

A biblical worldview includes the fact that God is sovereign over all things including the details of our lives. All the days ordained for us were written in His book before one of them came to be (Psalm 139:16<sup>i</sup>). He knows the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10<sup>ii</sup>). And yet Solomon tells us time and chance happen to us all (Ecclesiastes 9:11<sup>iii</sup>). When calamity strikes, we rightly assume that God has allowed it. But, like Job's counselors, we often wrongly assume the recipients of the trouble must have done something to deserve it (Job 11:6<sup>iv</sup>). Our thinking is something akin to the eastern concept of karma. If bad things happen to someone, we assume that they deserved it, unless of course it happens to us.

The text today teaches that the problem with that view is that we all deserve much worse. It is similar to the problem with the atheist question, "What about the innocent native?" There are no innocent natives. We are all sinners (Psalm 14:3<sup>v</sup>).

At the end of the message we'll hear a testimony from a Jewish man who found Jesus as Messiah. When a Christian told him Jesus could forgive him of his sins, he asked, "What sins?" The believer took him to the verse in which Jesus said to look on a woman to lust after her was to commit adultery in your heart (Matthew 5:28<sup>vi</sup>). The Jewish man said it was like someone punched him in the chest. He suddenly realized his thought life was open before God and he needed to be forgiven (Hebrews 4:13<sup>vii</sup>). That is what Jesus' teaching in these passages did for his audience and hopefully will do for us. Instead of judging others when we see calamity, we should look within our own hearts and be sure we are right with God. It should remind us that life is short and there is no guarantee of tomorrow (James 4:14<sup>viii</sup>).

*<sup>1</sup> There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.* Luke 13:1 After speaking on settling with your accuser before being brought before the judge, some people in the crowd feeling secure in their religious practices brought up an illustration of that very thing suddenly happening to some Jews. This tells us they understood that Jesus was implying that we should get right with God before we stand before Him in judgment.

They were sharing news about a group of seditious Galileans who apparently came for Passover. As they brought their lambs into the temple for sacrifice, Herod's soldiers suddenly attacked and killed them. Pilate mixed their blood with the blood of his pagan sacrifices. Those relaying the news thought that surely those men were the hypocrites Jesus was referring to who couldn't tell the signs of the times. Surely, they did not settle with their accuser before they died and stood before heaven's court. They must have deserved what they got (John 9:2<sup>ix</sup>). The crowd wanted Jesus to expound on people who had hidden sins that God judged for all to see and be warned. They thought that would make them feel even better about the fact that they were observant Jews who were listening to Jesus. Our sinful nature is always applying the Word to others, while we should be searching our own hearts.

*<sup>2</sup> And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way?" <sup>3</sup> No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.* Luke 13:2,3 Jesus doesn't beat around the bush or stroke their egos. He let them have the truth in a way they could not escape from hearing it. Those Galileans were no worse sinners than they. Calamity can happen to anyone at

any time. It doesn't just happen to the wicked. Time and chance happen to all. Repent, for we will all stand before God. Jesus was telling the crowd that it could have been any of them. Solomon elaborated on time and chance happening to us all in Ecclesiastes 9:12 *<sup>12</sup> For man does not know his time. Like fish that are taken in an evil net, and like birds that are caught in a snare, so the children of man are snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them.* Jesus was essentially saying the same thing.

Without repentance our eternal fate would be severely judged. The crowd was making the same mistake Job's "comforters" made. "You must have done something dreadfully wrong to suffer like you are (Job 4:7-9<sup>x</sup>). Tragedy doesn't happen to the innocent." The problem in their reasoning is that no one is innocent. God allows this fallen world to affect us. He allows us to suffer, for it mature us (Romans 5:3-5<sup>xi</sup>).

*<sup>4</sup> Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.*" Luke 13:4,5 Jesus gave them another illustration to help them get the point that tragedy happens to anyone. The tower at Siloam in Jerusalem fell on eighteen men killing them. They were not political rebels like the Galileans, just random sinners like everyone else. The common misunderstanding was that those men must have done something evil and their death was judgment from God. Jesus clearly told them that idea was a misconception (John 9:2,3<sup>xii</sup>). They were no worse offenders than anyone else in Jerusalem (Romans 3:23<sup>xiii</sup>). And then for emphasis He repeated His message. *"Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."*

He isn't saying some calamity will happen to them. He is warning them of the need of repentance before we appear before the Judge. Just following Jesus around and living the Jewish laws as best as possible wasn't going to save them. Listening to His message was not enough to save them. Attending church on Sundays isn't enough to save us. Even reading our Bible every day won't save us. **We need to repent of the evil that is in our hearts and have a new mindset about what life is all about.** We need the forgiveness that was provided by the Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Accepting that grace should cause us to earnestly live in a way that is pleasing to Him (Colossians 1:10<sup>xiv</sup>). Unless we repent, we will perish. Notice that Jesus said, "You will *all* perish." I wonder if He was referring to the first Jewish revolt and its resulting devastation. Was He speaking of the nation as the next parable seems to indicate?

