

Heaven and hell: both real, to be preached, useful to hearers (Matt 25.46). Jesus gives stern warning, "repent or perish," but implies offer of mercy. It is worse when God ceases warning the doomed altogether.

God loses patience with some sinners and cuts them down.

Special relevance to that time/place. The "fig tree" = Old Israel. The end of that apostate nation was near. Providence was about to curse it irrevocably (Matt 21.19) and give the kingdom to others (Luke 20.16). This explains Luke 23.28, "Weep for yourselves, and for your children." This judgment—the final end of God's patience with Old Israel—fulfilled soon after they, by their wicked hands, crucified and slew Jesus (Acts 2.23). Jesus' prophecy the utter ruin of old Israel (Luke 19.43, 44 "is a plain prophecy of the final destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies, which came to pass within less than forty years after" [70 AD], M. Poole).

But Luke 13 remains Jesus' merciful warning to us for our escape from hell.

- I. Poignant Examples (1-5). Brought to Jesus' attention by others, perhaps attempting to answer the question of why bad things happen to some.
 - A. Two current events: Galilean slaughter, tower collapse. Both tragic! Differences: 1) a depraved act of slaughter by Pilate (later sentenced Jesus) vs. an "accident," an "act of God," 2) religious people offering "sacrifices" vs. random people, maybe passers-by. Similarities: 1) all died, powerless, unwilling, surprised, their last day in this life, prob. painfully, 2) all these souls went into the next life, either in dreadful punishment or with the Lord. Your main concern shouldn't be how you die but where you'll go (Heb 9.27).
 - B. Two wrong conclusions: the survivors were morally superior (2x). Jesus' rhetorical question exposes their true thought: those killed got what they deserved and the rest live because they deserve better. "No!," Jesus says forcefully. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" implies universal depravity in ourselves. "Sinners" trans. a Gk. adjective, lit., "the sinful" (trans. mine), a term that "pertains to behavior or activity that does not measure up to standard moral or religious expectations, . . . generally with a focus on wrongdoing as such" (BDAG). Some are more sinful than others, but this does not explain catastrophes. Nor are the least sinful in society good enough in themselves to avoid "perishing" just as the worst sinners did in these terrible calamities. The "gold standard" is idiomatic for the best of the best, but we tend to use "the garbage standard" to evaluate ourselves. "I'm not as bad as other people I know." Perhaps, but all are sinners (Rom 3.10, 23).
 - C. Two faithful warnings: repent or perish like they did (2x, emphatic). "Perish" means "be ruined," not in the same way, but ruined after all. The Lord is pointing to a "terminal fate with even greater consequences" (Bock), ultimately, the second death (Rev 21.8). However, the grammatical form in Greek "leaves open whether repentance will come" (Bock, in loc.). There is only one possibility and one condition to prevent you from perishing: repentance. This

implies gospel: salvation for sinners who repent. Repentance has always been the way to reconciliation with God (1 Kings 8:46-50; Ezekiel 18:30-32; Acts 20.21; Rom 2.4). "Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience" (WSC #87).

- II. Parabolic Explanation (6-9). Drives home the warning very powerfully!
 - A. One disappointing tree. The whole point of a fig tree is fruitfulness. For three years in a row, fruit was reasonably expected but not found (like Old Israel not fruitful through Jesus' ministry). The "lord" of the vineyard tells the gardener to "cut it down." "Why cumbereth it the ground" means not just that it is in the way, but that it wastes the potential productivity of that spot where it is, depleting the soil's resources with no return, wasting it. Zero ROI (return on investment)! The fruitless tree hasn't justified its existence. How convicting for sinners! God judges every year of your life as a waste of resources while you are still unconverted (Rom 3.12; Prov 15.8, 9; Heb 11.6). Unbelievers are utter failures in God's eyes! You are the fruit tree with no fruit (John 15.5, 6).
 - B. One determinative year: "let it alone this year also." The gardener intercedes for one more opportunity—a little more time, a little more cultivation, a little more fertilizer—to see what happens. But this is just a brief reprieve. The tree still must bear fruit or else.
 - C. One disastrous end: "cut it down" in case of final fruitlessness. A vigorous verb applied to individuals (Luke 3.7-9, "hewn down"; Rom 11.22, "cut off"). Metaph. sense of "make an end of, extirpate" (LSJ). "Do away with" (DBL Greek). Jonathan Edwards: "Perfect destruction must be understood in the same sense as we say perfect happiness. The perfect happiness of the creature is so much happiness as to fill the creature's capacity; as much as the nature of the creature, while it has no larger capacity, is capable of receiving. So that is perfect destruction when the creature has as much misery as the nature, with such a capacity, can receive. As the vessels of mercy are to be filled up to the brim with God's love and with happiness, so the vessels of wrath are to be filled up to the brim with God's wrath and with misery" (Works [YUP], 14.308).
- III. Pressing Exhortations
 - A. Consider how often sinners are still swept away in judgment! Murders, hurricanes, car crashes. At any age, you could be next.
 - B. Acknowledge your inclination to self-righteousness and apathy! Your survival is no evidence of moral superiority, but God's patience.
 - C. Seize your present opportunity! "Sinner! thou art so desperately set on sin, that I have no hope thou wilt ever turn from it of thyself. But listen! He who died on Calvary is exalted on high 'to give repentance and remission of sin.' Dost thou this morning feel that thou art a sinner? If so, ask of Christ to give thee repentance, for he can work repentance in thine heart by his Spirit, though thou canst not work it there thyself" (Spurgeon, "Turn or Burn," #106). Ω