Journey with Jesus to the Cross in Lent Part 3:

The Call to Repentance and Bearing Fruit for the Kingdom

Luke 13:1-9

**Introduction**

 Good morning to you all. Please open your bulletins to our passage of study today which is Luke 13:1-9. Today we will be addressing a question that plagues society, especially those who do not believe in the existence of God. The question is “Why do bad things happen to good people?” This question is one of the most asked questions from skeptics who do not believe in God because the focus is for mankind to try to understand tragedies and why they take place. Before we begin looking at the passage, I would like to share an example of a tragedy that took place during my first year of teaching. One of the most difficult tragedies to comprehend is when the life of a young teenager is taken away by an accident. I began teaching in 1999 and the first job I had was as a work-study coordinator at Madison Comprehensive High school in Mansfield. I had a group of sophomore students who worked for the school and were also receiving employment training from me as well. One of my students on a Friday morning asked me if I would go out to the parking lot to see his Ford Mustang that he had worked hard to fix up. I took the entire class outside so we could look at his car. He had done an excellent job on it, and he was excited to show it to his classmates. Later that evening the Ashland/Madison football game was being played at Madison. That game was always a rivalry, so it was a tight game. At halftime I began to see many Madison students crying and there was a sadness that hit the crowd. When I asked a fellow teacher what was going on she told me that the student that had shown us his car that morning had a horrible accident and had been killed. Not only did the crowd sit there in shock, but the football team also was so shocked that the game was no longer a priority for them. They allowed Ashland to score a lot of points and pull away a big victory. The following week as my students and I tried to process this loss the question the students kept asking me was “Why did this happen?” The death of this student left a lasting mark on the class and at their graduation two years later they would honor him as part of the ceremony. I am certain that all of us can think back to a tragedy that has happened in our own lives or to someone we know very well. What we do know for certain is that no person in this world is exempt from tragedy or trial, but what we do not know is why things like this happen. In our passage today Jesus will be addressing this question. In His response He tells us that we need to repent, that God is patient by providing us with opportunities to turn away from sin and bear fruit for His kingdom and finally that we are not guaranteed unlimited time to repent and that we need to have an urgency because the time we have on this earth is not guaranteed.

**Context of the Passage**

Before we read the passage together, we need to familiarize ourselves with what is taking place at this point in the ministry of Christ. In Luke 12 Jesus was discussing His second coming and that His believers need to always be prepared for His return. After hearing about this the question about tragedies comes up because the belief by many was that if they followed Jesus and since He is the Son of God, they should be able to avoid tragedies because bad things should not happen to those who serve God. In this discussion Jesus wants to address this misconception because if His followers do not understand this correctly it will have dire consequences later in the ministry. There are two tragedies that are specifically addressed in this discussion. Both events were bad things that happened to fellow Israelites, so the people wanted to know why God would allow such things to happen to His people. What we know today regarding this topic is that there is still such a misconception that permeates among many followers of Christ. There is this perspective regarding suffering and tragedy that followers of Christ should never have to face such things since they are a child of God. This attitude has existed since the days of Jesus and has been a topic of major discussion since then. In the dark ages when the church was going through periods of transition a belief that many held was that those who had money, power and influence were blessed by God whereas those who were poor, uneducated and had little influence were being cursed by God. Jesus is going to address that misconception head on and remind His listeners that the time we have on this earth is not guaranteed, so we must use the time God has given us for His glory.

**Jesus Addresses the Misconception (vv. 1-5)**

 In verse 1 Jesus has a report brought to Him about a tragedy that had recently taken place in the temple in Jerusalem. Luke describes this as the blood of the Galileans that had been mixed with the sacrifices by Pilate. What had happened was that Governor Pilate ordered the execution of a group of Galileans in the temple, so when they were executed, their blood had mingled with the blood of the sacrifices, which according to the Law of Moses was an abomination before the Lord. Not only was the blood mixing with the sacrifices a tragedy, but the fact that these people were killed in the holy temple of God. This report was brought to Jesus because the people wanted to see how He would respond to the situation. What we cannot forget as we read this is that many of the people at this time saw the coming of the Messiah as being a military figure, who would lead a revolt against the Roman Empire to deliver the people from captivity. Upon hearing this report some of these people may have thought that Jesus would respond with anger and want to take the fight to Pilate. However, this is not the response the people are going to get.

