

# Luke 13: The Prophecy of Jesus

## 13:1-9: THEODICY

1. Last week we discussed Jesus' warning that his listeners need to get right with God by getting right with one another (12:57-59). The time for this is now, as shown by the signs of the times—the division Jesus' gospel message brings (12:49-53), and they are responsible for reading these signs and acting (12:54-56).

In response to this warning of impending judgment, the crowd brings up two recent catastrophes: Galilean pilgrims were slaughtered in the temple while making sacrifice (something even laypeople were permitted to do), and eighteen people were killed in a building collapse. Jesus, also leading Galilean pilgrims to Jerusalem, as asked whether these are signs of judgment—perhaps the same judgment Jesus is warning of?

This section of Luke reads very much like OT prophecy, right down to the use of Micah's image of the fig tree that bears no fruit (7:1-7), a passage which also includes a warning of family members turning against one another (a la Lk 12:51-53). As Collins writes in his Introduction to the Hebrew Bible, "No prophet could function in isolation from society... It is of the essence of prophecy that the prophets addressed specific situations in highly concrete terms" (285). From what we've read so far in Luke, infer what situation Jesus was addressing, and what sins he was condemning, on the part of which people.

2. The following are two readings of this passage, one from Wright, and one from Bock:

Herod is out to kill Jesus in Galilee, but Jesus knows that he must get to Jerusalem. Nowhere is now safe. Yes, Pilate has killed Galilean pilgrims in Jerusalem; but they were no more sinful than any other Galilean pilgrims. Rather—and he is about to repeat the point—*unless you repent, you will all be destroyed the same way.*

The same way? That's the key. Jesus isn't talking about what happens to people after they die. Many have read this passage and supposed that it was a warning about perishing in hell after death, but that is clearly wrong. In line with the warning he has issued several times already, and will continue to issue right up to his own crucifixion, Jesus is making it clear that those who refuse his summons to change direction, to abandon the crazy flight into national rebellion against Rome, will suffer the consequences. Those who take the sword will perish with the sword.

And Bock:

Now some see Jesus' remarks as national in character, in light of verses 6-9; in other words, Jesus is calling for national repentance. But this seems unlikely, for it requires a very indirect allusion to corporate needs. It is better to see the individual call in verses 1-5 and the national one in verses 6-9. The individual reading has continuity with the debtor imagery of 12:58-59, the general call to repentance through the gospel and the Jewish view that repentance is a part of the eschaton.

Who's right? Are vv. 1-5 primarily warning of judgment at the *bema* seat or the destruction of Jerusalem?

3. The later prophets referred to the Day of the Lord, a day of reckoning, bringing disaster for the sinful and joy for the righteous (Amos 5:18–20; Zeph 1:14–16; Joel 2:2). In the OT, the DoL need not refer to the final judgment. Similarly, on a personal level, the beatitudes are a mixture of blessings which come upon us both now and in the world to come. As James says, quoting Proverbs (3:34), "God opposes the proud by the gives generously to the humble." This pattern, that of Deut 28, that righteousness brings earthly blessings (if not necessarily monetary) and sinfulness brings curses, is seen over and over in the history of Israel.
  - a) Jesus warns in 13:1-5 against seeing God's hand in personal calamity (either natural or at the hands of others). Does God never act in this life against either ungodly nations or sinful individuals?
  - b) If not, then why pray for justice? If God does not oppose the wicked in this life, what good can prayer do?

## THE NARROW DOOR: 13:22-30

4. Prophetic warnings are never without the opportunity to repent, and so it is natural for someone to ask Jesus how residual the righteous remnant would be. In characteristic style, Jesus answers a somewhat different question from that asked, urging the questioner to *strive* to enter the narrow door. “Strive” (NRSV) is *agonizomai*. This is the word from which we get our “agony,” but in NT Greek it means to fight, to struggle or engage in a contest (e.g. an athletic contest), and in this context, to “strain every nerve to enter” the narrow door (BDAG).

- a) When it comes to a decision to follow Jesus, is there a “too late”?
- b) Jesus describes some in the passage as surprised by their eternal fate. Who?
- c) Buechner wrote about grace,

Grace is something you can never get but can only be given. There's no way to earn it or deserve it or bring it about any more than you can deserve the taste of raspberries and cream or earn good looks or bring about your own birth.

As Paul says, “even when we were dead through our trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved” (Eph 2:5). Like the crowd listening to Jesus, we are “harassed and helpless” (Mt 9:36) without the grace arising from his atoning sacrifice.

That said, what striving does Jesus refer to? What role should *agonizomai* play in the normal Christian life?

- d) As Bock says,

In today's context the warning of this passage might be that those who are first (who have exposure to Christ through attendance at the church) may turn out to be last (excluded from blessing) if they do not come personally through the door by personally receiving what Jesus offers. Simply put, knowing Jesus is the issue. (Smaller Bock, 246)

What's at stake here is no less than weeping and gnashing of teeth, exclusion from the messianic banquet. This brings to mind the warning of Ezekiel 3:16-18:

If I say to the wicked, “You shall surely die,” and you give them no warning, or speak to warn the wicked from their wicked way, in order to save their life, those wicked persons shall die for their iniquity; but their blood I will require at your hand.

What can we do to ensure we have warned those in our congregation that entrance to heaven is not based on attendance scores?

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*Fun Fact:* Augustine