

Grace, mercy and peace are yours in abundance through faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

At that time there were some present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. ²He answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered these things? ³I tell you, no. But unless you repent, you will all perish too. ⁴Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse sinners than all the people living in Jerusalem? ⁵I tell you, no. But unless you repent, you will all perish too.”

⁶He told them this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard. He came looking for fruit on it, but he did not find any. ⁷So he said to the gardener, ‘Look, for three years now I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and I have found none. Cut it down. Why even let it use up the soil?’ ⁸But the gardener replied to him, ‘Sir, leave it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put fertilizer on it. ⁹If it produces fruit next year, fine. But if not, then cut it down.’” **This is God’s Word.**

Dear People of God,

What is your reaction when you see or hear about tragedy; A plane crash or a famine or a tornado or a flood or a shooting? I have to admit one of my first thoughts is usually, “I’m glad that didn’t happen to me.” But when you see bad things happen, do you ever think, “I wonder what they did to deserve that kind of tragedy?” If it’s a group of people you don’t like or don’t agree with, do you have thoughts like, “They are getting what they deserve?”

We are naturally curious and want to know what’s going on in people’s lives – why did this or that happen? And sometimes, as we view different situations, we tend to be judgmental. The people gathered around Jesus wanted to know about a particular situation. They had considered what had happened to this group of Galileans as something terrible and they wanted to know if these people had done something just as bad to warrant God’s wrath and punishment. There are plenty examples of that happening. We heard of a few of them in our 1st and 2nd lessons this morning.

So what should we do with our sermon text? As we consider this portion of scripture and the events described here we might want to make comparisons to our own lives and think, **“Our Sins Aren’t Really All That Bad?”** Yet as we consider the words of Jesus we have to admit that, **“All Sins are Equally Bad,”** but there is hope because, **“Our Time of Grace – Our Time to Repent – is Now!”**

I. The time was drawing nearer for Jesus to make his final trip to Jerusalem. There were still many who came out to hear what Jesus had to say and followed him but Jesus had recently rebuked them for not paying attention to the signs of the times and the prophecies fulfilled. Maybe they were trying to justify their shortcomings as Luke tells us: **“At that time there were some present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.”** It would have been bad enough to be killed but then to have your body and your sacrifice you brought to God desecrated in this way – well that was just unspeakable.

But why bring this up? When we are trying to justify ourselves, we like to make comparisons: “Maybe I didn’t get it quite right but look at what this person over here did. They messed it up a lot worse than me.” So Jesus asked them a question and then added another example to help make his point, **“Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered these things?... ⁴Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse sinners than all the people living in Jerusalem?”** I guess you might say these were rhetorical questions because Jesus gave them the answer as well, **“I tell you, no. But unless you repent, you will all perish too.”**

The people were so focused on the fact that these folks might have been terrible sinners that they missed the real tragedy of these events and that is that some of these may have died without faith. A lot of times we are just like the people in this crowd – we like to categorize sin and judge people too. We like to make comparisons to somehow make our sins seem less offensive.

But consider Adam and Eve’s first sin – they ate a piece of fruit. They didn’t kill someone, they didn’t rob a bank, they didn’t blow up the Garden – they just ate a piece of fruit that God had told them to leave alone. That is a reminder that all sin is a disobedience of God’s Word and all sin is equally bad. As James reminds us, **“For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it”** (James 2:10). We need to heed the answer that Jesus gave to the people that day, **“Unless you repent, you will all perish too.”**

It is easy to get caught up in the idea that things are good and we are a good person and so God has to let me into heaven. And yet it is not our good life that saves us – it is only faith in the good work of our Savior that can bring us forgiveness and eternal life in heaven. We live in a world where sin and temptation are prevalent and what’s even worse is that society tries to make us think different sins are good and acceptable but they will only lead to death – spiritual death.

We have examples of that in our 2nd lesson when the Children of Israel committed idolatry and celebrated or got caught up in sexual sins or put God’s patience and mercy to the test. At times we do the same thing – we have things in our lives that sometimes come between us and God, sexual temptations are all around us and we are not immune from them, and sometimes we test God by putting ourselves into spiritually dangerous situations. We too, need to repent or perish. Remember, we are living in our time of grace – our time to repent Now!

II. Jesus shows us how important our time of grace is as he also emphasizes how important we are to him with this parable, **“A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard. He came looking for fruit on it, but he did not find any. ⁷So he said to the gardener, ‘Look, for three years now I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and I have found none. Cut it down. Why even let it use up the soil?’ ⁸But the gardener replied to him, ‘Sir, leave it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put fertilizer on it. ⁹If it produces fruit next year, fine. But if not, then cut it down.”** As we consider this parable, God is the owner and the vineyard is Israel. The fig tree is Jerusalem in general and the gardener is Jesus.

God has been looking for fruit for 3 years but none has been found. The reaction is to cut down the tree. But the gardener intervenes and pleads for more time to make the tree fruitful. If, after a year of tending, it does not produce fruit, then cut it down.

As I read the Old Testament, I see a lot of judgment and sometimes swift judgment coming on the people. It is a reminder that God doesn't have to be patient with us but he is. Our loving Lord gives us a time of grace here on earth to repent or perish. Day after day we sin. Day after day our gracious God offers his divine, free forgiveness. Peter reminds us that, **“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 Peter 3:9).

So as believers, saved by grace, we are privileged and blessed to be able to live each day under God's grace. What a comfort to know, by faith, that our salvation does not depend on us, our works or anything else. Our eternal salvation only depends, completely and solely, on the redemptive work of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Through faith we understand that **Our time of grace is limited but God's grace and forgiveness is unlimited.**

It's natural for us to compare ourselves to others. But as we make those comparisons, let's not do it as a way to justify our sins and let's not do it thinking that we are somehow better than that person. Pay attention to your sins and your life and remember that your time of grace is now, so repent of your sins daily – **“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord”** (Acts 3:19). For our Lord truly loves us and looks for our repentance in order to bring us his blessings of forgiveness and eternal life. Amen.