**The Gospel of Luke**

**Lesson 8** Luke 13:1-21 Repent or Perish/Healing on the Sabbath!

**Questions:**

1. What important truth did you learn from the lecture, and how does it apply to your life?
2. Read Wiersbe pages 173-179.

What application can one draw from the parable of the fig tree? How are you encouraged by the parable? What warning does it contain?

1. Read Luke 13:1-5 along with the following article entitled, “Why did Jesus mention the tower of Siloam in Luke 13:4?”

Jesus mentions the tower in Siloam in the context of answering a question about a recent tragedy in Jerusalem. Some people told Jesus about a group of Galileans who had come to the temple to sacrifice, and Pontius Pilate slaughtered them, probably due to a public disturbance the Galileans were causing (Luke 13:1). The men who related this story to Jesus may have been trying to lure Him into taking sides, either for or against Pilate, or they may have simply been curious about Jesus’ reaction to the massacre. Whatever their motivation, Jesus’ response is sobering: “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish” (verses 2–3).  
  
Jesus continues the conversation by mentioning another current event, this one involving the tower of Siloam: “Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish” (Luke 13:4–5).  
  
The fall of the tower of Siloam is not mentioned in other historical records, and, since the Bible gives no more detail of the structure’s collapse, we cannot be sure what the tower was for or why it fell. The tragedy was obviously well-known to Jesus’ hearers. Siloam was an area just outside the walls of Jerusalem on the southeast side of the city. A spring-fed pool was there, which was the scene of one of Christ’s miracles (John 9). The tower of Siloam may have been part of an aqueduct system or a construction project that Pilate had begun. In any case, the tower fell, and eighteen people were killed in the catastrophe.

Here are two current events—the massacre on the temple mount and the collapse of the   
tower of Siloam, yet the same lessons are drawn from each. First, Jesus warned His audience not to assume that the victims of those tragedies had been judged for their great evil. It’s always a temptation to assign sudden, unexplainable deaths to the judgment of God in response to secret (or open) sin. Jesus says not so fast; it is a mistake to automatically attribute such tragedies to the vengeance of God. Whether it is a man-made tragedy (Pilate’s slaughter of the Galileans) or a naturally caused tragedy (the fall of the tower of Siloam),   
it is wrong to assume that the victims are somehow worse sinners than everyone else and   
thus deserve to die.  
  
The second point Jesus made concerning both events is that everyone needs to repent. Repentance is a change of mind that results in a change of action. Jesus highlights the importance of repentance twice in this passage: repent or perish, He says; turn or burn. Instead of conjecturing on the Galileans’ sin, focus on your own sin. Rather than assigning wickedness to those killed by the tower of Siloam, examine your own heart.  
  
When tragedies strike, such as what happened at the tower of Siloam, it’s natural for people to start asking why. Thoughts creep in such as maybe the victims deserved it somehow. Maybe they were bad people, and that’s why bad things happened to them. But then sometimes it really seems like the people affected by tragedies are good. Especially when   
the victims are children. Why do bad things happen to good people? Why do bad things happen at all?  
  
In commenting on the fall of the tower of Siloam, Jesus negates four assumptions that people often make:

1) Suffering is proportional to sinfulness.

2) Tragedy is a sure sign of God’s judgment.

3) Bad things happen only to bad people.

4) We have the right to make such judgments.

To each of these assumptions, Jesus says, no.  
  
When we read of a tragedy in the headlines, we should resist the temptation to assign guilt to the victims, as if they had received God’s judgment. Rather, Jesus bids us look to the sin within us and take the headline as a warning to repent. The sudden death of someone should not be an occasion for blame but for self-examination.  
  
