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Luke 13:1-9

THERE IS STILL TIME TO REPENT

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Throughout our lives we will have the opportunity to respond to special offers. You will get letters in the mail and phone calls and offers on the internet and newspaper coupons. Most of them have some sort of time limit on them. Some of them are offers that we just can't pass up. We see it and we respond immediately. Others are very good, and we want a little time to think about them. Sometimes we will find that we have waited too long. The offer has expired or so many people took advantage of the offer that there are none left for us. Now while it may be nice to get two pizzas for the price of one, a lower rate on our home mortgage and credit card, no interest to pay for a year on our new dining room set, or \$2000 off on a brand-new car, it really isn't going to change our life permanently if we miss the deadline. However, when it comes to God's offer of eternal life through his Son Jesus Christ, if we miss the deadline, we've lost it forever. This morning we see the good news that THERE IS STILL TIME TO REPENT. Don't worry about other people. Focus on your own sin.

Jesus had been teaching the crowds. He was telling the people about the importance of watchfulness. The things of this world are very unimportant compared to spiritual things. Things really haven't changed much, have they? We see the same thing today. People are much more concerned with the here and now than they are about eternal treasures. The truth is that we do not know how much time we have left living in this world. We don't know when our Lord Jesus will return to judge the world. Jesus would chide the people because they did not examine the signs of "this critical time."

Someone brought up a very tragic incident. Roman soldiers were pursuing certain Galileans. They were suspected of rebellion against Roman rule. During the Passover as these men were slaughtering their lambs for the Passover Seder, Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, violated all Jewish holiness codes by sending his troops into the temple area to murder these Galilean Jews. During this holy feast the blood of these Jews was mixed with the blood of the lambs. You can imagine the outrage at this incident. This was neither the time nor the place for such an atrocity. It was bad enough that it happened, but the Romans had no respect for the religious rites of the Jews. It would be just as if soldiers would come into a Christian church and start shooting people as they partook of the Lord's Supper.

Those who told Jesus this story probably had hoped to elicit from Jesus a very strong rebuke against Pilate and the Roman occupation of Israel. Some may have even hoped that Jesus would use his power to gather an army against Rome. That's what they wanted from the Messiah. Jesus would once again disappoint them.

The specific question they had was: "Had these Galileans committed some terrible sin and were now being punished by God for that sin?" You've heard that one before, haven't you? The Pharisees commonly taught that calamity was a punishment for a specific sin. If you are good, you will have nothing but blessings. If you are evil, God will punish you. That came up specifically when Jesus would give sight to a man who was born blind. They asked, "Who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?" Remember Job. His so-called friends kept telling him that he must have committed some horrible specific sin. Otherwise, he would not be suffering. People still ask that question: "Am I suffering because I committed some particular sin of which I am not aware?"

Jesus then told his hearers that instead of keeping their minds and tongues busy with speculations of what some people might or might not be guilty of, they should focus on themselves and their own spiritual condition. "But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

Jesus would reinforce that by bringing up another tragic situation. It happened right in Jerusalem. Eighteen people were killed when the tower of Siloam suddenly collapsed and fell on them. Whereas the Galileans suffered a tragedy caused by human agents, the Judeans died from a tragedy with a natural cause. Did these people die because they were more sinful than all the other people living in Jerusalem at that time? Once again, the answer is "No!" Once again is the call to repentance. "Unless you repent, you too will all perish." Jesus does not try to answer the questions that arise with such calamities and catastrophes such as "Why did God let that happen? Why these people and not those who were far more deserving of death?" The answers to many of those questions must wait for eternity. Jesus simply issues a call to repentance now.

We all have what is called our time of grace, the period of time that God gives us here on earth. We don't know how long that time may be. The important thing is that the time for repentance is now. Tomorrow may be too late. Repentance is sorrow for sin and trust in the one who brings forgiveness, Jesus Christ.

