

Luke Chapter 13 v 1 - 9

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[0 : 00] Good morning everyone, good to be with you again. Well we're here to worship God aren't we?

So it's good to get our hearts in the right place and remember who it is we're worshipping. So I'm just going to read a few verses from Psalm chapter 99. The Lord reigns, let the nations tremble. He sits enthroned between the cherubim. Let the earth shake, great is the Lord in Zion. He is exalted over all the nations.

Let them praise your great and awesome name. He is holy. The king is mighty, he loves justice. You have established equity. In Jacob you have done what is right and just.

Exalt the Lord our God and worship at his footstool. He is holy. Moses and Aaron were among his priests. Samuel was among those who called on his name. They called on the Lord and he answered them.

[1 : 08] He spoke to them from the pillar of cloud. They kept his statutes and the decrees he gave them. Lord our God, you answered them. You were to Israel a forgiving God. Though you punish their misdeeds, exalt the Lord our God and worship at his holy mountain.

For the Lord our God is holy. And today we're not the nation of Israel, are we? But we're God's people, we're God's church. And we've come in a sense to a holy mountain to worship God. We've come to meet with God. And the refrain through this chapter is that God is holy. And so it's good to remember as we come to worship God, we're to come with reverence and fear and respect. And also we're to remember that he's a God of love. It says in verse 8 that you are a forgiving God to Israel. And we come because we've been forgiven, don't we?

So we hold those two things in our minds. That God loves us and he forgives us and he wants to speak to us. But he's a holy God. So it's good just to get our hearts in the right place.

[2 : 16] We're going to start by singing. Arise my soul, arise. Shake off your guilty fears. The bleeding sacrifice on my behalf appears. Before the throne my surety stands.

My name is written on his hands. Shall we sing? I'll just commit this service to God in prayer. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this privilege again to draw before your throne. To come together as a body and to worship you. We thank you for the freedom we have to do that this morning.

We thank you for the opportunity we have to do that. We thank you for the grace that you've given each one of us. We thank you that as we've just sung, we have an intercessor, a great high priest, Jesus.

Who's taken our sin away. And because of that sacrifice we come before you and we worship you. And we come before you as children. And we come before you saying, Abba Father.

[3 : 28] We thank you for this privilege. We thank you that you see us as children. And we pray that you'd take our eyes away from the things of life, the things of the world. And that you'd draw us again to you.

You'd show us again who you are. We pray especially for Peter this morning who's not feeling too well. And we just pray that you'd give him strength as he delivers the message this morning. We pray that you'd be with him.

And we pray that you'd speak to us and nourish us this morning we pray. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Well, we'll do the reading now.

So, the reading will be from Luke chapter 13, page number 1046 in your Bibles. And we'll start the reading actually in the previous chapter.

Chapter 12 verse 54. So Luke 12 verse 54.

[4 : 34] He said to the crowd, When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, It's going to rain.

And it does. And when the south wind blows, you say, It's going to be hot. And it is. Hypocrites. You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky.

How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time? Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right? As you are going with your adversary to the magistrate, try hard to be reconciled on the way.

Or your adversary may drag you off with the judge. And the judge turn you over to the officer. And the officer throw you into prison. I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny. Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mixed with the sacrifices. Jesus answered, Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?

[5 : 39] I tell you, no. But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those 18 who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them, do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?

I tell you, no. But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Then he told this parable. A man had a fig tree growing 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 it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine.

If not, then cut it down. May God bless his word to us. Let's put it down. And turn, if you would, back to Luke and chapter 13.

[6 : 46] Luke and chapter 13, those first eight verses. Don't you hate it when people really milk it when they're ill, don't they? They just milk it and milk it together, as much sympathy as they possibly can.

Apologies for my unfriendliness, not shaking hands or speaking to you, and I won't be at the end of the service either. I've had this cold. Well, it's man flu, of course. Ladies, you just call it a sniffle, but it's man flu.

And it's been giving me a lot of jip for the last few days. So apologies for not being very friendly. So I want to read just those verses again from Luke and chapter 13.

The first eight verses, page 1046. Now there was some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.

Jesus answered, do you think these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered in this way? I tell you, no.

[7 : 47] But unless you repent, you too will perish. Or those 18 who died when the Tower of Siloam fell on them, do you think that they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?

I tell you, no. But unless you repent, you too will all perish. He told this parable. Man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any.

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. I 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 round it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine. If not, then cut it down.

Let's pray together. Lord, we come to your word, the word of our Lord Jesus Christ, that word of him who is the truth and who speaks the truth.

