

Luke 13 (Part 1): 1-17 • A Time to Repent

Teacher: Pastor Paul LeBoutillier
Life Bible Ministry

So I'm going to read through the first 35 verses of the chapter here, and I invite you to follow along in your Bible as I read. It goes like this.

“There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ² And he answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? ³ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. ⁴ 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?

⁵ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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?’ ⁸ And he answered him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. ⁹ Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

¹⁰ Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. ¹¹ And behold, there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. ¹² When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, “Woman, you are freed from your disability.” ¹³ And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God. ¹⁴ But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, “There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day.”

¹⁵ Then the Lord answered him, “You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it? ¹⁶ And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?” ¹⁷ As he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame, and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him.” (ESV)

Stop there. Let's pray.

Father, as we take time to get into Your Word this morning, we as always pray for the work of Your Holy Spirit to bring light and understanding to our hearts. Whenever we open the Word, Lord, we need You to make things plain to us and give us understanding. And Father, it is no less true today.

So we're asking for You to open our spiritual eyes to unstop those spiritual ears and to cause our hearts, Lord, to receive all that You want to say. You are the teacher. We are the students. We look to you in Jesus precious name, amen.

Well, let me show you on the screen for starters what we're covering here this morning, because there are three things essentially that we find in these verses.

- Jesus responds to recent atrocities and tragedies
- Parable of the unfruitful fig tree
- Jesus heals on the Sabbath (Again!)

The first one is Jesus responding to some individuals who came to Him and just, we're talking about some various things. Things that had been happening, one of which was a Roman atrocity. And then Jesus, Himself, brings up another apparent tragedy where some people lost their lives.

Then He's going to talk about the parable of the unfruitful fig tree and we'll talk about what that means.

And then finally we see Jesus healing a woman on the Sabbath day, which was something He did fairly regularly, and the response of the people.

Now, it's interesting here that Luke records for us a conversation that some people were having with Jesus about some Galileans. Now remember, Jesus was in Galilee at this time. He was up in Capernaum which was His place where He hung most often.

And so, He's in the synagogue, He's teaching and so forth but some individuals come up to Him and they begin to speak to Him about some Galileans who lost their lives. And they could very well have known them personally. Apparently they had gone to Jerusalem during some a feast and while they were there, Pilate had them put to death.

We don't know the reason. This is an historical event that we really don't have the backstory on, and so, we're not really sure what happened. We're not even

really sure why the people are telling Jesus about it except for the fact that, again, they may have known the folks that died. But it's also possible they were trying to get Jesus worked up. Get Him a little outraged about all the atrocities that Rome was doing to the people because it could be that they wanted Him to lead them in an uprising against the Romans. Most of the Jews thought that that's what Messiah was there to do anyway.

Anyway, they're telling Jesus about this and you've got to know that in a society that is marked by legalism, which Israel certainly was at the time, the people are naturally going to wonder, are these Galileans, these ones who died? I mean, what big, bad sin did they probably commit that they lost their lives? And that's our natural response when we see somebody who's going through a hard time. It's frankly a natural response when we're going through a hard time. We think God is punishing us.

We'll look at somebody else and think, well, I wonder what they did. Or you're going through a rough season, you lose your job, your car breaks down, a family member passes away, or you get sick, and you're like, Lord what did I do? It's a very natural sort of a thing.

And so Jesus responds to that natural inclination to ask those questions. And look with me again in verse 2 and He asks them a question. It says, *“Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because this happened to them?”*

This is really one of those penetrating questions by our Lord. It's like, okay, we're talking about these Galileans who died. Did you think that they were worse than you? Did you think they were worse than other people for the fact that they lost their lives and so forth?

Jesus is correcting a notion, a mistaken notion that they, the Jews had and we still have today. And that notion is basically that there are good people, and there are bad people. And so our logical assumption is, God punishes the bad people, and He blesses the good people. Isn't that nice?

And Jesus is saying, no, that's really not the case here. You're confused. And what the Jews were confused about, and what we also get confused about is the belief that anyone is actually good. You see, actually later on in this very Gospel account, Jesus is going to address this issue of personal goodness. Let me put it on the screen. Here's what He's going to say. It's going to be in the 18th chapter. He's going to say,

Luke 18:19 (ESV)

And Jesus said to him, "No one is good except God alone."

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That's a great statement. It's a universal statement. Every so often, I hear people talking about others, and they'll say, well I've learned in my years that people are just basically, people are basically good. People are just, they're basically good people. And I understand what they're saying and I don't argue with them usually when they say it. What they're doing is they're comparing people with people. And when you compare yourself with an axe murderer or a hardened criminal of some kind, you're probably going to come out smelling pretty good.

But I've got news for you. That's not who God compares you with. He doesn't compare people with people. In other words, God doesn't pick out the worst of the people who have ever lived, and then put you alongside them and go, yeah you're doing alright.

