

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

How to Think and Act in Evil Days, Part 1

Scripture: Luke 13:1-9

Code: TMC270

I want to talk to you today from the thirteenth chapter of Luke, so if you have your Bible handy, you might want to open to that chapter. Been thinking about this, always wanting to provide something for you that will be useful, something that will help you to not only clarify your Christian world view, but will help you to talk to the people that you're going to intersect with, as you go through the world and have the opportunity to honor Christ in every situation.

It was 9-11, all the way back when the terrorists flew the planes into the Twin Towers in New York City that sort of catapulted me in to a new world. I...I had pretty much been confined to the Christian world until 9-11 happened, and then through a series of circumstances, all of a sudden within a couple of days I wound up in the national media, I wound up in the International media and I remember sitting down on CNN for the first time in an international broadcast with talk show host Larry King. And I really didn't know what the questions were going to be, I never did for all the many times that I was with him and other programs. You never know what they're going to ask. But the first question out of his mouth was, "What does it mean...what is the lesson...what do we take away from the devastation of the collapse of the Twin Towers under the terrorists and three thousand some-odd people dying, what's the message?"

And I just said, off the cuff, not knowing the question before, I said, "Well the take away is this, you're going to die, and you're not in control of when." Everybody is going to die.

And it was kind of a stunning answer and as a result of that, it launched a lot more opportunities for me to communicate that conviction. That is the message. In fact, that's the message of life in all the catastrophes and calamities that we see around the world. We live in a society unlike any in the past. We live in a world of electronic media and mass communication, relentless visual images and enhancements, we see everything. We see everything that happens in the world of any significance and we see it again and again and again and again. We're not isolated from anything. Every catastrophe, every calamity, every cataclysm, every disaster, every tragedy, everything is paraded before our eyes and becomes a vicarious experience for all of us...earthquakes in Mexico, Japan, Indonesia, tsunamis in Japan; famine in Africa; volcanic eruptions on various islands; hurricanes in Asia; plagues in India; avalanches in Europe; wars in Iraq; Sudan, Syria; suicide terrorists wherever they show up in the Middle East or anywhere else, we see it all. We've seen it all. We've seen massacres of children in schools in Russia, massacres of children in a school here in the United States, we've seen massacres in theaters, and we've seen it again and again and again and again,

there's a steady parade of these people, their families, their personalities. We see plane crashes, train disasters, sinking ferry boats, and on and on it goes.

We're not isolated from anything. In fact, we're overloaded with absolutely everything for the first time in the history of the world. Most of these things have nothing to do with us. We're not there, we're not involved, we regularly do not experience these cataclysms and these catastrophes. But all of it becomes ours vicariously. We end up having to process the emotion of all of these things. And I think some of the reality is that after you've seen them over and over and over again and so many of them, it begins to become kind of the same thing replayed again and again. And our emotions aren't moved at all. Mass murders, we sort of take in stride. Gruesome killings of innocent children, gang murders of innocent bystanders, including little babies are so familiar to us. Catastrophic automobile accidents with families, wiping them out, house fires that burn up families in the middle of the night, we would normally never experience any of this, never. We might occasionally experience some tragedy, but we have to bear the weight of the whole world now. And I guess part of the coping mechanism is, you eventually become a little bit insensitive to all of that and we forget that life is dangerous on this planet, very, very dangerous and life is very, very brief.

How do we as Christians absorb that, take that in, turn that into motivation, be effective for Christ in the world in which we live? Now we know everyone dies, "It's appointed unto men once to die and after this the judgment." We know that, the Bible says that, Hebrews 9. We get that. Everybody is headed for death, and everybody is headed for heaven or hell. That ought to be enough motive for us to be serious about using the time and opportunity God gives us to bring the gospel to people, realizing everyone dies, everyone lives forever in heaven or hell, and the only way to get to heaven is through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ should be enough compulsion for us. But, of course, we're caught up in a strange kind of paradox where on the one hand we're overexposed to these massive calamities that catapult large groups of people into death. On the other hand, we live in a very self-conscious, self-satisfying, personally fulfilling world of people who are trying to suck everything they can out of this life and live temporal life to its max and elevate themselves to the highest level of comfort and prosperity they can. It's a strange paradox.

