

*1 Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2 And He answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered this fate? 3 "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. 4 "Or 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? 5 "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."*

*6 And He began telling this parable: "A certain 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. 7 "And 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; 9 and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.'"*

Last week we finished up a long chapter in Luke's gospel, and the entire chapter is a sermon that Jesus gives after He had spoken to the religious leaders in Israel and they had hostilely rejected Him, He gives this sermon, this message to the huge multitude and His message to them is, you need to follow me, you need to separate yourselves from this world, this culture, these leaders and follow me, no matter what the cost.

Last week was the great call to do that. Settle out of court. This life is where you have an opportunity to settle with the creator, out of court, so to speak. Jesus used the analogy of two men on their way to court. One owes an unpayable debt and Jesus says, you need to make a deal on the way there because once the case comes before the judge and is adjudicated, you'll be found guilty and handed over to the officials who will throw you into a prison and you won't get out of there.

It's a now or never scenario. Plead for mercy now! On the way to the judge plead for mercy, settle the matter now. When you get to that courtroom, it's

too late for plea bargains.

This lifetime is the time to settle. Now is the opportunity to settle the matter with your accuser. This lifetime is the trip to the courtroom, the only chance to settle out of court.

These first 9 verses of chapter 13 are part of that same sermon, that same message. Jesus is going to drive home the idea of emergency. The compelling urgency of the situation. Don't wait to do it later. Settle out of court now, because you don't know if you have a tomorrow.

*57 "And why do you not even on your own initiative judge what is right? 58 "For while you are going with your opponent to appear before the magistrate, on your way there make an effort to settle with him, in order that he may not drag you before the judge, and the judge turn you over to the constable, and the constable throw you into prison. 59 "I say to you, you shall not get out of there until you have paid the very last cent."*

He's going to drive home that point with two arguments. Calamity and time. You don't know when your life will end, and you are living, even now, on borrowed time. He's going to give a whole new meaning to "now or never".

So Jesus closing statement for His message to separate from this world and to come and follow Him instead is threefold. Settle out of court. Do it now before this world kills you. Do it now before God kills you. You don't know how much time you have. Whatever it is, it's borrowed time. You stand condemned before God. You're just waiting for the court date.

Urgency, Urgency Urgency.

A few months ago we heard from trusted sources (and I say that more tongue in cheek than ever before) that in Tonopah, and indeed everywhere else on earth, 4 people would be missing from every hundred. We were also told that it would favor the weak and the aged.

Within months a group that was here before, would be gone. And that's just one calamity among hundreds. It turns out this world is trying to kill me. This world is hostile, and it's trying it's best to kill me, one way or another.

Covid. Traffic on our highways increasingly dismissive of both laws and respect for anyone else. Riots. Murder. Natural disasters. Man made disasters. Gravity. Time. It's all trying to kill me. This world is hostile to me. Just being a christian is rapidly gaining prominence on that list of liabilities I just read.

And that's what Jesus addresses first in the closing of His call to repent from this world and follow Him. Settle out of court. Do it quickly. Avoid the courtroom of God after this life.

And He does it with the help of an interruption. Talk about provenance in the sovereignty of God. This guy speaks up and interrupts at the exact time as if he were scheduled to ask this ahead of time by God Himself Almighty and Sovereign.

*I Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.*

*Now on the same occasion . . . ;* Those words are our clue that we are still within the confines of this same occasion, same sermon, even though some later would be helper has given us a chapter break. This is at the close of the sermon to the masses that goes all through chapter 12.

And it tells us something about Jesus presence among that multitude. He dwelt among the people and spoke to them in such a way that they were not intimidated by Him. At all. He's giving a sermon and it's OK to interrupt. Peter had already done that earlier in this same sermon.

This guy interrupts Jesus right at the part about settling with your opponent out of court, on the way, as it were, and he wants to know, What about the Galileans that Pilate killed in the temple Jesus?

This guy is a journalist with Jewish NPR and he interrupts Jesus and says, Pilate, the other racial group who is in power and holds all of the privilege, those guys, they killed our guys, who were doing what God said they should be doing, in the temple. What do you say about justice for a racially motivated mass murder Jesus. Can you comment on that, Jesus? What does it mean?