He compares you with Himself. And when He does that, His conclusion is, and by the way it's an absolutely correct conclusion, there is no such thing as a good person. Right? And that's what Jesus says, and we'll get to that in a few chapters. There's nobody good but God, right?

When Jesus is talking about these Galileans who lost their lives and He says, Did you guys think that these people were worse than you? He's not saying that these Galileans weren't sinners. The point He's making here is that they weren't worse sinners than anybody else. And it's frankly a truth that the apostle Paul would clarify some years later when he wrote to the Romans, put that also up on the screen for you from Romans 3:23.

Romans 3:23 (ESV)

...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

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It's a simple universal truth. All have sinned. All have sinned. It's everybody all right? Here's what's interesting. As we grow in our personal relationship with Jesus Christ, we begin, and I don't know how, when it happens exactly, but we eventually come to an understanding that none of us deserves anything good that we receive. You would think that the longer you walk with the Lord, the better you become and the more you're eligible to receive good things from

God, but actually the opposite is true. The longer you walk with God, the more you realize I don't deserve anything from Him. In fact, what I deserve is the severest of punishments.

That's what I do. The longer I've walked with the Lord, the more I realize that I deserve the worst. And yet I don't get it. Why don't I? Well, because of the mercy of God, and so forth. And I'm not talking, when I talk about punishment here, I'm not necessarily referring to eternal punishment because you see, I believe that even as Christians, even those of us who are in Christ, and again, trusting Jesus for our salvation. Let's just be clear about this. We've sinned enough in our lives just after we came to Christ. We've sinned enough that God would be justified taking the life from our bodies right now.

Let's just face it, okay? You didn't really think that after you became a Christian, you suddenly became a good person, did you? The fact of the matter is, sin is still as much of a reality in your life as it ever was. You're just forgiven now. Now, I'm not saying that we shouldn't be walking in some victory in our lives because we should, but the point is we have still sinned enough that if God wanted to, He'd be greatly, He'd be justified in just saying, boom, you're done.

You guys remember Ananias and Sapphira? They're given to us in the Book of Acts and they're a lovely couple who sold a piece of property and then lied about how much they sold it for so that they could keep some of it. They actually got more than what they said they got for it because they wanted to keep some of the money, but they also wanted to look good in the eyes of the people for giving the whole amount so they lied and they, this is what, hey, we just sold this property and here's what we got, so here's the money guys, sort of a thing.

And of course you can't lie to God. And eventually, Peter had both of these two come before him separately and he questioned them on whether or not that was the exact amount that they'd gotten for the land. And they both said, yeah, it is. And they both dropped dead. Yeah. Boom, just hit the floor.

Now, we read that in the Book of Acts and it's probably natural to suppose, or to just wonder for a minute, I wonder if they were really Christians, because, I mean, they lied. They lied to the Holy Spirit. How could a Christian do that?

And I'm like, oh, easy. I don't have any doubt about the fact that Ananias and Sapphira were born-again believers. I fully expect to see them in heaven someday. You look at that situation and you think, well then, Pastor Paul, why did they die? Well, because God was making an example of their hypocrisy. But

do you think they were the only hypocrites in the church at that time? You think they were the only ones and everybody else was good? Think again. Good grief, the man who pronounced sentence on them was Peter, and you know all about Peter.

He denied he knew the Lord 3 times. if God dealt the same way with everyone in the Church, in the first century Church He did with Ananias and Sapphira, they all would have dropped dead. God was making a point with Ananias and Sapphira. But please understand, the point was not, these guys are bad and you're not. The point was, don't do that, right? It doesn't mean you're good. And that's exactly why Jesus said to the people who are listening to Him, what He did in verse 3.

Look with me again in your Bible in verse 3. Here's what it says. *“No, I tell you, but unless you repent, you will all, likewise perish...”* After making the point that these people who lost their lives, these Galileans, weren't any worse than anybody else, He said, listen, unless you repent, it's worse than that that's even coming your direction.

And I really love how Jesus takes their conversation and He turns it, He turns it back to them and in the form of an exhortation. They're talking to Jesus about other people. Hey, Jesus, did you hear about those Galileans that went to Jerusalem and while they were there, Pilate got all gnarly with them and put them to death and stuff like that?

Isn't that terrible? And Jesus goes, hey listen, unless you repent, do you see what He's doing? He's like, there's no such thing as a theoretical conversation with Jesus. If you talk to Him about something, he's going to talk to you about you. If you go to Him in prayer about your spouse. Lord, you don't know what I have to put up with. God's going to talk to you about you, right? He's going to talk to you about your patience. He's going to talk to you about your forgiveness. He's going to talk to you about your kindness.

