

## Unfruitful trees, unworthy profession

### a. Repent or perish! (13:1-9)

**13:1-5 Tough words for those who place the highest priority on personal 'rights', even social justice! (The logical question, therefore, when disaster strikes should NOT be 'why me?' or 'why them?', but 'why not everyone?'!)**

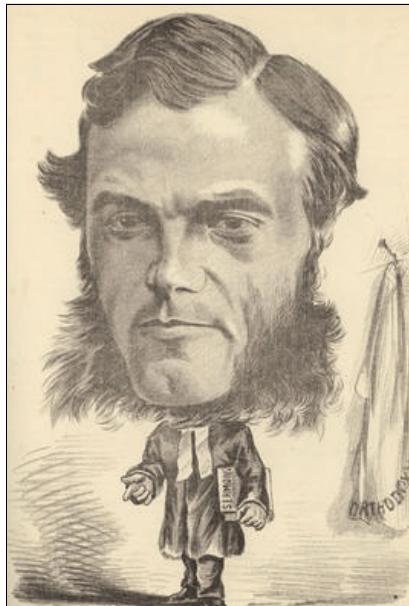
[1] 13:1] There is no account in Josephus, the only Jewish contemporary historian, of this massacre of the Galileans. The oldest account of it is in Cyril of Alexandria (about 400 years after it occurred) and runs thus: "For these [Galileans] were followers of the opinions of Judas of Galilee, of whom Luke makes mention in the Acts of the Apostles, who said that we ought to call no man master. Great numbers of them refusing to acknowledge Caesar as their master were therefore punished by Pilate. They said also that men ought not to offer to God any sacrifices that were not ordained by the law of Moses, and so forbade to offer the sacrifices appointed by the people for the safety of the Emperor and the Roman people. Pilate, thus being enraged against the Galileans, ordered them to be slain in the midst of the very victims which they thought they might offer according to the custom of their law, so that the blood of the offerers was mingled with that of the victims offered. **M. F. Sadler** Luke p.345

[2] [13:2,3] it was commonly held that disaster was a punishment for sin (cf. Jn. 9:2). So Jesus immediately makes the point that these Galileans had not been singled out for a horrible death because they were worse sinners than others. He calls on His hearers to repent, otherwise they will *all likewise perish*. Plainly He does not see any need to argue that they are *all* sinners and need repentance. As elsewhere, He takes universal sinfulness as basic. **Leon Morris** Luke p. 221

[3] [13:1-3] Jesus with His piercing eye immediately discerns the prophetic significance of the fact. The carnage due to Pilate's sword is only the prelude to that which will soon be carried out by the Roman army

throughout all the Holy Land, and especially in the temple, the last asylum of the nation. Was not all that remained of the Galilean people actually assembled forty years later in the temple, expiating their national impenitence under the stroke of Titus? **Frederic Godet** Luke p.355

What is OUR theology of disaster? Of poverty and prosperity? Do we promote the wisdom of Uz (Job's friends) – you get what you deserve!?



**Marcus Dods**

(1834-1909)

"... if we exclude or neglect the influences which God has seen fit to furnish us with, we must be failing to produce the fruit He wishes."

**13:6-9 If we have not yet had a tower fall on our heads, how should we view ourselves? (3:7-9 - note that trees do not have rights – even if they are Abraham's seed!)**

[4] You can only judge of the kind of fruit God wishes you to bear by considering the position He has set you in; and you can bear that fruit only by using *all* the advantages He has given you. The gardener leaves some plants out and unsheltered, but others he brings into the walled garden, and some he puts under glass; and if the vine were treated like a gooseberry bush, it would bear neither grapes nor yet gooseberries. So if we exclude or neglect the influences which God has seen fit to furnish us with, we must be failing to produce the fruit He wishes. **Marcus Dods** *The Parables of the Lord* St. Luke p. 70

[5] [13:6-9] Those 3 years, therefore, represent the time of grace granted to Israel; and the last year, added at the request of the gardener, the 40 years' respite between the Friday of the crucifixion and the destruction of Jerusalem, which were owing to that prayer of Jesus: "Father, forgive them." **Frederic Godet** Luke p.356

[6] There comes a time when even the tears of Christ will not save us; when even He can do no more than weep. **Marcus Dods** *Parables: St Luke* p. 76

### Death fascinates us – except our own!

[10] ... *How much more ready people are to talk of the deaths of others than their own.* The death of the Galileans, mentioned here, was probably a common subject of conversation in Jerusalem and all Judea. We can well believe that all the circumstances and particulars belonging to it were continually discussed by thousands who never thought of their own latter end. It is just the same in the present day. A murder – a sudden death – a shipwreck, or a railway accident will completely occupy the minds of a neighbourhood, and be in the mouth of every one you meet. And yet these very persons dislike talking of their own deaths, and their own prospects in the world beyond the grave. ... In religion, men are ready to talk of anybody's business rather than their own. **J.C. Ryle** Luke Vol.2 p108

## b. Common 'religion' vs. 'the narrow gate' (13:10-30)

### 13:10-17 A reality check for the priorities of the religious!

[7] This is the last time Jesus is recorded to have taught in a synagogue or even to have been in one. **L. Morris** Luke p. 222

[8] [13:11] One more remark. Let the reader notice that the fig-tree is not condemned because it produced evil figs (Jer. 24:3), but for its barrenness; and so God looks for fruit, *i.e.*, good works; He is not for a moment satisfied with a mere respectable abstention from sin. His Son was sent to "purify unto Himself a peculiar people, *zealous of good works.*" (Titus 2:14) **M.F. Sadler** Luke p.350