[8 : 52] And we pray, O Lord, that you would give us ears to hear your words of truth, that we would not reject them or count them false or disregard them or ignore them, but that rather we would hear them, believe them, and act upon them, for we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. The pastor by the name of John Marshall, he was pastor of a church in Alexandra Road in Hemel Hempstead for nearly 50 years.

And I listened to a sermon of his some years ago when he was speaking at a conference, a conference of other ministers. And at that conference during his sermon, he confessed to a peculiar habit that he had formed as a young man.

Every day he would learn a new word. And he was a very clever man. He'd been to Oxford. And this was his pattern. Every day he'd learn a new word.

And then he went on to tell those who were present. One of the favorite new words that he'd learned during his lifetime. I can't remember what it was, of course. I forgot her. Most of us have an active vocabulary of about 20,000 words.

[10:06] Those are words that we use regularly. We've got another 40,000 words in what's called our passive vocabulary. Those are words that we know and know most of the meanings of, but we rarely use them.

The total number of English words in current use is over 171,000 words, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, with another 47,000 obsolete words which are no longer used.

Now, Jesus uses a word here in chapter 13 which is not exactly obsolete, but it certainly is not active in our present society.

It's the word repent. In verse 3, I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you too will all perish. Repeats the same phrase in verse 5.

I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you too will all perish. It's a word that Jesus had used earlier in his ministry. In fact, it was one of the very first things he preached when he began his ministry probably nearly three years before this time.

[11:15] In Mark and chapter 1, we're told that Jesus said this, the time has come, the kingdom of God is near, repent and believe the good news.

So why does he here use this word repent again? And again, why does he use it twice to impress upon us the importance of it? Clearly, according to Jesus, it's absolutely vital that his hearers, and ultimately us who read this, repent, or you too will perish.

Now, the reason I asked Joel to read the end part of chapter 12 is because these verses at the beginning of Luke chapter 8 are in one sense the conclusion or Jesus' rounding up words, teaching for all that he's been teaching throughout chapter 12.

Remember, when we went through 12, we were seeing how Jesus was warning us and talking to us about heaven and riches and ultimately his coming again, preparing and being prepared for his return.

And those verses at the end of chapter 12 speak very much about knowing the time, recognizing the time, recognizing what time that they were living in and what time we are living in, and the importance of getting things sorted before time runs out.

[12:40] So Jesus speaks of repent. Well, the circumstances, how he talks about it, are there as well for us, aren't there? There's some people in the crowd. There were many thousands who followed Jesus, we know, and some of them came up to Jesus with a bit of gossip, with a bit of tittle-tattle maybe.

And they told Jesus about these Galileans. Remember, Galilee was the northern part of the country. So in one sense you could say, he was telling them about some Yorkshiremen who had been killed by Pilate.

Well, they weren't Yorkshiremen, they were Galileans. They had been killed by Pilate. He'd mingled their blood with their sacrifices. We don't know much about this apart from what Luke tells us here. It's one of those pieces of information that he had gleaned that the others hadn't. But we do know this, that Pilate was a very, very harsh and harsh, hard governor of the country.

Whenever there was unrest, whenever there was any scent or smell of rebellion, he would come down on them with a ton of bricks and put people to death, send the soldiers in, send the troops in.

[13:45] And he was a violent ruler in that sense. So this isn't out of keeping with his character and what we know about him. Now, again, why these people came and told Jesus this news or when this had happened, we're not really sure.

But it gave Jesus an opportunity, an opportunity to speak about the importance of repentance. And he does so as he teaches us why we must repent.

The first thing he tells us why we must repent is this. God's judgment is not part of our present day suffering.

God's judgment is not part of our present day suffering. Do you notice here that they come and Jesus' response to their news is this. Do you think that the Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this way?

There is a thought in Jesus' day, it even has crept into our own day, this sort of belief that those who suffer are getting what they deserve. Later on in John's Gospel in chapter 9, Jesus and his disciples meet a man who was born blind.

[14:59] He was about 40 years old. He had been blind. And his disciples asked Jesus a very strange question. They asked him, Rabbi, who sinned? He said, this man or his parents that he was born blind.

Amongst the Jews at that time, it was believed that the reason people were sick, the reason people were disabled, the reason people might have died while they were still relatively young was all because they were sinful people and God was judging them and punishing them for their sin. But even today, something of that thought permeates, doesn't it? Perhaps we hear about a criminal or somebody who is a wicked person and they die a violent death and there's something within us or even we may say ourselves, we hear someone say, they've got what they deserve. There's that sense, isn't it? Of universal, we might say, judgment. Most people wouldn't attribute that to God as the Jews did. Some people would say, well, that's karma. Some sort of universal justice.

