Some questions on Luke 13vv1-9 ‘**Repent or perish’**

**Getting started**

1. How do you feel when you hear about the latest act of violence brought to us almost daily on the news?
2. How do you feel when suffering comes much closer to you, and either you or a member of your family experiences some acute suffering?
3. How would you answer a friend who asks you ‘how can there really be a loving , powerful God when the world is in such a mess?’

*Today we are going to see how Jesus responded to news of a recent atrocity brought to him by people in the crowd travelling with him. His approach may surprise you, but his words – as ever- are designed to be helpful to us*

*Read Luke 13vv1-9*

**Into the text**

1. Jesus is told about the latest act of violence perpetrated on Jewish pilgrims by the Roman Governor, Pilate (v1). How might you expect Jesus to respond to this news?
2. Instead of replying immediately, he asks a question (v2). Why does he ask them whether they think the murdered Galileans might have been worse sinners than other people? How does this ‘chime in’ with the attitude of one of Job’s friends (Eliphaz) in Job 4vv7-9, and even Jesus disciples in John 9vv1 and 2? Do we still find this sort of ‘Just deserts’ attitude today?
3. What is Jesus answer to any direct link always being made between sin and suffering? (v3). Indeed- see how he repeats this with another incident of human suffering in v4-5? How is Jesus’ answer a great comfort to someone who is suffering greatly?
4. Jesus moves from comfort to warning in v3 and v5. How does Jesus want people in the crowd to respond in the light of the sudden deaths of the pilgrims in the Temple, the people under the Tower in Siloam?
5. What do the words ‘repent’ and ‘perish’ actually mean?
6. What realities about sin, death and judgment flow from the news of sudden death? How might you explain this to others?
7. Why do you think Jesus told the parable in vv6-9? What did he want hearers to realise about the urgency of ‘repentance’?

**Getting personal**

1. What response would Jesus hope for in a person who is not currently a Christian?
2. How might Jesus words bring comfort to a Christian who is suffering greatly at the moment?
3. How might Jesus’ words motivate Christians to share the gospel with others? (nb if we are doing that with someone who is suffering, we may need to balance our approach with the compassion Jesus showed throughout his ministry – see eg Luke 13vv1-17.

*Do finish with prayer, after such a sensitive study…*

**Repent or Perish (sermon)**

I wonder how much you have thought about the **suffering** that there is in the world?

* **Suffering** we read about in the media, often caused by the brutality of human beings or countries;
* **Suffering** that is even closer to home, more personal, like serious illnesses and other crises that family and friends often experience.

I’m sure that you’ve often wondered why there’s **so much** suffering in our world, in our lives, and asked how we can cope with it - when it comes our way…

The **good news** is that our passage today will give us some answers, answers that may surprise us, but will be a great help to us.

Let’s then discover those answers in our passage - Luke 13vv1-9 [on p1046 bibles].

Jesus is continuing on his long journey to Jerusalem, and some people tell him about the latest atrocity committed by the Roman Governor, Pilate.

It seems that Pilate has had some pilgrims from Galilee killed as they were in the Temple offering sacrifices to God. Alongside the blood of the animals, there was also the blood of these Jewish pilgrims.

It was a horrible thing to do!

And the people tell Jesus about it because they want to get his ‘take’ on it.

* Will he denounce Pilate in strong terms ‘calling him out’ for his brutality?
* Will he call people to rebel against Pilate, and storm his Palace?

Jesus does **neither** of these things. Rather he asks a **question**, then issues a **warning**, and finally gives them a **picture**.

Let’s look first at his question (Image of Jesus talking with a few disciples) there in v2.

He asks them

“Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners

than all the other Galileans

because they suffered this way?

**Why** do you think Jesus felt he needed to ask this particular question?

Well, the reason is Jesus knew that the crowd would have been wondering whether the suffering of the Galileans was **caused** by their own sins, sins that were now being punished by God.

