

## Letting God's Words Read Us To Transform Our Words.

Luke 13:1-9 with reference to Isaiah 55:6-9

March 2022

### Luke 13:1-9

#### Repent or Perish

**13** There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup>And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? <sup>3</sup>No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. <sup>4</sup>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? <sup>5</sup>No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

#### The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree

<sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>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?' <sup>8</sup>And he answered him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. <sup>9</sup>Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

### Isaiah 55:6-9

<sup>6</sup>"Seek the LORD while he may be found;  
call upon him while he is near;  
<sup>7</sup>let the wicked forsake his way,  
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;  
let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him,  
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.  
<sup>8</sup>For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.  
<sup>9</sup>For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

### Message

### Why Repent?

#### Intro:

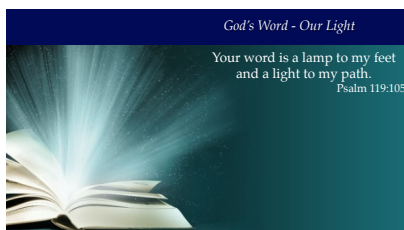
I'll be talking about repentance but I am going to start a few steps away from the Scripture text to first consider what we may be bringing to the text today.

We have just heard the Holy Scriptures read to us as the 'Word of God' or God's message to us. In this church we have a high view of scripture so they are read as if they bring something of God. They are not just stories.

**Q<sup>1</sup>:** Is that so? Amen?

**A<sup>1</sup>:** That's why we take reading and hearing the scriptures seriously and do it as well as possible.

Its why we -like several other traditions- stand to hear the words of Jesus in the Gospel.



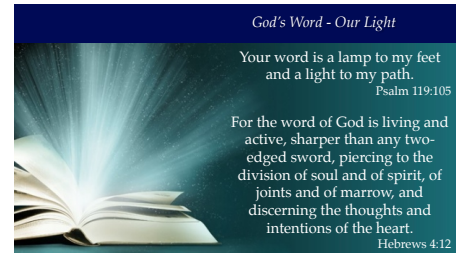
Psalm 119 celebrates God's Word as a lamp unto our feet and a light for our path.<sup>1</sup> God's Word is light on the ground in front of us. It empowers our progress in the darkness and it shines on us too.

This shining within and without is a feature of encountering God. What I want to consider is how as we read God's Word, it will be reading us!

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 119:105

Just as it brings light to our path God's Word may also hold and shine inside us and expose us in God's light.

This is the Word of God as a two-edged sword cutting both ways - piercing to the division of soul and of spirit and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.<sup>2</sup>



Being read by God's Word can be a powerful experience of being known ranging from deep consolation to deep conviction. It can involve feeling exposed and left searching for a fig leaf to hide behind as Adam and Eve did.

While God's Word comes to us totally including what lives inside that shapes and drives us. We come to God's Word with our words as they live in our minds and inform our hearts. This being read while we read cannot be avoided so we do not come objectively. The issue that then forms is, whose words will actually abide within us? Do the word of Jesus abide in us or just our words?

There is also potential for our words and God's Words to get mixed up. We can even be confused enough to put our words into God's mouth! *It happens!* Imagine getting God to speak our words instead of his!

It can be as if we have a dictionary of definitions and pictures or archetypes in our minds which define God's Words in ways that God did not intend. This is a simple communication glitch that persists until, God's light shines to reveal it and we change our personal dictionary definition of God's Words to match God's intention and get the message. This is a pointer to how deep being renewed by the transformation of the mind must go.

### **Text:**

The Gospel passage we heard today has the power to read us and judge what is informing our minds and hearts. It is a story with a message that can edit our dictionaries and change our pictures. Let's get into the story and follow it:

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and his cross. He hears a news story that some other Galileans like himself and his disciples, had been killed by Pilate while sacrificing animals in the temple.<sup>3</sup> In the savagery of the attack their blood and the blood of their sacrificial animals had mingled. This was a terrible horror story that brings Pontius Pilate and all he represents into the frame of Jesus going to his cross.

