



Sermon

Fr. Jeff Wylie
Rector, Christ's Church, Greensburg, Pennsylvania

March 24, 2019

Working in the hospice field and being a priest in general, I get a lot of variations of the question: Why? So and so lived their life as we teach: they prayed, they exercised, and they ate properly. Why did God do this to them or allowed this to happen to them?

There are two contemporary thoughts about our relationship with God both of which are incorrect. This passage addresses both of them, though it is not the main point of the passage. *Retribution Theology* is an understanding that if I do something sinful, there will be consequences. This is the very question being asked about the Galileans.

The flip side of the same problem is viewing Jesus' words as a prosperity Gospel. "If you give generously, you will come into more money." If you do the right thing, God will reward you here and now with health, wealth, or

prosperity. This is not scriptural, nor what being a Christian is all about. In fact, these thoughts have gone far in destroying Christianity. Jesus emphatically states that this world destroys and is the reason for all the hurt and suffering. The opposite of this is the statement that if you are a good person and try to do good things most of your life, you will go to Heaven. This, too, is not biblical; in fact, the question scripture asks is, "Who is good?" Who is without sin?"

This passage is about repentance and the realm of God, not the realm of earth. We are not to look at what personal gains our repentance will bring: it's not lip service. How often does a child do something wrong, and they cry. "I am sorry, I am sorry." Then ten minutes later, the child is out doing the same thing. So too, are we. This passage though goes beyond our personal sins and offences.

Luke is very apocalyptic. Luke's view is that this world is so damaged that it needs to be replaced. We, as followers of Christ, repent and live for the realm of God.

It is no coincidence that John the Baptist was first in the Gospel. John the Baptist had one focus: preparing the way of the Lord. Step one, REPENT. Repentance is an essential step for the Community to begin their journey for the Realm of God. John the Baptist states "Bear fruits worthy of Repentance." This shows that sin goes beyond the personal, it is also corporate and global. Sin is

something individual or corporate that turns us away not only from God, but also violates God's purpose.

This is further illustrated by the tree that bears no fruit. Israel understood that they are the tree, and the way it is written, it does not look good for them. But there is an extension of the Apocalypse. God is giving them more than enough time as represented by three years. This also means don't take God's grace for granted. There is a limit. Those who do not repent and bear fruit, perish. Loosening the soil, shaking the earthly ideas, so that God's message can be heard. Bear fruits worthy of Repentance are the echoes we hear. The repeated mantra we hear in Luke is repent and accept the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost when people asked Peter what should they do; his response was to repent and be baptized. Bearing fruit brings Christ to others.

This passage calls us not to look at repentance as something selfish. It's not about our earthly lot. It's about preparing for the heavenly realm. It's all good to have love, and desire to serve the Lord, but step one is repentance. All denominations and the Church universal need to do so. Listen to the way the great litany or the prayers of the people are written. They are not so much personal as they are corporate. We hear in our service seek repentance as a group as well as an individual. We need to acknowledge our sins corporately as well as individually so that we can preach the Gospel. Have you ever wondered why the scriptures seemed so hard on the

disciples? Because repentance was necessary to bear fruit.

We are called to feed. Feeding others is bearing fruit. We then should not ask why, but respond, “Hear I am Lord, I come to do your will, but first, forgive me, forgive us. AMEN

Fr. Jeff+