I love it. After any calamity, the journalists are all standing around saying, what does it mean? A gunman killed dozens of people. What does it mean? Four people out of every hundred people will be dead in a few months. What does it mean.

This instance is particularly interesting to us because it has a racial component. It's them versus us, Jesus. Those guys killed our guys Jesus. What does it mean? Will you comment please, Jesus. We have to assume that Jewish Lives Matter! So what are we going to do to those Romans who are killing us.

And he stabs the microphone in front of Jesus as the video guys and the sound guys hover around to get what Jesus is going to say about Jewish and Roman race relations and how the Romans who have privilege are trodding down the jews. Do Jewish Lives Matter, Jesus? What does it mean?

Levity aside, this mention in Luke's gospel is all we really know about this incident. From history we know that Pilate was ruthless. He used all the power of the Roman state to crush these jews into submission.

Fear is effective for despots. Crush people on a regular basis, and the rest of the folks will not cause you any trouble. They fear for their lives. They don't cause trouble. That was Pilate's method.

We know that this happened in Jerusalem, in the temple, because the temple in Jerusalem is the only place where sacrificial offerings can take place. Synagogues don't make local sacrifices. That activity is done in Jerusalem.

We know that these folks who were crushed were galileans. Out of towners, in town, probably during one of the feast activities that happened in Jerusalem 3 times each year. So they're not locals, they're galileans.

We know that galileans were an especially troublesome group when it came to uprisings and discontent against the Roman occupiers. Trouble makers, those galileans. They could get away with more up there, away from Jerusalem.

Many scholars figure these galileans were having a jewish lives matter kind of a riot in Jerusalem during this time period, throwing dust in the air and perhaps slitting a few Roman throats if they could, and perhaps Pilate sent the praetorium gaurd to go squash the riot and so they fled into the temple like kings X.

That's speculation, for what it's worth, but it makes a good story. JLM rioters fleeing from Roman soldiers into the temple, because romans can't go in the jewish temple so they'll be safe there. Kings X. You can't get me.

Except it would be just like Pilate to say, I don't care about their stupid temple, if they go in there, you go in after them and slaughter them and let their blood join the other blood from all of the animal sacrifices. I'm up to here with JLM activists.

Jesus, can you comment on that? What does it mean.

And Jesus says, here's what it means. Those guys are dead. Their opportunity to settle out of court is over! It means they're dead. Period. Way more important than your racial war.

But first, Jesus has to answer this in two parts, because the long standing belief of all jews, from pre-Abraham, is that if you're a good boy, God blesses you. Your fig tree grows huge and not only provides sweet figs, but it makes a shade for you to bar-b-que in.

But if you're a bad boy and God is dis-pleased, your fig tree will wither and no figs for you. No shade for you to relax in. That means God is mad at you.

Exhibit A is Job. Bad things don't happen to good people and now we know about you Job. We thought you were good, but now we know you're bad. God is punishing you Job, because you're bad. That was their belief, and Jesus deals with that first.

What does it mean Jesus. Well, here's 2 things it doesn't mean;

*2 And He answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered this fate?  
3 "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.*

That's Jesus singular message. The debt that we owe to our Creator is such that differentiating between the worst sinners and the best sinners doesn't really matter. All sinners perish. And when that happens . . . you wake up in that courtroom answering charges before God.

If you don't settle out of court now, the same fate waits for you as happened to those guys from galilee. Death. And after death, judgement. And hell. Every human has that same appointment. It might not be with the Romans mingling your blood with the animal sacrifice blood flowing out of the temple. But you'll be just as dead, and just as guilty as anyone else.

Likewise is an interesting word. homoios. In like manner. And Jesus point isn't that you're going to die in the same gory fashion as those galileans. His point is, no matter what gets you; you'll be just as dead, and . . . *inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment,* Heb. 9:27

Jesus beats the Jewish Public Radio interview guy to his next question, He just does it for him. What about that tower that crushed 18 people at Siloam? What does it mean?

*4 "Or 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?  
5 "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."*

This was a construction worker accident. We think. Pilate was into spending public money for city improvements. But since there was no public money, he took money from the temple treasury to construct an aqueduct. He was bringing water into Jerusalem by an aqueduct system.

And apparently, in order to keep elevation right in order to get the water there, they were building some towers for the aqueduct to be on top of. And one of the towers collapsed and squashed 18 people.