The idea that a person dies because they are more wicked than others. Now it's true that the Galileans who died here in this event did die because of sin, because of wickedness and evil, but not their own, the wickedness and evil of Pilate, who we're told mixed their blood with their sacrifices.

[16:27] A gory picture is painted for us. The wickedness of another person brought about the suffering and the death of these people. Why is it that we question God as to the suffering in this world as if he's failed in his duty?

When in fact the large majority of suffering and heartache and death and sorrow is caused by one person against another. It's humanity. Sinning against humanity.

Sinning against humanity. Sinning against humanity. And yet immediately men and women sift their fingers up and point at God. Is it because we would rather blame God and point the finger at him than admit to any sin in ourselves that we have any part to blame in it?

The problem is that we've been suckered into believing this modern notion, and it is a modern notion which is completely false. Everyone has some good in them.

But that has blinded us to the truth. The reality that all human beings, every single one, is sin-filled and has a sinful nature which is revealed in their actions and lives.

[17:48] These people died because of the wicked actions of others. Not primarily or firstly because they were wicked and sinful people.

That's what Jesus is saying. No, they weren't the worst Galileans. They didn't die by Pilate's hand because they were really awful, terrible people and they just got what they deserve from God.

No, not at all. And since the reality is that we are all sinners and all of us have a sinful heart which reveals itself in the way we behave, therefore, what we understand from what Jesus says next is this.

All our present suffering is due to sin in this world. Jesus talks about another incident. They tell him about one.

He reminds them of another one. A time when there was 18 people who were killed when a tower, the Tower of Siloam, we know about the Pool of Siloam. It's one of the places where Jesus healed people in Jerusalem.

[18:52] Clearly, there must have been some sort of a tower, a building there which had, over the years, eroded or whatever. It collapsed and fell upon these people and killed them. And they were tragically lost their lives.

We, again, know very little about it apart from what Luke records here. But it's a very different situation. It's a different situation to the bloody murder of the Galileans.

This was what we might call an accident, a tragic accident that's happened. But it raises a very similar question to the first event. Did these people die because God judged them more wicked than the rest of the people who survived?

Yeah? All those 18 who died when the Tower of Siloam fell on them, do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? Tragic accidents happen all the time.

But are they God's way of punishing people in this world who are more wicked than the rest of us? Absolutely not, says Jesus. Absolutely not. No one dies in an accident.

[19 : 59] No one gets a fatal illness. No one has a heart attack because of God's judgment against their personal sin. Or because they are worse than other people who don't get those diseases or illnesses or accidents.

Accidents, illnesses, whether falling towers or volcanic eruptions, all happen because the world we live in is a sinful world.

A broken world. A damaged world. The Bible makes it very clear that when God created this world he made everything good. When he created this world it was a perfect world.

There was no illness. There was no death. There was no sickness. There were no accidents.

Because there was no sin in the world. No wickedness in the world. No brokenness or pollution in the world.

But when Adam and Eve purposefully chose to reject God and his commandments they opened the door to sin. They welcomed sin in.

[21 : 03] And when sin comes in it has only one effect. To bring death and all that's associated with it. Here's how the Apostle Paul describes what happened way back in Genesis in chapter 3.

He says, Just as sin entered the world through one man that's Adam and death through sin and in this way death came to all people.

Because all became sinners. Adam's sin spread like a virus throughout every one of his descendants but through every part of the created universe as well.

Because Adam was the gatekeeper the guardian as it were of all of God's creation appointed by God to that position. And so when he allowed in this virus of sin it affected every part of the world.

Accidents happen not because an individual person's sin brings it upon themselves but because we live in a world of universal brokenness.

[22 : 19] A world where sin has touched and laid its clammy cold deathly fingers upon everything. Every creature every plant every rock every star.

And that's why Jesus calls us all to repent. Because we are all sinners.

We are all sinners. And every sin must suffer. It happens that way.

Every sin must bring about suffering. And so Jesus warns his hearers just as there's sinfulness in the human heart and there's sin in the whole of creation.

So the reality is this unless you repent you all will perish. Without genuine repentance his hearers would perish.

[23 : 24] Not just that they will die either by the hand of an evil person or wickedness or by an accident or by just old age or whatever it may be but all will perish and the word perish of course is much more than die isn't it?

The word perish is the Bible's shorthand for something beyond death something worse than death something which is everlasting suffering. We know that very famous verse of John 3 16 for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Perish and eternal life are the opposites. That's one or two destinations as it were that we must end up in. One or two rewards that we shall have at the end of this life.