We know from various sources that Pilate had a history of visiting terror in dramatic fashion. This particular story is not known from outside the Bible but it is not out of keeping with the Pilate's reputation. Then writing sometime later, the historian Josephus mentions that Galileans had a reputation for being trouble-makers. In his words: "very wicked, and much disposed to disturbances and seditions."

Being told about this created one of those situations for Jesus where he was set up to react on a sensitive question spanning faith and politics. Whatever he said about Pilate would have been reported. As a Jew he

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

<sup>3</sup> Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges: Luke 13:1-9 Probably at some Passover outbreak, on which the Roman soldiers had hurried down from Fort Antonia. This incident, which was peculiarly horrible to Jewish imaginations, often occurred during the turbulent administration of Pilate and the Romans; see on Luke 23:1; Acts 21:34. At one Passover, "during the sacrifices," 3000 Jews had been massacred "like victims," and "the Temple courts filled with dead bodies" (Josephus. *Antt.* xvii. 9, § 3); and at another Passover, no less than 20000 (id. xx. 5, § 3; see also *B. J.* 11. 5, v. 1). Early in his administration Pilate had sent disguised soldiers with daggers among the crowd (id. Luke 18:3, § 1; *B. J.* 11. 9, § 4). The special incidents here alluded to were far too common to be specially recorded by Josephus; but in the fact that the victims in this instance were Galileans, we may perhaps see a reason for the "enmity" between Pilate and Herod Antipas (Luke 23:12).

asks a question to get people thinking around what he felt was needed in the context. His question touches on the question, why do bad things happen to good people?

“Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way?”

If Jesus had been a red-necked Galilean patriot he would have focused on the insinuation that some Galileans were worse than others! He does not go that way.

He engages around whether those killed by Pilate and the Pagan Roman might he represented were somehow worse sinners before God. Were they cut down as sinners by God through the Roman tyrant?

For those who like quantitative thinking: Was this God’s punishment for their above average sinfulness and can blatant sinners expect to suffer God’s punishment in some obvious harsh way even while worshipping?

To amplify it: Does God actually punish people for sins by inflicting pain and death in proportion to their sin?

Q<sup>3</sup>: What do you think?

A<sup>3</sup>: It depends on what God is like

### Reflection:

I have been around long enough to know that people come to the scriptures with different answers to those questions already hard-wired in the mind to the point of being basic assumptions. These assumptions represent existing words brought to God’s Word.

After every natural disaster, someone will be reported as saying: The earthquake, tsunami or plague was sent as punishment by ‘god’ because people were doing evil things. One can read scripture this way and you may have heard such?

So now let’s read ourselves.

Q<sup>4</sup>: Do you believe God punishes those who annoy him by sinning? - Now or in the future?  
Is that an assumption you hold in mind when reading God’s Word?

Q<sup>5</sup>: Not far from this is the question: Do you assume ‘Theistic Karma’?  
Does God reward the virtuous and punish the sinful such that it can be seen?  
Can we interpret what happens around us accordingly?

Expressions I hear relating to this are: “A God of Justice must punish evil so there has to be a hell” while others say: “A God of love would never destroy people in a hell.”

It goes all the way down to the basic picture of what God is like and what determined that for us.

So before we now hear Jesus’ answer to the question of whether extra bad things happen to punish outstanding sinners just check with yourself right now as to what you believe?

Jesus says:

Luke 13:3-5  
No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. 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.”

“No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. <sup>4</sup> 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? <sup>5</sup> No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

I think that is a clear and simple ‘No’.

The God Jesus represents does not visit brutal punishments on some people because they offend against him more than others.

**Q6:** Are you surprised?

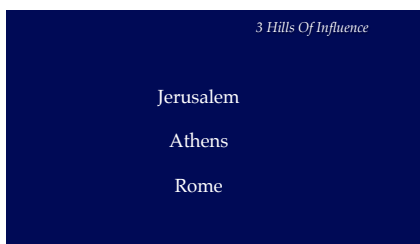
I'll pick up the message about repentance shortly but let's just stick with the clear 'No' first.