This is a two part question Jesus, were those 18 people more wicked and that's why they got squashed? And what does it mean.

*4 "Or 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?  
5 "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."*

No, they didn't die that way because they were extra wicked. What does it mean? It means they're dead, and their opportunity to settle out of court is over. The moment their lives were over, they were standing in that courtroom that you don't want to ever stand in, because you're guilty, and it was too late, because those guys are dead. That's what it means.

The tower killed them. Something else is going to make you just as dead. What that is doesn't matter. What matters is whether you settled out of court with your Creator who is going to judge every person.

We've talked about that word repent. That's what every person needs to do in this life before their court date with the Judge of all the universes. It means turn around and go the other way. It means you were born into a rebellion and are as guilty as anyone else in this rebellion against the Creator.

To repent means to change sides. To come out of this perishing world and

join forces with Jesus who holds the tital deed to this world. Quit fighting against Him and get on His side and fight with Him.

He purchased that possibility for every person when He died on the cross. He takes the punishment for our sin and rebellion, and in turn He gives us His righteousness. A righteousness not our own. His perfection is accounted to me. My sin is accounted to Him at the cross.

Repentance means giving your heart, soul, mind and strength to Him. He owns you and if you belong to Him, from that day forward, you do His bidding.

It's like that old joke; You had one job. We have one thing to accomplish in this life. Settle out of court. Repent and give your life to Jesus. Ask for His forgiveness for all of your sinful rebellion against your Creator who owns you. Follow Him and leave this world behind. Do it NOW because no one is guaranteed a tomorrow.

Those galileans began their day thinking they would have many more. They didn't. Those construction workers got up that morning, just like any other morning, with no reason to believe there wouldn't be thousands more mornings just like that one. It was their last day. Business as usual one moment; Wake up in a courtroom that you don't want to be in, next moment. Judged. Found guilty. Handed over to a constable. Thrown in prison. No hope of escape. You can't pay that last cent. You can't pay any of them.

Take the deal! Settle out of court! Give your life to Jesus. Stop following this world. Start following Jesus. Trust me when I tell you after 50 years, it's the best thing you'll ever do in this life, and it will get even better in the next one.

Back to the question the guy who interrupted Jesus asked. If you listen to it, there's a note there that we hear very often. If there is a God, why doesn't He play by our rules of fairness.

Why did God allow Pilates soldiers to kill those galileans? Was that fair? Or what about the 18 construction workers who died in the calamity of the towers? They had little ones and wives. Good hard working men. They weren't making trouble for anyone. In fact they were working hard in order to make everyone's lives better. Running water!

Why did God allow them to be squashed? Was that fair. Was it fair to their wives who now have no hope of support? Was it fair to leave their kids fatherless? What kind of a God does that??

We hear it all the time. Gruesome, horrific stuff. God could fix it if He wanted to. He just seems to look the other way while people are doing horrendous stuff. Why Jesus? What does it mean?

If you're in that club that thinks the whole purpose of God is to fix our lives and make them better, you're not going to like Jesus answer very much. Jesus launches into a parable.

*6 And He began telling this parable: "A certain 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."*

Fig tree's are big in Israel. They provided sweet delicious fruit every single year. And they grew big enough in Israel to provide shade. This terminology about fig trees was a colloquialism similar to our turkey in every pot.

In Israel, if life was good, living was fine, the expression used over and over in the old testament was every man sitting under his own vine and his own fig tree. Figs, shade, wine, security, peace, safety. It was all tied up in this fig tree thing. That was like jewish code for "the good life".

Even the invaders picked up on it. Sennacherib, the king of Assyria sent a messenger to the people of Israel and he said, if you want the fig tree thing, peace, safety, security, good life, ease, pleasure, wine, figs; then don't listen to Hezekiah. I'm the guy who's going to give you those fig tree things.

So the illustration was a common one and when Jesus mentions a fig tree or a vineyard, all of those good things are mixed up in the metaphor.

But Jesus turns the tables, and it turns out that God has a fig tree. God has a vineyard. And God's vineyard and God's fig tree is Israel. And God is looking forward to some sweet fruit. Some good wine. Fruit from His vineyard and shade and sweet figs from His fig tree.

