

Luke 13:1-21 • Living a Fruitful Life

Introduction

A lot of books and movies have been produced around the scenario where someone finds out they only have a limited time to live and how they spend that remaining window of life. In reality, even though a doctor has not pronounced a specific end date due to a terminal illness, we are all in this same position. The fact is that this life is going to come to an end whether through the Lord's return or the end of our natural life. Herein we have a teaching as to how to live life in the knowledge that it could come to an end at any time. What are the basic characteristics of a life that consistently looks toward eternity instead of the temporal?

¹Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. ²And Jesus said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? ³I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. ⁴Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? ⁵I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

[Read v.1-5]

Q: What does it mean that the Galileans' blood was "mixed with their sacrifices"?

A: We do not know for sure about this specific event, but based on other actions taken by Pilate it is believed that the Galileans were killed as they came to offer their sacrifices at the Temple. There was an incident involving Judas of Galilee (Acts 5:37) who tried to draw Jews away from paying tribute to Caesar against whom Pilate sent soldiers to set an example by killing them in this manner. Something similar to this is most likely to have taken place. There were many incidents like this.

Q: Of all the incidents which could have been brought up, why might one involving Galileans show that there was another agenda at work here?

A: Jesus and His followers were often referred to as "Galileans" and this may have been an attempt to link them to a political movement at odds with the authorities. If Jesus supports them His antagonists could report Him to the Romans; if He denounces them He may lose favor with the people.

Q: How does Jesus turn the table on the questioners? How does He change the nature of their question?

A: Jesus re-frames the real question so as not to state "Why did others die?" but rather "What am I still alive?"

Application: Tragedies are a stark reminder that although we feel like we are going to live forever, the end could come unexpectedly at any time. How would your Christian walk change if you began living every day as if it may be your last?

Q: What is implied in Jesus' answer as to how the people viewed the reason for these deaths?

A: They thought those who perished must have been especially egregious sinners.

Q: What did the Galileans and those killed at the tower of Siloam have in common that would make the people think that God must have been displeased?

A: Both groups were killed while engaging in Jewish rituals. The Galileans were killed in the course of bringing their sacrifices to the Temple, the others most likely in the act of purifying themselves at the Pool of Siloam near the base of that tower. They cannot understand how this could not be a direct judgment by God since they were killed in the course of activities devoted to God.

Q: How does Jesus confront His questioners to show that they are actually sinners as well?

A: Notice that He says “Do you suppose that these Galileans were **greater sinners?**” (v.2) and “Do you suppose that those eighteen...were **worse culprits?**” (v.4) Jesus is teaching that sin is not a sliding scale, but in **all** cases leads to death.

Q: How did the questioners miss the real lesson to be learned from these real-life events?

A: They were judging others instead of themselves. They did not see the issue as “Am I prepared if I were to be suddenly taken today?” but rather as “They would not have been taken if they weren’t such sinners”. This betrays that they were actually trusting in their own righteousness.

Q: How does Jesus answer the real question, “Why am I still alive?”

A: In order to take advantage of the opportunity while it is still available to repent and avoid the consequences of sin; so that when physical death comes, spiritual death will not ensue.

Application: *The first and foremost step toward a spiritually fruitful life is repentance. In fact, without repentance, all subsequent works are actually dead regardless of how good the intentions.*

⁶And He began telling this parable: “A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any. ⁷And he said to the vineyard-keeper, ‘Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?’”

⁸“And he answered and said to him, ‘Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; ⁹and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.’”

[Read v.6-9]

Q: In order to understand how this is a continuation of the previous teaching on repentance, how was this issue in relation to sin stated by John the Baptist?

A: “Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance”. (Mt. 3:8)

Q: And how did John the Baptist state this issue in regard to Israel?

A: “Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” (Lk. 3:9)

Point: *Jesus ministered to Israel for 3-1/2 years but there was still no fruit. God could have judged the nation immediately, but gave them more time. In 70 A.D. He allowed the Romans to destroy Jerusalem and the Temple and end their continuity as a nation for nearly 2,000 years. But there is also an application of this for anyone of any age who does not produce spiritual fruit.*

Q: What do we know about how a new, literal fig tree is to bear fruit?

A: It usually takes about 3 years before a newly planted tree first bears fruit. Thereafter they employ a yearly cycle by which a form of fruit is evident, but the full, mature fruit most sought after comes every 3 years.

Q: What is the implication, “Why does it even use up the ground?”

A: Unfruitful trees suck up the nourishment that would ordinarily go to other, fruitful trees around it. It not only hurts other trees, but occupies ground which might be occupied by a fruitful tree.

Q: How does this all fit with the original questioners who came to Jesus about the Galileans and the tower of Siloam?

