

## **Luke 13:1-9**

- Last week a Boeing 737 Max 8 crashed killing 157 people on board.
- Four months earlier a similar plane crashed killing 189 travellers.
- The black box recorder has been recovered,
- Which will give detailed information on what caused the crash.
- Addis Ababa evidently is one of the trickiest airports in the world to fly into or out of,
- Because the topography creates all sorts of challenging turbulence and wind shear.
- Whether the air crash investigators come back with a conclusion of pilot error or mechanical failure,
- You can be absolutely sure they won't come back and say,
- ‘The plane crashed because it was filled with 157 worse sinners than the plane that took off before it!’
- Now that reasoning sounds totally bizarre to our modern ears,
- But it wouldn't have been to the culture of Jesus' day.
- You can hear echoes of that view in the words of Jesus that begin our gospel reading today;

“Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?” Luke 13:2

- And again;

“Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem?” Luke 13:4

- Jesus was referring to an incident where Pilate murdered a group of Galilean worshippers,
- As they were preparing to enter the Temple.
- There's no other historical references to these incidences,
- So we don't really know what exactly happened or why Pilate did what he did.
- But it's clear that Jesus is addressing a group of people,
- Who firmly believe there's a direct connection between sin and punishment.
- And if you think that's just an ancient problem,
- Think about this,

- ‘Why do bad things happen to good people?’
- What lies behind that question is a widely held belief that blessings should come to the good,
- And misfortune or curse should fall upon the wicked.

-You might be familiar with the story in John 9 where Jesus’ disciples ask him;

“‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’<sup>3</sup> Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.’” John 9:1-3

- Jesus then spits on the ground,
- Mixes up some mud which he puts on the man’s eyes,
- And tells him to go to the pool of Siloam and wash his face.
- The man does and he’s healed.
- A mighty work of God is revealed in him.
- No connection at all, Jesus says, between sin and blindness.

-One of the longest treatments on this idea of suffering being a result of sin is the book of Job.

- Again you’re probably familiar with the story,
- Job has a series of terrible misfortunes that leave him childless, destitute,
- And afflicted with a particularly nasty skin disease.
- His friends turn up to comfort him but they’re less than helpful,
- Because their advice basically is,
- ‘Stop claiming innocence, confess your sins and maybe God will heal you.’
- But unlike his friends,
- We’ve read the introduction to the book where it says;

“‘There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.’” Job1:1

- And because we get to see into heaven and hear the dialogue between God and Satan,
- We know that it’s the devil behind Job’s suffering not any particular sins.

- Which aligns with Jesus words to his listeners.
- They obviously raised the question of the murdered Galileans and those killed in the tower collapse,
- In such a way that it implied this connection between sin and suffering.
- But Jesus' response shatters that link,
- Not because there's some scale of sinfulness that will elicit various levels of suffering,
- But that all sin will be punished.
- Listen carefully to what Jesus said;

**“Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? <sup>3</sup> No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.” Luke 13:2-3**

- Ch12 of Luke's gospel is an alternating series of speeches by Jesus to his disciples and the crowd,
- That warn of the future judgement upon sinful humanity.

- In Revelation 20 John is shown this scene;

**“I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. <sup>12</sup> And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books.” Revelation 20:11-12**

- It's a picture of the last judgement where every human being stands before Jesus.
- The interesting detail revealed here,
- Is the two types of books that are used to determine the eternal destiny of those before the throne.
- Although I should say,
- A pile of books and a single book.
- These open books record an individual's life in this world,
- And they're judged according to their works recorded in the books.

- Now most religions have a scenario similar to this,
- When you die you stand before a divine judge,
- Who assesses your life according to the good and the bad you did.
- Ask almost anyone how they think they'll fare in the next life,
- And they'll probably say they hope their good deeds will outweigh their bad.
- But what John saw describes an entirely different scenario.
- The books that record our life seem to have a rather ambiguous role in our eternal destiny.
- We might assume that they contain both good and bad deeds,
- But the ultimate determinant of eternal life is not according to what's written in the books, plural,
- But in the book, singular.
- Let me continue with what John saw because I stopped short of the conclusion;

“The sea gave up the dead that were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done. <sup>14</sup> Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; <sup>15</sup> and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.” Revelation 20:13-15