Either we will perish which is everlastingly perish or we shall have everlasting life. We call them hell and heaven or rather God does.

But why will everyone perish if they do not repent? Why will the people of Jesus' day perish if they did not repent? Why will you and I perish if we do not repent?

[24 : 44] Well Jesus follows up those two events with a parable doesn't he in verse 6 and it's connected it's not disconnected it's meant for us to understand that Jesus goes straight in to explain this.

He told this parable a man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard. In the Old Testament from time to time God would speak of the Jewish nation the Jewish people the sons and daughters of Abraham as being like either a vine or a fig tree.

a fig tree that God expected to bear fruit. In other words a people that were blessed of God and there was to be an expression of their faith there was to be an out working of that faith and that blessing from God fruit.

And the fruit that God expected was a fruit of love obedience faithfulness holiness justice and so on. But just like this man who went to his fig tree and went looking for fruit and didn't find any so it was again and again as you read through the Old Testament that God's people had received so many

blessings a new land freedom from slavery the enjoyment of God's presence again and again when God came to them as it were there was no fruit in their lives there was no fruit of love no fruit of obedience no fruit of holiness instead rather when God looked to his people for fruit he found only rotten fruit Jeremiah is told this by the Lord in Jeremiah 24 like bad figs which are so bad they cannot be eaten says the Lord the people didn't produce love for God they turned away and worshipped false gods they didn't have justice in the way they dealt with one another they used one another and abused one another they didn't have holiness they were sinful and wicked and their hearts were far from the Lord again and again

God would send them a king or a judge or someone to turn them back things would be better for a while but again they would sin however in spite of their sins in spite of their constant failure to love God and to do his will in spite of their failure to bear this fruit God was wonderfully patient with the people just as it were as the man is with his tree for three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any God gave them every opportunity to produce good fruit he sent them his prophets he gave them his word he showed them his kindness he delivered them from their enemies and there came a point and this is what Jesus has come to tell this nation come to tell the people of Israel at this time he's come to say look God has been patient but now God has come to this time this point where now things have to change or else

[27 : 49] I've come to this tree for fig for three years and haven't found any fruit cut it down now's the time for it to be chopped now's the time for it to finish now's the time for it to end why should it use up the soil and the gardener here sir the man who cares for the vineyard cares for the tree asks for just a little more time asks for one last chance for the fig tree that he'll dig around it those of you who are horticulturally minded will understand dig around it and put fertilizer in it care for it do everything he can possible to give it a last chance to bear fruit and in one sense exactly this is what Jesus is saying what he's been saying earlier when he says to him how is it you don't understand interpret the present time he is the gardener Jesus is the one that has come and for this last opportunity come to reveal the love of God come to tell the people of Israel the Jews that there is a God whom they they must bring fruit to they must turn to they must live for they must follow they must act upon the blessings

Jesus' ministry was just like the fertilizer spread around the tree good things the miracles he did the teaching he gave all to show the people that God longed to spare them God longed to restore them God longed to be reconciled to them but we know what happens don't we we know that Jesus came to his own came to the people of God came to them with the love of God came to them with the truth of God and how did they react to him ultimately they rejected him and they crucified him and they murdered him ultimately they he suffered at the hands of those he came to save and sadly as we know our history the acts that God had promised would cut them down did cut them down within just a generation the Roman army came and destroyed all Jerusalem and the temple and all the people were scattered and that country and that people of

God were never a people of God ever again they lost all the blessings that God promised and gave them for generations and they perished what about you and me what fruit has God received from your life or mine has he received from you obedience to his laws and commandments no we've sinned against him just as we reminded by Caleb we've lied we've stolen we've coveted we've not honoured his name we've not had him as the one true God of our lives we've had other gods ourselves mainly and the list could go on what fruit has God has received your love for the creation for the life he's given you day by day for the good gifts that you enjoy on a sunny day like today is it the first thought of your heart day by day say

