

Years ago... when I was still in college... several of my friends attended a Mennonite Brethren Church where a man was pastor by the name of Bob Radke. ... These friends told me something he said from the pulpit one Sunday... that has stuck with me all these years. Pastor Radke spoke of what he saw ... was his role as a pastor. ... According to Pastor Radke... the role of a pastor is to COMFORT THE AFFLICTED and AFFLICT THE COMFORTED.

Now... I would doubt that anyone would have a problem with the first part... a pastor's job **is** to comfort those who have been afflicted with sickness... hardship... and suffering. ... We make hospital calls and home visits... and we regularly pray for the needs of those who are in our congregations. ... But God has also called pastors to afflict those who have become too comfortable in their Christian walk... We are to afflict those who want to treat the Kingdom of God as some sort of social night club for Christians... or some sort of cruise ship to Heaven... where your personal comfort and convenience is the central focus of your Christian life. ... Church people... just like everyone else... naturally prefer **comfort** to **challenge** ... and **encouragement** to **correction**. So there may be many in the church who say "Yes" to the first part of a pastor's role... but "no thanks" to the second.

But in recent weeks... our study in the Gospel of Luke has shown Jesus in this second part of this role... afflicting the comforted. And you know what...? I sometimes wonder ... if Jesus, Himself, were to appear in the pulpit of the typical American church today... and preach these messages that we have been studying here in Luke... .. How well would He be received...? ... Because I know that Jesus would **not** simply tell folks what they **wanted** to hear. Even though they **prefer** comfort to challenge – Jesus would rebuke the overwhelming tendency that has made comfort and convenience the primary goal of ministry today.

Consider with me the passage we were just in... last week... where He told His hearers He had come to bring "fire on the earth" (Luke 12:49)... and division instead of peace (Luke 12:51-53)... then... Jesus went even further and accused them as being "hypocrites" who would not apply the same interest and energy to reading the spiritual weather that they apply to understanding earth's weather (Luke 12:54-56).

Let's just play with this a little. Imagine with me that Jesus **had** appeared in physical form and delivered that same message in a church today. ... Now try an imagine a family after that sermon discussing it around lunch.

Author and Pastor, Stuart Briscoe, has envisaged the kind of conversation that could have taken place at a family meal time after that.

"Well, Dad, what did you think of the sermon?"

"I was insulted!"

"Why? What did he say to insult you?"

"He said that if I was interested in weather forecasting... that proved I was a hypocrite."

"Oh come off it, Dad, he didn't say anything of the sort. What he actually said was that if you take the time to become an expert in reading the skies... so that you can predict the weather... but won't take time to become an expert in spiritual matters... when you profess to be spiritual... then you are being inconsistent!"

"Well, I don't think He has any right to judge people like that... and I won't be going back to listen to him again. In fact, I'm going to see if something can't be done to get him silenced. We don't need that kind of talk around here."

There is a reason why I wanted you to imagine this with me. ... Because we need to understand the nature of the confrontation Jesus was doing in these passages. Jesus was **NOT** telling people what they wanted to hear. ... In fact as we open the 13th chapter of Luke's Gospel this morning... we are going to see Him become even **more** aggressive... in afflicting the comforted. ...and there may be some here today who need this afflicting.

The people He afflicts in today's passage... were so comfortable in their sense of being **righteous** that they saw no need in their life for repentance.

They had jumped through all the right religious hoops of their culture's expectations... just like many in the church culture of our own day... We all need to hear what Jesus had to say...

Luke 13:1-3

Jesus' teaching heated up when some of His listeners asked Him about a recent atrocity... that had happened to some fellow Galileans.

Remember... Jesus, Himself, was from Galilee. In their minds... to be from Galilee and not from Judea... which was the epicenter of religious life... qualified you to be taken less seriously.

Now... Jesus had just been convicting them with truth about coming judgment. So rather than receive the impact of Christ's teaching... they had a ready-made means to reject it. *"Wait a minute... this guy is from **Galilee!** Why should I even take Him seriously? Everyone knows Galileans are less righteous than those who are from Judea. As a matter of fact there was a recent event that proves that God thinks less of Galileans... than He does of those who are from around here. God recently showed His judgment against Galileans. ... So in light of this*

proof, here... Jesus... why should we take all your talk about judgment seriously...?