- Notice that?
- If your name is not found written in the book of life,
- You're thrown into the lake of fire.
- If you look carefully at this vision,
- You'll see that it doesn't seem to really matter what's recorded in those other books,
- If your name is not written in the book of life you stand condemned.
- And that's why Jesus said;

“I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.” Luke 13:3

- It's repentance that adds your name into the book of life.
- That's why there's no distinction between good people, really good people and bad people.
- It's what Paul observed in Romans 3;

“There is no one who is righteous, not even one;<sup>11</sup> there is no one who has understanding, there is no one who seeks God.<sup>12</sup> All have turned aside, together they have become worthless; there is no one who shows kindness, there is not even one.” Romans 3:10-12

- All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.
- Even our very best works are like filthy rags before a holy God.
- And regardless of how, when, where or why we die,
- The inescapable truth is that we will all perish.
- We cannot escape death,
- And when we do die,
- We'll stand before a holy and righteous judge.
  
- And that's where the parable comes in.
- Here is the good news in the midst of the bad,
- The hope in the midst of the warning.
- It's a parable that picks up on a lot of other parables and stories from the Old Testament,
- The prophets and even Jesus himself,
- Where the owner of a vineyard or farm goes to collect his expected produce,
- Only to be disappointed by the lack of fruitfulness,
- Or the hostility of his tenants.
- It's a picture of Israel of old,
- God's chosen people through whom salvation of the whole world would come.
  
- In this parable the owner comes to find fruit on his fig tree.
- It takes three years from planting before a tree will produce figs,
- So after that time has elapsed the owner comes with high expectations,
- Finds nothing and tells the gardener to chop it down.
- This tree has been growing away for three years sucking up water and nutrients,
- That could have been used by the other fruitful trees in the vineyard.
- Can you see the parallels with what's gone before in vv1-5?

- Jesus is warning his listeners of the judgement they face,
- Because like the Galileans,
- Like the tower builders,
- They could die at any time and face the judgement of God.
- The owner has judged the fig tree as worthless and destined for destruction.
- But the gardener steps in to save the plant;

“Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig round it and put manure on it. <sup>9</sup> If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.” Luke 13:8

- Immediately after John 3:16 where it famously says;

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” John 3:16

- John writes;

“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” John 3:17

- The reason why Jesus didn't come to condemn the world was because it was already condemned.

- Adam's sin condemned us,

- Our own sins condemn us.

- We all stand under the cloud of judgement.

- But like the gardener in that parable,

- Jesus steps in and saves us from the condemnation we're heading for.

- Jesus takes our name and writes it into the book of life,

- So that what's recorded in the other books will have no influence on our eternal condition.

- But we need also to notice that a response is required.

- The gardener wasn't expecting a guaranteed outcome from his careful tending of the tree;

“Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig round it and put manure on it. <sup>9</sup> If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.” Luke 13:8

-If it bears fruit, well and good.

-But if not, cut it down.

-It seems the gardener is saying his work could go either way,

-It could be fruitful or fruitless.

-Jesus has already injected into this story a call for action;

“I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.” Luke 13:2-3

-Jesus wasn't just thinking of the inevitable death that faces all of us,

-He's confirming the second death that we're all condemned to if we continue in our sin,

-If we continue in spiritual unfruitfulness.

-Here then is the call for action,

-To repent of our sins and turn to Christ.

-Jesus has done all the work to ensure that we can escape the coming judgement,

-But unless we recognise our own sinfulness,

-Unless we recognise our own condemnation,

-We will perish and face the same judgement those Galilean and tower builders experienced,

-In that moment of their deaths.

-So let me go back to Job?

-What's the point of his suffering in that book?

-It's similar to Jesus' parable,

-Which comes down to who are you going to trust?

-At the end of the book God asks Job a series of questions,

-Which show who is the Creator and who is the creature.

-After seeing his foolishness in doubting the provident love of his God,

-Job responds;

“I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees

you;<sup>6</sup> therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” Job 42:5-6

-Even this,

-Even this blameless and upright man,

- One who feared God and turned away from evil,
- Still needed to come before God and repent of his sins.
- When Jesus began his ministry he said;

**“The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” Mark 1:15**

- Even as followers of Jesus we still need to come before him and confess our sins and failures.
- It's why in every one of our services we say the confession,
- Because repent and believe is an ongoing part of the Christian life of fruitfulness.
- And the promise Jesus makes to us is that through repentance we will have our name written in the book of life.