

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).

- a) 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.
- b) Which of the following prophets was Jesus most like?

Moses Elijah Daniel Amos Jeremiah

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; for Judah, for instance, the DoL came when they were taken into exile. The same is true on a personal level: God's blessings as expressed in the beatitudes are also a mixture of here-and-now and at-the-end. And as James says, quoting Proverbs (3:34), "God opposes the proud but the gives generously to the humble." Deut 28 tells Israel to expect blessings and curses depending on their actions, though of course the when and how are God's choice, and not something we can control or predict. That righteousness brings earthly blessings (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) Pat Robertson famously conjectured that Hurricane Katrina was God's judgment against America for the countless abortions performed here. Many Christians object to this perhaps because it puts Robertson in the position of reading God's mind, and because it casts God as punisher. Yet not all divine intervention must be by an avenging God; God may intervene to oppose the wicked for the sake of the downtrodden.

If God does *not* oppose the wicked, then why pray for justice?

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.¹ "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:

¹ From Evans, p. 213: "Compare 2 Esdras 7:11-14: 'For I made the world for their sake, and when Adam transgressed my statutes, what had been made was judged. And so the entrances of this world were made narrow and sorrowful and toilsome; they are few and evil, full of dangers and involved in great hardships. But the entrances of the greater world are broad and safe, and really yield the fruit of immortality. Therefore unless the living pass through the difficult and vain experiences, they can never receive those things that have been reserved for them'."

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.

Should we be concerned that there might be people in our congregation who will experience the same surprise of the “many” in Jesus’ parable (v. 24-28)?

14:7-14: HUMILITY AND HOSPITALITY

5. We read in Prov 25:6-7,

Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great; for it is better to be told, "Come up here," than to be put lower in the presence of a noble.

The temptation to seek the better seat is one of pride. Regarding pride, C. S. Lewis wrote,

In fact, if you want to find out how proud you are the easiest way is to ask yourself, “How much do I dislike it when other people snub me, or refuse to take any notice of me, or shove their oar in, or patronize me, or show off?” The point is that each person's pride is in competition with every one else’s pride. (*Mere Christianity*)

In what situations does others’ pride most irk you?

6. Cindy is one of a group of those regularly called upon by the elders of her church to teach. This is her primary ministry to her church. To her surprise, when the summer teaching schedule is emailed out, she is not on it—only the elders are. Was the omission a comment on her teaching? Was it an oversight? Was it because the elders wanted to give her a break, or perhaps because they didn’t like her style?

Without knowing the reason, and with Luke 14:7-14 in mind, Cindy is thinking of not asking the elders about their decision. Better to show her trust in her leaders, she figures, and be content with her lot.

What would you advise?

7. In the ANE/Roman culture, there were two social rules taken for granted:

- Where you sat (and even that you were invited in the first place) was an indication of status, and in this world of honor and shame, everyone wanted status;
- “...central to the political stability of the Empire was the ethics of reciprocity, a gift-and-obligation system that tied every person, from the emperor in Rome to the child in the most distant province, into an intricate web of social relations. Apart from certain relations within the family unit... gifts, by unwritten definition, were never ‘free,’ but were given and received with either explicit or implicit strings attached.” (Green, 500) As a result, to invite someone who couldn’t reciprocate was to put them in an awkward situation, forcing them to decline.

In this context, Jesus gives advice to both the guest and the host. In the Greek there is a strong parallelism between the advice to each:

When you are invited to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor,

lest someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, 'Give this person your place,' and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place.

But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher';

then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you.

Because all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not

invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors,

lest they invite you in return, and you would be repaid.

But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.

And you will be blessed,

because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

- a) Notice the “lest” which occurs in both pieces of advice. In the first column it follows common sense, and so anyone might see the wisdom of Jesus’ advice. In the second column, though, the “lest” is by worldly standards completely out of place, leading us to see our lives and actions in a new light.

There are many ways to measure how well we are doing at following Jesus. Consider this one: **Tally up the ways in which you incur debts which God can or will repay**—in the first case, honor bestowed by God, and in the second case, repayment at the resurrection of the righteous. (This isn’t to say that our *motivation* should be heavenly reward, only that such a tally is one way to see how self- or other-directed our lives are.)

By this measure, how are you doing? How might you change your forms of service and giving to increase this metric?

- b) Jesus is advising antisocial behavior. In the case of inviting the poor, it would put them in a hard and socially awkward situation. But at the same time, it would undermine the culture of reciprocity and patronage which perpetuates social inequality. (See Green, 551-554.) Jesus’ advice here is particularly keyed to the honor/shame reciprocity/patronage world in which it was given. What are the social conventions which keep the poor down in our world, and which we use (perhaps without thinking) to our benefit?
- c) We tend to give to the poor monetarily more than through table fellowship. Many of us read this passage and feel guilty that we don’t do more to eat with the needy. Yet meals don’t have the same power and function they did in Jesus’ culture. Given your answer to (b), is table fellowship the best way to minister to the needy?

Ω

Fun Fact: “The picture [in 13:34] is of a hen, gathering her chicks under her wings to protect them. There are stories of exactly this: after a farmyard fire, those cleaning up have found a dead hen, scorched and blackened—with live chicks sheltering under her wings. She has quite literally given her life to save them. It is a vivid and violent image of what Jesus declared he longed to do for Jerusalem and, by implication, for all of Israel.” (Wright, 171)