If part of you, somewhere deep down is uncomfortable right now, that could be the Word of God reading your words.

What we believe or assume in our mind might not totally agree with or accept that clear 'No' from Jesus. Our own sense of justice might even be offended. If God is in control then why is a tragic death still about being in the wrong place at the wrong time?

Let me reflect on why our words may be mixed up in this.

Western Christianity, like Western Civilization has been shaped by three hills.



They are:

- Golgotha-Mount Zion in Jerusalem,
- The Areopagus (Mars Hill) in Athens
- The Capitoline in Rome.

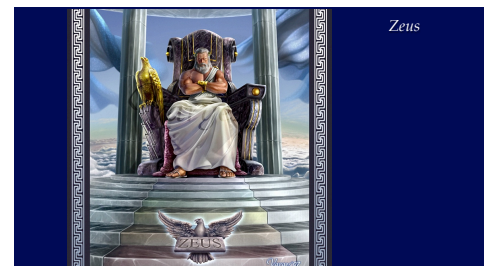
These three places shaped Christianity and Europe as well.

These sources also produced different pictures of God, Justice, Heaven and Hell.

What emerged after first 1000 years from these three hills was a blend of words and pictures and in many people's minds it still is a mixed blend. This is so much so that the God of the Bible represented by Jesus Christ is often painted or perceived as being like Zeus of Pagan Greece.

Zeus was the chief god in the Greek pantheon. He ruled from Mount Olympus and threw thunderbolts at whoever displeased him.

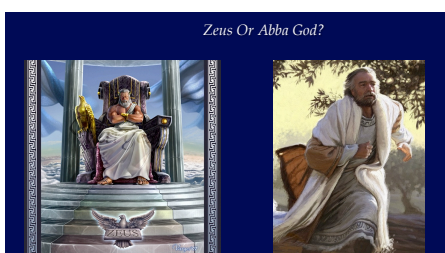
*Some Company CEOs or departmental heads operate that way today!*



Meanwhile Jesus spent a lot of time painting pictures of what God is like and what God's Kingdom - the Regime of Heaven - is like. We can read those words and see the pictures he painted in the Gospels. Yet the pictures in our mind informing our hearts may still derive from somewhere else.

This is part of the business of transformation.

For many people YHWH is actually strangely more like Zeus on Olympus than the pictures Jesus painted of the Waiting Father of the Prodigal Son or the Estate Owner who patiently sends emissaries to his tenant farmers inviting them to pay their dues, or the Good Shepherd who gives his life for the sheep.



Jesus was answering the question: Is his Father a typical Pagan super-deity like Zeus, or someone very different?

It's a question that we need to be clear on for ourselves as we read the scriptures and hear Jesus.

It may be necessary to dismantle our existing pictures of God and erase some words that go with it.

Jesus was clear, YHWH, his Abba-Father is not like Zeus or others like him and one should not get them confused.

*Hurray!* The God of our Lord Jesus Christ is not vindictive emotionally immature punishing tyrant!

But Jesus did have some sober advice that he said twice in this discussion:

“...but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

What does that stir up in you – even with a Jesus’ word-picture of God?

Unless you repent, you will likewise perish?

It could still sound and look more like Zeus, Mars or even Wotan than the Good Shepherd or Waiting Father?

The key word here is ‘repent’, *metanoia* in Greek.

Most people think this is once again behavior orientated and so a limited understanding of repentance being used to hear these words in contradiction to what I have just said.

It could still be read: No they did not die as punishment but you surely will unless you stop sinning.

That is like a Zeus thunderbolt deferred and the way many people hear this is as a threat of hell.

The calculating mind might think: So the deal is, no punishing thunderbolts now but stop sinning or it’s hell for you in the future.

That is what many Christians have believed and some still do.

Again, That word can be more shaped by images from Pagan Greece and Rome than from the Bible.

If that is what is coming to mind for you now there is good news.

Repentance does involve behavior change. Behaviour change is a clear indication of repentance.

But in essence *metanoia* / Repentance is about changing the mind. It is about replacing the words in us with God’s Words and our thinking becoming God’s thinking.