*<sup>6</sup> And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none.* Luke 13:6 In chapter 8 Jesus told the parable of the seeds that were sown on the various types of soil. The point of that parable was to be careful how we hear and heed the Word of God (Luke 8:8<sup>xv</sup>). This chapter started with the need for all people to repent. If our hearts are not broken up to receive the seed of God's Word, we will not bear fruit.

In the fig tree parable, the land owner had a fig tree planted in his vineyard. A newly planted fig tree will take three years before it is established enough to produce figs. Time had come for it to produce, but there were no figs.

*<sup>7</sup> And he said to the vinedresser, 'Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?'* Luke 13:7 The owner told his gardener to cut it down. It was wasting valuable space on his land. Garden plots around Jerusalem are precious. The limestone formations are terraced, and the soil is built up over generations to make it possible to produce wheat,

grapes, olives, or figs. The small plots had to produce so many calories of food for the owner. Space could not be wasted on ornamentals.

There is a spiritual analogy in this picture that I would like us all to carefully consider. Just as the land owner has an allotted space to produce fruit, so we have an allotted timespan that is our life (Psalm 90:10<sup>xvi</sup>). How many of our plants, by that I mean the things upon which we spend our time and energy, are merely ornamentals that are not related to producing the fruit that our Master is seeking? **Are there things in our lives that merely take up our time and produce nothing of spiritual substance?** I'm not suggesting that we become so austere that we don't enjoy life and God's many blessings (1 Timothy 6:17<sup>xvii</sup>), but that some of our time is wasted on things that are just taking up the valuable space that we call time? I would suggest that we ask the Holy Spirit to show us the ornamentals that might need to be cut down so that something which bears fruit can be planted (Hebrews 12:1<sup>xviii</sup>).

*<sup>8</sup> And he answered him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. <sup>9</sup> Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'*" Luke 13:8,9 The gardener suggested that the owner give the tree one more year. The gardener planned to cultivate the soil around it and fertilize it. If after one more year there was no fruit, then he would cut it down.

The fig tree symbolizes Israel. We can see that to be the case in Jeremiah 24:5-8<sup>xix</sup> and Hosea 9:10<sup>xx</sup>. Jesus used it to represent Israel in another passage as well (Mark 11:13,14<sup>xxi</sup>). It was planted in God's vineyard. After God's many years of patience it should have finally born fruit, but there was none. Jesus can be seen as the gardener who asks the Father to allow Him to give it extra care and a little more time. Figs do well in rocky soil and rarely need fertilizer. If it still did not produce, it would be cut down. It was the warning in the previous verses, *"Unless you repent you will all likewise perish."*

And God did just that. After the crucifixion and the outpouring of the Spirit, God gave the nation another 40 years of care and grace. We would expect that after the crucifixion He would just wipe the rebels out. Yet, even then the Gospel went to the Jew first (Romans 1:16<sup>xxii</sup>). How merciful and patient! But they did just what their fathers had done (Acts 7:51<sup>xxiii</sup>). Even with the fertilizer of miraculous signs and the witness of the Apostles, they persecuted Christians, called Jesus a bastard, and declared the Gospel was blasphemy. Testimony after testimony of healing and grace along with miraculous signs in the temple, and still they turned to false messiahs. That resulted in the devastation of the first and second Jewish revolts, the destruction of the temple and the loss of tens of thousands of Jewish lives. No wonder Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37,38<sup>xxiv</sup>)

Certainly, it is the same with our individual lives (Micah 7:1<sup>xxv</sup>). The Spirit of God moves on us through circumstances and the influence of believers. We carry on as usual making excuses for our behavior and even thinking we are good enough for God. Then Jesus gives us extra grace and care which may come in the form of a blow to the things of the earth that we hold so dear. This is grace beyond anything we deserve. We take His last-ditch efforts of illness or misfortune as cruelty, when they are meant to help us let go of our earthly attachments so that we might be fruitful and truly blessed. He may even bring someone to our deathbed to invite us to place our faith in Jesus. Even then some will go into eternity refusing to bow their knees.

We are all headed to the grave. The things of this world we chase so vigorously, lust, love of wealth, pleasure, and titles will all be left behind. That is certain. Those who are wise, humble, and have an ear to hear and a receptive heart will lay up their treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21<sup>xxvi</sup>). Instead of leaving all they labored for behind, they will go to what they lived for: the glorious presence of our loving Savior (Matthew 24:31<sup>xxvii</sup>). **Repentance is that turning point moving us from a focus on temporary vanity to eternal significance and value.** It turns us from self to our Creator. God is looking for fruit, which is His likeness in our hearts.

