

Luke 13:1-9

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[0 : 00] These days the news have carried several bad things that have happened. There have been news of flood, killing, death in one way or the other.

And each time one turns on, whether the TV or the radio, one is just bombarded with lots of news about bad things. And it reminds me of a time in the spirituality of Nigeria, and I don't know if it happens here, when it would appear that every bad thing that happens to someone is associated to one sin or the other that the person must have committed.

If you said you had a headache, the brethren would want to tell you, examine yourself, check, a child of God should not be ill, or a child of God shouldn't have any kind of ill health.

And we found that ridiculous because it didn't have a basis in scripture. It would appear in this passage also, Jesus was responding to such an assumption.

The people that were around him were trying to give the impression that the Galileans that died as a result of the massacre of Pilate, who came and surrounded them with soldiers and killed them and mixed their blood with those of their sacrifices, must have committed something heinous or terrible.

[1 : 25] But that's because in the course of his ministry, they also wanted to give the impression they were very current people.

They knew what was going on. And they prided themselves on getting or knowing the juicy details of everything that was happening. In chapter 12, from verse 54 to 56, Jesus had to respond to this same knowledge that they claimed.

He said to the crowds, when you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, a shower is coming. And so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, there will be scorching him.

And it happens. You hypocrites, he said. You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and sky. But why do you not know how to interpret the present time?

They were so good at predicting events and they would happen just as they predicted. And yet it seems, when it came to the matter of the heart, that which should matter to their very existence, they were blind to it.

[2 : 32] Since I came to this country, one of the things I found very interesting is the fact that every time I turn to BBC, it seems every 15 minutes, I am reminded of the weather.

I am told this is going to happen. And in some channels, I get to have two versions of weather report. At first, I just couldn't understand it.

I am still struggling to be able to discipline myself to get out of the house, checking first the weather report before I would step out. But I found out it is useful.

And I seem to hear the Lord saying something to me. How come you are able to, in this generation, you are able to predict the weather and it happens just like that with some level of accuracy.

And yet, in the matters that will determine our eternity, we are not able to predict them. So for these people who rebel Jesus, it would appear, with news of their knowledge, their ability to interpret correctly that these brethren or these Jews who were killed must have done something wrong.

[3 : 44] Or the Jews that found themselves on a tower that collapsed must have done something wrong. If not, why should a terrible thing like that happen to good people?

Jesus chose to respond in a wonderful way. And he said to them, the issue is not, it goes beyond why should it happen to these people.

It's wrong when we imagine that when bad things do not happen to us, it's because we are wonderful or we are so right or we are righteous or we are perfect.

Jesus didn't go into the theological discussion of arguing whether the people sinned or not. That's not what matters. Jesus, what matters is, any bad thing could happen to anyone and it does not have to be as a result of sin.

However, there is something that is critical and Jesus spoke with a harshness that I don't seem to see in the rest of his messages.

[4 : 46] He said, except you repent, you will likewise perish. And I'm caught by the fervency, the vehemence of that declaration by Jesus.

As though he was saying, while paying attention to the things that do not matter, there is something that should be most important to us. The matter of repentance from our sins, making our ways right with God, else there is judgment.

There is a definite thing of perishing. I'm concerned about this attitude of the presentation of the gospel because these days I seem to hear it less and less.

It would appear in our conversation with people in this generation, the emphasis is not necessarily on repentance, calling people to repentance because of the likelihood of perishing that is coming. Yet, for Jesus, that was a message he had to present and he declared it very forcefully. To those who thought they were knowledgeable, to those who thought they were in tune with the things that were happening, to those who thought they were right, his message to them was, stop being judgmental, stop looking at what is happening to others.

[6 : 13] And remember this, if you do not repent, if there is need for setting things right in your life and you do not repent, what has happened to these people is only a reflection of what could happen to you and worse.

And it conveys to us a sense of urgency, doesn't it? That we should not take life for granted. We should not take the fact that we are here and hurting now for granted.

We shouldn't take it for granted that things are going right. Why? Because the pilgrims who were in Jerusalem at the time of the slaughter, none of them knew death was coming.

The people who were on the tower, maybe they were tourists, none of them knew that there was a possibility of facing the end of their very existence on that day.

And each day we get out of our beds and walk around and come even from healing lunchtime talk. We are faced with this possibility that it could be our last trip also.

[7 : 26] It could be our last outing. Yes, the means of transport here is very safe. Yes, everything seems to be understood we can predict. But can we really predict when the end for us could come?

So Jesus turned. And Jesus turned the attention of the people away from these disasters. As though to look at the fact that those people who perish, no, no, no, it's their problem.

And he turned the focus of the speakers in words. As though to say, if you were to face the prospect and the possibility of that death now, are you sure that the end would not be one that would be described as perishing?

Or would your end be one that you have every confidence and joy that at departure now, I will be with Christ? And this same attitude is what even the disciples of Jesus exhibited in John chapter 9, when Jesus met the young man that had been born blind.

The question that the disciples were asking was, whose fault is it? It's not normal that a young child should be born blind. So who sinned? And Jesus responded and told them, no, it's not a matter of sin.

[8 : 49] No, God is safe. But God allowed even this to happen to this young man so that he would be glorified. However, to the person asking the question, Jesus leaves this response.