But as believers, we need to understand the world the way the Lord wants us to understand it. We need a biblical view. So that takes me to the thirteenth chapter of Luke this morning for just a little while with you. And this is a very notable portion of Scripture. Let me read the opening few verses, 1 through 5: "Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. And Jesus said to them, 'Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? I tell you no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you no, unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.'"

Now this is a very, very important and very foundational way to view the world. This is information that would have been in the Jerusalem Gazette, or the Jerusalem Times, or whatever they called it. Some Galileans were in the Temple and they were offering sacrifices and Pilate's soldiers came in and slaughtered them so that their blood was mingled with the blood of the sacrifice. Very dramatic scene. And some other Jews, eighteen of them to be exact, were minding their own business and walking in a construction zone and a tower fell on them and crushed them to death.

Now the question that is on the minds of these people who are in the presence of our Lord, is, "Did this happen to these people because they were worse sinners than everybody else?" That's the point. Verse 2, "Do you suppose these Galileans were greater sinners?" Verse 4, "Do you suppose those eighteen on whom the tower fell were worse culprits?" That is the question. Why is this the question in their minds? Because this was Jewish theology. Go back to the book of Job. Job's friends come to him in the middle of his calamity and they say, "There must be sin in your life, Job, because God is punishing you." This is the only way they would have defined that. You remember they were silent for a long time and then when they opened their mouths all wisdom left and they gave that same ridiculous viewpoint that when you have a calamity in your life, this is the direct personal judgment of God. That's what the Jews believed in Job's time, way back, in Pentateuchal times. You go all the way to the time of Christ, John 9, a blind man, and what did the leaders say to Jesus? "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" He's blind because somebody sinned because if something's wrong with you, that's a judgment of God on your personal sin. If on the other hand you're doing fine and you're well and you survive, you must be the good people. Is that how we are to understand calamity, were the twenty-some folks who were killed in Connecticut the worst people in that school? Were the people that were murdered in the theaters in Arroyo, Colorado the worst people in the theater? How do we understand those kinds of calamities.

Well let's look a little closer at this passage because it's very, very instructive for us. Verse 1, "Now on the same occasion, that is the same occasion as a long, long sermon in chapter 12, a sermon that our Lord is preaching, an evangelistic sermon, to be sure, which ends in verses 58 and 59 while you're going with your opponent to appear before the magistrate, on your way there make an effort to settle with him so that he may not drag you before the judge and the judge turn you over to the officer and the officers throw you in prison, I say to you, you will not get out of there until you have paid the very last sent." This is an analogy and at the end of our Lord's sermon, he's saying, "You better make your peace with the judge before you show up in court." That's an analogy with a spiritual point. You better get right with God before you show up in His courtroom, before you show up in His presence.

So He has preached this long evangelistic sermon. It has been interrupted a couple of times. It was interrupted in verse 13, someone in the crowd interrupted Him. And then it was interrupted again in verse 41 when Peter interrupted Him. And I love that fact that Jesus is so intimate in His preaching that people feel like they can stop Him in the middle of His message and talk back to Him, and even

strangers did that as well as Peter. And then down in chapter 13 verse 1, He's interrupted again. There were some present who report to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate shed. He's talking about judgment. He's talking about being ready to meet God. And that introduces into the minds of these people the question about death and judgment and what happens, what is God doing in the midst of a calamity?

So they tell Jesus about this incident where the Galileans were offering sacrifices, Pilate's men came in and massacred them. Obviously a very fresh event. It surfaced and it brought up their traditional idea that God punishes bad people and if you escape the punishment, or the calamity, then you're the good people.

Let me give you a little background. This is a mass execution. We don't know how many people but this is a slaughter of Jews at worship, a bloody slaughter in the most protected and sacred place in the Temple. The Temple is the only place where sacrifices are offered in Israel, so this is in the Temple. The gory details say that the blood flowing down the altar from the sacrifices mingled with the blood of the offerers. That means that it probably happened at Passover because Passover is the only time people actually participated in the slaughter of their own sacrifices. So there they are, these people from Galilee, offering their sacrifice of Passover, a surprise attack by Pilate's men slaughters them.