What does He see in your heart? His patience has limits. The gardener's request for one more year for that fig tree means there is a limit. Before that time is up – repent and bear fruit. Turn from selfishness to love, from darkness to light (Psalm 18:28<sup>xxviii</sup>), from a fading lie that can never fulfill, to the truth that will set you free and fill your heart with overflowing love (John 8:32<sup>xxix</sup>; 4:14<sup>xxx</sup>; Romans 5:5<sup>xxxi</sup>).

I'm going to conclude the message with a video of a very intelligent Jewish man who heard what Jesus was saying in our passage for today. The story of his mother reiterates what Jesus was saying in the parable of the fig tree. Consider that it does not come from a man who was raised as a Christian, but rather as a devout Jew.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JVGMa9yuqnM>

I've experienced a person telling me that if I had a better education I wouldn't believe in the Bible. Well, I wonder if they have a mind like James Tours'? **You can't be too intelligent to believe. You can't be too old to believe. But we can be too hardhearted** to believe. When we are too hardhearted. Jesus pleads with the Father for a little more time to dig up our soil and fertilize us with His love and grace. But if there is no fruit after all His gracious care, we will be uprooted. Jesus' words are just as applicable to each of us and our nation as well. *“Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”* When the Jews at Pentecost heard Peter tell them they killed the Messiah they asked what they should do. Peter told them, <sup>38</sup> *And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”* Acts 2:38 That message is for everyone who is willing to hear this message of warning from Jesus. Do you have ears to hear?

## Questions

- 1 What was the wrong assumption of those who told of the tragedy of the Galileans?
- 2 Why did Jesus respond as He did?
- 3 Who does God allow to be struck by tragedy?
- 4 What was the event that Jesus referred to? Who was guilty?
- 5 What is our urgent need?
- 6 What did the parable of the fig tree teach?
- 7 What may have the extra care been symbolic of?
- 8 What is the fruit of repentance?
- 9 What spoke to you in the testimony of James Tour?
- 10 Have you repented of your sinful nature and received Jesus as Savior and Lord?

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<sup>i</sup> **Psalm 139:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

<sup>ii</sup> **Isaiah 46:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,'

<sup>iii</sup> **Ecclesiastes 9:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all.

<sup>iv</sup> **Job 11:5-6 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> But oh, that God would speak and open his lips to you, <sup>6</sup> and that he would tell you the secrets of wisdom! For he is manifold in understanding. Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves.

<sup>v</sup> **Psalm 14:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

<sup>vi</sup> **Matthew 5:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

<sup>vii</sup> **Hebrews 4:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

<sup>viii</sup> **James 4:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

<sup>ix</sup> **John 9:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

<sup>x</sup> **Job 4:7-9 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> "Remember: who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off? <sup>8</sup> As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same. <sup>9</sup> By the breath of God they perish, and by the blast of his anger they are consumed.

<sup>xi</sup> **Romans 5:3-5 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup> and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup> and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

<sup>xii</sup> **John 9:2-3 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

<sup>3</sup> Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.

<sup>xiii</sup> **Romans 3:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

<sup>xiv</sup> **Colossians 1:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

<sup>xv</sup> **Luke 8:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold." As he said these things, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

<sup>xvi</sup> **Psalm 90:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.

<sup>xvii</sup> **1 Timothy 6:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

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xviii **Hebrews 12:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

xix **Jeremiah 24:5-8 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Like these good figs, so I will regard as good the exiles from Judah, whom I have sent away from this place to the land of the Chaldeans.

<sup>6</sup> I will set my eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up, and not tear them down; I will plant them, and not pluck them up.

<sup>7</sup> I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD, and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart.

<sup>8</sup> "But thus says the LORD: Like the bad figs that are so bad they cannot be eaten, so will I treat Zedekiah the king of Judah, his officials, the remnant of Jerusalem who remain in this land, and those who dwell in the land of Egypt.

xx **Hosea 9:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. Like the first fruit on the fig tree in its first season, I saw your fathers. But they came to Baal-peor and consecrated themselves to the thing of shame, and became detestable like the thing they loved.

xxi **Mark 11:13-14 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs.

<sup>14</sup> And he said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it.

xxii **Romans 1:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

xxiii **Acts 7:51 (ESV)**

<sup>51</sup> "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.

xxiv **Matthew 23:37-38 (ESV)**

<sup>37</sup> "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! <sup>38</sup> See, your house is left to you desolate.

xxv **Micah 7:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Woe is me! For I have become as when the summer fruit has been gathered, as when the grapes have been gleaned: there is no cluster to eat, no first-ripe fig that my soul desires.

xxvi **Matthew 6:19-21 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, <sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

xxvii **Matthew 24:31 (ESV)**

<sup>31</sup> And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

xxviii **Psalms 18:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> For it is you who light my lamp; the LORD my God lightens my darkness.

xxix **John 8:32 (ESV)**

<sup>32</sup> and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

xxx **John 4:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

xxxi **Romans 5:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.