 In verse 2 Jesus begins to respond to the situation by asking a question. He asks if the people who were killed by Pilate were worse sinners because they suffered such a fate. In other words, did these people do something evil to deserve such a punishment? This takes us back to what we just discussed in the introduction. Jesus is asking if bad things happen to bad people and if good things happen to good people. He will be providing an answer to this question in verse 3. What we need to do today is ask this question, but look at it from the perspective of God, not mankind. What does it mean when someone says they are a good person? (Ask the church to share answers to this question). When someone says they think they are a good person they are usually saying that they have not done anything to cause them to be arrested, jailed or punished by the legal system. Now, just because someone is not jailed or in prison does that mean they have never done anything evil? Of course not. Jesus is clear in His teaching that sin against God is not only what is done on the outside of the body, but what happens in the heart. In the Sermon on the Mount, for example, Jesus teaches that hating a brother in your heart is the same as murdering them and that adultery is not only the physical act but also lusting after someone in the heart. What Jesus is saying is that sin begins in the heart and from there is manifests itself in our outer actions. What we understand when we look at our hearts is that we are prone to sin and that there is no one that can be good in the eyes of holy God. Jesus Himself, when He is called good teacher by the rich young ruler corrects the man and tells him that no one is good except for God alone. Therefore, the first point we need to make is that there is no such thing as a good person in the eyes of holy God without the blood of Christ to cover them.

 As we move on to verse 3, Jesus begins His instruction by telling the people that unless they repent, they will also perish in the same way. This does not mean that everyone will be executed by the Romans, what He means is that if they do not repent of their sins they will die in their sins without hope. Since we have established the fact from Scripture that there is no one who can call themselves good based on their own merits we must also admit that every man and woman need repentance.

 In verse 4 Jesus brings up another tragedy that had taken place recently in Jerusalem. There were 18 men who were working on the tower of Siloam, which was most likely one of the towers located along the walls of Jerusalem. While they were working on the tower it collapsed crushing the 18 men who were working on it resulting in all of them dying. Once again, Jesus asks the same question that He asked regarding the massacre in the temple. Were these people worse sinners than everyone else living in Jerusalem? He answers in verse 5 with a firm no and further reminds the people that if they do not repent, they would also die in their sins without hope. What we will discuss very soon in our application is that Jesus is telling the people that life is fragile, we are not guaranteed tomorrow so we need to take the opportunity we have right now to confess our sins, repent of them and change our attitude toward God.

**The Example of the Fig Tree (vv. 6-9)**

 After concluding the discussion regarding the two tragedies, Jesus begins to share with His listeners a parable to further explain the point He has been trying to make. In this parable Jesus tells the story about a fig tree that a farmer had in his vineyard that was not bearing fruit. What was normally done to plants that did not bear fruit was they were cut down and thrown into the fire since they were no longer performing their function. The planter in this situation had been rather patient because he waited for three years before he had decided to cut it down. However, the keeper of the vineyard asked for the planter to be patient and allow him one more year to take extra care of the plant to nurture it. If the plant bore fruit that year they would keep it, but if not then they would destroy it. Now what does this parable have to do with the previous discussion regarding tragedy and repentance?

 Here is the lesson that Jesus is teaching in this parable. Just like the fig tree in this story, followers of Christ are expected to bear fruit for the kingdom after they have confessed their sins, repented and have trusted Christ for this salvation. Being saved from the wrath of God and having the new life in the spirit is good news, but if a follower of Christ is to bear fruit for the kingdom, they need to be sharing that faith with others and working to make more disciples for the kingdom of God. Since God shows us so much love, patience and grace when He forgives us of our sins, we need to show appreciation for such unmerited grace by sharing that good news with others and bearing fruit in our lives by living in repentance, righteousness and holiness. Someone who proclaims to be a follow of Christ but does not bear any fruit showing the change that has taken place in their life is not useful for the kingdom just like the non-fruit bearing fig tree.

