

Time Is Running Out

A warning to all who live in sin -- A blessing to all who repent of sin.

Luke 13:6-9

TEXT: *Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' "'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

How can a God of love allow innocent people to be killed? They asked that question in Jesus' day and the question still rings loud today.

The historic context of the parable that serves as today's sermon text involved a tragic incident involving a number of Jews who were murdered in the temple courts by Pontius Pilate while they were worshipping. Scripture says: *Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.* Lu 13 Nothing exists in the Bible or in non-biblical records regarding what caused this cruel attack upon Jewish worshippers by Pilate. But it stunned Jerusalem like any terrorist attack might stun us today.

When they asked Jesus his thoughts about the incident, this was his response: *Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them-do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.* Lu 13 Notice that Jesus does not speak to the question of why and how people die, but directs them to the importance that all men repent of their sins or they will be damned forever in hell.

Then comes the parable that is for our consideration today: *Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' "'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"* Time was running out for that fig tree. It had one more year to bear fruit or it would be cut down.

This is what the parable means: **Time Is Running Out! A warning to all who live in sin; A blessing to all who repent of sin.**

Bible students have wondered about whether the unproductive fig tree referred to the individual or to the Jewish nation as a whole. I think we can safely say that it really doesn't matter. Repentance is required of all, whether on an individual basis or as a nation, race or culture. What disturbed the farmer concerning the fig tree that bore no fruit was that it was wasting space, using up the soil and sucking up the air: *'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?'* God looks down upon the mass of humanity that occupies the world today and what does He see? He sees terrorism and beheadings. He sees adulteries, murders, wars, broken families and broken homes. He sees husbands and wives falling out of

love, and children not being brought to worship him. He sees his Word despised and his commandments ignored. The Apostle Paul tells us what God sees when He looks down from heaven: ***There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.*** Ro 3 And people wonder why towers fall on them, or any kind of evil should befall them? Is there anyone here this morning who would claim that God owes us any good for the exemplary life of perfect obedience, perfect love for God and for others that he, not only is living at this moment in time, but during his entire life so far?

Jesus once said that in the Last Days before his Second Coming, things would be like they were in the days of Noah before the flood. Peter tells us about Noah, that he was ***a preacher of righteousness...*** 2 Pe 2 That means that Noah preached the Gospel. But no one repented. God finally declared: ***My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years.*** Ge 6 Then, one day, the flood came and countless souls went to hell while Noah and his family were saved.

Time is running out. How much longer must God tolerate this world of sinners ***using up the soil?*** Time was running out for that fig tree, and it is for this world, for our nation and for each and every single human being including each of us. But this warning is a blessing to all who repent.

While time is indeed running out, there still is time. The Bible says: ***The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*** 2 Pe 3 That is illustrated by the farmer's helper who pleaded: ***Sir,...leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.*** The fruit for which our Lord is looking is repentance.

Repentance is quite simply defined as "a change of mind." It is a heartfelt and sincere change of mind in regard to sin. It is expressed by a recognition and admission of sin, and it is powered and motivated by the knowledge and faith in our Lord's promise to forgive sin. Since we have a sinful nature, repentance is a fruit of faith that pleads God's mercy day and night. Paul speaks of his personal life of repentance when he writes in Romans 7: ***When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?*** Here is his truthful confession. ***But then he declares what he knows and believes: Thanks be to God-through Jesus Christ our Lord!*** This is the fruit that grows from the heart of faith. This heartfelt plea is rewarded, not with condemnation, but with the same words our Savior said to the criminal dying on the cross next to him: ***I tell you the truth! Today you will be with me in Paradise!*** Lu 23 So then you have God's own assurance that when the time comes, you will indeed be in heaven with him!

No one can say this as they choose to live in a sin. That's why one of the blessings this warning is that we are called to warn others who are living in impenitent sin. The Bible says: ***Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.*** 1 Co 6 You must tell them this truth because time is running out. If they listen to you and repent, then you will have been a blessing to them for they also will be saved from their sins.

Time also is running out for our beloved country. Christian theologians point out that there can be two applications of Jesus' parable of the fig tree. One is, as we have already done, directed to the individual to consider. The other is that we direct it to our nation as a whole. Jesus may have had both in mind, directing the truth of repentance both to his individual listeners as well as toward the entire Jewish nation that was about to crucify him. When we consider applying this to our own nation, the promise of the Lord given to Solomon when he prayed for the Lord's blessing is a fitting promise to consider: *...if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.* 2 Chr 7 Note carefully that this promise is not given the ungodly. They could care less as their sinfulness destroys our nation. It is given to us, that we repent of our sins, and pray. We are they who repent, and so it is up to us to pray for our beloved country, that the Lord will give it more time so that others might hear the Gospel from us and learn to repent and be saved!

Time is running out. So we humbly pray, "Forgive us our sins so that we turn from them and lead others to know you with repentant hearts as our Lord and Savior."
Amen