*“A certain 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.*

That's a bummer. No good life, no comfort from that fig tree. What a disappointment! What good is a fig tree that doesn't provide those comforts?

There is a sense of the bigger picture here. God created this world and He created man in His image, male and female so they could make lots more of themselves, and He created all of it to reflect glory back on Him. God created men for His pleasure and enjoyment. Some fellowship. Friendship.

But then sin spoiled it. Sin entered and every man is born a sinner, and no glory comes from men back to God. No fruit is possible. Only sin and rebellion. And then God chose a people for Himself, a people who He would reveal Himself to with prophets and a book that describes what mankind is supposed to look like.

Having done that, He had expectations of fruit. Glory reflected back to Him. Acceptable worship. A sacrificial system that requires His people to acknowledge that they have offended Him with sin. Animals slain, blood flowing in rivulets out of the temple. All of it looking forward to the final acceptable sacrifice that can singly cure men of sin, once for all.

Having done that, He expected fruit. Worship and honor. Justice and godliness in the midst of a world lost to sin and chaos. Israel was His fig tree.

7 *“And 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?’*

I don't want to be accused of parable pushing, but, what we have here, good folks, is an inter-trinitarian conversation. God owns this vineyard and this fig tree. His Son is the vineyard keeper. Or vice versa. It doesn't really matter.

*‘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?’*

Behold! It's a note of exasperation. Behold!! We might say Dude!! It's just a note of discouragement and or disgust. Behold!!! This is a problem!!!

*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?’*

We're guilty of saying something similar. Why does that guy even use up the air. That guy is so worthless the air he's breathing is being wasted. Worthless! Get rid of this worthless tree. It's a waste of water and earth. It does nothing. It's worthless. Cut it down!

Israel was God's fig tree. And when God came to His fig tree, expecting to find comfort and fruit, the good life, it was worthless. No value. No fruit. No comfort. No acceptable worship. No glory for the Creator. Nothing.

And I hate to break it to you, but in the broader scope, we're even more worthless, if that was possible, than Israel. This is a picture of all mankind, with Israel being the best possible case.

God had given everything to His chosen people. They were the recipients of everything. Revelation. The Word of God. He poured out every special blessing on them. They were worthless. The rest of mankind was under Israel in value. Israel; worthless, all the rest of men, more worthless, if that was possible!

If the order comes down for the chosen people, *cut them down*, it's looking even worse for the rest of us.

*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; 9 and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.'"*

This is a reprieve. There's simply no other way to look at this action. This is a stay of judgement for a limited set time.

There are two ways to interpret this reply of the husbandman who cares for the Master's vineyard and within the vineyard, this fig tree. Both are biblical and are taught over and over in scripture, so both are valid. It's a matter of "if the shoe fits".

The first is the most obvious to us. Israel is God's fig tree, and the stated 3 years that the Master has been seeking some fruit from His tree is interesting, because we know that's the duration of Jesus ministry, the Son of God, sent by His Father to visit the people who He has chosen to be His own.

They have turned His revealed truth into a worthless and false religion, and the entire place, save a few remnants, is putrid. Israel is a stench to God. The chosen people, the best case scenario of all of the families of mankind, is open sewage to God's nostrils. There is no fruit from His tree.

There is a reprieve, a stay of judgement on Israel. Perhaps with digging, softening of soil and adding of even more nutrient, fruit will come?

Is this a reasonable hope? More digging. More nutrients. Let me give you a little history to help you formulate a hypothesis whether the reprieve and the extra care will help. We have some past history about this vineyard, some information about it's location and substance. I mean, maybe the property is in the sahara desert and it's impossible for fruit to grow in the available conditions.

Isaiah chapter 5 gives us some background about this particular real estate and the owners expectations.

*1 Let me sing now for my well-beloved  
A song of my beloved concerning His vineyard.  
My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill.*

*2 He dug it all around, removed its stones,  
And planted it with the choicest vine.  
And He built a tower in the middle of it  
And also hewed out a wine vat in it;  
Then He expected it to produce good grapes,  
But it produced only worthless ones.*

The ground is fertile. The location is choice. This is prime real estate for the purposes of fruit. Then to make it better the owner lovingly invests more effort. The rocky soil is made perfect by removing the stones.

