

Unless You Repent...

Luke 13:1-9

Introduction

Just before our story begins, Jesus has told the people they must learn to read and interpret the signs of the end of the age. When they brought up the Galileans who were butchered by Pilate for sacrificing to God, they were trying to trap Jesus but also asking what that meant. Were these people terrible sinners? Was God judging them? This way of thinking is as old as Job. That's what that book was all about. Job was a righteous man, but he was suffering terribly. His family, wealth, and health had all been taken away from him. His "friends" kept trying to tell him it was because of some great unconfessed sin in his life. Conventional wisdom said that if a man is being blessed, it's because he's a good man, and if a man is suffering, it's because of sin. Today, people call that *karma*. But we don't always see that happen in this world. Many times, we see bad people prosper and good people suffer. Which brings us to this question: "Why do the righteous suffer and the unrighteous prosper?"

Sometimes, an Accident Is Just an Accident

When we get down to it, can we really divide the world into righteous and unrighteous people? If we do, the only one on the righteous side would be Jesus Christ. Everyone else is born with original sin and has that sin nature throughout their earthly existence. Since all suffering is the result of sin *and all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)*, why do we think anyone should be exempt from suffering? Everyone suffers. There are several known reasons for suffering. Some suffering is a natural result of poor choices, such as taking part in things that harm your body and getting sick from them. Some suffering is the direct result of sinful actions by others. Some suffering is sent from God as a wake-up call. The plagues in Revelation are sent with the aim of bringing people to repentance. But sometimes in this fallen, imperfect world, an accident is just an accident, and we shouldn't read anything into it.

Why Do Bad People Prosper?

Maybe we could word the question this way, "Why do the unfaithful prosper and the faithful do not?" This world is fallen, and to prosper according to the world's terms, one must often play by the world's rules. Honesty and fair play are usually not rewarded in a fallen world. However, sometimes a faithful person will be blessed and prosper. So, we mustn't go the other way, condemning the wealthy and thinking all poor people are saints.

All Will Be Judged

The fact is all will be judged. While some may prosper according to the world's standards, and others don't, all will be judged for eternity based on their faith. We will be judged according to our faithfulness. As Ezekiel said in our Old Testament reading today, *when the righteous turns from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it. And when the wicked turns from his wickedness and does what is just and right, he shall live by this (Ezekiel 33:18-19)*. What matters is not how we start our life, but how we finish it.

A Lesson from the Fig Tree

Jesus tells the story of the unproductive fig tree to illustrate this lesson.

Purpose

The purpose of a fig tree is to bear figs. That's why the farmer planted it in his vineyard. God chose or "planted" Israel to show His salvation to the world and carry His Promise of a Redeemer. He has chosen us and planted us in His church to bear the fruit of righteousness and bring His Gospel to the world.

Another Chance

The farmer has been disappointed in his tree for three years and has had enough. It's wasting space and nutrients and he's ready to cut it down. But the vinedresser asks for one more year. In that time, he will fertilize it with manure. For centuries, Israel has disappointed God. Jesus has come to give them one last chance. The manure can be seen to represent different things. He gives Himself; He gives the Holy Spirit; and He gives Word and Sacrament. We disappoint God when we do our own thing and go our own way. He gives us His Spirit through the Means of Grace to bring us forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

Time Is Short

That there is one more year shows us that time is short. We live in the last days. The judgment will come when Jesus returns. And He could return any time now. This is our last chance.

Means of Grace

To sum it up, God has given His Son and by His sacrifice has planted us in His church. He expects us to bear the fruit of righteousness, and to share the Gospel with the rest of the world. To this end He has given us the Means of Grace. Through Word and Sacrament, we receive forgiveness of sins, and our faith is strengthened as He gives us His Holy Spirit to live within us and produce the fruit of righteousness. All we must do is repent and receive this gift in faith. But **UNLESS WE REPENT ...**

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