But Lord, this person that you gave me. Yeah, well, look at the person I gave to them. It's always going to come back. He's going to, and I, and I like that. You remember when Peter there, this is after the resurrection, all the disciples are talking to Jesus. And Jesus just got done telling Peter about what his life was going to be like in the coming years. And then it says that Peter looked at John and he said to the Lord, Lord, what about him?

Remember what Jesus said? He said, what's that to you? You follow me? You follow me. Don't ask about them. Don't ask about him. Don't ask about what's

going on over there. What's going on in your heart? That's just the penetrating Word of God, isn't it?

Now, in the context of this statement that Jesus is making, which is, "*unless you repent, you will all perish.*" This statement is being made to Jews, and the statement is being made about Israel. That's the context. It doesn't mean that it doesn't apply to us. I'm just saying that's the context in which he's making the statement. Because Jesus knew that in 40 years, the Romans were going to come in and they were going to completely obliterate Jerusalem.

They were going to burn it to the ground and they were going to destroy the temple, and many, many people were going to lose their lives. And Jesus is giving them an opportunity to repent. He's appealing to them to turn from their stubbornness, and just to underscore the need for a national repentance He begins to give this parable of the unfruitful fig tree. And that's what begins here in your Bible in verse 6. And you'll notice that it's a simple parable about a landowner who had been waiting patiently for a fig tree on his property to bear fruit, but every year he went out and looked at the tree and, there was nothing, nothing in the way of any usable fruit and so forth.

It's not difficult to identify that the fig tree is a symbol of Israel. And that's actually a consistent thing in the Word of God. Fig trees often are a representation of the nation of Israel. And this is all about second chances because the message that Jesus is giving through this parable is that I have come to inspect the fruit of Israel and it's not here. And He's basically communicating that the time is almost up. Your second chances are almost over as it relates to this and so, He makes a statement here in verses 8 and 9 that communicates that where the vine dresser speaks to the landowner saying, sir, let me give some TLC to this fig tree and we'll see what happens.

Give me one more season. And I'm going to water it, and I'm going to fertilize it, and take some real special care. And let's see if we can't get some fruit out of it. And if nothing comes from it in the coming year, then fine. Fine. So, it's an interesting parable, but as Christians we understand that contextually, this statement is made to the nation of Israel. But how does, what are you and I supposed to think about? I mean, what is this saying to us as believers? I mean, is Jesus basically saying to you and I that God's going to look at us, look at our lives and see if there's any fruit on our branches and if there isn't He's going to lop us off?

No, I don't really see it that way. I think Jesus is basically explaining in this parable that it is to Israel that He is giving a call to repentance, and He is

wanting them to be saved and reminding them that the time is short to respond, but it's how you and I would talk to unbelievers. When you go to an unbeliever and you say, hey, listen, Jesus died for you on the cross and you need to make a decision and don't put it off. It's time, because you never know if you even have more time to put it off.

And then we come to this final section that we're looking at here this morning where Jesus is teaching in the synagogue and we're told in verse 11 that while He was there he noticed a woman who had what Luke refers to as a disabling spirit.

The Greek literally means a spirit of infirmity. And we're told in the middle of verse 11 that she was bent over and she couldn't fully straighten herself and when Jesus saw her, verse 12, *"He called her over,"* and so He's literally calling attention to her situation.

Look at the words of compassion as He says to her, *"woman, you are freed from your disability."* What a lovely thing to hear the Savior say. And He just, with that voice of authority, you are, you're freed, I'm setting you free, and so forth. And it says here that it looks like everybody's pretty much happy about it, except just one person, and that's in verse 14.

We have the synagogue ruler, who we're told was filled with indignation, and he addressed the people. He didn't even, he didn't talk to Jesus directly, but he addressed the people and he said, *"There are six days that you can come in and be healed. Come in during one of those, but not on the Sabbath day."* And look how Jesus responds.

Verse 15, the Lord answered him, *"You hypocrites!"* He says, good grief, you guys! Don't you take your, your animals out to get water on the Sabbath? Don't you untie them and lead them out to a place where they can get water, even though it's the Sabbath day? Of course you do.

You give more compassion to your animals than you do people. And you'll notice that He speaks about this woman in different ways. He's showing that she is far more important than a farm animal. Notice that He first refers to her as a woman. He says, *"and ought not this woman."*

And He calls her that because that tells you she was created in the image of God. Animals are great and I'm really glad you love your pet, but they're not created in the image of God. But people are. And that's one of the reasons why

we extend special consideration and compassion for people. It's something that we can't take for granted anymore in our culture.

Secondly, you'll notice that He refers to her as a “*daughter of Abraham*,” which also accords her a special place above an animal. She is one of God's covenant people. And then thirdly, you'll notice that He mentions that she was, “*bound by the enemy*.” And that ought to elicit the compassion of anybody. He says, good grief, you guys. She's been bound by Satan, and I have come to set people free from that bondage.

