

The Gospel According to
Luke

“Calamity Jesus”

Chapter 13:1-9

Introduction

The Tsunami that struck Asia had barely been reported when Christians began speculating that it was sent as a judgment from God.

Going back a few years... Almost immediately after the planes crashed on 9-11, there was talk and teaching by respected Christian leaders that God was judging America.

Going back about two decades... As soon as AIDS and HIV were reported, we were certain it was God’s judgment against homosexuals.

Whether disasters are natural, or national, or personal, there is a tendency to see them as deserved by sinners who are being judged by God. The question we might want to ask ourselves is this: How does Jesus want us to understand disasters?

The answer is in the verses we are looking at today. The Lord was asked about a particular disaster; then He mentioned another one. Both of them prompted Him to give this advice: **Unless you repent you will all likewise perish.**

Disasters are not about “them”; they are not about some group of awful sinners. They are about **you**. They remind **you** that you could be gone in a moment, with or without warning. They say to you, *“If you had been there; if it had been you; would you have been ready to die?”*

At any given moment, there are many disasters happening on our planet. News cameras take us beyond the yellow tape and through

the barriers so that we can experience disaster scenes up close. Jesus is still giving us the same advice.

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 At Every Disaster Scene, Jesus Is Calling For You To "*Repent!*", and #2 Behind Every Disaster Scene, Jesus Is Cultivating You To Repent.

#1 At Every Disaster Scene,
Jesus Is Calling For You To "*Repent!*"
(v1-5)

God does judge. There are numerous accounts in the Bible of God's judgment coming upon sinners:

1. There was a global flood in the days of Noah.
2. Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by God.
3. Jesus Himself predicted the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman legions as a judgment against the Jews for their having rejected Him.

You can also look to the future and see God's judgment coming. In the last book of the Bible, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, we are told in brutal detail about the judgments that will fall upon earth in the Last Days.

The problem we have presently is that we don't know whether a disaster is *supernatural* or *natural*. We don't know if it's God directly judging, or if it's simply the result of living in a fallen world.

When we jump to the conclusion that God is judging some person or group of people, it leads us to self-righteousness rather than self-examination. Every disaster scene should instead encourage self-examination. You should ask yourself, "*Where am I at in my relationship with God?*"

News of a disaster was brought to Jesus:

Luke 13:1 There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea for ten years. We know nothing historically about this incident except what Luke tells us. A group of Galilean Jews were offering their sacrifices to God when Pilate ordered them killed – thus mingling their blood with that of their sacrifices.

Jesus' comments upon this revealed the prevailing attitude among the Jews concerning disaster:

Luke 13:2 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?”

That's exactly what they supposed! Whenever disaster struck, it was supposed that the people who were affected were guilty of extraordinary sins.

As I indicated – Disaster *may* be deserved; it *may* be a judgment from God. **But it might not be!** In the Gospel of John, in Chapter Nine, there is the wonderful story of the man born blind whom Jesus healed. The disciples asked Jesus who sinned – the blind man or his parents – to bring the disaster upon him. Jesus answered and said, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him” (John 9:3). His blindness was not the result of his or his parents' sin; it was simply the result of sin – the result of living in a fallen world.

It was a whole new way of looking at disasters. It puts you in the disaster, at the disaster scene, so you could examine yourself.

Luke 13:3 I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.

There was a national application of these words. **Unless** the Jews repented as a nation, they would perish. Jesus was their promised Messiah, offering them salvation and the kingdom of heaven on earth. They would reject Him as their Savior. The result was the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD by the Romans, and then their scattering throughout the world.

The *prophetic* application is important; but we want to focus more on the *personal* application of these words. All of us are born with a death sentence:

1. We're born dead in trespasses and sins.
2. We're dying physically.
3. And, **unless** we **repent**, we will die eternally – meaning we will live forever but separated from God in Hell.

The disasters we see or experience in the world only serve to emphasize the final judgment we all face.

Before we look at repentance, Jesus mentioned another disaster:

Luke 13:4 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?