The event they used to discount Jesus' convicting message to them... is thought to have occurred when some Galileans Jews had come up to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices at the temple... They were apparently murdered indiscriminately by Pilate's soldiers. ...Pilate was governor of Judea and Samaria... and he had a reputation for being inflexible... merciless... obstinate... cruel... and unjust... He also lacked common sense in handling the delicate problem of the strained relationship between the Jews and their Roman conquerors.

William Barclay... a Scottish pastor and New Testament scholar with great insight into the history and culture of the New Testament times... has attempted to shed some light on this obscure political event. He writes:

...Galileans were always liable to get involved in political trouble because they were a highly inflammable people. Just about this time Pilate had been involved in serious trouble. He had decided rightly that Jerusalem needed a new and improved water supply. He proposed to build it, and to finance it with certain Temple monies....But at the very idea of spending Temple monies like that, the Jews were up in arms. When the mobs gathered, Pilate instructed his soldiers to mingle with them, wearing cloaks over their battle dress for disguise....at a given signal they were to fall on the mob and disperse them. This was done, but the soldiers dealt with the mob with a violence far beyond their instructions, and a considerable number of people lost their lives.

In the ensuing melee... human blood mixed with lambs' blood that was being offered to God in their sacrifice... This was an appalling bouquet.

So when this recent event was brought up... as a means to reject Christ's teaching... Jesus aggressively answered... "*Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered this fate?*"

It was generally believed in Jewish culture that victims of calamities and misfortunes were guilty of extraordinary sins that they had kept hidden.

People have had this **false** notion... at least since the days of Job... The believed that the greater the sin of a man... the greater the calamity. ...

Eliphaz the Temanite asked the suffering Job:

Job 22:3-5 (ESV)

Is it any pleasure to the Almighty if you are in the right, or is it gain to him if you make your ways blameless? Is it for your fear of him that he reproves you and enters into judgment with you? Is not your evil abundant? There is no end to your iniquities.

We can also see this same idea in the case of the blind man in Jerusalem when the disciples asked Jesus in John 9:1, "*Rabbi, who sinned, this man or*

his parents, that he should be born blind?" ... indicating that they thought his blindness was a result of God's divine judgment upon his parents... or the man... for some terrible sin in the past. ...So now these people have moved this theological logic over to the present atrocity in the temple. Their dominate thinking was that God directed the soldiers of Pilate to pick out the greatest sinners within the group... which were these visiting Galileans... and show how unrighteous Galieans truly are.

The Lord rejected that false concept... Physical disasters... just like physical advantages... are no indication that those who experience them are either worse or better than their fellow man. Those who suffered in Japan a few months ago from their devastating earthquake... or those in Turkey who suffered last week's earthquake... or those who died from Chile's earthquake this past Friday... did not suffer this because their sin is greater than ours.

This was an convenient way to think about their own life... which had been spared adversity. **Their** goodness... **their** moral superiority... had spared them! ... It was all so very neat... and so self-satisfying. "Come on, Jesus, do You really think we are going to accept such teaching from You...?!!!

Jesus countered with the ruthless truth, ...unless **you** repent [a present imperative with continued force], **you** will **all** likewise perish."

He sounds a lot like John the Baptist here. This same type of warning was given earlier by him as he confronted the Pharisees:

Luke 3:8-9 (ESV)

Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

Satan uses so many justifications to fill our minds today... as to why we don't need to pay attention to Christ. *"He lived a long... long time ago. How do we know it was true?" ... "There are so many religions all over the world – we cannot say that this is a better way... or the only way."* *"Do you mean to tell me that a person who grew up in a deep jungle of Africa will be sent to hell simply because he was not born here where he could hear about Christ...?"* *"Why did God allow a certain tragedy to occur in my life?"*

Let me just say right now... that there are good answers to these questions. Seek them. Do not allow the mere presence of the question bring you to a complete stop. ... But all too often people justify their rejection of Christ... because of the mere **presence** of these questions...

and they never push through to discover satisfactory answers. The questions themselves are used to justify a turning away from Christ and say... I don't need to go any further. ...But if... indeed... there **is** a coming judgment... and it is based on what a person does with the truth Christ gives... then it is well worth the pushing through...

The concept that personal tragedy in a person's life is a sure sign of God's punishment for their unrighteousness... has so many ill-informed Christians today... heaping imagined guilt upon themselves and others.

We must accept the reality that Christ points us to in this passage ... Death **happens**. ...Tragedies come to **all**. ... Sometimes unthinkable things befall the **most** godly and committed.