Whether you’re from Galilee or Jerusalem, from Kansas or Kenya, from the country or the city; whether you’re rich or poor, young or old; whether you think of yourself as a sinner or a saint; and whether or not you even want to think about spiritual things—the fact is you are under God’s judgment unless you repent and have faith in Jesus.[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. The sinful state of mankind. Read the following verses and answer the   
   accompanying question.
2. Psalm 51:5 states, “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” What was the condition of our soul at birth? When did we first become sinners?
3. John 3:36 states, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.” At the time of our birth, where does God’s wrath reside?
4. Ephesians 2:1-3 states, “As for you, you were dead in your trespasses and sins,   
   in which you used to live, when you followed the ways of this world, and the   
   ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in the those who   
   are disobedient. All of us lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings   
   of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.” What is the condition of a man’s soul/heart until the time of his conversion to Christ?
5. Romans 5:10 states, “For if when we were enemies of God, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!” Until the point of reconciliation with God, what is man’s relationship to Him?
6. The need for repentance. Given that we are all born sinners, enemies of God and under His wrath, the need for repentance should be obvious.
7. Define repentance.
8. Why is repentance necessary.
9. Read Matthew 3:1; 4:17; Mark 1:14; and Acts 3:19-20. What was the main focus early on of the preaching of John the Baptist, Jesus, and the disciples?
10. If preaching a message of repentance was the main focus of the preaching of the above men, why do you think we do not hear this message much any more in the churches of America?
11. [Personal reflection] Have you truly repented of all of your sins? (Remember, to repent simply means to agree with God that you are a sinner, and then, to turn away from those sins and walk in the newness of your relationship with Jesus Christ!) Have you turned to Christ, confessed your sins, and asked for His forgiveness? If not, why not do so now?
12. Read Luke 13:6-9 along with 2 Peter 3:9. The Patience of God!
13. Jesus’ public ministry lasted about three years. During this time, he preached almost exclusively to the nation of Israel. Moreover, the nation of Israel was often compared to a vineyard in the Old Testament. From this parable what do you learn about Jesus toward his people, the Jews?
14. Why is God so patient with us?
15. Has God been patient with you? Explain.
16. Read Luke 13:10-17 along with the article below entitled, “Did Jesus break the Sabbath law?” Healing on the Sabbath!
17. According to the article below, what was the purpose of the Sabbath based upon God’s original instructions (Exodus 20:8-11; 31:13; Mark 2:27)?
18. According to the article below, offer three reasons why Jesus healed this crippled woman on the Sabbath?
19. In Luke 4:14-22, Jesus read from the scroll of Isaiah (Isaiah 61:1-2). He read this text to reveal the purpose for the Messiah’s coming into the world. When he sat down in the local synagogue that day, he said in verse twenty-one, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” By this statement, Jesus declared himself to be this promised Messiah. Based upon what he read from Isaiah, what was the main purpose of the Messiah’s coming? How does the healing of this woman tie into the Messiah’s purpose?
20. Have you been set free from your own imprisonment in sin? If yes, are you willing to share this with your group?

The gospels record several instances when Jesus healed a person on the Sabbath:

* 1. Simon Peter’s mother-in-law in Peter’s home (Mark 1:29–31).
  2. A man with a withered hand in the synagogue (Mark 3:1–6).
  3. A man born blind in Jerusalem (John 9:1–16).
  4. A crippled woman in a synagogue (Luke 13:10–17).
  5. A man with dropsy at a Pharisee’s house (Luke 14:1–6).
  6. A demon-possessed man in Capernaum (Mark 1:21–28).
  7. A lame man by the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1–18).

Whenever Jesus publicly healed someone on the Sabbath, the Pharisees accused Him of breaking the Sabbath law (Matthew 12:10; Mark 3:2, John 5:14; 9:14–16). Jesus’ response was that He was working just as His Father was working, an answer that did not appease the religious leaders: “For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God” (John 5:18). Breaking the Sabbath would have been a sin, so we must ask the question: did Jesus actually break the Sabbath law?  
  
The short answer is “no,” but here is some background: God instituted the Sabbath for the Israelites when He gave Moses the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:8–11). On the seventh day of the week, the Israelites were to rest, remembering that God created the universe in six days and then “rested” on the seventh day (Genesis 2:1–3). The Sabbath was given for the benefit of the people (Mark 2:27) and as a sign of the Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 31:13). Over time, however, perspectives on the Sabbath changed. By Jesus’ time, the religious leaders had added burdensome rules and traditions for keeping the Sabbath and had elevated their own rules to the level of God’s instructions. It was so bad that, when Jesus’ disciples picked and ate some heads of grain as they walked through a field, the Pharisees accused them of breaking the Sabbath because they were supposedly “harvesting” and “threshing” (Luke 6:1–2).  
  
Jesus did not break the Sabbath, as outlined by God under the Old Covenant. As He publicly stated, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matthew 5:17). The Pharisees had so conflated their own standard of holiness with God’s that they accused Jesus of breaking the Sabbath law. They were furious over Jesus’ actions, yet it was only *their* Sabbath law He did not keep. Jesus kept God’s law, and He had done nothing to violate the Sabbath.  
  
Many Pharisees opposed Jesus. He taught with authority unlike the scribes (Matthew 7:29). He called out their hypocrisy, saying, “They do not practice what they preach” (Matthew 23:3). He also equated Himself with God (John 5:18). In the incident involving the man   
with the withered hand, the Pharisees asked Jesus, accusingly, if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:10). Jesus’ response was full of logic: “If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:11). Jesus applied God’s principle of desiring mercy not sacrifice (verse 7), referring back to Hosea 6:6. This infuriated the Pharisees, and they plotted how they might kill Him (Matthew 12:14). Yet Jesus came to do the will of the Father (John 5:19) not to follow the man-made religious rules.  
  
Jesus referred to Himself as the Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5). In doing so, Jesus proclaimed that He is greater than the law and has authority even over the laws that govern the Sabbath day. Jesus is the One who made all things (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16), and He instituted the Sabbath day. He had the authority to overrule the Pharisees’ traditions and regulations that they had placed on the Sabbath. By healing on the Sabbath, Jesus showed God’s goodness, revealed the Pharisees’ hardness of heart, and gave a glimpse of the full healing from sin that would soon be made possible by His sacrifice on the cross.  
  