Luke 13:5 I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

This was a construction accident. Several days ago there was an explosion, in Texas, at an oil refinery. At least fifteen people were killed. It's the kind of thing Jesus was referring to – a tragic accident.

Accidents can make us wonder about the people involved. Diseases, too. We have a sad tendency to suspect that some extraordinary sin is responsible for their accident or their illness.

It's just not true! It is part of living in a world that needs saving that accidents and illnesses occur – to believers and to unbelievers.

What you ought to do is engage in a little role-play. Put yourself at the scene. What if it were you? Would you be ready to die?

Unless you repent you will all likewise perish. It may not be in a national or natural disaster; but you will one day perish – you will one day die. *No one gets off the planet alive!*

Repent is a great Bible word. There are volumes of theological definitions and descriptions. I want to give you a more practical understanding of what it means to **repent**. Here's the situation: I've

got my back to God - I'm going *away* from God. No matter how righteous, how good, how much I keep all the rules and regulations, how active I am in the church - my back is to God, and every step I take is farther away from Him. Somewhere along the line I recognize that this trusting in my own goodness is not adequate, that this cannot save me - that salvation is not by works. And so, *I change my mind*. I say, "*I'm no longer going to pursue this way, which leads to Hell. I want to face God; I want to follow God*"

I change my mind - that's **repentance**, and having changed my mind, **I turn around** - that's *conversion*. And now that I'm facing God, following Him, every step I take moves me closer to Him.

(This is some of the symbolism behind having an altar call. It is a physical illustration of your decision. You change your mind, turn from your sin, and step towards God).

So you have repented and converted; are you done? No – because, as we said, you are now walking with God. It makes sense that you would see radical changes in your life. To help you understand exactly what these radical changes are like, the Bible compares you to a fruit tree. Fruit trees bear fruit according to their kind. If you've repented, you will bear the **fruits of repentance** as you walk with God on earth.

John the Baptist preached repentance, then told the people to **bear fruits worthy of repentance** (Matthew 3:8). The things John described were changes in behavior that were the result of a change of heart. The apostle Paul would later describe more fully the change of heart. He, too, used the analogy of **fruit** in the famous passage in Galatians that says,

Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
Galatians 5:23 gentleness, self-control...

You repent, convert, and then, walking by faith in Jesus Christ, you produce fruit. Jesus works *in* you by His Holy Spirit, and *upon* you by the Word of God, to produce the fruit of the Spirit - the fruits worthy of repentance.

It's no surprise that Jesus next talks about a particular fruit tree:

#2 Behind Every Disaster Scene,
Jesus Is Cultivating You To Repent
(v6-9)

A disaster was looming on the Jewish horizon. We have the benefit of history and can look back upon it. General Titus would come and burn Jerusalem, killing over a million Jews and taking more than one-hundred thousand captive. Behind the disaster, before it would occur... Jesus was busy cultivating repentance. He explained it in the Parable of the Fruitless Fig:

Luke 13:6 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.

Luke 13:7 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?'

Luke 13:8 But he answered and said to him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize *it*.

Luke 13:9 And if it bears fruit, *well*. But if not, after that you can cut it down.'"

A Jew understands that this farmer had been waiting a total of seven years. According to the Old Testament, farmers could not eat fruit from their trees for the first three years after planting. Then, in the fourth year, the entire yield belonged to God. So, if this farmer had been waiting three years to enjoy a fig, he'd already waited four years prior – for a total of seven years.

Why seven years? If you were a Jew, you'd know that every seventh year was a Sabbath year when debts were cancelled and slaves set free. Through faith in Jesus as their Messiah, God would cancel their debt of sin and set them free.

Israel, as a nation, is often compared to a fig tree. In this parable, the vineyard is the world and God is the owner. Israel is the fig tree, planted in the world to bear the fruit of salvation. Jesus is the gardener who has been working for three years (the length of His earthly ministry) to bring forth the fruit of repentance. The parable was left open-ended; but we know, from history, that Israel did not

bear fruit, and was indeed cut down by the Roman Legions, then scattered all over the planet.

