

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty God, because You know that we of ourselves have no strength, that we would fall if tempted beyond what we can bear, keep our hearts and minds from all evil thoughts, and defend our bodies from all harm and danger, that we may serve You in faith and stand firm in the face of temptation. Through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

THE GOSPEL LESSON Luke 13:1-9 (*Jesus uses two tragedies and a parable to call us to repentance.*)

¹ Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.

² Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?"

³ I tell you, no! But **unless you repent, you too will all perish.**

⁴ 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?"

⁵ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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?'

⁸ "Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it.

⁹ If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'" (NIV)

INTRO - There is a day of reckoning approaching. In about a month April 15 will roll around. Everyone knows this day as the day our federal income taxes are due. We've had our income tax forms since the beginning of February. Maybe some of you have your taxes done. But if not, you know they will need to be done by April 15. Now, I hear you can get extension to August 15. But still, there is a final day by which you have to have your taxes figured out and paid in full. This is a deadline and day of reporting that cannot be ignored, or there are consequences to face.

- I. This March we are listening as Jesus tells parables, and today Jesus tells another parable.
 - A. A farmer plants a fig tree and comes 3 years to get fruit, but finds none. Finally when he comes that 3rd year and there is no fruit, he says, 'Cut it down. Why used up the earth?' His gardener pleads for and gets a one year extension. But, still, there is a day of reckoning. If the fig tree does not bear figs, it will face judgement, and be cut down.
 - B. Jesus tells the parable to the people of His day because he wants them to know there is ultimately a day of reckoning with God.
 1. People cannot put off their relationship with God forever.
 2. More to the point, people cannot put off repentance, and faith forever.
 3. Finally a day will come when people who have not turned to God in repentance and faith will face a reckoning of eternal condemnation.
 - C. Now, it is important to know why Jesus tells this parable.
 1. Jesus is not trying to condemn, or scare people.
 2. Jesus' purpose is to let people know this day of reckoning is coming so they can be ready
 3. Jesus is telling the truth in a way intended to show people the urgency of turning to God.
 4. In many ways John 3:17 sums up what Jesus is doing in today's lesson. John 3:17 says, **God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.**
 5. God sent Jesus to save us from our sins by his sacrificial dying and rising. He sent Jesus to call us to ever lasting life. But, if we don't respond to that call there is a day of judgement and reckoning.
- II. Last fall there was a news story that saddened the Christian Church in America. One of the leaders of the Evangelical movement in America is Pastor Ted Haggard of Colorado Springs. I personally have read and really liked a book he wrote. But, during the recent elections in Colorado Pastor Haggard was one who strongly supported a ballot initiative banning gay marriage. Let me tell you that God is against sexual immorality of any kind, because it hurts the lives and faith of people who practice this immorality. However, while Pastor Haggard was supporting this initiative, it came out that he was actually involved in such an affair, and was also using illegal drugs, meth amphetamines. He was like the pot calling the kettle black. He was wanting to pass a law to prevent people from doing what he himself was doing. How could he call others from a behavior he was practicing. He needed to repent as well.
 - A. That same thing was happening in our lesson for today, and that is why Jesus told the parable about the fig tree.

1. The people of Jesus time were telling him stories about others' sin and judgement.
 2. Jesus pointed out to those telling the stories, that they were guilty of the same lack of repentance they were pointing to in others' lives.
 3. So, Jesus tells them, **unless you repent, you too will all perish.**
 4. He is calling the people of his time to Repentance and faith as the way to prepare for God's judgement.
- B. American Christians are not immune to this same kind of situation.
1. Sometimes we can look at sin in the world around us as the country goes away from God.
 - A. We can look at sexual sin or drug abuse.
 - B. We can look at people who have turned away from God and the church and point fingers.
 2. But sometimes we have sins of our own that we miss as we point to others.
 - A. Our affluence can lead to decadence, loving our things rather than God.
 - B. There is often in the church a loss of love. People are so willing to show how they are right, they can hurt one another.
 - C. People can say they have faith, but live in self trust, we can live trusting our good works rather than God's mercy and forgiveness through Grace in Jesus Christ.
- C. So, Just as Jesus calls the people of His day to repentance and faith, he is calling us.
1. Admit your materialism, your lust, your pride, your self-righteousness, whatever your sin is.
 2. Confess that sin to God, and turn from your sin to the Lord in faith.
 3. Trust that Jesus died to pay for that sin and receive His forgiveness.
 4. Really, these are not harsh words, but words of love meant to keep us from judgement.
- III. This is why this month we are inviting people to hear the merciful love of God in Jesus.
- A. Sometimes when we tell people about God, they feel like we are trying to scare them into faith by words of Judgement.
 1. In truth, God does not want people to be condemned, he wants them to be saved.
 2. But people need to know that if they don't turn to God, there is a day of reckoning.
 - B. Can we invite the non-churched to worship, and ultimately call others to God's love?
- CONCLUSION - What if you were a smoker, and your doctor told you to stop smoking. You know that you might resent the doctor telling you what to do, even though his advice is really for your good. And you also know that if you don't stop, some day you will probably regret not listening to your doctor.
- Today, Jesus tells the people of his time, **unless you repent, you too will all perish.** He is reaching out with truth, to save people FROM Judgement *for* HEAVEN. We are being called to tell others about Jesus. A call to the Christian faith can seem like a harsh call for non - Christians, but it is really a call of love! God calls us, and we call others, Repent and believe in God's love for us in Jesus.