Death comes as a result of sin, the disease. We are all infected with it. We are born with it. It comes from Adam's fall into sin. "All mankind fell in Adam's fall. One common sin infects us all; from sire to son the bane descends and over all the curse impends." We don't know when we are going to die. Horrible things happen all the time. Planes and trains and automobiles crash. Young people get cancer and other diseases. Evil people murder others. Fires and floods and earthquakes happen. We don't know how long we will live on this earth. Some people will live well into their nineties. Others won't make it to their tenth high school reunion. The words of Jesus ring true: "But unless you repent, you too will all perish." Repent while there is still time. Tomorrow may be too late.

Death could strike at any time. Tragic accidents could come at any time. No one, including, God's people, is exempt. A tragedy should not be seen as God's judgment upon a specific sin, but upon sin, period. Jesus tells us not to worry and speculate about other people. Instead, we should focus on our own sin. Unless you repent, you too will all perish.

Jesus then gives a parable to illustrate the point. God is patient, much more patient than any of us could ever hope to be. But God's patience will eventually come to an end. Jesus would remind the people of the words of John the Baptist who had exhorted the people to repent. He told them that the ax was already at the root of the tree and that every tree that did not produce good fruit would be cut down and thrown into the fire of God's judgment.

It's a pretty easy parable to understand, isn't it? "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. 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?' 'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'" The owner of the fig tree expected to see figs on the tree. That sounds plausible. The tree had been planted in a very choice location, right in the middle of the vineyard. It had been very carefully tended. The owner certainly had the right to expect fruit on the tree after three years.

If the tree was not going to produce fruit, then the owner had every right to chop it down and replace it with another tree, one that would produce fruit. This was not a quick decision reached in a fit of anger. It was a wise decision. This tree wasn't producing, and it was taking up space for other trees that would produce fruit.

There is both an immediate context as well as a timeless context to this parable. Last week we saw Jesus weep over the city of Jerusalem because of its unbelief. The city that God had chosen for true worship and the temple had

become known for killing God's prophets and stoning God's messengers. The city of Jerusalem had been given every spiritual advantage. They had the temple. They had the priesthood. They had the Law of Moses. They had the prophets who told them about the coming Christ. When God looked for faith in the people of Jerusalem, he did not find any. He found only stubborn unbelief. The religious leaders, the teachers of the Law, had already rejected the baptism of John. Not only had they killed God's prophets, but they were proud of the fact that they had killed God's prophets.

God was ready to cut down that unfruitful tree, but Jesus would plead to give it one more year. Jesus' ministry lasted for a total of three and a half years. If you add the six months that John had spent preaching repentance, you see the timeframe here. There would be one more year of grace.

Patiently and untiringly, Jesus had taught the people of Jerusalem. He had pleaded with them. He had earnestly warned them to repent and to produce the fruits of faith that God desired. He would return to Jerusalem and give the city one more chance. He would teach in the temple courts. We know what happened. Jesus would be arrested and brought to trial. He would be condemned by the Sanhedrin and brought to Pontius Pilate. Pilate would bring Jesus before the people. They hardened their hearts in unbelief and shouted out: "Crucify him! Crucify him!" The very people that he came to save would reject him and demand his death. God in turn, would reject the people of Jerusalem. Their time of grace would run out in the year of our Lord 70 as the Romans would destroy the city.

While this parable had a specific application at the time that Jesus told it, we dare not limit it to that time and to those hearers. The message is timeless. Now is the time to come to the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot save ourselves. Jesus Christ came into this world to be our Savior by living the perfect life we could not live and by offering up his life as full payment for our sin. He rose from the dead guaranteeing that our sins were forgiven and taken out of God's sight forever. It is God's gift to us, free of charge. That is the message that we must preach in every sermon, every devotion, every class.

"Unless you repent, you too will all perish." This is the crucial, critical time. We have no guarantees that we will be here tomorrow. Don't worry about other people. Focus on yourself, your sin, and your need for a Savior. Now is the time for repentance. Now is the time for Jesus. Receive him with faith and joy! AMEN.