Now there had been other slaughters, there was a slaughter by Archelaus, killing three thousand Judean Jews in 4 B.C., according to Josephus. There have been these kinds of slaughters before, many Pharisees had been crucified on an earlier occasion historically. Some have even suggested that these Galileans were thought of as insurrectionists, that they had somehow done some rebellious acts and had irritated the Romans and this was retaliation. And when they knew the Romans were coming after them, they ran to the altar and they grabbed the horns of the altar, you remember, that's what Adonijah did back in 1 Kings, chapter 1. He said, you know, this is like King's X, I'm hanging on to the horns of the altar, you can't hurt me. And Solomon did not kill him on that occasion. Pilate was not so gracious, however, and did not spare them. He was a brutal man, he was a man marked by bribery, atrocity, he was implacable, inflexible, self-willed, a wicked man. And it was this kind of conflict that eventually led the Jews to rebel and brought the Romans down in 70 A.D. to destroy them. So this is an incident that would have touched everybody's life. They all would have known about it. Pilate would have been in Jerusalem at the Passover, over from His place in Caesarea where he usually was.

They—they mentioned this and Jesus presumes to know the question that's on their minds. They just make a report. They just report to Him about this recent incident and He says, "Do you suppose," and that means He's going into their minds and according to John 2:23 to 25, He knew what people thought. "No man needs to tell Him what was in the heart of man, He knew what was there." He reads thoughts. He read Nicodemus' thoughts in John 3. He knows. So He knows the question and He

answers the question. It's a question that's in their minds and the question is that simple question—what about calamities? Not about death in general, what about calamity? Is this singled out for the worst of people? Is God doing something that we could actually call judgment? Actually call judgment?

Well let me back off of that question for a minute and just say, God would have a right to kill us any time, any of us, any time, right? The wages of sin is...what?...death. "The soul that sins, it shall die." Certainly God would have the right to kill every sinner anytime He wanted and that would be a just act on God's part. That would be a just act. That's why way back in Joshua when Achan was told to confess his sin and give glory to God, he was setting himself up for the judgment that would fall, being a just judgment by God, not an unjust one. God is just to judge sinners, we are worthy of that judgment. But God is merciful, God extends grace to us and sinners live and they get used to living and they get used to not being judged.

So when something happens like some calamity, then the question arises, "Why is this happening? Why is this happening?" The better question is, why is this not happening? Why is there not more of this? Because God is patient and kind and gracious and merciful. The sinner may be storing up wrath against the day of wrath, but he has the opportunity during that time to come to God and to be forgiven.

So here is the simple principle. God has a right to kill every sinner instantaneously and it's a just act. He doesn't do that so sinners get used to being favored by God in the sense of common grace. In the Old Testament, occasionally, when God opened up the ground and swallowed somebody, or sent bears out of the woods to tear up young men for saying bald head, bald head, mocking a prophet, people say, why would God do that? That's not the question. The question is, why did God let people live? Why does He allow the sinner to live? Why does He extend common grace, the just falls...the rain falls on the just and the unjust. Why is God so patient and so gracious? And we'll see in particular the answer to that at the end of our discussion this morning.

The real punishment for sin comes in the next life. God giving sinners gospel opportunity, we could say, in this life. So the question then, go to verse 2, do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? And the Lord says in verse 3, "I tell you, no." They're not greater sinners than anybody else, or everybody else.

Go to verse 4. And now Jesus introduces another incident. Do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who lived in Jerusalem?

We don't have any other details on this. This is the only place that this is ever referred to, Siloam is an area of Jerusalem where the southern and eastern wall of the lower city come together, a pool is

there, it's referred to in John 9, fed by the Gihon Spring outside the wall in the area of Hezekiah's tunnel. Apparently this disaster happened in that area.