One lazy Sunday afternoon in Papua New Guinea, Wycliffe missionaries Walt and Vonnie Steinkraus were out enjoying nature... along with their daughters Kerry and Kathy... when suddenly... their world came to an abrupt end. ... At precisely 3:00 P.M. ... a half-mile-wide section of the mountain... on the opposite side of the river from their village... broke off and buried (just) them. ... They may never even have heard the sound. ... But in a world **full** of vacant hillsides... in a world **full** of evil reprobates,

who we can so easily see would repulse a Holy God... in a world with too few missionaries... the Steinkrauses disappeared under a mountain.

Was it because of their sin? ... No! ... Jesus settled the issue — not all tragedy or crisis is due to one's own sins.

The issue is not - who is the greater sinner... but the reality is... that all who reject Jesus as the Messiah... Savior... and Lord will perish as the Galileans did... because they simply would not change their minds about Christ. ... The fate of the Wycliffe Missionaries... as well as the fate of the people who died in Christ's day... is not a reminder of who is more righteous... but of the urgency of the gospel. ... If you reject Jesus Christ as your Messiah... no matter what justification you use... you will - in time - perish."

Jesus strengthened the impact of his point by citing another incident:

Luke 13:4-5

Many believe that the tower stood at the juncture of the south and east walls of Jerusalem and may have fallen during the construction of an aqueduct from the reservoir of Siloam to improve the water supply (the project Pilate was trying to raise money for... which caused the

discontent... expressed by the Galileans... who were murdered in the Temple.)

Some of Jesus' listeners could have argued that the Galileans had "asked for" such tragedy from Pilate due to their political expressions of discontent... and thus they made themselves vulnerable... .. But no one could say the same about the random deaths from the collapse of that very tower of Siloam.

Jesus wanted to be sure He got his point across. "*Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?... Or those eighteen (non-Galileans) who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them — do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?*" ... His answer was emphatic. "*I tell you - **no!**... I tell you - **no!***" ... Jesus could not have put it more forcefully. Those who died were run-of-the-mill sinners like the rest of us.

It is a cheap excuse that you are using to reject my sober warnings. Stop rejecting it.

These eighteen Jews had no time to repent... but you do have time because you and I are standing here, alive and breathing... so repent! ... Repent of

your views of Who I am. ... I performed all those miracles... and fulfilled all the prophecies. ... I am not casting out demons in the power of Satan. ... I am the Messiah of God... your long-awaited Savior and Lord. ... Are you just dismissing that... with some cheap justification...? ... Unless you come to terms with this reality... all of you from the least of sinners to the greatest will suffer the same fate as the eighteen Jews in Siloam. ... You will experience not only physical death... but also spiritual death resulting in being eternally separated from God.

We need to note that God **may** allow some atrocities and disasters to fall on certain people... or nations... as a temporal punishment for their particular wickedness. This was true for the people of Sodom (Genesis 18:16-19:29). And God makes clear through 2 Kings 17 that this was true of the nation of Israel... when they forsook the Lord and followed after idols. God had them taken into the Assyrian captivity. ... But not **all** atrocities and disasters are to be viewed as God's visitation... because of some special sins. It is not all to be viewed as the wrath of God. ...

The real issue, as the Scriptures point out... is that "...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23.) And in the passage before us today... The Lord directed His listener's attention to the reality that their sin

was that of rejecting Him as their Messiah. ... Our Lord wanted these people... as well as all of us... to come to terms with Who He was.

In His love and mercy... He may use some "tragic event" to shock or sober us into dealing with the spiritual realities. ... He is the Savior of the world.

Acts 4:12 (ESV)

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

When death comes... we will all perish (with all our cheap justifications... or not) ... unless we have repented.

Now "*Repentance*" is a much misunderstood word. ... Some people think "repentance is an emotional experience enjoyed by strange people... who wear their emotions on their sleeve... often putting themselves on public display... for all to see." This caricature involves well-trained men who lead their fellow Christians to weep and wail their way back to God. ... But there is **more** to repentance than manipulated or even genuine remorse.

Another well-traveled caricature identifies repentance with the ritual of penance... Penance begins with an obligatory "confession." Then this is followed by a very mechanical (perfunctory) carrying out of exercises... that are somehow seen as ordered by God. ... These exercises are viewed as a means of making restitution... or paying the price of our sin in some

sense... Such exercise may include reading the Bible every day... going to church more regularly... and giving tithes and offerings. ... These are all good things – except when they are done as a means for making restitution with God... paying Him back... so that disasters in life won't happen.

