

How are we? Let's get to work...Luke 13. If you've ever met anyone with a deep soul, someone who has that persona that seems unshakable, someone who's able to live and walk in such a way that transcends triviality, they're rare people. If you come across them and sit them down and ask them questions, usually there is some extreme level of behind them, or for whatever reason God wired them in such a way that they are unable to numb what bothers them but instead excavate it. The majority of people I have found prefer what is trivial to what is meaningful. Now I don't think we do it on purpose; I think we're just trained that way from a very young age. If something hurts or something's misfiring or if something's weighing on us, we've learned to kind of deal with it. Instead of excavating and getting to the bottom of what's going on in our souls, we've learned to numb it. And the bulk of people don't numb the bulk of disjoints in their soul by doing drugs and alcohol. They usually numb it with television, movies or sports. Now I'm a sports guy, but I think so much of it is goofy. If you're a grown man, don't paint yourself. It's a bunch of boys playing with a ball. There's something wrong with that. Stop it. And so we just numb it. We avoid what's bothering us and busy ourselves with something that's light and trivial in order that we don't have to find out what might really be down there. But some people, and they're very rare, don't do that. If there's a disjoint, they excavate, they press into it, they don't run from it. Here's the thing about pressure, about weight. When you put pressure or weight on coal over a long period of time, you get a diamond. And the reason you have so few diamonds and so much coal is because we prefer candy and naps. We want that in our sermons, we want that in our entertainment, we want that in our churches, we want that in every area of our lives. Our mantra is "Comfort, comfort, comfort, comfort." And it breeds weak-willed, shallow people. We can even step outside of religion and go philosophy and sociology. The text that we're going to be in for the next few minutes does not lend itself to naps or candy. It is bloody, difficult, painful and it can offend, but it also might just take coal and turn it into something beautiful.

Let's look at Luke 13:1. "There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices." So let me catch you up historically. The only celebration a Jew would have had in the 1st century where a layman would kill their own sacrifice was Passover. You can find references maybe in Josephus' writings historically, but we don't know outside of this little bit in Luke 13 what exactly is happening here. What we know is that there is a group of Galileans celebrating Passover when Roman soldiers invaded them, gutted them, bled them out, mixed their blood with their sacrifices' blood and poured that out on the altar. It would be the equivalent of some sort of governmental authority crashing in to this room, slitting our throats, bleeding us out and then purging our blood on a cross in here. That's the equivalent here. So they're telling Jesus, "Are You aware of what happened to the Galileans?" Here is His response, "And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way?" Now, Jesus is attacking a very popular idea both then and now. It's this idea that if you are good, good things will happen to you, and if bad things happen to you, there's some level of wickedness in your heart that brought that about. It's the idea of karma, and comically I can't see how anyone can buy into this. Are you seriously telling me that your philosophical belief system is that good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people? Have you ever been outside? Have you ever turned on the television? So He's attacking this idea. He goes, "Do you think they were worse sinners than you? And then look at what He says in verse 3. "No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." This is one of those texts that make me giggle at so much of the emergent dialogue about Jesus just always being friendly and sweet. That didn't sound friendly, and it did not sound sweet. Let's keep reading. Verse 4, "Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you

repent, you will all likewise perish." So now you've got one calamity that's man-wrought. A wicked man says, "I want them killed," and soldiers carry out the order, and then you've got another instance where there is no wickedness on a man of authority, but rather a foundation gave out and a tower fell on men, women and children and killed them. In one there was a wicked man; in one a building just fell. And Jesus says, "Do you think that they're worse than you? No." So these men and women who were worshipping and had their throats slit, these men and women who just went to work in the tower of Siloam and had it collapse on them, they were everyday people. They were not more wicked than you, and they were not more moral than you. They're every day people." They're like the group of men and women who got up seven years ago on a very beautiful September morning and boarded planes to L.A. They were like the 250,000 in 2004 who woke up, put sunscreen on and went to some of the most beautiful beaches on the planet Earth, not knowing at all that an earthquake in the middle of the Indian Ocean sent a 50' wave to snuff the life out of them. They were like the man who calls his wife and says, "I'm on my way home" and doesn't get home. It's not that they're wicked or any more wicked than you and me. And then Jesus says these words that are so politically incorrect, like "repent" and "perish." Look at what He says. "No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

So we've got to do some work here, because He can't be saying that if they don't repent, a building is going to fall on them or they're going to have their throats cut, because that's not true. Not all of us are going to die that way, correct? We're not all going to die horrifically. So what does He mean by saying "likewise?" Here's what He means by "repent or perish likewise." The likewise means that to these men and women, death snuck up on them. They were not prepared, they were not ready. The alarm went off just like it does every Tuesday morning, and they got up and took a shower, and then they sit down to breakfast with their children and they eat, he kisses his wife goodbye, he gets his briefcase and hops on to his camel and heads down to the tower in Siloam, and he gets there and sits in his desk, and then the building vibrates and then he's dead. Unprepared, death snuck up on him. Now if you're thinking I'm resorting to scare tactics, here's just a common misunderstanding of why hellfire and brimstone is a stupid idea. Heaven is not created and was not established for those who are afraid of hell. It was created and established for those who love God and long to worship Him forever. You can't scare anyone into heaven. It doesn't work that way. You can do that and have people come down and say the little witchcraft mantra and be baptized, but that's not how it works. Death snuck up on them. They weren't ready for it.