It’s a way of thinking that is often drilled into us from primary school onwards – ‘*you get what you deserve’*. This is often seen in exams, in careers - success or failure often flow from our efforts. ‘*Is it the same with sin and suffering*?’ the crowd is wondering

Look carefully at v3, where Jesus ‘blows a huge raspberry’ at that sort of thinking!

Were these Galilans **WORSE** sinners than anyone else?

Jesus says ‘I tell you NO!’

To draw a line between the sins of an individual and the suffering they undergo is often not fair, and it is intensely cruel. For it **adds** to the burden of suffering, a worry that the suffering may have been caused by my own behaviour. It can make a parent whose new-born child has been born seriously ill worry ‘*What did I do to deserve it*?’

Jesus **denies** that these Galileans’ sufferings were necessarily caused because they were worse sinners than other people kicking around at that time, and his words…..

* Warn us **NOT** to make neat links between individual sufferings and sins;
* His words comfort us as we suffer NOT to think we’re doing so because we have done something wrong!

If Jesus answer had stopped with these 4 words, I think his listeners disciples would all have nodded wisely, and applauded his answer. ‘*Well answered, Master’*!!

But **look** at what he says next, which is a very strong **warning** to them

‘But unless you repent, you too will all perish.’

~ We were taught at ‘vicar factory’ to be very careful how we responded to people who were traumatised by suffering. To measure our words, so that we didn’t make their distress even worse….

Jesus’ words here seem rather **blunt**, even **shocking**. He comes not with a box of tissues (!) but calls the crowd to repent, or **they too** will perish…

And this wasn’t a slip of the tongue, because he says the same thing a few seconds later.

He reminds them of another sad loss of life- 18 people killed when a tower in Siloam fell on them. This seems to have been what we sometimes call a ‘natural’ disaster, when something that appears to be just a tragic accident -like a building falling, a violent storm, or a severe earthquake happens.

As before, Jesus addresses the ‘*Did those crushed under the tower* ***deserve*** *it*?’ question and he replies ‘*No they didn’t’*- v4- they were certainly **not** worse sinners than anyone else who lived in their vicinity in Jerusalem.

And yet the lesson from this very sad incident is **exactly the same** as before

V5 ‘*Unless you repent, you too will all perish*…’

~ Well, what are we to make of this very strong warning from the lips of Jesus?

The first thing I need to say is that this is **not** all we hear from Jesus about suffering during the course of his ministry. On other occasions, we see his heart going out to 2 sisters who’ve just lost a brother, and he cries with them and for them. When he sees people suffering from cruel diseases like leprosy and paralysis, or demon possession, he is full of compassion and power. Indeed, the very next incident in vv10-17 shows Jesus dealing sympathetically with a woman who had been crippled for 18 years.

That tenderness is what makes his words here seem so strange….

He’s saying that **unless** we repent- that is **turn away** from our sins and **turn back** to God- we too will perish as those poor pilgrims did in the Temple, or those people did under the tower.

So, **what’s** going on here?

Well, it seems to me that Jesus is wanting his listeners to face up to 3 realities, realities that the sudden death of these people bring to the fore.

The first is The reality of sin. For although Jesus is clear that the folk who died were not **worse** sinners than anyone else, nevertheless they were still sinners. Neither they - nor we - are free from the stain of sin. ‘Sin’ means that we do not love God with all our hearts, and don’t love other people as we should. That sin has consequences – it’s like a metal bar shoved in the engine of a factory in a Bond movie. It affects everything . Sin affects human relationships, even our world which is pictured as groaning as a consequence of sin. ‘*All suffering – of whatever type- reminds us that of the reality of sin’* says Jesus

The 2nd reality flows from the first and it can be called ‘The certainty of death’ . God made it quite clear to the first human beings, Adam and Eve, that disobedience to Him would result in death. They ignored his words and so were booted out of the Garden of Eden, and eventually died. ‘*Any death reminds us of the certainty of sin leading to death’* says Jesus.

