

Luke 13:1-9. Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. ² Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? ³ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. ⁴ Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." ⁶ Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. ⁷ So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?'" ⁸ "Sir," the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. ⁹ If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down."

Jesus Gives Us Answers

Why do bad things happen to good people? What's the meaning of life? How's that for an opening? I am sorry but there will be no clever introduction today. There will be no cute story about my kids to start the sermon this week. Today our lesson hits us over the head with those two big life questions. Why do bad things happen? What is the meaning of life?

There are certainly moments in time that we are forced to consider these type of big questions, aren't there? Certainly, our nation as a whole was forced to confront such questions more than once recently. Within the span of the last nine months there have been multiple local, national, and worldwide tragedies. Horrible shootings in Aurora, Colorado and Newtown, Connecticut rocked this nation. Natural disasters and other events of turmoil all have the power to make us stop and wonder, "Why?" "Why would such horrible things happen?" And during such moments we also might begin to wonder about our place in this crazy mixed up world. Why I am still here? What is my purpose in this life?

Today, Jesus gives us answers.

Luke tells us at the end of chapter 11 that the Pharisees began to oppose Jesus fiercely. He writes that ***they "began to besiege him with questions" (Luke 11: 53).*** As they frantically tried to trap him Jesus calmly answered their questions with wisdom and authority. Soon a crowd of many thousands began to gather. Some began shouting their questions in Jesus' general direction. The crowd at one point became so desperate for answers from this wise teacher that Luke tells us that they

were trampling on one another (Luke 12:1). One man yelled from the crowd asking Jesus to settle a dispute he was having with his brother over the family inheritance. Jesus rebuked the man. This was not what Jesus came to do to serve as an arbiter or judge in financial disputes, but Jesus took the opportunity to teach those gathered about the dangers of greed. He taught them to be more concerned about their spiritual debt they owed to God. He taught the crowd and his disciples not to be so worried about this life that they miss out on eternal life. He reminded them that God would provide treasures that do not wear out, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. (Luke 12:33)

Jesus continued on this theme of spiritual watchfulness. He warns both his disciples and the crowd that they were not to live as unfaithful and inconsiderate servants doing whatever they want because they think their master is still a long way off. He advised the crowd that instead, they were to serve the Lord as faithful servants ready and prepared for his return. Jesus also does not hide his frustration that so many were unwilling to do this. Jesus was critical of their inability to see the many warnings that had been placed before them. He implored them to repent before it is too late.

Someone in the crowd then brought to Jesus' attention the unfortunate incident that begins our lesson. One can sense that they were attempting to prove that they were indeed aware of how God punishes sinners. They were citing this as a prominent example of God's judgment. Jesus, however, is compelled to correct their misinterpretation of this sad event.

We are not told about the event in detail. Apparently Pilate or some of his soldiers had slaughtered and killed some Galileans as they came to sacrifice at the temple. Why would such a horrible thing happen? Had God punished these people for some sin they committed? Jesus jumped to the heart of the matter. He heard their comment and he answered, ***“Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?”***

That's the natural assumption, isn't it? Bad things happen to bad people and good things happen to good people. Therefore these people *must* have been bad. They *must* have been punished by God for some sin that they had committed. Those in the crowd also must have reasoned that because nothing bad has happened to me I must have been doing right by God. But Jesus directly challenged these false assumptions. ***“I tell you, no!”*** Those words still ringing in their ears Jesus brought up another sad occurrence. ***Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?*** Again Jesus directly challenges than natural assumption that these people somehow got what they deserve. ***I tell you, no!***

Ok, Jesus, then why did it happen? If they weren't bad people who deserved punishment why did this happen. Why did the tower come crashing down on these people? Why did the sword of Pilate's soldiers come crashing down on these

Galileans? Notice what Jesus does. Jesus doesn't look into the mind of God and give some answer that only God could understand. But instead he tells those people what they really needed to hear. He speaks this needed warning to those crowding around him looking for answers. He speaks this needed warning to us and to the people of our day. ***But unless you repent, you too will all perish.***

Bad things happen because this world is bad. This world is broken. This world is far too broken for everything to work out as it should. Innocent people die, good people have to endure hardship and pain, and many times the wicked prosper. We want things to make sense, we want to understand why God allows certain things to happen, but even *Jesus* didn't try to interpret why. Instead, Jesus brings us back to the fact that this world daily suffers under the curse of sin. This life and all that we know could be over just like that and then judgment follows. Brutal murders, shocking accidents, death in whatever form – all are shocking sermons of God's law. We are sinners and the wages of sin is death.