 What is so amazing in this parable is that even though the tree is not bearing fruit and has not done so for quite some time, the gardener asks for more time so that the tree might be revived. Who represents the gardener in this parable? Jesus Christ does. He has given His life to pay for the sin of mankind and through that sacrifice makes the ability of His followers to repent and be restored in their relationship with God possible. All of us without Christ are the fig tree that is not bearing fruit for the kingdom. But, when the Holy Spirit takes root in the heart of a believer, they begin bearing fruit because no longer is the desire to live for self, the new desire is to live in the glory of Christ and glorify God in all we do. The gardener digging the trench and fertilizing the plant is the work that the Holy Spirit does when He changes our desire to live on honor of God rather than in obedience to our own carnal sinful nature.

 The last part of the parable we need to look at is the reply of the vineyard owner, who is representing God. After the gardener asks for more time, the owner agrees to allow more time for the tree to be revived. What God says at the end of the story is that the tree will be spared and allowed to grow and mature if it bears fruit. If after all the extra work the tree does not bear fruit, it will be cut down. God is patient with His creation allowing them the opportunity to change and experience the power of the Holy Spirit. However, if man chooses to reject God and refuses to repent of sin, then the consequence of that choice is eternal separation from God. These are the actions of a loving God because He allows His creation the ability to reject the salvation made possible through Christ. When man chooses not to heed the words of the gospel and live in his own way God tells us in His word that will result in eternal damnation. We must use all the time we are given on this earth to share the good news with all so that they may choose life!

**Applications**

 In our passage of study today we have learned that Jesus is teaching some very important lessons that we need to remind ourselves of as we travel through this life. Since there have been two major parts of the lessons, I have two applications to share with you this morning:

1. Our first application we can take from the section addressing the two tragedies is that our lives are fragile, and we need to live with a sense of urgency because we do not know at what date or hour our lives will be demanded from us. The people in those two tragedies did not know they would be facing death at the time they did. None of us are aware exactly when our moment of death may come. As we discussed in the Epistle of James the Apostle told his readers that life in a vapor that only exists for a brief time **(James 4:14).** Not only is life fragile, but the future is only known by God meaning that it is not possible for us to know when God has planned to either take us home or when He has planned for Jesus Christ to return. Every moment we have on this earth with our loved ones is a gift from God that we should never take for granted. Since that is the case, we need to make certain that we use the limited time we have here to proclaim the good news of the gospel and tell others so they might come to faith in Jesus Christ. We really do not have any time to waste, so may always live with a sense of urgency in growing the kingdom of God here on earth.
2. Our second application this morning comes from the parable of the fig tree. Just as the gardener asked more time to revive the plant, we have a God who is patient and gives us grace so that we can experience the change that comes from a repentant heart. Jesus Christ has allowed us the opportunity to experience this new life through His sacrifice and because of the grace of God He allows us through the blood of His Son to experience a new life in His name. Rather than living under the wrath of holy God we no longer must fear the grave or fear death. Our eternal destination is secured when we place our faith and trust in Christ. The Apostle Paul writes these words of encouragement in **2 Corinthians 4:16-18 “16 Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer person is decaying, yet our inner person is being renewed day by day. 17 For our momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, 18 while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”** Even though we will have tribulations while we are here on earth, we can rest in the comfort that we will eternally be in the presence of God.

**Conclusion**

 As we conclude our time together this morning let us consider the importance of this teaching considering our preparation for resurrection Sunday and holy week. Jesus is teaching in this passage that confession and repentance are essential aspects of life for those who follow Him. If we are to experience the new life given in Christ, we must remember that our God has taken each of us, lowly sinners who are not worthy of grace, and given us new life through the death and resurrection of His Son. As Jesus travels to the cross He is wanting all to hear Him to be aware of this new life that is available through Him. As we continue to ask God to guide this church in our ministry outreach may we always remember that we serve a God of second chances who is willing to use anyone who is willing to be used for the work of His kingdom.