Later on in Isaiah's song he says, What more could I have done? Prime location. Good fertile soil. Exhaustive further soil preparation. Planted with the best vines, the choicest plants. What more could have been done. Fruit is expected.

*4 "What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it?  
Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones?"*

This is sort of heartbreaking. Prime ground. Lovingly prepared. Nothing spared. Choicest vines. Worthless fruit. No usable fruit. The produce is vile. The word for the produce that He did get is bee-oo-sheem. Stinking grapes. Bitter, wild grapes, good for nothing. Not only useless, they stink. Inedible.

These ancient people were sophisticated wine makers. This field that the fig tree shades should have produced the best wine on earth. But the grapes are

wild and they stink. Nobody wants wine that stinks. What produce came, was worthless. No figs at all, and vile stinking grapes.

So that's the background historic narrative these folks would have in mind when Jesus says, this fig tree is on a final limited reprieve. Choice soil, choice plants, stones removed, in the first place. Is this last reprieve really going to change anything?

Well, we know the end of the story, don't we. God's chosen people, His choice vineyard within the larger vineyard of the whole planet, His choice people murdered His only Son, their promised Messiah, and within a generation after that act, Rome came and decimated Israel.

And I mean decimated. All of their records were destroyed. The people of Israel were either slaughtered or dispersed. The cities were left as piles of stones and rubble. God's people were sent to wander the earth, those who remained, until the British allowed them to have a homeland, a national identity again, in 1948.

God isn't finished with His people. Those who say He is, can throw their Bibles with all of the unfulfilled promises He made to that people, in the trash. What good is a book full of promises from a God who doesn't fulfil them. That's lunacy.

Every promise to Israel will be fulfilled, and this is important, not somehow quasi-spiritually to the church in Israel's place, but to the nation and the people that God, who knows how to communicate, he doesn't need any help from us, God will fulfil every promise to the people and the nation that He promised them to. Count on it. That's why they survived, intact, through all of the centuries.

But, there is still a larger way to look at what Jesus taught in this parable. Also borne out in scripture. And that applies to every human living on this planet.

Our lifetimes here, while we dwell on this planet, are borrowed time. You think Israel stank? You think Israel was a vile stench in God's nostrils. We, moreso. Every person, every human, born into this rebellious place, this planet with Satan as the god of this world, this sewage heap, spoiled by the spoiler, is living on borrowed time.

We all, every one of us, spoiled and vile to God, a stench to Him and awaiting His judgement, we are on the way to that courtroom. We are on borrowed time. This life is the final reprieve. And we are hopeless wild vile smelly grapes, good only to be destroyed. No value.

That's how God see's this place. Not only no value, no good fruit, but we are rebelling against Him. We as a planet are like a people throwing dirt into the air and shouting our obscenities and hatred at God who owns us. And we're doing it on borrowed time. The day for the cutting down of the worthless fig tree is approaching.

Individually, that reprieve, that walk with our opponent to the courtroom of justice, is this lifetime. When this life is over, you will face the judge. And this world is dangerous. It has a thousand ways to kill you. You are not in control of when the year of reprieve is over.

Jesus said it perfectly earlier in this same sermon. You with all of your worry and concern and effort and lock downs and face masks and hand sanitizers and crash helmets and locking yourself into a padded room cannot add one cubit, 18 inches of length to that reprieve that God controls.

And if you think you can, that's an added arrogance to the pile of other offenses you have stacked up against you. God gives breath and God takes it away. On His sovereign time scale, according to His perfect plan. You have no control over that moment. None.

What you DO have control over is one thing. During this reprieve, this stay of judgement, this lifetime, you can make a deal with your accuser and settle out of court.

Jesus died in your place so that your offense could be punished in His death. And He rose again from the dead so that His life of righteousness could be accounted to your account.

When we give our lives to Jesus and repent of our rebellion and ask Him to come into us, He clothes us with His righteousness. His Holy Spirit comes into our hearts, and for the very first time, because of Christ IN you, you can actually produce fruit that is pleasing to God.

The moral of the story is; Give your life to Him now, this minute, and beg for forgiveness for your sinful rebellion. An earthquake may come and these stones that this building is made from may fall on you and kill you before this message is over. We are all living on borrowed time. Make the most of it. Settle out of court. It's literally now or never.