And if those realities are not stark enough, here’s a 3rd. The inevitability of judgment. In Britain today NOT all crimes will lead to someone being arrested, convicted and sentenced. With some sorts of offence, the conviction rate is very low. ‘*But* - says Jesus- *it’s not like that with God. After death, all human beings will face judgement at the bar of God’s court.’*

It is this **judgment after death** that Jesus describes as ‘perishing’, and it’s such a serious -indeed eternal- reality, that Jesus wants us to take any and every step to avoid it happening to us, and those we care about.

Jesus wanted his hearers to think about those Galileans killed by a wicked ruler, those people crushed under the Tower. None of them imagined that this would be their last day upon this earth. But it was, and some of them might have been totally unprepared for their lives to face the scrutiny of God.

*‘Don’t make the same mistake’* urges Jesus. ‘*Wake up!’* (Image of picture with words ‘Wake up’) ‘*God sees your sin, and it grieves him. Your lifespan is in his hands. And after your life has ended, he will judge you with rigour and complete fairness.’*

‘*There is only* ***one*** *way’*, says Jesus, ‘we can approach that judgment with any confidence, and it’s if we **turn from** our sins, and **turn to** God, trusting in the freedom, light, joy, peace and hope that flows to us from Jesus’ death on the Cross, when he steps into our place and take the punishment for sin that we deserve, so that we might begin to approach God with confidence now, and look forward to an eternal future with him beyond the grave. The Communion we will take in a few minutes time is a powerful picture of all that the Lord Jesus did for us, and all that we enjoy in union with him.

Well, we’ve seen a **question** from Jesus, then his strong **warning**. Let’s finish with the **picture** he gives in v6-9 to illustrate and underline his main point..

This picture concerns a rather disappointing fig tree [Image of fig tree] . It had failed to produce any fruit for 3 long years, and its owners’ patience was coming to an end. ‘*Cut it down’* he said to the manager, *‘and let its space be used for something more promising, something that will bear fruit’.*

 ‘*Oh sir’,* the manager replied *‘please give it one more year’s grace, and I’ll put it into special measures. If it’s still a flop next year, ok, I’ll get an axe!’*

It's not a hard picture to grasp- but it’s important to realise that things like a vineyard, and even a fig tree are sometimes, were used in the OT as pictures of Israel – a people that was designed to be fruitful for God, but was often very disappointing in terms of producing any real spiritual fruit

The prophets warned Israel about this fruitlessness, as did John the Baptist and now Jesus. Fruitlessness will lead to an axe!

Jesus says the same to us today**… ‘You need to repent**.’

This is **not** an optional extra, like a musical instrument or a Parkrun at the weekend 😊 This is **essential** if you are going to get right with God now, and be ready for his divine scrutiny when Jesus returns in judgment at the end of time…

This extra year of the story has extended due to God’s mercy, his amazing grace, to over 2000 years since Jesus came on that first occasion, but it won’t extend forever, indeed we have no idea when God’s window of opportunity for us will close. It may be months, it may be years, but it may be only hours or days……

So, there may well be people listening in to whom Jesus wants to appeal very directly. If you have never repented of your sin, Jesus would urge you to turn and trust. ‘***Turn*** *from your sin, which is more serious than any virus like Covid.* ***Trust*** *the Jesus who has done everything necessary to make peace between you and God…*.’ You might feel ready to do that today, or maybe a course like Alpha would be a great help to you. Don’t let this drop off your radar. This is urgent!

Or there might be a word to some of us who are already followers of Jesus, and yet for whom the issue of suffering is making us pull back from God, tempting us to doubt his love and goodness. Jesus would urge you not to do that. Suffering has not necessarily come to you because you’ve done anything wrong. It may simply be God’s way of drawing you even more deeply to himself, and strengthening your spiritual muscles and giving you an even deeper testimony of his grace to you. ‘Don’t draw away from God, but come closer to the God who understands all about suffering, indeed he watched as his own son suffered and died for you…’

For all Christians, me included, the words of Jesus should surely inspire us to care enough to share. For what other people need most is not a new job, a new car, a new home, but they need to hear about good news of Jesus- the only one who can save them from their sins and give them confidence as they one day approach God’s judgment throne.

[Prayer]