Repentance is therefore necessary not just for the wicked or those suffering, but it is necessary for everyone. We must all seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. We continually must keep our eyes focused not simply the things of this life, money, or our property, earthly things, but also on the life to come. Repent, turn from this sinful world and cling to God. Daily bad things happen, and daily we are reminded of the curse of sin that will only be lifted when those who believe in Jesus are brought to our home in heaven. Jesus alone has defeated sin. He alone restores our relationship with God and brings us from death to life. Daily we are to repent, we are to turn from the things of this world, and we are to look to our Savior Jesus, because without him we would perish for all eternity. And what a horrible tragedy that would be!?

Jesus then quickly transitions from one big question to another. After considering why bad things happen Jesus leads us to the question what is the meaning of life? What is our purpose? If we are still here while others taken what should we do then? What should we do with this time that God has graciously given to us? Jesus tells the parable of the fig tree to illustrate how we should use the time God gives to us (our time of grace) to repent and bear fruitful lives of service to God's glory. ***"A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. ⁷ So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?'" ⁸ "Sir," the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. ⁹ If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down."***

Judgment is coming, but in his mercy God gives us time. He is a God of mercy. We were sinners who deserved to be punished for our sins, but God does not treat us as our sins deserve. No instead God sent Jesus and Jesus stepped and was punished for us. Jesus of Nazareth, another man from Galilee, would be killed under

Pilate's watch. But this horrible act would bring about salvation. This man from Galilee was also the son from heaven. His body beaten, his blood was shed as the ultimate sacrifice for sins. And now the crucified and risen Jesus pleads to the Father on our behalf. He forgives our sin. He gives us a time of grace. He gives us time on this earth to learn of his love, to come to faith, and to live for him.

This pardon from judgment is not a free pass, but we are given a clean slate and a second chance. In fact our God is the God of 2nd and 3rd chances. He spares us from immediate judgment when we sin and turn and constantly wander away from him. He cares for us with his own loving hands. Like a tree that bears no fruit he tends to us. With his own hand he turns over the soil around us and cultivates our souls. Daily he scatters his word upon our hearts and applies law and gospel so that we might grow in him. He takes unproductive sinners full of death and he gives us the life of his salvation. He cares for us and tends to us with his good news of salvation so that we may live productive lives of service. He gives us time to grow, time to repent of our sins, and time to bear fruit in his vineyard and to his glory.

What is our purpose here? That's one of those big life questions that people struggle to answer. For some people it is simply just take up space; that is, to build a comfortable life on this earth, enjoy that life, and then die. God has created us for so much more than that. He has created us and given us a place on this earth, not just so that we take up space on this planet while we do whatever we want, but he has created us to bear fruit to his glory. He has given us a place on this earth, a place in his kingdom so that we can be a productive part of his kingdom. He has created us not to be a negative influence on those around us, but a positive one. In his mercy he has spared us from judgment. He has called us to faith. He has touched our life with his gospel and now he calls us to bear fruit by living out our Christian vocations to the best of our abilities. He has called us to be good neighbors and productive citizens. He has called us to be good Christian husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters. He has called us to serve our church and community. He has called us to encourage each other and pray for each other and share the word with each other. That's what this life is all about. It is not just about taking up space, but it is about so much more. Jesus has spared us from judgment and now we are here to serve him and each other.

Why do bad things happen? God allows bad things to happen in this world so that they might serve as constant calls to repentance. What is the meaning of life? God has created us and he has spared us from judgment through the blood of Jesus Christ so that we may turn from sin and serve our God in this life and the next. When life sends us clamoring for answers Jesus gives us answers. Amen.