And then finally, you'll notice He makes mention of the fact that her affliction had been going on for 18 years. And again, if that doesn't elicit your compassion, nothing probably will. And so, He sets her free.

And then I like, Luke goes on to tell us, and Luke does this, this is typical of Luke. He likes to give us crowd reactions. And so in verse 17, it says that, “*as he said these things, all his adversaries, or all of his enemies, all those who disagreed with him, were put to shame*.” Because Jesus is basically telling them, you guys care more about your dog than you do your neighbor. And so they were ashamed.

And it says that the people rejoiced. And all the glorious things that were done by Him. Because the woman was so obviously healed, and the synagogue ruler was so obviously mistaken, that the people just rejoiced at what Jesus said and did. So, as we look at this last story, we have to ask ourselves, what's the takeaway, again, for you and I? What's going on here that we can take away? So we're going to put these up on the screen so we can see them. Might help some of you who take notes. The first one is,

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Don't add to the Word of God.

And that's exactly, you see, what the Jews had done concerning the Sabbath. God told His people in the Old Testament, rest on the Sabbath day, but they came up with all these additional kinds of explanations of what resting meant. You could only walk this far. You could only do this, but not this. And it got ridiculous because they had had all these years to add to the simple command to rest. And they got to the point where the rabbis taught that doing a miracle on the Sabbath was working.

Which amazes me that they would say such a thing because it's like a miracle is working. Really? Who's behind the miracle anyway? I mean, can you heal people and give them sight when they're blind? Can you make a lame man walk? Can you raise the dead? Cause I certainly can't. And if it ever happened after I prayed for somebody, first thing I would say is, look what God did. Right? Well, if God is the one behind the miracle and He was willing to do it on the Sabbath, don't you think they would have went, uh, duh. I think God's working on the Sabbath. I think this is okay.

Well, they just didn't get it because, why? They had added rules to the Word of God that literally robbed them of common sense. Secondly, we take away from this that our God is a compassionate God toward those who suffer. And I say that because I think that we could all manage to grow in the area of a heart of compassion toward those who suffer. I know that I can. I get real compassionate when I suffer myself, but when I'm not suffering, I tend to be turned off a little, not turned off in that way. I tend to just shut off my radar or my consideration, so much.

But I've got to get over that. I need to grow in that area and I'm willing to bet that there's one or two of you that probably could stand to join me in that. So understanding, as we do, that Jesus responded to this woman with such a heart of compassion I'm motivated in my heart to say, Lord, give me such a heart. Give me that kind of a heart for people.

Take aways...

- Don't add to the Word of God
- God is compassionate toward those who suffer
- Legalism cares more for rules than people

And then the last thing is that we understood this, I think legalism cares more about keeping rules than it does loving people or meeting the needs of people. And the reason I bring that up as a simple sort of a statement is because even though you and I might understand that legalism is a bad thing, it seeps into our lives so subtly. I mean, it can just be just a well, let me just say this. If you have ever had a hard situation in your life and you have wondered for a moment, Lord, what did I do? What did I do that I'm going through this hard thing.

You're thinking legalistically, you're thinking performance track, and that's what legalism is. It's a relationship with God on a performance track. If I perform, He blesses me. If I failed to perform, He doesn't bless me. So you see what I'm saying? We can say to ourselves all day long, well, legalism is really a bad thing, but let me tell you something.

We don't realize that the seed of legalism is in all of our hearts, and it germinates very quickly, very rapidly. And the reason that's important to know is because, allowed to grow, it will supplant your love and concern for others. And pretty soon, rules become the way you reach out to God, and that's a tragedy. That's a tragedy because it has nothing to do with keeping rules. It has to do with having a relationship and that's the most important reminder. So we're going to stop there, we'll pick it up in the following verses next time.

Let's go ahead and stand together, shall we? We're going to have some people down front here as you're being dismissed to pray with you. They're sinners just like you. Just wanted you to know that. Our prayer team are not they're not down here praying for people because they're better than you are. They're down here because you just, some people need somebody to pray with and we want to make that available. So if there's something going on in your life right now that's just really pressing hard, then take advantage of just having somebody pray. Come up and we'd love to pray with you.

Heavenly Father, thank You so much for the power and the wonder and the majesty of Your Word. Thank You, Lord, for the great reminders that we get in the Scripture of Your love for us and for others. Thank You, Lord, for blessing us with the richness of seeing your mercy for what it is, understanding that that we don't deserve what we get from You. But Your love for us is such a powerful, glorious thing. We praise You for that.

Lord God, help us to continue to walk in humility and protect us, Lord God, from entering into a relationship with you that is based on the keeping of rules or performance. Help us to remember, Lord God, that we are forgiven and cleansed of our sin by faith. We ask all of these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and King and all God's people said together, amen.