

The Gospel of Luke

Lesson 18: Repentance and the Kingdom of God -- Luke 13:1-35

Someone in the crowd brings Jesus a piece of breaking news, the kind that travels fast and leaves people shaken. Pilate has murdered some Galileans while they were offering their sacrifices, mingling their blood with the blood of the animals on the altar. The people who tell Jesus this are doing what people have always done with tragedy. They are trying to make it manageable, to draw a quiet line between the victims and themselves, to assume that those who suffered so horribly must have deserved it. Jesus refuses to let them hide behind that line. He answers their report with a question and then with a warning that lands like a hammer: "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (v. 3). And then He says it a second time, adding a collapsed tower that crushed eighteen people in Siloam. The point is not who is guiltier. The point is that everyone in earshot, and everyone reading these words, stands in the same desperate need.

From there the chapter unfolds as a series of pictures of God's patience and God's reckoning held together in the same hand. A barren fig tree is given one more year before it is cut down. A woman bent double for eighteen years is set free on the Sabbath, and a synagogue ruler is more upset about the day than delighted about the deliverance. Two tiny things, a mustard seed and a handful of leaven, become Jesus' chosen images for how the kingdom of God grows, quietly, surely, filling the whole. A narrow door stands open now but will not stand open forever. And at the end, Jesus weeps over a city that has hardened its heart against Him, longing to gather its people as a hen gathers her brood, and finding them unwilling.

This is a chapter about urgency, but it is not an anxious chapter. It is urgent the way a doctor is urgent when the diagnosis is real and the treatment exists. Jesus is not playing on fear for his own sake. He is telling people the truth because He loves them, because the door is still open, because the gardener has asked for one more year, because there is still time to come in. Repentance is not a grim sentence here. It is the way home. And the kingdom Jesus describes is not a far-off dream but a present, growing reality that we are invited to enter today, through the narrow door of Christ Himself.

Read this chapter slowly and let it do its double work. Let it strip away the comfortable assumption that we are fine as we are, that judgment is for other people, that we can respond to God whenever we finally get around to it. And let it draw you toward the patience of a God who keeps tending the barren tree, who reaches down to lift the bent and the broken, who plants the smallest seed and grows a kingdom, and who stands at the door still calling. The question this chapter presses on every one of us is not whether others are worse sinners than we are. The question is whether we will strive to enter while the door is open.

Group Discussion: When tragedy strikes, whether a sudden death, a disaster, or a diagnosis, we instinctively look for someone to blame or some way to reassure ourselves that it could not happen to us. Jesus took the news of the slain Galileans and the fallen tower and turned it into a mirror, telling everyone present, “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (vv. 3, 5). Why do you think we are so quick to make tragedy a question about other people’s guilt rather than a call to examine our own hearts? What might change if we heard hard news the way Jesus asked His hearers to hear it?

Personal Reflection: Picture the barren fig tree the owner wants to cut down, and the gardener who pleads, “Let it alone this year also” (v. 8). God has been patient with you in ways you may take for granted, giving you time, mercy, and another chance you did not earn. Is there an area of your life where you have been presuming on that patience, telling yourself you will deal with it later? What would it look like to treat this season as the extra year the gardener bought for you, and to bear the fruit God is waiting to see?

Read Luke 13:1–35

Study Questions

1. Jesus responds to the news of the murdered Galileans and the fallen tower of Siloam by twice declaring, “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (vv. 3, 5). What does this teach about the universal and urgent necessity of repentance, and why does Jesus refuse to let His hearers treat sin and judgment as someone else’s problem?
2. Jesus dismantles the assumption that the victims of these tragedies were “worse sinners” than everyone else (vv. 2, 4), pressing each person to look inward instead. When you hear of someone else’s failure, suffering, or downfall, what is your honest first reaction, and what would it look like to let that news send you to examine your own heart before God?
3. In the parable of the barren fig tree, the owner is ready to cut it down, but the gardener pleads for one more year of digging and fertilizing before judgment falls (vv. 6–9). What does this parable reveal about how God holds together His patience and His judgment, and what does it teach about the purpose of the time and mercy He extends to us?
4. The woman had been bent over and unable to straighten herself for eighteen years, and Jesus saw her, called her over, and set her free, declaring her “a daughter of Abraham” whom Satan had bound (vv. 11–16). Where in your own life have you grown so used to a burden that you no longer expect to be free of it, and what does it stir in you that Jesus notices and moves toward the person everyone else overlooks?
5. Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a tiny mustard seed that grows into a tree and to a little leaven that works through the whole batch of dough (vv. 18–21). What do these images teach about the nature and growth of the kingdom Jesus came to establish, and how do they correct the idea that the kingdom is a future earthly empire rather than the present, spreading reign of Christ through His church?
6. The synagogue ruler was indignant that Jesus healed on the Sabbath, and Jesus exposed the hypocrisy of those who would untie an ox to give it water but begrudge a suffering woman

her freedom (vv. 14–16). Where are you tempted to care more about keeping up religious appearances or rules than about the actual good of hurting people, and how does Jesus' rebuke challenge the way you practice your faith?

7. When someone asks, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" Jesus does not answer the speculation but redirects it to a command: "Strive to enter through the narrow door" (vv. 23–24). What does it tell us about the way of salvation that Jesus turns a question about numbers into a personal summons to effort and entry, and what does "strive" mean for the way we respond to the gospel?
8. Jesus warns that many "will seek to enter and will not be able" once the master of the house has shut the door, and that some who ate and drank in His presence will hear, "I do not know where you come from" (vv. 25–27). What does it do to your sense of security to know that nearness to Jesus is not the same as belonging to Him, and how does this passage examine whether you are truly entering through the door or merely standing near it?
9. Jesus says, "Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able" (v. 24), and then describes a door that is finally shut, people from east and west who recline at the feast while others are cast out, and a startling reversal in which "some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last" (v. 30). What does this whole passage teach about how a person is saved, about the reality that not all will be saved, and about why the time to respond to Christ is now, before the door is shut?
10. Look back across the whole chapter, from the call to repent, to the barren tree given one more year, to the bent woman lifted up, to the mustard seed and leaven, to the narrow door, to Jesus weeping over Jerusalem with its house left forsaken (vv. 34–35). Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from Luke 13:1–35 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Acts 2:37–41, the crowd at Pentecost cut to the heart and called to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins; Acts 17:30–31, God now commanding all people everywhere to repent because He has fixed a day of judgment; 2 Peter 3:9, the Lord patient and not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance; Matthew 7:13–14, the narrow gate and hard way that leads to life, which few find; Daniel 2:44, the God of heaven setting up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed and shall stand forever.