

The Upside-Down Kingdom (4)- Unless You Repent

(Luke 13:1-9)

I. Introduction

- A. This has been an election year where the candidates' preachers have been news
1. First it was Obama's preacher Jeremiah Wright that was in the headlines
 - a. Now it's Sarah Palin's preacher (*Alaska as a refuge state for end of time*)
 - b. If one of you ever runs for office, I'm deleting sermons off the internet!
 2. One Jeremiah Wright's widely criticized statements concerned Sept 11
We are indignant because the stuff we have done overseas is now brought right back to our own front yards. America's chickens are coming home to roost
 - a. **Irony:** Pat Robertson & Jerry Falwell both said basically the same things
 - b. All agreed God was punishing America for sins... just for different sins.
 3. Is it true? Was God punishing US for national sin on September 11, 2001?
 - a. Was Katrina judgment on sinful New Orleans? *Why not one in Las Vegas*
 - b. We know that God did that sort of thing in the OT. (*Joel and the locusts*)
 - c. But to claim to know exactly what God is doing today is pretty arrogant.
- B. We seem to want to believe that hardship/tragedy is God's judgment on sin.
1. That seems to make for a world that is more manageable and under control
 - a. We want to tell those who suffer. "*Everything happens for a reason.*"
 - b. But when we are the suffer, this "*everything is for reason*" may not help
 2. Barbara Brown Taylor tells of visiting woman whose 5 yr-old faced surgery
 - a. Girl was diagnosed days before with brain tumor; now she fought for life
 - b. Mother believed the tumor was God's punishment for smoking cigarettes
 - 1) So everything was for a reason, she the mother's smoking was reason
 - 2) Taylor assured her God isn't like that, but the mother was insistent
She preferred this harsh, punishing God to an absent, capricious or uncaring one
 3. Don't we often respond to difficulty with, "*What did I do to deserve this?*"
 - a. Do we believe this or it is just an expression? Do we believe it a little?
 - b. Does any tragedy in our world speak to God's condemnation for sin?
 - c. Is God ever trying to tell us something when everything falls in on us?
 4. That question is the context of the parable we look out today from **Luke 13**

II. The Parable of the Fig Tree (Luke 13)

- A. Jesus is told of Galileans slaughtered by Pilate in Temple (**Read: [Luke 13:1-5](#)**)
1. We don't know *why* they tell him. *To trap him? Get a comment on news?*
 - a. This event not mentioned by history, but similar things Pilate did are.
 - b. Those that come to Jesus seem to assume God's judgment on Galileans.
 - 1) Dead worshippers (*Jesus*) were Galilean; questioners are in Judah.
 - 2) The assumption was that these Galileans got what they deserved.
 - c. It also follows that the Judean questioners assume **THEY** are more holy.
 2. That assumption seems to be precisely what Jesus addresses here.
 - a. Twice here he segues from these tragedies to a **call to repentance**
 - 1) Murdered worshippers were not more guilty than other Galileans
 - 2) 18 killed by tower of Siloam weren't more guilty than other Judeans
 - b. We are **ALL** guilty, so "*Except you repent...*" (Plural: "*ye*" or "*all y'all*")
 - c. Those killed in tragedy were under God's judgment... *and so we ALL are!*
 3. Lynn Anderson tells of touring Israel with a guide named Joseph Shallum
 - a. They passed the traditional site of the death of Uzzah, man touched ark
 - 1) Anderson, "*From Jewish perspective, why did God kill ol' Uzzah?*"
 - 2) Shulam, "*Jew wouldn't ask that, but "Why does He not kill us?"*"
 - b. **Calvin:** "*All calamities that happen in world are testimony to wrath of God*"
- B. God doesn't cause all calamities, but they remind us of judgment (**[Heb 9:27](#)**)
1. Those killed on Sept 11 did nothing more that morning than go to work
 - a. **Stories:** Some were delayed by babysitter; others stopped for Starbucks
 - b. So why did some die? The reason is the evil choices of evil hijackers.
 - 1) Jesus, "*Those who died weren't more guilty than those who lived*"
 - 2) He also wants us to see thru tragedy just how **tenuous** is hold on life
 2. Like Job's friends, these Jews thought tragedy was proof of God judgment
 - a. But Jesus instead insists that God's judgment is coming on us all
 - 1) What is the point of tragedy? We need to **repent** and **be ready**.
 - 2) If we aren't ready, don't repent, that would be greatest tragedy of all!
 - b. So Jesus moves us from sudden death to the constant call to repent