Lord I love you thank you so much for the gifts you've given me I do love you for loving me and caring for me and providing for me no of course we haven't we've got up and we've just taken for granted all the gifts that God has given us we've just lived our lives and taken the good things he's given and we've just enjoyed them with never a moment sort of thankfulness have we given him a life of righteousness of justice in other people of this world have we gone out of our way to sacrifice and to suffer for them have we given them or have we just simply taken and taken oh yes of course there'll be a few coppers that'll go in the offering every now and then or for the charity that's the latest one on the TV but we're not giving it to God we're not acting in justice we're acting out of guilt and hasn't God been patient with you and me hasn't he brought you here today this morning to once more hear his voice calling you to repent and be saved to repent and escape you see you must you must repent or you will perish sin must produce suffering and death it does in this life but it

will in eternity too and when

Jesus Christ came into this world he suffered and he died for sin but not for his own sin not because he was a terrible person in fact as we've been already reminded he was the only sinless man who ever lived no Jesus came and suffered and died for your sin in 1 Peter in chapter 3 Peter writes for Christ also suffered once for sins but he goes on to say not for his sin rather the righteous for the unrighteous the good for the bad the law keeper for the law breaker the pleasing of God to the displeasing of God the obedient for the disobedient the sinless for the sinful he suffered and died for the sin of everyone who will repent and put their faith in him because it goes on to say Christ also suffered once for sins the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to

[33 : 36] God God you see your sin must bring about suffering either it's the suffering that Jesus took himself for you or the suffering that you will experience yourself when you perish that's why Jesus cries out twice repent or you will all perish repent or you too will all perish how is it that you're still alive today how is it that you haven't died that you haven't suffered and tasted of death and already passed into that place where there is only perishing why is it that members of your own family have died and you're alive why is it that people in your own street have died but you're still alive why is it people younger than you have died but you're still alive isn't that the very evidence to you to show that

God is gracious and patient with you you could have died like the people of Salome when the wall fell on them you and his patience is for one purpose for one reason that you might be saved Peter writes to the Christians and he says God is patient with you not wanting anyone to perish but for everyone to come to repentance you are only alive today because of the patience and the love and the goodness of God who longs and calls and commands that you repent so that you might be saved unless you repent Jesus says you too will suffer for your sin in eternity what is repentance it's to turn to turn away from that path that you have chosen for yourself is to turn around 180 degrees from the direction in which you are going you see the direction in which you and

I are going unless we repent is the way and the road that leads to destruction Jesus warned about this in Matthew 7 and other places he said wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction and many enter it yes there may be lots and lots of people you know who going their own way going away without God going away without repentance many people who are just doing their own thing and you think well everybody else is doing it that's fine I'll just continue no you can't just because it's the popular way doesn't mean it's the right way to repent is to turn around and recognize the way that you have lived your life thus far before God is completely wrong and if you continue in that way there can only be one conclusion one goal one final destination and that is eternal death to perish to suffer for your sin see the reason

I can say that as Jesus did that those who suffer accident those who die in war those who have died before us did not suffer the judgment of God in those things is because of this in this world God has kept back his judgment and reserved it for a day of judgment when every single human being who has ever lived will answer for their sin will answer for their fruitless lives and on that day unless you have repented already and put your faith in Jesus who has suffered for you and in your place died and born all the horror of hell then you yourself must perish you must take the blame you must bear the guilt you must suffer repent says

Jesus repent or you too will perish dear friends every single person is like a man running towards a cliff edge unaware that there is only death a few steps away some of us are closer to that cliff edge than others some of us may think that we've got a long way to go before we reach there but we just do not know you do not know but you know this you've got a chance now to turn you've got a chance now to stop and to turn around and go in the opposite direction now is the time of God's salvation now is the time of his mercy now is the time to repent who in their right mind would continue going down a way of destruction a way to eternal hell when they had the chance and the opportunity to turn and here it is you cannot and

[39 : 37] I cannot guarantee to you dear friends that beyond this moment in time you will have another opportunity or more time you have got to you must for your soul sake for your eternity sake for your own sorrow sake repent and the wonderful thing is this the wonderful grace is this that God has been longing for you to do that he will not reject you he will not turn you away he will not discard you he's given you time up till now and you can never say dear friends I never knew I didn't have the time I didn't realize that it was too late let's pray together you are a most amazing

God who is so loving and patient and kind and just we thank you that our Lord Jesus Christ out of love for the people he spoke to called them to repent because the time was short we thank you oh Lord that you are the God who has withheld your judgment against our sin at any moment Lord you could rightfully justly destroy us and put us to death Lord because we have all sinned we've all broken your commandments we all deserve your just judgment but Lord you haven't because such is your great love that you have given us time to hear the message to hear the call to hear your voice and now we must act upon it we must repent for if we do we will perish oh Lord I pray that even this morning that those here who are on that path to destruction that you would awaken them shake them do whatever you need to do to them that they might see that unless they repent they too will perish and turn them round to yourself that they might receive the embrace of your forgiveness because

Jesus suffered for them amen Jesus said come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls amen