Now we know that Pilate built an aqueduct in that area and either the tower was perhaps part of the construction scaffolding for the aqueduct or some kind of a permanent tower maybe as a guard station or whatever. But it collapsed, and it collapsed and snuffed out the life of eighteen people. That also would be headline stuff in the Jerusalem Gazette. In the first case, what's interesting is, they were worshipers doing what the Old Testament prescribed for them to do. They were doing righteous deeds. They were acting obediently. In the second, they were just innocent bystanders. They weren't doing anything in particular, but walking down the way when it crushed them. And again Jesus understands the conventional wisdom. And so He says, "Do you suppose those were worse culprits, *opheiletes*, worse debtors to God, worse violators of God's law than any other people?" And He says, "I tell you no...no." Which is to say, the fact that you're alive and you're wondering this and you're posing this question in your mind, does not mean that you're better. It doesn't mean that you're any better at all. This is eliminating this long, standing, wrong idea that bad things happen to bad people, and good things happen to good people. Calamity happens to good and bad people. Calamity happens to people doing the right thing. It happens to people doing nothing in particular. It happens. And that's why in verses 3 and 5, the answer to the question, do bad things happen only to bad people, is no...no. Emphatic, *ouxí*, no I tell you. Just because you're alive doesn't mean you have escaped judgment. Doesn't mean you are good. The true calamity is that you will die and you will experience the terrible judgment of God. You better—going back to verse 58 and 59 of the previous chapter—you better get before the judge and make a right relationship with the judge. Find out what the judge requires for forgiveness and deliverance, and salvation. The issue is not how you die, the issue is not from what you die. Real calamity is that you die without repenting, then you will face divine judgment and perish in hell.

So that simple statement that I made on CNN that day, what is the lesson of the terrorists flying into the towers and three thousand people dying? The lesson is this, you're going to die, you better be ready because you're not in control of when. That's the lesson. And again I go back to what I said earlier, life in this world is a very dangerous thing and there's only one group of people who have any truth that can deliver people from the danger of being alive, and that's Christians. There is no other message. There is no other truth.

How important is your life? How important is your testimony? It's more important than anything else on the planet. People are being slaughtered in Syria up to seventy-five thousand people. Politicians and world leaders are meeting to try to solve that problem but nobody died that wasn't going to die. Children are killed in a school. Politicians get together and they talk about gun control. But nobody died that wasn't going to die. People in Colorado just passed laws against guns because a person massacred people in a theater, but nobody died that wasn't going to die. The answer is not diplomacy, the answer is not new laws. The answer is only available for the world from you. You're

going to die. You don't know when you're going to die.

Just dodging traffic in L.A. can be a deadly experience, as you know. You have no control over that. So that makes you critical to the world in which you live. But the only thing that makes you critical is that you have the gospel which alone can rescue people from the eternal damnation that is the consequence of dying without repenting.

So what is the message that Jesus gives? At the end of verse 3 and at the end of verse 5, "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." You're going to die and it's going to be the end, you're going to be literally destroyed. A very familiar word used there in the New Testament to speak of eternal destruction, you need to change your mind about your sin. You need to come to the only Savior, the only one who can rescue you from judgment. You will all likewise perish, *apollumi*, to be lost, destroyed, killed. The intent of the warning is that divine judgment comes after death, you have to be ready to die.

You know, once you get a vision of this and you see all humanity as people on the brink of death, and you have the only message that can rescue them from hell, your life takes on an importance that transcends every president, every king, every monarch, every ruler, every great mind on the planet. So I think it's a fair assumption to say that all the people killed at the altar, and all the people crushed by the tower went to hell, they perished. I don't know that we could conclude that any of them were true believers in the true God. And it was over for them, in this life, but it had just begun eternally in the next life.

So, in a sense, everybody's living on borrowed time, everybody lives on borrowed time. And with that thought in mind, pick up the parable with which Jesus draws this sermon to a conclusion in verse 6. "He began telling this parable. A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard and he came looking for fruit on it and didn't find any. And he said to the vineyard keeper, "Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down. Why does it even use up the ground?" But he answered and said to him, 'Let it alone, sir, for this year too until I dig around it and put fertilizer and if it bears fruit next year, fine. If not, cut it down.'"