- C. To drive home this point, Jesus tells our parable for today (**Read: [Luke 13:4-9](#)**)
1. The details are pretty straightforward; the owner of fig tree wanted figs
 - a. Bill Blair cut down several trees at building and planted fruit trees
 - 1) Reason big trees at back of parking lot escaped—elders stopped him
 - 2) He believed that trees existed for fruit; non-fruit trees = lumber
 - b. Owner would have liked Bill; tree with no fruit was a waste of dirt (**[v. 7](#)**)
 2. But his “*vineyard-worker*” (lit) talked him into working with it another year
 - a. We’ll dig and use Miracle Grow for one more year to see if it bears fruit
 - b. If it does not bear fruit after one more season, then turn it into kindling
- D. This parables makes **two different points** about God and His judgment
1. **First**, it teaches us that **judgment** is for **unfruitful**—we must bear fruit!
 - a. This image of fruitfulness was once assumed to be evangelistic
 - 1) Fruit of a Christian is another Christian—evangelism motivation text
 - 2) But then the fruit of fig tree isn’t another fig tree—it’s a fig
 - b. This image of bearing fruit is much broader in NT than evangelism
 - 1) Bearing fruit is a rejection of sin and a life of holiness (**[Eph 5:8-9](#)**)
 - 2) Fruit is **both** our works for God **and** knowledge of God (**[Col 1:10](#)**)
 - 3) Fruit is ultimately found in a relationship with Christ (**[John 15: 5](#)**)
 - c. But with this promise of relationship is the threat of judgment (**[15:5-6](#)**)
 - d. This parable calls for **fruit or else!** “*Unless you repent, you will perish*”
 2. **Second**, this parable is at the same time a parable of **God’s grace**
 - a. In the parable, the unfruitful tree was not cut down at all
 - 1) It was given **time** to bear fruit—though that time was not unlimited
 - 2) It was given **care** to help it bear fruit— digging and fertilizing
 - b. The story of the Bible is a story of grace (Olbricht’s *He Loves Forever*)
 - 1) History is time between Adam and today where God’s wrath waits
 - 2) We must never think that time means God has forgotten (**[2 Pet 3:9](#)**)
 3. **Context:** Pilate’s murder of worshippers and falling tower of Siloam
 - a. Those people did not expect they were going to die... neither do we
 - b. Lesson we are to learn from them—the time to repent is **RIGHT NOW**

III. Conclusion

- A. People see different in tragedy like tower falling—Siloam or Twin Towers
1. **First**, some would see in them a radical proof of God's **non-existence**
 - a. Why would an all-good, all-powerful God allow such evil to exist?
 - b. If we really look at evil in world, we see man's fingerprints, not God's
 - 1) God gave us free will, and we have abused it. Evil is the result.
 - 2) Most of horrors of history were man-made abuses of gift of free will
 2. **Second**, some would see a radical proof of God's **disinterest** in suffering
 - a. Deists have no problem with evil; God winds the world and walks away
 - b. We are on our own; God is too busy or too holy to be too concerned
 - 1) One brother who survived Oklahoma City came to that conclusion
 - 2) Bible tells us how to live, prayer re-orders thinking— **on our own**
 - c. But the cross assures us that God has invested himself in our world
 - d. God doesn't ignore our suffering but identified with us (**2 Cor 1:5**)
 3. **Third**, some would see in tragedy a radical proof of God's **judgment**
 - a. There is judgment here, but not necessarily on those who suffer tragedy
 - b. The Galilean worshippers and bystanders in Siloam were not more guilty
 - c. Jesus sees the message of those disasters as a warning to the living
- B. The fig tree reminds us that we must bear fruit right now for now is all we have
1. Every disaster, tragedy and death reminds us of our coming appointment
 - a. Every obituary reminds that we are writing our own obit right now
 - b. Every death teaches that life doesn't last forever, so we must live now
 2. It is so easy to put off spiritual things until later; one day but not today
 - a. But today is all we have; waiting can harden us to sin (**Heb 3:12-13**)
 - b. In our parable today, the fig tree is given the **time** and **care** to be fruitful
 - 1) But in **Matt 21**, Jesus comes across fig tree that's all leaves, no fruit
 - 2) He curses it, and it immediately withered—no year & no special care
 - 3) There is a time for grace; there is a time when that time is past!
 3. We'll never be able to answer the WHY questions of tragedy and suffering
 4. We must answer the WHAT... WHAT will YOU do? *Except you repent...*