

# Jesus Seeks Repentance

**Luke 13:1-9 There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup> And Jesus answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all *other* Galileans, because they suffered such things? <sup>3</sup> "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. <sup>4</sup> "Or 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? <sup>5</sup> "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." <sup>6</sup> He 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. <sup>7</sup> "Then 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?" <sup>8</sup> "But he answered and said to him, "Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize *it*. <sup>9</sup> "And if it bears fruit, *well*. But if not, after that you can cut it down."**

When we were kids we played this game enchanted forest. You had to move your piece through a forest and look under the little plastic trees. All the trees had a picture of a treasure on the bottom and you were supposed to find a particular one. It was very disappointing when you got to the tree and looked under and it wasn't the right treasure.

In the parable Jesus comes looking for a particular fruit. He makes it clear in our text how often He is disappointed. He does not find the treasure, the fruit, He is looking for. Unfortunately, the fruit Jesus is looking for is the rarest treasure, the hardest thing to find among us humans.

What is this fruit Jesus is looking for? Repentance. What Jesus is checking the trees for and what He so often can't find, is simple repentance. He searches for the humble heart which does not attempt to judge other people but merely confess my own sin and clings to Jesus for mercy.

Jesus and the scriptures use this picture of "bearing fruit" in many different contexts. You would expect to find different fruit on different trees. The fruit is different on an apple tree and a grape vine. Just so the "fruit" that scripture is talking about is different in different contexts.

Paul talks about the "fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness." In this context the fruits are the good things the Spirit creates within us. These things are the natural result of living our lives in God's word and being filled with His Holy Spirit.

John the Baptist tells the Jews who were coming to be baptized "bear fruit worthy of repentance." In that context the fruit is the effect of repentance in your life. Namely that if you are truly sorry for what

you have done you are going to show it in the way you act and talk. For example, if you stole something you will return it.

When speaking of false teachers Jesus says, "by their fruits you will know them." The fruits of a teacher are his teaching. You can spot a false teacher because His teaching will differ from the teaching of scripture.

We are so used to thinking about the fruits of faith, that I think we sometimes just assume we understand this parable without looking at the context. Fruits of faith are things like be good, speak good, be loving, help our neighbors etc. But this context makes it clear that is not what Jesus is talking about.

But in the context of this parable. In the context of the question what does Jesus come searching the trees for? There is only one fruit that matters, simple repentance.

Jesus makes it quite clear what he is looking for in verse three "unless you repent you will likewise perish."

Jesus makes it quite clear in verse five of our text what is the difference between the tree that is left in the vineyard and the one that is cut down, "unless you repent you will likewise perish."

My wife is particular about her apples. I had to make a list of her favorite apples to make sure I get the right ones when I am the one shopping. Often I find the stores don't have any of the apples on her list and I come home without apples.

Jesus is extremely particular about the fruit he is looking for: "unless you repent." Any tree that doesn't bear this fruit is cut down.

**Psalm 51:17** <sup>17</sup> The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart-- These, O God, You will not despise.

What kind of fruit is Jesus looking for? A repentant heart.

**Joel 2:13** So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the LORD your God, For He *is* gracious and merciful, Slow to anger,

**Act 17:30** "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,

It is for this reason that Jesus teaches us to pray "forgive our sins" so that true repentance might grow in our hearts. It does not grow there natively. Repentance is foreign to the soil of the human heart. Jesus does not find it. He must cultivate and fertilize the tree. Without Jesus' work there is no repentance. When we pray "forgive our sins" we are asking that Jesus would cultivate and grow repentance in our hearts.

The Jews come to Jesus with this account of the Galileans whom Pilate had killed while they were worshipping. Jesus responds with an example of his own, those who died when the tower of Siloam fell. At first glance these accounts are similar but there are some important differences.

One difference is that in the first account it is a human act. This is something Pilate does. Whereas in Jesus example it is an accident.

No doubt those who brought this to Jesus' attention were expecting Jesus to react by condemning Pilate. Look at how evil he is. Look at what a terrible person Pilate is. He not only killed these people he did it in the temple while they were offering sacrifices.

We have a fascination with the evil deeds of others. We love to point out how terrible this person or that person is. Look at what he did. It makes us feel better about ourselves. We love to get angry at the injustice and evil acts of others, because it distracts from our own sins.

Is that the fruit Jesus is looking for? The fruit of self-righteous indignation? What a terrible thing he did? Did Jesus come to raise an army of people indignant at the atrocities of Pilate?

No Jesus is seeking repentance of our sins. Jesus teaches us that when we see others doing evil things it should be a reminder to us of our own sin. It ought to be a call to us to repentance.

Another difference between the two accounts is that the first one is Galileans whereas the tower of Siloam was in Jerusalem, so likely Judeans, probably even residents of Jerusalem, were involved. The Judeans did generally consider themselves better than the Galileans. Those who brought this to Jesus attention seem to stress that they were Galileans.

When bad things happen to other we love to convince ourselves that they "deserved it," or that they "were asking for it" or that they "got was coming to them," or that such thing would never happen here or never happen to us.

Is this the fruit Jesus is looking for a false sense of security based on a false sense superiority?

Rather when bad things happen we ought to recognize that we are our sinners and repent now from our hearts. What happens to them could easily happen to us to. Our hope is to flee for refuge to the Lord who is our Rock.

The third difference is that in the first example the Galileans where supposedly doing what God wanted them to do. They were offering sacrifices in the temple. Why then did God allow this to happen to them? The false logic of the human heart would reason that they must have been blaspheming in their hearts. If they were "good Christians" God wouldn't have allowed this to happen. Jesus responds with an incident that has nothing to do with worship. Evil things happen to believe and the unbeliever.

We do not repent because repentance keeps us safe from the sufferings of this world. We repent because when such things happen to us we want to be ready to meet Jesus.

We like to try to find meaning in everything that happens. Was that a sign? Was this a sign? What does it mean? Why did it happen? Jesus makes it clear that every tragedy, every evil action, every death and disease and war ought to be reminder to us that we are living in a sinful world. And why are we living in a sinful world? Because we are sinful people. Therefore repent of your sins and look to Jesus.

Many criminals in prison will try to convince others they do not belong there. It is true that injustices do happen and innocent people end up in prison. But not with God. We live in a sinful world because we are sinful people. Therefore repent.

Jesus is waiting patiently looking for the fruit of repentance. For three years Jesus comes checking that fig tree. For three years Jesus preached to the people of Galilee and Judea, preaching repentance. In those three years He was looking for one fruit, the fruit of repentance. After three years there was still no repentance but instead they crucified him. What was Jesus response? Jesus still waited even longer, and sent out his apostles to fertilize that tree with His word and the message of Him risen from the dead.

Luke 24:46-47 <sup>46</sup> Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, <sup>47</sup> "and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

Jesus does not find repentance, therefore He cultivates the tree and fertilizes it. He does not find repentance therefore He creates it in our hearts.

When we pray, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive," this is what we are praying. That God would change our hearts so that instead of looking for reasons to assume that we are better than other we would recognize our sin, repent of our sin, stop finding reasons to hold our noses up at others and receive Jesus' forgiveness. We pray that we are chief of sinners. And praying it day after day Christ creates true repentance through His word.

Jesus keeps waiting for that fruit.

Amen