

## Sunday, March 17, 2024 | The Road to Redemption

### Week 17 | Luke 13:1-9 | "Karma"

Last week, we finished up Luke 12 and, with it, a section with one hard saying of Jesus after another. If you recall, we unpacked the topic of conflict, specifically the conflict between Jesus and the world. Should we align ourselves with God's Son, we will be alienated from all those who are the enemies of God. This division can extend even to the *family*, such as father against son, mother against daughter, brother against sister, in-law against in-law, and so on. Though Jesus is the Prince of Peace, reconciling us to the Father, he is also a forest fire, setting ablaze the world and causing disunity. Thus, every believer must be prepared to face conflict, even if we find that our enemies are of our own household. Make no mistake, **being a disciple of Jesus means we are loved by God but hated by the world.**

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**Broadly speaking, karma is the belief that a person's actions determine their future**—i.e., do something good, and, in return, you'll receive something good, or do something bad, and, in return, you'll receive something bad. And to a certain extent, this principle is true. Does not the Scriptures say in **Gal. 6:7, "Whatever one sows, that will he also reap?"** Good or bad actions have consequences (cf. Pro. 27:18; 2 Cor. 9:6-11).

**But if we're not careful, we can apply this standard to things that are *out of our control*.** For instance, should we have **a stroke of luck**, we might be tempted to think we *deserve* it because we live a virtuous life, even though there is no clear correlation between the blessing and our good habits (**e.g., getting all green lights**). Conversely, should we go through **some tragedy**, we might be tempted to think we're being punished for a mistake we've made in the past, even though, again, there is no clear correlation between the two (**e.g., 9/11**).

So, while it is true that "hard work pays off," it is also true that the hardest working and most well-educated do not always get paid the most (e.g., teachers). **At this point, the principle of karma breaks down; it cannot account for the real world, whereas the Bible can.** In fact, God's word teaches, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord" (Pro. 16:33). **The Lord determines outcomes, not karma.** Furthermore, the Scriptures also teach that often it is **the righteous who will suffer** and **the unrighteous who will prosper** (cf. Job 21; Psa. 73; Ecc. 7:15-18; Jer. 12:1-2; Jn. 15:18-20; 16:33). Browse the Beatitudes; nowhere is earthly prosperity attached to heavenly blessedness (Mat. 5:2-11).

Karma is (for the most part) bogus, so why are we talking about it? Because, as we'll see in today's passage, first-century Israelites went about their lives believing something akin to karma. The key difference was that, rather than thinking that some great cosmic scale determined events, the Jews rightly believed God was behind the scenes, doling out blessings and punishments (cf. Amos 3:6; Lam. 3:37; Eph. 1:11; Ja. 1:17; 4:13-15). But they took this belief too far.

The problem was that the Israelites began to assume that if someone suffered, it *must be* because of some specific sin (cf. Jn. 9:2-3). And while, given humanity's fallen state, this is correct at the *universal* level, it is wrong to assume that *every* tragedy can be traced back to some mistake at the *personal* level. Experiencing pain does not *automatically* mean we must've failed in some way. It can (cf. Jn. 5:14), but it is not *always* true. The world is broken, and, sometimes, there is no explanation for why we suffer. As Westley once told Princess Buttercup in the film *Princess Bride*, "Life is pain, highness. Anyone who says differently is selling something."

But make no mistake—just because pain is unavoidable does not mean it is pointless. In today's passage, we'll see that suffering serves a specific purpose: *it calls us to repent*. The suffering around us, be it justified or not, ought to remind us that we live in a broken and fallen world destined for destruction. And the only way to avoid the coming judgment is to repent and turn to Jesus.

### So, what's the takeaway?

Suffering is a part of this life, but repentance can save us from suffering in the next life.

**READ:** Luke 13:1-9 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> 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."

<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.’

As is apparent from Jesus’ question, the prevailing interpretation at the time was that the victims of Pilate’s actions *deserved* to be slaughtered. “But,” you may protest, “were not the people who died faithful worshipers of God who came to offer sacrifice to God?” Yes. Yet, despite this, popular opinion at the time insisted that those Galileans who were killed by Pilate were “*worse* [emphasis added] *sinner than all the other Galileans.*” And people came to this conclusion because “*the other Galileans*” were not killed by Pilate.

Why did they think this? Well, if it were otherwise, their untimely deaths would’ve been viewed as unjust because (or so the train thought goes) only sinners suffer. The Galileans who were killed by Pilate must’ve had some secret sin that no one knew about, and God must’ve been punishing them for it. After all, God would NEVER allow the just to experience suffering of this magnitude, right?

To this, Jesus gives a resounding “**No.**” No, the Galileans who were killed by Pilate were *not* “*worse sinners*” than the Galileans who were not killed by Pilate. But make no mistake, “*unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.*” In other words, “You are wrong about the Galileans who were killed by Pilate; they were no worse than the rest of the Galileans. Nevertheless, let their demise be a warning; unless you repent, you too will perish just as easily and swiftly as those unlucky Galileans.”

With the tower in Siloam example, Jesus gives an almost identical example of human suffering, except, unlike the Galilean illustration, there is no apparent perpetrator of the suffering in Siloam. Hypothetically, human error could be to blame; such a thing is not unheard of. However likely that theory may be, the fact is, we’re not told anyone made a mistake. All we’re told is that the tower fell on eighteen people who were unlucky enough to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Thus, the best explanation is to consider the whole event an *accident*.

Yet, despite the subtle difference between the two examples, Jesus’ point is the same: *repent*. In essence, the Lord was saying, “Stop speculating. Those who were killed in Siloam were not “*worse offenders*” than anyone else in Jerusalem. Those eighteen people were not handpicked by God because they had committed some unforgivable sin which made them worthy to be crushed by a tower. Nevertheless, be warned; you too will perish just like those in Siloam if you do not turn from your wicked ways.”

Contextually, the "fig tree" represents Israel. Essentially, the Lord was trying to let his people know that they should've produced "fruit" by now. They've had "three years" to do so, which is a comment about sufficient time and not a literal designation of time. So, given they're in the fourth year, and the "vinedresser" has dug "around it and put on manure," they're basically at the end of the line. If they do not produce fruit after this year, the man who owed the vineyard will uproot the fig tree to make room for plants, likely grapevines, that'll produce.

So, Jesus was admonishing the people to stop playing the speculation game. They cannot know why Pilate did what he did or why the Tower in Siloam fell. However, they can know they are headed for a similar tragedy if they do not repent. Their time was short. And, unlike those in Galilee or Jerusalem, they have a golden opportunity to avoid the coming judgment.

## **Video Description:**

### **The Road to Redemption | Week 17 | "Karma" (Luke 13:1-9)**

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

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**Pastor's manuscript can be found here:**

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