Neither of these caricatures are true repentance.

Repentance begins with a change of the mind... but not in the contemporary sense of changing one's mind - only to change it again. ... It is a change of mind that God is **right**... and **His** ways are best. This will always bring a change of actions... NOT to pay God back in any way... NOT to court His favor so nothing bad in life will ever happen... but simply because God is right... and His ways are always best. ... Your changed mind now sees that God really isn't holding back from you. ... You don't ever have to turn away from Him because there is something better that the world's ways is offering you.

Once we change our minds about God in this manner... our behavior is **automatically** different. ... This kind of thinking will always show itself.

Repentance is a real turnaround of one's life in respect to sinful conduct.

Repentance **must** happen in our souls... or we will perish in the judgment. If there has not been any change in your conduct... and if change of your conduct is not continual... most likely... you are not a Christian.

Repentance is the style of true Christianity! ... Repentance is **not** an option. That is the whole point that Jesus moves to next in our passage. ... There will always be recognizable fruit – evidence – when repentance has happened. In order to be very clear about this... Jesus told a brief parable. ... Fruit bearing **must** come from repentance.

Luke 13:6-9

Jesus' hearers are to examine themselves... through the metaphor of the fig tree. ...The *owner* is emblematic of God the Father... and the *caretaker* represents Christ. ... They are in complete agreement... the owner brings forth the reality and logic of righteousness... while the caretaker reasons from the reality and logic of mercy.

The wishes of the owner of the vineyard are perfectly reasonable. Three years earlier he had a fig tree planted on a sunny slope in the fertile ground of his vineyard. ... Excellent care was given to it by the caretaker. ... But after one... then two... then three years... there was no fruit! ...So the

owner's common sense commanded, "Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?" ... The useless tree was taking up precious space and exhausting the soil. It must go.

But the caretaker pleaded for one last opportunity for the tree. ... This is astonishing mercy and grace! ... Astonishing because it means that the Lord of the universe... Who transcends... sustains... and maintains the vast universe... gives us an extended period of grace... during which He painstakingly does what He can... to bring forth the fruit of repentance in our lives. Such mercy is awesome!

I would like to borrow the insights of a puritan preacher on this... who lived a life of strong religious persecution in England during the 1600's... John Bunyan. He understood in this parable... that the caretaker's promise to "dig around it" ... indicated that its root structure was earthbound. Bunyan suggested that the cause of its fruitless soul... is because the things of this world lie too close to its heart. The tree had its roots sucking up worldly influences into the life of the tree. Its roots were bound up by the world.

Then Bunyan has Jesus... the caretaker... address the owner — the Father: "Lord, I will loosen his roots; I will dig up this earth, I will lay his roots bare. My hand shall be upon him by sickness, by disappointments, by

cross providences. I will dig about him until he stands shaking and tottering, until he be ready to fall."

Bunyan goes on to explain:

The Lord often will dig around a believer...

"He smiteth one blow at his heart... another blow at his lusts... a third at his pleasures... a fourth at his comforts... another at his self-conceitedness...thus He diggeth about him. This is the way to take bad earth from the roots, and to loosen his roots from the earth. Barren fig-tree! ... see here the care... the love... the labor... and way... which the Lord Jesus... the Dresser of the vineyard... is fair to take with thee... if haply thou mayest be made fruitful.

Wow! The mercy and grace of God is absolutely astonishing! ... He will dig in order to free us! He will pry at our earthly attachments... because He is cruel...? No!... It is so we might become fruitful.

Yesterday afternoon I read a very timely quote in a magazine. The quote is from Annie Dillard... who said: "You don't have to stay outside in the darkness. But if you want to see the stars, you will find the darkness

necessary.” - God sometimes allows trials... to have us discover His highest good.

Has Jesus been digging around the roots of your earthbound soul lately?

Have there been unending hardships and trials that have left you reeling?

A very strong possibility... is that the object of these shakings... is to make you more fruitful. ... This is His astonishing mercy toward you!

The caretaker's other stated method is to fertilize your soul with the Word and the Spirit. ... He also wants to apply the life-giving nourishment of the gospel to your soul. ... He sends the Spirit to minister His Word.

Has the Word been coming to you? ... Has the Spirit been stirring your soul? ... Then the time has come, as Bunyan would say, to "suck in the Gospel and bear fruit"

The message of the parable is: *do not presume on the grace of God.* ... He is looking for fruit. If He does not find it... you may be cut down! You never were His.