

Repent or Perish

Luke 13:1-5

1 There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2 And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? 3 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. 4 Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

We have just read how a news story of the day had been relayed to the Lord Jesus Christ. It told of a horrendous act that one would have wondered, “Why would God allow it to happen?” That is how Jesus addressed the news.

When we hear of disasters falling upon people, or an area, we will naturally wonder if God’s hand wasn’t at work. Was He pouring out wrath upon the area, or people, because they were more criminal than their neighbors who didn’t suffer such calamities?

I have heard this passage, in Luke, enlisted to immediately dismiss any thoughts that such

tragedies happen because of God’s wrath. Is such a usage a correct interpretation of what Jesus was talking about here? In some cases, that would be an accurate understanding, but certainly not in all.

Let’s start by paying attention to the actual examples Jesus listed. There were two:

1. The Galilaeans who were killed and had their blood mixed with their sacrifices (adding insult to injury).
2. Eighteen people who were the victims of a tragic structural collapse.

We should note that Jesus specifically itemizes the cases in point. He does not give a broad, all encompassing, example. He knew the details of both news stories. Jesus could do something we generally cannot do. He could knowingly tell His listeners that those two incidents were more random tragedies, not direct acts of the wrath of God.

We should also note that neither stories were “natural disasters”. In our society we hear tales of “Mother Nature”. In blaming natural disasters on Mother Nature, the focus of the possibility of God the Father’s wrath can be more easily skirted. I have heard this passage in Luke enlisted to help skirt consideration that such acts of nature are not acts of God’s wrath. That is not what Jesus is saying. Neither does this passage actually list ANY destructions of nature. After all, we know that Korah, Dathan and Abiram were swallowed by the earth opening as a direct act of God’s wrath.

What Jesus did tell us, through these news stories, was that all men are appointed to destruction. Not all will die a tragic death, but all will perish.

Consider the apple. If you have a bag of apples and one has a bad bruise, that bruise will quickly destroy the whole apple. If that apple is touching other apples, those in contact will quickly go bad. The apple that is sitting alone may stay fresh for a much longer time, but even if it doesn’t catch the bruise and rot, it will eventually perish. Such is man.

A further illustration with the apples: The first bag of bruises speaks of something akin to disease. Let’s look at something more like the news stories Jesus was covering. This time we are in an apple warehouse. A case of apples is inadvertently crushed by the forklift. The manager of the warehouse may mourn over the loss of the case of apples. Such loss does occur. What a good manager would do, would be to examine how the loss happened and figure a way to improve the working environment to keep that kind of loss from happening again. Consider the tower in Siloam. The people who govern the city would surely grieve the tragic loss, but wouldn’t stigmatize those who were killed. They would want to replace that tower with one with careful structural designs to prevent another collapse.

Such is the course of life in this world. We, like the apples, which will all be eaten, will perish in a good day or a bad. This passage shows something further than just

a recollection of sad news. Consider that Jesus is using these particular stories to preach a message. His is a message of hope. Like the apples, all will eventually be gone, but Jesus is actually telling of a way out of that cycle. We know that all will eventually die, but Jesus tells His listeners there is an exception!

We know that just because one is saved, one is not exempt from dying a physical death in this world. How could repentance change the course of events for anyone? How would repentance make things any different? Consider verse 5 carefully:

I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

Jesus was speaking a clear warning. He used the news to bring to light a serious meditation on the tragedies. Whether we are one of those who suffered directly, or were one of the more fortunate apples, we will all come to an end. Life is not all of this world, it is vastly more.

As men, we tend to be short-sighted. We look at loss or gain so superficially and fail to spend enough time on eternal considerations. Jesus was giving us a good warning. The end is indeed a tragic one, but we can do something about it. Those who had passed away, in the tragedies, are like those apples crushed by the forklift. Jesus speaks like the good manager who uses the loss as a springboard to help avoid such tragic loss to ourselves. The natural manager will find a better design for towers, or the like, but the Spiritual Manager shares some critical information as to what we need to do to avoid such perishing on an eternal scale.

Jesus said the design change that needs to take place in each of us, to avoid being just a passing element of this world, is to repent. Such is instruction directly from the halls of heaven. Being words from Jesus, we have a sure confidence that such

will bring about the desired result of being saved from perishing.

Many do not know what that old term, “*repentance*” means. It doesn’t mean to just be sorry, “I’ll try and do better.” It means a change of heart to see that wickedness within us. To be absolutely vexed by it, to be horrified to behold the vileness of what we see in ourselves. That horror then leads to calling upon God to forgive and change us.

Repentance is not something that can come without a sense of desperation. Desperation burning in us to get on the good side with God! When we perceive we will have a tragic end, when we will fall under God’s eternal wrath, we will get desperate. Such an end may come after a long, comfortable life or through being suddenly cut off in the midst of our youth. To spend eternity in the flames of an eternal torment is to perish in the worst way. Such an end is what is waiting for every man and woman who does not repent before God. No matter how one’s body comes to its end, the eternal destiny is what ultimately counts. The end in this world cannot help but pale in comparison to what will await all of us on the other side.

Jesus did not say, “Except ye say a little prayer, ye will likewise perish.”

Jesus did not say, “Except ye join a particular religious group, ye will likewise perish.”

Nor did Jesus say, “Except ye tell everyone ye meet that I am the Son of God, ye will likewise perish.”

Don’t forget, as James said:

19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. 20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

James 2:19-20

What is this “*faith without works*” James is referring to? It references, a change in the person’s being.

When we see ourselves before God

on Judgment Day, a living faith will result in repentance unto the salvation from eternally perishing. If such news stories bring about shock, knowing perishing is awaiting us, shouldn’t we change the course of events in our lives? God will have mercy. Jesus would not have said that repentance would change our outcome, if it were not so. Don’t believe any lie you may have been trusting in. If repentance is not part of the course you have taken, you are doomed.

Having had the privilege of being forewarned of a coming time of perishing, doesn’t it make sense to take every action necessary to save yourself? Consider that if you had been standing on the street at Ground Zero, on that fateful September 11th, and you knew what was about to happen to the towers looming over you, would you just idly walk away? If you possessed any sanity at all, you would flee from that tower as fast as possible, taking as many as you could with you. Step into that shelter of safety through repentance, and call others to follow you there as well.

Let me sum this up with the only passages in the New Testament that have both repent and believe in the same verse. They show how the repentance and the belief intertwine:

15 And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

Mark 1:15

32 For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.

Matthew 21:32

The call is clear. What will you do?