES:

- (1) **It is not true that those who suffer are necessarily afflicted because of personal sin.**

It is not true that "exceptional suffering is the result of exceptional guilt."

While it is true that the wicked are sometimes stricken in the midst of their wicked deeds; it is also true that the righteous are sometimes stricken in the midst of their righteous deeds.

Calamitous destruction is NOT always the result of personal sin.

- (2) **It is true that those who suffer remind us to make sure we are living for God's glory.**

If not, we should take advantage of His grace and turn back to Him—REPENT! *You don't play games with God and walk away unharmed!*

WHAT REPENTANCE MEANS:

- (1) **One *never* used in Scripture: Sorrow, feeling bad about sin.**
- (2) **To change your conduct or lifestyle.**

Found in passages *addressed to God's people*, or in a limited context when pagans are committing a specific sin offensive to God. They are told to stop or God will stop it.

Pagans are never told to stop sinning and start acting like Christians. They can't. Only the Spirit of God residing in God's people can accomplish that.

- (3) **Most common use in Scripture [basic meaning of word]: TO CHANGE YOUR MIND.**

Harry Ironside: "The word 'repent' means a change of mind; it is not merely a change of viewpoint. It is not like a change which one might make, for instance, from one political party to another: a man might be a Democrat today and a Republican tomorrow, or *vice versa*—that is not repentance! Repentance is a change of mind which results in a complete change of attitude. When a man who has been living in sin and utter indifference to God, confesses his sin and judges his wickedness and earnestly seeks to be delivered from it, when he is determined to walk, not in his old ways or live as he formerly lived, but turns to the God he had spurned and puts his trust in the Saviour He has provided—this is genuine repentance! . . . The repentant man now finds in Christ not only a Saviour from all his sin and guilt, but also One who gives him a new life in order that he may walk henceforth in a new way."

Direct application, for Israel, fulfilled in A.D. 70 at the fall of Jerusalem. The nation came under judgment and they all perished.

Indirect universal principle: God's program for all mankind works the same way.

THREE LEVELS OF APPLICATION FOR US TODAY:

(1) NATIONAL

If we don't turn to God, our nation is destined for destruction. We have left our foundation and been set adrift. Anyone who thinks the U.S. is a Christian nation has lost contact with reality.

George Barna (Last year, 1991)

- 2/3 of Americans agree that "America is a Christian nation"
- 64% agree that "Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and others all pray to the same God, even though they use different names for God." (46% of evangelicals agree)
- "There is no such thing as absolute truth; different people can define truth in conflicting ways and still be correct." (53% of evangelicals agree with this!)

Either we turn to God and to Christian values, upon which this nation was founded, or we can expect to perish under the hand of God.

Dealing with Israel and God's judgment that was about to fall on them, Hebrews says: *"It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of an angry God."*

Have we lost our fear of an angry God?

We will not flaunt sin and dare God to do something about it forever. It is still a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of an angry God!

(2) INDIVIDUAL-SALVATION

It is also true of each of us as individuals. We can try earn our own way.

Or, we can **stop trying. Change our minds about Jesus. And lean on Him.**

(3) INDIVIDUAL-WALK WITH GOD

Some have **trusted God for salvation, but still want to live their own way.** If you haven't felt the fury of an angry God in your life, **God's patience is giving a chance to repent.**

Some of you have learned that lesson the hard way: *"You can't play games with God and walk away unharmed!"*

THE ILLUSTRATION OF THE UNPRODUCTIVE FIG TREE warns of the danger they are facing. **13:6-9**

They have produced no fruit and are about to be cut off, unless they change.

The tree is producing no fruit.

For three years he waited patiently, expecting to take his fruit, and found nothing.

It was time to quit wasting energy on them. New trees would produce fruit.

Jesus had been in their midst for three years, looking for evidence of fruit, and finding none. It was time for judgment.

The tree is keeping the ground from becoming productive.

"Why does it even make the ground useless?" – even the ground suffered.

Even so, the farmer seems to have a special attachment to the tree. He wants to give it just one more chance to become productive. **13:8**

Hendriksen: Tells of an attempt to raise a tangelo tree in Florida. It was unproductive and all their friends told them the tree had died. They should dig it up and plant something else. Not willing to accept that conclusion, they decided to dig around the tree and apply fertilizer. It has been producing fruit ever since—more than 400 large tangelos in one season.

God is gracious. He will wait far longer than normal in the hope of seeing people repent and bear fruit (2 Pet. 3:9; Matt. 3:7-10).

He has already waited longer for us than would seem reasonable.
He has spared us, but we shouldn't presume upon His mercy.

God won't put up with us forever. His day will come.

The Lord's mercy is often misunderstood. Some think that because God has not yet intervened, He won't. Don't kid yourself. Pay day WILL come, some day.

WHAT WAS THE RESULT OF THE LORD'S PATIENT WAITING?

The story has no ending. Did it produce the next year? The Lord doesn't say!

Each person answers that question for himself or for herself. The end is up to us.

Will we be productive vines, drawing our life from Him, or will we remain useless?

Will He come and find fruit or will He come to issue the final order, "Cut it down! I've waited too long already! I'm through waiting!"

What are the contemporary applications of the fig tree warning?

That which produces no fruit, which God has established for His own benefit but which yields Him nothing, will be replaced with a productive one.

If you had "one more year" to turn your life around and become fruitful, what would you change? What would you do differently?

The next time you hear about a great tragedy, remember the warning.

Ask yourself:

"Why not me? Is this another chance for me to turn around and become useful in His service?"

"Am I just taking up space, or am I bearing fruit for God's glory?"