A: They sought a spiritual reason why God’s people in the course of spiritual rituals were allowed to die, implying it might be a judgment for sin. Jesus here gives them a spiritual reason why such people are taken away. They were concerned with the letter of the Law, Jesus is

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concerned with actually putting it into practice to the point of producing visible evidence of its intended purpose.

Q: But according to this teaching, are such people taken without any warning?

A: Although the act of death itself may come without warning, Jesus is stating that in such cases God has relented time and again and given extended opportunity to repent and change one's ways so as to avoid this final, inevitable result of ignoring such opportunity.

Application: After repentance, the next requirement is to live a spiritually fruitful life. This is the visible evidence of true repentance.

[Read v.10-17]

¹⁰And He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. ¹¹And there was a woman who for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was bent double, and could not straighten up at all. ¹²When Jesus saw her, He called her over and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your sickness." ¹³And He laid His hands on her; and immediately she was made erect again and began glorifying God.

¹⁴But the synagogue official, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, began saying to the crowd in response, "There are six days in which work should be done; so come during them and get healed, and not on the Sabbath day."

¹⁵But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall and lead him away to water him? ¹⁶And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?"

¹⁷As He said this, all His opponents were being humiliated; and the entire crowd was rejoicing over all the glorious things being done by Him.

Q: Given our discussion to this point, what might this be an example of?

A: This is a practical example of those who are spiritually fruitful and those who are not.

Q: How were the religious leaders of the day a stark contrast to Jesus when it comes to being fruitful?

A: They had so burdened the people with the misapplication of their rules and regulations that it was impossible to bear spiritual fruit. In fact, it was so cumbersome that it was actually illegal to do so under these circumstances.

Q: What is the greater spiritual teaching that Christ is conveying here?

A: It is actually the application of love to the Law. Whereas the authorities over-realized the Law to the point that it would oppress people, Christ did not allow it to negate its intended purpose to express love toward others.

Q: What might be spiritually remarkable about this woman considering her ailment?

A: In spite of being sick for 18 years she still sought to worship God. Her heart was still seeking God.

Q: How is this healing also a representation of the working of salvation?

A: Like all of us, the woman is someone incapable of breaking free from the bondage of her situation without the power and grace of Christ to effect it for her.

Q: How does Jesus characterize the unfruitful who misapply the Law?

A: "You hypocrites". (v.15) The reason they are spiritually unfruitful is that they profess something contrary to their actions, over-emphasizing one portion of the Law to such a degree that it actually negates another part of the Law. In one case their zeal for upholding the Sabbath neglected the greater requirement to love others; in another case they make allowances for their personal possessions they refuse to make for a fellow human being.

Q: Why might it be particularly powerful to those in attendance that Jesus characterizes the suffering woman as "a daughter of Abraham"?

A: Abraham was not merely recognized as the father of the nation Israel but as the spiritual father of faith who operated at a time many hundreds of years **BEFORE** the Law was given through Moses. It is a way of stating that they are not adhering to the greater intention and spirit of the Law.

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Q: How does Jesus provide a kind of exclamation point to show this is truly a spiritual issue?

A: He reveals that the source of the illness was brought about by Satan. They are presented with the stark contrast of the works of Satan versus the works of God. When their choice goes against the woman, they are not actually supporting God through their misguided attempt to uphold the Law, they are actually working in direct conflict with the Law on the side of Satan!

Application: *In the time each of us has remaining in this life the first order of business is repentance, then to live a spiritually fruitful life most notably defined by applying the greater law of love in the course of obedience to His Word and ways.*

¹⁸So He was saying, “What is the kingdom of God like, and to what shall I compare it? ¹⁹It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and threw into his own garden; and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches.”

²⁰And again He said, “To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? ²¹It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened.”

[Read v. 18-21]

Q: What is the major contrast between the Parable of the Mustard Seed and the Parable of the Leaven?

A: The leaven represents internal growth whereas the mustard seed represents external growth.

Q: Why would the tree resulting from the mustard seed represent our external, visible witness to the world?

A: “*The birds of the air*” which find rest would be unclean animals which represent the unsaved in the world.

Application: *If we are bearing proper, biblical fruit one of the proofs is in our attraction and witness to the unsaved.*

Q: Why would the leavened flour represent our internal, visible witness to the church?

A: The proper application of the greater working of love to the Law would have multiplying effects within the Body of Christ to cause it to grow into its fullest, most fruitful potential.

Application: *The proof of a spiritually fruitful life is in its visible witness and working both to the unsaved in the world and to the saved within the church.*

Overall Application

It is important to remember that Christ re-framed the question from “Why did others die?” to “Why am I alive?” If we truly understood we only have a finite number of days left in this life, would we increase our grip on the things of this life or would we let everything go except the things which will work in concert toward the next life? How would you evaluate your present course based on what you learned here?