Unless you repent, you will also in likewise perish. So for Jesus, the matter of repentance was a very serious issue.

He had come to this world to call people to repentance, to call people out of the darkness into light, to call people into a relationship with God the Father, to call people from the kingdom of the world into the kingdom of God, so that they would have an assurance of eternity with him, not only on this earth, where we will enjoy the presence of his kingdom, but we will also be prepared for an eternity with him.

And the only way that could happen was first through repentance. So he emphasized to them the possibility of the suddenness of death.

And it's a thing that we will do well to remember. The end could come any moment. On news, young people have been stopped.

[10:11] Old people have been stopped. These days, I thought it was only in Nigeria that I would need to walk and look back. But I'm finding out that each time I'm in the evening, and I'm passing through some particular areas, I like to be careful.

But there's no better way of being careful than to be ready to meet with the Lord in the hour of death. That's why a man like Paul would be someone that would love to have the relationship with God that he has, that he could say in Philippians 1, verse 21, that for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

There is a man that won victory over the fear of death and the threat of death because he was confident of the relationship he had with Christ Jesus.

So Jesus, in this passage, challenged the people first to be ready. It could have been them.

We should stop this dichotomy of them versus us. It could have been us. And he goes on to give the parables. And he gives the parable of the fig tree that was supposed to produce fruit, and it did not bear fruit.

[11:33] And for three years, the owner of the fig tree kept coming to see if he could get fruit from that tree, and it yielded no fruit.

So the owner of the fig tree said, Cut it down. Why should it constitute a burden to the ground? You know, each time I read this, the first thing that comes to me is God saying, I am expecting so much fruit from your life that if you do not produce fruit, I will cut you down.

Yeah, that's threatening enough. But I'm not sure that's what Jesus necessarily wanted to convey to the people. Jesus wanted to just emphasize to them that God is such a compassionate Father.

He's a compassionate God that is not desirous of our end. Instead, what will please him is a situation where, even though we've not been fruitful, he keeps giving us opportunity to be a fruit. It's as though the Lord keeps coming to us in reminders, and he comes to us in encouragement, and he says, Yes, you have not met my expectations. You have not lived as I desire.

[12:51] You have not obeyed me as I desire. Maybe we have even judged ourselves, and we have come to the end of our abilities. Or we have been so concerned about our unfruitfulness.

But you know, the good news for me here, is that, like the compassionate gardener, he keeps pleading, one more chance, so that we will be fertilized again.

So that we will be watered again. So that the fruit of repentance will begin to come forth. So that what God desires to see, he will find it.

I mean, God's desire is that for each who has the privilege of coming to him, we come into such a relationship with him that the transformation in us will cause us to bear fruit.

fruit that will abide. So he pleads with us, even today, that we should open up to the leading, the yield, the voice of the Spirit of the Lord.

[14:01] to bear for fruit. Because his desire is not to see, to bring about the end of any life. His desire is not to cut us down.

His desire is not to destroy us, or to present himself as a God whose heart is more in judging us and in cutting us off. No. But you see, in God we have a Father whose love for us is such that he would keep extending mercy so that we come to fruitfulness.

We are not told whether this tree eventually bore fruit. But it's also good that we are not told that because we do not see that the tree itself was cut down.

Which means the door of mercy is kept open. So that we would come to the repentance that God desires.

This is what makes the Christian faith to me such a unique faith. Such a wonderful faith. This is what makes my God such a loving and compassionate God because he has not dealt with me as I ought to be dealt with.

[15:16] He has gone beyond my inabilities, my failures, and several times I find myself misusing his grace upon my life. Yet, lovingly, he comes again drawing me to repentance so that I will bear forth fruit.

And in the end, he will be glorified. I find that God wants to find joy in our lives and that joy comes only when we cooperate with him and we submit to him and we yield to his gardening through the through his word through opportunities to hear him speak to us and encourage us and call us to himself just like this.

Through opportunities of fellowship with other believers. Through opportunities of the study of word of prayer of encouragement and through the ministry of others who lift us up when we fall.

All of this comes as the loving work of the gardener whose desire is to see that we flourish, we bear fruit to the glory of his name and his compassionate and ever giving of such opportunity. it tells me that I will therefore have no excuse if in the end I do not bear fruit because God has provided everything necessary for my help and your help.

[16 : 52] This is the God we serve and in the Christian faith this is the love that invites us so that he invites us to open our hearts to him to open our hearts to God who will walk in us and walk on us to bring forth the fruit that will honor his name.

I'm sure these Galileans who were feeling very good about themselves that they did not perish because they were righteous people didn't expect this kind of response but I'm sure what God would also want is for us to look more in words and listen to him and open ourselves to the voice of his spirit as he calls us to repent so that what we hear happening to others does not happen to us. It's amazing that Jesus preached in this evangelical and powerful and strong manner of repent or perish but it is critical that that be conveyed because it remains the only way we can enter into the rest that the Father has prepared for us.

His desire is that we would repent and for any who is seeking to get to know the Lord the more the path to rest is to just come to him in repentance in acknowledgement of his commitment to our welfare and in submission to him and we'll find him lifting us up in mercy and changing our lives and making us fruitful in a manner that will please him alone.

Let's pray together.