Is it really so hard to believe that death is going to sneak up on us? Ten minutes ago I was a freshman in college. Now I'm 34 with two children. This year my five year old started kindergarten. There's a little mourning there. She started kindergarten and everyone we knew with children who are older came up to us and said, "In the blink of an eye she'll be gone." Why do people feel the need to do that? Okay, I know. It will be just a second, and then she'll be gone. I get it. Have you ever hit the information button on a show you're watching that you've loved for years and it comes up and it came out in 1987 and you're like, "No way! There's no way that movie came out in 1987." It seems like just yesterday that you first saw it, and it's been 21 years. So if everything else sneaks up on us, do you think it's a far stretch to think that in just a moment you're 70 or 80 or 90 in a bed gasping for air? And that's only if you aren't killed on the way home tonight or you don't have some weak little blood vessel in your brain that is going to pop off and kill you or you don't have some valve in your heart that did not form correctly when you were developing in your mom's womb. Now I'm not trying to scare you any direction, because it doesn't work that way.

Jesus says, "Repent or perish likewise." He's saying that these men and women died unprepared, but intrinsic within that is that there is a way to die prepared. So He says in order for you to die in such a way where you are prepared, you must repent. Now what He means by repent is paramount here. He's going to end this with a story, and within this little bitty story, is all the wrath of God towards sin and all the patience of God towards creation. Look in verse 6, "And he told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, 'Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down.

Why should it use up the ground?' And he answered him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"" So Jesus here, talking to religious men and women who are thinking that their behavior has brought about the favor of God and the destruction of others, is saying, "You need to repent of your fruitlessness." He's attacking this idea that you continually believe that your moral achievements are somehow building up for you a storehouse in heaven, regardless of the fact that all of your righteousness are as filthy rags to God according to the Scriptures. All of your goodness, all of your social justice, all of these little things that make you feel better about you, that you believe are going to bring about some sort of favor from God Almighty, Christ is saying in this parable, "You think that that is the fruit that I want? It's not what I want. The fruit that I want is worship, repentance and submission. That's what I'm after." And then He's going to throw this line in there too. "Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?" What happens when you begin to stagnate in your faith? What happens when faith becomes to you a list of moral observances? What happens when this is what it is, church for an hour? What happens when you don't grow into joy and worship of Him, when you don't grow into a love for God's transcendence, power, might and glory, but instead you're always busy trying to be better, trying to be good, you begin to use up what He would call His ground. You begin to pull nutrients from others. Your very life is a contradiction to the gospel, and it's confusing. So Jesus is going, "Cut that thing down and I'll plant a tree that will bear fruit." Now all of that's pretty heavy. All of that should make us go, "Oh, that's me." And if you're like, "That's not me," it's especially you.

So here's what He should do, but then look at what He does. The vinedresser is also God. God is both characters in this parable. There's this angst and anger toward the belittling of His name, but then there's this patience in the middle of it that goes, "Give it more time." Can I tell you what this sermon is about? This sermon is, once again, God engaging you, reminding you and warning you. This what we're doing is the fertilizer mentioned. If we wanted to do it literally, we might even say that this sermon is manure. It is meant by God to push you, challenge and press you, "Are you bearing fruit or are you just an observer of this great faith?" Are you an observer or a participant? Because every time we baptize, that water is filled with men and women who grew up in church observing God and not participating. There's a difference, a fundamental, spiritual difference. And so you've got the wrath of God towards those who would belittle His name, despite the cross, still trying to be good enough. And then you've got the patience of God going, "I'm slow to anger, abounding in love. I'm going to give it another shot. I'm going to draw him into My presence on a Saturday night or Sunday morning, I'm going to have somebody speak to them, I'm going to massage their heart, I'm going to convict him, I'm going to do it again and again and again." But there will be a day...let me paint it for you. There will be this day where the Lord leaning on your heart and you're like, "Oh, yeah I know...okay, yeah I know...okay, yeah I know..." And there will finally be a day where it's just not there anymore. This is what Romans 1 means when He says, "He turns them over to do what ought not be done." But I think Romans 8 would tell us that even that is done in hope. This is the weight that might just transform our hearts.

Let's pray. "Father, I thank You for our time together. I know it's been quick. Help us, teach us, challenge us, push us. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."