By the way: Do you remember after Jesus rose from the dead, that Mary Magdalene saw Him outside His tomb, but she thought He was the gardener (John 20:15)? It may be just a coincidence, but Jesus was the gardener of Israel in a symbolic sense!

Again, I want to get into the personal application, for us. Jesus has told us twice **unless you repent you will all likewise perish**. We talked briefly about bearing the **fruits worthy of repentance**. We concluded that, if you are a Christian, Jesus works in you, and upon you, to produce the fruit.

For all that, we sometimes find ourselves unfruitful; or our fruit is immature; or it is shriveled.

The Parable of the Fruitless Fig can therefore be a tremendous encouragement to you. It presents Jesus as your gardener – working in your life to produce the fruit of the Spirit, the fruits worthy of repentance.

Looking back over the parable, the first thing you notice about Jesus is that He is **patient**. The fig tree had born no fruit; seven years seemed long enough to wait. But He desired yet another season to work the tree.

I was talking to another pastor. He mentioned a problem he was having with someone in the Church. It seemed like something a young, immature believer might do, so I asked him how long the person had been saved. He said they had been a one-year old Christian for ten years!

Our passage doesn't discuss the reasons for unfruitfulness, or immaturity. It doesn't have to. All of us can examine ourselves for the fruit of the Spirit. If it is not there, or not maturing... *Then we have a problem!*

1. It's possible that you have not repented and converted. It's possible you are not saved. If that is the case, the Lord is

longsuffering with you, not willing that you should perish, but rather that you would come to repentance (2Peter 3:9).

2. It's possible that you are a Christian, but one who is backslidden. Jesus is just as patient in your life. Writing to His Churches in Asia, Jesus several times called upon believers to **repent**.

Jesus is not only patient; He is **persistent**. Look again at verse eight:

Luke 13:8 But he answered and said to him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize *it*.

I like to read this verse in the KJV; it's a little more colorful and, therefore, memorable:

Luke 13:8 And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall **dig** about it, and **dung** *it*.

The tree needed to be **digged**, and it needed to be **dunged**! I dare you – next time you pray out loud – to ask the Lord to dig and dung you!

These two activities probably summarize any and all possible methods and techniques used to encourage growth. They are as many and as varied as there are believers needing help to be more fruitful.

The two techniques are themselves a good starting point. You need to be **digged**. Ground becomes hard when it receives little or no moisture. Moisture, or water, can refer to the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. It is interesting to note that, if the three years of the parable roughly correspond to the Lord's earthly ministry; the extra year includes the coming of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost and takes us to about the stoning of Stephen in the Book of Acts. It was a pivotal event; Stephen reviewed the entire history of Israel and indicted them for rejecting Jesus. Not long after, in the very next chapter of Acts, the Gospel began to be preached outside of Jerusalem.

It is all too true that Christians can begin in the Spirit, but then take-over and think they can go forward with God on their own power, with their own programs. Many devoted writers have used the

anonymous quote that says, *“If the Holy Spirit were removed from the Church, 95% of its activities would continue!”* The same can be true of you as an individual. You can be going through the motions, but without the emotions.

You need to be **dunged**. You need proper fertilizer. That would include a steady diet of God’s Word. God’s Word is compared to the most nutritious, life-giving milk; and to the very highest quality meat; and to the sweetest honey.

Besides the good nutrition of the Word, you need to quit eating junk food! It ruins your appetite, and works against the effects of the Bible.

Other disciplines of the Christian life, anything that encourages growth, could be considered fertilizer: prayer, fellowship with other believers, witnessing, etc.

This is a great spring message! Every new planting; every time you till or fertilize; every time you water; you can be thinking about the work of the Holy Spirit and the disciplines of your Christian life, leading to growth in your walk – yielding fruit.

Applying the Word

Disasters are all around us. Whether or not they are the direct judgment of God, we usually can not and should not speculate. But His judgment **is** coming!

In the mean time, Jesus is not willing that any should perish, but that all would come to repentance.

And, if you’ve done that, He is wanting to work in your life to see you bear fruits worthy of repentance.