Pretty dramatic. Fig trees were common in Israel, valuable, excellent for shade, used for gathering. See one in John chapter 1, the fruit useful, delicious. Everybody understood that. The farmer comes and he looks to the fig tree to find fruit. Didn't find any.

By the way, fig trees have fruit every year. Apparently this had been planted as a grown tree and should have produced. He kept coming back for three years, disappointment after disappointment after disappointment. Interesting that three years is used here because that's the length of the ministry of the Lord Jesus to Israel. Or was this Jesus saying Israel is the fig tree? That would certainly fit a biblical picture. I've given enough time to see some fruitfulness. I see none. The tree

has been around long enough to prove itself worthy, nothing coming from it. Why does it even use up the ground? What a waste, cut it down...cut it down.

Judgment on Israel. But not just Israel, judgment on any fruitless life, any fruitless life. At that point, in verse 8, the farmer responds by saying, "Let it alone, sir. Let it alone. For this year, too. Until I dig around it and put in fertilizer." Digging around it, a verb simply means to loosen the soil, better irrigation, let me put some *koprion* on it, some manure. Let me do whatever I can to help. And if it bears fruit next year, fine. If it bears fruit in that duration, fine. If not, cut it down.

That tree is living on borrowed time. And that's exactly what our Lord is saying about every human life, not just Israel, but every human life. Everybody lives on borrowed time, everybody. You're moving through a world as a possessor of Christ and the Holy Spirit as a believer, knowledgeable of the gospel, you're living through a world, moving through a world in which you alone have the truth that rescues dying people. You are THE most important people on the planet. Judgment is near, next year. Judgment is imminent. Life is short, it appears for a little time like a vapor and fades away. God is patient but He will not always strive with man.

So as we think about life in this world, as we think about what matters in this world, I think we have to go back to this very basic reality that really only one thing matters and that's what has eternal implications.

Just a personal word maybe to wrap this up. You know, when I was a college student, I was thinking about athletics, that's what I did, that's what I loved and that's what I enjoyed. And I had the opportunity to play football and thoroughly enjoyed it and an opportunity to go to a pro-football camp after my junior year and get into the mix of being drafted and all that, after my senior year. And I had an experience. I was speaking at an event as a senior, football player, the season was over and I had received some kind of an award and so I went to speak to this group that invited me to come and talk about football. It was a secular kind of thing. So I just gave my testimony, talked about Christ. By then I knew kind of in my heart that I wanted to minister, that I wanted to give my life in ministry. But out of that event, somebody told me about a girl and this is kind of an important point in my life, really important, who had been shot through the neck by her boyfriend and severed her spinal cord and she's a quadriplegic. She was a head cheerleader at Thousand Oaks High School in those days. And somebody asked from that event if I would go talk to her in the hospital cause they heard me give a testimony. I'm like you, you know, I'm a high...I mean, I'm a college senior, I'm not sure I'm ready to give profound answers to people who have just been shot through the neck by their boyfriend at the age of 17, a lifetime quad.

But I went and I...her name was Polly, Polly Grider. And I talked to her and I just said it's not what happens to your body that matters, it's what happens to your soul. And I even said, "Fear not him who destroys the body, but fear Him who destroys both body and soul in hell," and I just gave the gospel

and told her that God could give her reason to live, purpose in life and I remember the occasion very, very vividly. It was in the hospital in Glendale, Adventist Hospital. And she responded by saying, "I...I would kill myself if I could but I can't move anything." And I said, "Well then you are hopeless, you can't live without hope." And we began to talk some about that.

Eventually she opened her heart to the Lord. She prayed a beautiful prayer, acknowledged Christ, responded to Christ and I was shocked. How that kind of desperation and anger and fear could turn into a heart open to Christ was a work of the Holy Spirit and I saw it. Anyway, she gave her life to Christ and that totally shifted my entire life thinking. Why would I do anything other than that? What else would matter? Certainly football didn't matter, that mattered. And the wonderful part of the story is she recovered and, of course, quadriplegic in a wheel chair. A young man came along, fell in love with her, married her, a Christian young man and God graced her life in that way.