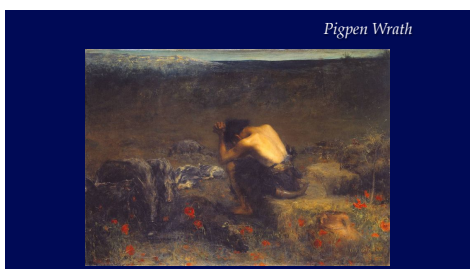
It is about changing our operating program to one suited for heaven where God reigns.

What I hear these words of Jesus to say is:

Unless we change our thinking and our way of life to conform to God’s thinking and way of life, we are drifting away from God to the point where we will be lost, cut off and doomed to destruction.

This is depicted elsewhere in the lost sheep, whether it got lost through wandering off absent mindedly or ran off in rebellion.

The resulting experience is the ‘wrath of God’- a place of God’s absence. God’s wrath is God allowing people to maintain their course to destruction. It’s often the culmination of multiple rebellious choices that bring us to a place of being utterly cut off from God, deeply in bondage and left to stay there, until we turn.



The prodigal son tasted this at the end of his run in the pigpen. He had cut himself off and was tasting this wrath. His wise and genuine response was to repent which he first did in his mind and then with his feet.

Repentance is a command of hope for a new future. It's the way home to a door that is always open but it needs to be engaged.

Illustration

To make this concrete there is clear illustration to be seen in how parents discipline their children in recent decades.

When I was a child it was common for parents and school teachers to hit children when they misbehaved. Bad behavior met swift justice in smacks or whippings with a strap or cane. I was brought up and schooled that way. It was normal! Some were professionally cool about it and others were venting their anger and were emotionally involved.

In this world the word ‘wrath’ was heard to mean venting anger, asserting power and visiting pain as punishment to change behavior and settle the issue. Then with the rise of the behavioural sciences various methodologies emerged as alternative strategies. A popular strategy was ‘Time-out’ where a misbehaving child is isolated in a small room by themselves to calm down, come to their senses and decide whether they are ready to change their behavior to rejoin society. This is another experience of wrath. It is a social pain in isolation instead of physical pain through beating and rage.

My point is that the time-out experience is more like the Prodigal Son’s experience of wrath, isolated and sober in the pigpen, than wrath of vengeful disaster inflicted from Zeus on Olympus. Time-out provides opportunity to repent which is what prison does at its best.

St Paul focuses what repentance involves in Romans 12:2

“...be transformed by the renewal of your mind,”

In the Amplified Bible it reads as

“Be-transformed *and* progressively changed [as you mature spiritually] by the renewing of your mind [focusing on godly values and ethical attitudes]”

This is a continuous process. It is not a one day effort like someone who stops smoking but a mental revolution that is ongoing. It’s about our words being redefined by God’s Words.

Jesus is saying: Unless we engage that mode of change in our minds and hearts, we will drift away from God the source of our life and being, and perish. So stop this concern with punishment either now or in some future life. Your destiny is in your hands now, it’s your choice. Choose for God’s Mind on God’s Words to live in Him, or drift onto a rock of disaster, away from God.

God is not about policing our behavior. He wants us to hold his Words in a mind shaped by Him.

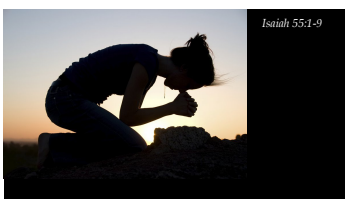
That is the fruit sought from the fig tree in the next part of the Gospel reading – give it a season to repent and come right.

It’s time to hear Isaiah again and note how the Words he speaks for YHWH match what we hear from Jesus.

**Isaiah 55:6-9**

Isaiah 55:6-9  
 6 “Seek the Lord while he may be found,  
 call upon him while he is near;  
 7 let the wicked forsake his way,  
 and the unrighteous man his thoughts;  
 let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him,  
 and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.  
 8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
 neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.  
 9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
 so are my ways higher than your ways  
 and my thoughts than your thoughts.

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Isaiah 55:1-9