### 13:18-21 What are the options we have in interpreting these much-disputed parables?

[9] [13:20,21] Leaven is the emblem of every moral principle, good or bad, possessing in some degree a power of fermentation and assimilation; comp. Gal. 5:9. The *three measures* should be explained, like the *three years* (ver. 7), by the figure taken as a whole. It was the quantity ordinarily employed for a batch. They have been understood as denoting the three branches of the human race, Shemites, Japhethites, and Hamites; or, indeed, Greeks, Jews and Samaritans (Theod. of Mopsuestia); or, again, of the heart, soul, and spirit (Augustine). Such reveries are now unthought of. The idea is, that the spiritual life enclosed in the Gospel must penetrate the *whole* of human life, the individual, thereby the family, and through the latter, society. Those two parables form the most entire contrast to the picture which the Jewish imagination had formed of the establishment of the Messiah's kingdom. One wave of the magic wand was to accomplish everything in the twinkling of an eye. In opposition to this superficial means and takes account of human freedom, consequently slow and progressive. **Frederic Godet** Luke p.358

[11] This was wonderfully exemplified in the early history of Christianity. The leaven was effectually hidden. How striking is the entire ignorance which heathen writers betray of all that was going forward a little below the surface of society – the manner in which they overlooked the mighty change which was preparing; and this, not merely at the first, when the mustard-tree might well escape notice, but, with slight exceptions, even up to the very moment when the open triumph of Christianity was at hand. **R.C. Trench** *The Parables of Our Lord* p.98

### 13:22-25 How does the Lord deal with a classic

theological question? (Should our focus be on numbers?)

[12] [13:22,23] The question was very relevant in view of the confused religious state of the day. There is evidence that it was discussed (e.g. 4 Ezra 7:55ff.), and that the rabbis held widely differing views (e.g. *Sanhedrin* 97b). But it seems to have been firmly held that all Israel would be saved, except for a few blatant sinners who excluded themselves (*Sanhedrin* 10:1). **Leon Morris** Luke p. 225

[13] [13:24] The word for *striving* is the word from which the English word *agony* is derived. The struggle to enter in must be so intense that it can be described as an agony of soul and spirit. **William Barclay** Luke p.183

[14] Jesus does not say whether there will be few or many saved; He confines Himself to saying that there will be many lost. **F. Godet** Luke p.360

[15] [13:25] The illustration seems to be formed on the idea of some great house, or castle, into which men enter, not by some grand and lofty portal, but some narrow postern gate (betokening humility and penitential sorrow) by which if men desire to come in, they must throw away all impediments, and the period of entrance is uncertain and may be closed at any moment without warning given. **M.F. Sadler** Luke p.357

[16] As very often happened, the Saviour does not give a direct reply to the *speculative* question, but points out to those present the *practical* side of the matter: they are not to waste their time and strength in arguments as to how many will be saved, but everyone must strive hard and make sure that he himself is saved, for whether the saved are to be many or few one thing is certain – the gate leading to life is strait, and only those who strive ... whole-heartedly to enter, will be saved. **N. Geldenhuys** Luke p. 379

[17] "... We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught," &c. We can well imagine many who know our Lord after the flesh – many who sat down with Him at such a meal as that of the

Pharisee in Luke 11:37, saying these very words. But it is impossible to read them without our minds reverting to another eating and drinking, and that in the still more immediate presence of Christ, even in the Eucharistic Communion. To plead even this will be of no avail, because for what purpose is Christ present in the Eucharist there and then to feed us with His Flesh and Blood, but to separate and purify us from all sin, and to bring about that He should dwell in us and we in Him. His presence among us is for a purpose, and if we have not accomplished that purpose, even His Sacramental Presence will be our condemnation. **M.F. Sadler** Luke p.358

Are we **really** "eating and drinking in His presence"? At which table do we spend most of our days?

Are we living off the capital of long dead Christians?

[21] [13:22-30] The defence of these people was, "We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets." There are those who think that just because they are members of a Christian civilization all is well. They differentiate between themselves and the heathen in their ignorance and blindness. But the man who lives in a Christian civilization is not necessarily a Christian. He may be enjoying all its benefits; he certainly is living on the Christian capital which others before him have built up; but that is no reason for sitting back content that all is well. Rather it challenges us, "what did you do to initiate all this? What have you done to preserve and develop it?" We cannot live on borrowed goodness. **William Barclay** Luke p.183

**13:26-30 How are these frightening words, if our ultimate question is about the 'right religion'? (esp. v.26 - is 'having Jesus in your heart' much different from having him in our presence?)**

**[18]** [13:28] They (that is, the majority of that generation of the Jewish people) will through their unbelief and the fact that they let the time of grace slip past endure inexpressible afflictions and pangs of conscience when at the end of the age, while they themselves are rejected, they see how their pious ancestors inherit the rich blessings of the kingdom of God. **Norval Geldenhuys** *Luke* p. 380

**[19]** [13:30] There is a story of a woman who had been used to every luxury and to all respect. She died, and when she arrived in heaven, an angel was sent to conduct her to her house. They passed many a lovely mansion and the woman thought that each one, as they came to pass it, must be the one allotted to her. When they had passed through the main streets they came to the outskirts where the houses were much smaller; and on the very fringe they came to a house which was little more than a hut. "That is your house" said the conducting angel. "What," said the woman, "that! I cannot live in that." "I am sorry," said the angel, "but that is all we could build for you with the materials you sent up." **W. Barclay** *Luke* p.184

**[20]** And now let us ask ourselves whether we are among the many or among the few? Do we know anything of striving and warring against sin, the world, and the Devil? Are we ready for the Master's coming to shut the door? The man who can answer these questions satisfactorily is a true Christian. **J.C. Ryle** *Luke* Vol.2 p 134