

Small Group Leaders March, 2010

Luke 13: 1-9

At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ²He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? ³No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. ⁴Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”

⁶Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. ⁷So he said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’ ⁸He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. ⁹If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

Background

This section (or “pericope”) has two sections. The first 5 verses reflect Jesus’ response to others recounting a tragedy. Pontius Pilate had not only killed some Galileans, but to add insult to injury he had mixed their blood in with that of some of the Jewish holy sacrifices.

The prevailing theology (Deuteronomic) was that people who had bad things happen to them must have deserved it somehow. The worse the thing that happened, the worse of a person you were. Jesus immediately becomes controversial by saying (verse 2) ‘you don’t think they were worse sinners than everyone else do you?’ Right away he answers for them – “No!” Then he adds “but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.”

Right away we know that this makes little sense. Most scholars agree that these latter words are an addition by Luke himself whose church was faced with certain problems, i.e., groups of Gnostics telling folks they could do whatever they wanted and God didn’t care.

But the second section is more likely to be an original from Jesus, since Jesus was the great parable-teller. What the parable has to do with the first paragraph, additions or no additions by Luke, is somewhat of a mystery!

Discussion Questions

1. Why do bad things happen to good people?
2. What is God doing when bad things happen to good people?
3. What could Jesus – or Luke – possibly have meant by “unless you repent you will all perish as they did?”
 - a. Repent of what?
 - b. Doesn’t everyone ‘perish’ anyway?
4. If Jesus and Luke had two different meanings in mind, should we simply reject Luke’s?
 - a. If we don’t, what can we learn from Luke
 - i. About ourselves?
 - ii. About the early church?
 - iii. About our own church?

John 12: 1-8

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ²There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. ³Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ⁵"Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" ⁶(He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) ⁷Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

Background

- John's recounting of this story says that Mary of Bethany (Martha and Lazarus's sister) is the one who anoints Jesus in this way. The synoptics (Matthew, Mark and Luke) tell the story but do not mention the woman's name. They do, however, make the great statement "wherever the Gospel is preached in all the world it will be done in memory of her" (and yet they don't know her name). John gives her name, but does not include the great statement about her.
- John also recounts that Judas Iscariot (meaning "Judas the murderer") was the one complaining about her generous gift. In the synoptic it just states "some were saying..."
- A denarius is a day's wages. 300 denarii is equivalent to almost a year's pay for the average labourer. Figure that out in today's dollars!
- John may have woven two stories together here – one of "a woman" who wiped Jesus' tears off his feet with her hair (a scandalous act performed in front of some Pharisees) and another of Jesus' hair being anointed with the perfume. It makes no sense to "wipe off" expensive perfume.
- Jesus says in this passage that Mary is anointing Jesus for burial.
- There is much rich symbolism in this passage – too much to get into in a short time!

Discussion Questions

1. Why would Mary go to such great expense to anoint Jesus? What do you think of this act of hers?
2. Does Judas have a point?
3. Is Jesus being selfish when he says "you will always have the poor with you but you do not always have me?" Why do you think he would say such a thing and what could it mean?
4. If we listen to Jesus, rather than Judas, what might be the current-time equivalent of Mary's act of extravagance for Jesus' sake?
5. In what way do we live our lives too cautiously?