That was a monumental event in the life of a young guy, about your age, and that answered all the questions that I ever had about what should I do because what was the most important thing you could ever do with your life. The one thing and only Christians can do, and that makes them the most important people in the world, and that is to communicate the gospel to a dying people who are all living on borrowed time. They're going to die, they don't know when, they're not in charge of when...whether it's here or anywhere around the world. That's why we're here, that's why we exist. That's our great high calling.

Nothing but that really matters in the big picture. Can't get caught up in the trivial, can't get caught up in the superficial and the temporal. We're too important.

I guess the irony of it is, the world is trying to marginalize us, trying to shut us up. And you may see that happen more in the next ten to fifteen, twenty years, thirty years of your life if the Lord tarries. But this is how it flows. Reject the Bible, in a culture, we've done that, we're there. That's first, reject the Bible. Second, turn morality upside down. Fornication is good, sex is recreational, homosexuality is normal, homosexual marriage is acceptable, abortion is good, a woman's right to choose, so you've rejected the Bible, now you've turned morality upside down, you've substituted good for bad, light for darkness, bitter for sweet, to borrow Isaiah 5's words.

Third; demand tolerance...demand that all of this morality be turned on its head, be tolerated, all of it. It has to be tolerated. You have Hillary Clinton coming out the other day advocating homosexuality, gay marriage, everybody jumping on the bandwagon, and it has to be tolerated. We have trouble with that because we understand that immorality on any level, sex outside marriage between a man and a woman, is wrong. It's sinful, it's dishonoring and it's destructive. And a lot of other issues of morality. But we're going to be forced to be tolerant which then turns to intolerance.

So first you reject the Bible. Then you turn morality upside down. Then you demand tolerance and then for the people who don't provide that tolerance, you become intolerant so that the message of Christianity becomes hostile. And that leads to the final step which is persecution...persecution.

I wouldn't be a bit surprised to look down the road and say we are the only people in the world who have the message and we're liable to be persecuted for it, which is going to raise the stakes on your commitment. The price is going to be higher. Not going to be a benign sort of Judeo Christian tolerant culture that you work and live in ahead of you. It's going to be hostile. It's going to be aggressively hostile. And when you speak the truth, they're not going to like to hear it because you're going against the grain. And that can be even in some ways the most self-righteous people.

I was watching Bill O'Reilly the other day and he said he's going to write a new book, he wrote Killing Lincoln, Killing Kennedy and then he said his new book is Killing Jesus. And I grabbed my head and thought, "Oh, what does he know about the death of Christ?"

And then he said this, "I'm going to write a book on killing Jesus, and, of course, we've discovered new documents that give us insight into the real reasons Jesus was killed. And we also recognize that the gospel writers all contradict each other." Humph.

So I got busy and sent him a copy of The Murder of Jesus and One Perfect Life to show that the gospels do not contradict each other and the real reason Jesus died with a little "Dear Bill," thing. That...and I'm sure that me telling him the truth about that will generate hostility .

So hostility will come even from those who are Roman Catholics, or who want to be our friends, but it's liable to come in greater measure from those who are anti-Christian. I think it's going to be tough for us in the future. In a sense I wish this could be more like a boot camp here because I think you're not just going to be going into the world of your parents, you're not going to be going into the world of my world, where I grew up, my parents' world which was favorable and open to Christianity and affirming of a biblical morality...that's all changed. So now you have a message that is the truth, the only hope of the world and they're not going to like you for it...which raises the stakes on your commitment.

Just look at the world the way our Lord told us to look at the world. Everybody's on their way to death. Everybody's going to die. They're not in control of when. When they die, they do face judgment. They're all living on borrowed time. You're their only hope. Make your life count for the gospel.

Father, we are so grateful that You have given us insight, simple insight, memorable, unforgettable, to the urgency of life. We live in a world that is mad over recreation, entertainment, trying to satisfy itself with very little concern about an eternal hell. But You have said much about it and may we see people

the way You see them, it made You weep and You were in control of it. May we with equally sad hearts live in a dying world with people on borrowed time, making sure we do everything we can with urgency to make Christ known, the only hope, the only Savior. Use us, Lord, for the gospel's sake, we pray. Amen.

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