Jesus did not break the Sabbath law, although He did act against the Pharisaical *interpretation* of the law. He broke the Pharisees’ laws, and they couldn’t stand it. Jesus healed on the Sabbath to help people, to glorify God, and to remind people that “the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). Just as the Sabbath was originally instituted to give people rest from their work and to turn people to God, so Jesus came to provide us rest from attempting to achieve salvation by our own labors. His sacrifice on the cross made a way for the law to be fulfilled and for righteousness and rest to come to all who trust in His finished work.[[2]](#footnote-2)

1. Read Luke 13:18-21 along with the article below entitled, “What is the meaning of the Parable of the Mustard Seed?” The Parable of the Mustard Seed!

As with all parables, the purpose of the Parable of the Mustard Seed is to teach a concept or “big idea” using various narrative elements or details that are common, easily recognized, and usually representational of something else. While the elements themselves do have importance, an overemphasis on the details or literal focus on an element usually leads to interpretive errors and missing the main point of the parable.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed is a short one: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches” (Matthew 13:31–32).

One of the possible practical reasons that Jesus used parables such as this is that, by depicting concepts in word pictures, the message is not readily lost to changes in word usage, technology, cultural context, or the passage of time. Literal, detailed narratives are more susceptible to becoming archaic or obsolescent. Two thousand years later, the imagery is still vivid. We can still understand the concept of a growing seed. Jesus’ parables are brilliant in their simplicity. This storytelling approach also promotes practicing principles rather than inflexible adherence to laws.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed is contained in all three of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 13:31–32; Mark 4:30–32; Luke 13:18–19). In this parable, Jesus predicts the amazing growth of the kingdom of heaven. The mustard seed is quite small, but it grows into a large shrub—up to ten feet in height—and Jesus says this is a picture of kingdom growth. The point of the Parable of the Mustard Seed is that something big and blessed—the kingdom of God—had humble beginnings. How significant could the short ministry of Christ be? He had but a handful of followers, He was a man of no rank and without means, and He lived in what everyone considered a backwater region of the world. The life and death of Christ did not catch the world’s attention any more than a mustard seed would lying on the ground by the road. But this was a work of God. What seemed inconsequential at first grew into a movement of worldwide influence, and no one could stop it (see Acts 5:38–39). The influence of the kingdom in this world would be such that everyone associated with it would find a benefit—pictured as the birds perched on the branches of the mature mustard plant.  
Elsewhere in Scripture, the kingdom of God is also pictured as a tree. A passage in Ezekiel, for example, parallels the Parable of the Mustard Seed in many ways. In this prophecy, the Lord God promises to plant a shoot “on a high and lofty mountain” (Ezekiel 17:22). This small sprig “will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar. Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches” (Ezekiel 17:23). This messianic prophecy foretells the growth of Christ’s kingdom from very small beginnings to a sizable, sheltering place.

Some have wondered why, in the Parable of the Mustard Seed, Jesus calls the mustard seed the “smallest” of seeds and the mature mustard plant the “largest” of plants in the garden, when there were smaller seeds and larger plants. The answer is that Jesus is using rhetorical hyperbole—an exaggeration to make a point. He is not speaking botanically but proverbially. Jesus’ emphasis is on the change of size—from small to large—and the surprising nature of the growth.

The history of the church has shown Jesus’ Parable of the Mustard Seed to be true. The church has experienced an explosive rate of growth through the centuries. It is found worldwide and is a source of sustenance and shelter for all who seek its blessing. In spite of persecution and repeated attempts to stamp it out, the church has flourished. And it’s only a small picture of the ultimate manifestation of the kingdom of God, when Jesus returns to earth to rule and reign from Zion.[[3]](#footnote-3)

1. What are two to three main lessons that you learn from the parable of this mustard seed?
2. Matthew 11:12 states, “From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been **forcefully advancing**, and forceful men lay hold of it.”
3. Which is in retreat, the kingdom of God of the kingdom of Satan?   
   Explain your answer.
4. How and where do you see the kingdom of God advancing in the world?
5. Tertullian said, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” Explain.
6. Read Acts 7:54-8:1. How does persecution lead to the spread of the gospel?
7. [Personal reflection] Read Ephesians 2:10 along with 2 Corinthians 5:20. How does God want to use you to help advance His kingdom? Are you ready and willing to be used by God to advance His kingdom?

1. “Why did Jesus mention the tower of Siloam in Luke 13:4?” Got Questions Ministries, accessed June 20, 2022, [https://www.gotquestions.org/tower-of-Siloam.html] [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “Did Jesus break the Sabbath law?” Got Questions Ministries, accessed June 20, 2022, [https://www.gotquestions.org/did-Jesus-break-the-Sabbath-law.html] [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “What is the meaning of the Parable of the Mustard Seed?” Got Questions Ministries, accessed June 20, 2022, [https://www.gotquestions.org/parable-mustard-seed.html] [↑](#footnote-ref-3)