

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

Luke 13:1-9

(Discussion questions can be found at the end.)

This is the second time in the book of Luke that the name Pilate comes up...though it won't be the last. (Luke is a good foreshadower.) The first time is back in 3:1 and is used more as a date stamp for time reference purposes, helping place when the events of Luke's Gospel took place. But here in this chapter we begin to see some of Pilate's character, and the reason for Jewish hatred of him.

Here's a little more about Pilate from N.T. Wright:

"If the New Testament had never been written, we would still know that Pontius Pilate was an unpleasant and unpopular Governor of Judea. The Jewish historian Josephus lists several things he did which upset and irritated the local Jewish population. Sometimes he seemed to be deliberately trying to make them angry. He trampled on their religious sensibilities; once he tried to bring Roman standards (military emblems) into Jerusalem, with their pagan symbols. He flouted their laws and conventions; once he used money from the Temple treasury to build an aqueduct, and then brutally crushed the rebellion that resulted. These incidents, and others like them, are recorded outside the New Testament, and help us to understand what sort of person Pilate was...So it shouldn't surprise us to learn that on another occasion, while some people on pilgrimage from Galilee had been offering sacrifice in the Temple, Pilate sent troops in, perhaps fearing a riot, and slaughtered them."

Having the despicable Pontius Pilate as their governor was just one of the reasons why the Jews hated the Romans. It was just another reminder that they were occupied and underfoot. And the plaguing question in the back of their minds through it all was, "Where is God in all this? What about His promises to us?" And in much the same spirit as "father Abraham" who received a promise from God of having a son, took matters into his own hands by having a son through his servant Hagar, so the first century Jews fostered the idea of taking matters into their own hands to get rid of the hated Romans.

This is likely why the matter of the Galileans being slaughtered was brought to Jesus' attention. Some in the crowd, perhaps opportunistic zealots, saw in Jesus a charismatic young leader who could lead a (hopefully successful) charge against the Romans. Unbeknownst to them, Jesus had other plans, a different agenda that was far superior to whatever the Jews could come up with, one that was in alignment with and fulfillment of God's plans, purposes, and promises.

But speaking of being opportunistic, Jesus took this opportunity to confront some misguided thinking on behalf of the Jews. The first misguided notion they had was that suffering was a direct result of sin in the person suffering. While in a very broad, general sense suffering is a result of sin (i.e. we live in a broken/fallen world where evil and suffering abound), Jesus confronts the idea that every specific incident of suffering is directly caused by the sin of the sufferer. (For a more thorough treatment of this topic I'd recommend John 9—the healing of the man born blind from birth, as well as the book of Job.)

The second misguided notion that Jesus confronted here was the idea that the Jews could go head-to-head, toe-to-toe with the Romans and somehow succeed (and along with that, He confronted the misguided notion that somehow that's what God wanted). In fact, Jesus confronted this idea so strongly that He packed it in the form of stern warning....twice: "*But unless you repent, you too will all perish.*" (13:3,5 NIV).

So did God/Jesus not care about the plight of the Jews? Wasn't this Roman occupation and oppression counter to God's will and promises? What gives?

The problem was that the Jews had misunderstood God's plan/purposes and subsequently their role in it all. Did God want to use the Jews to fulfill plans? Hadn't He chosen them centuries before to be His special, chosen people and to fulfill His purposes through them? Yes!

But the Jews had fixated on being "special/chosen" (i.e. entitled and full of self-importance...which all humans are prone to) and had not given proper consideration as to what it meant to be faithful to God's purposes. What were God's purposes after all? Going all the way back to Genesis chapter 12 we see that God desired that "*all people on earth will be blessed through you*" (Abraham, and subsequently his descendants).

A proper understanding of Scripture, for that matter a proper understanding of God, is to see God as a missionary God. He has a heart for all nations/peoples. His goal all along was to bring salvation to ALL. Israel/the Jews were simply a means toward that end...a people who would bear witness to the Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer God to all peoples. Everything God had ever done for Israel was for the larger purpose of making His name known among ALL PEOPLES. (See for example: Exodus 9:13-16, Deuteronomy 4:6-8, Joshua 4:24, I Kings 8:56-61, II Kings 19:15-19, Psalm 9:7-11, Psalm 22:25-28, Psalm 47, Psalm 67, Psalm 86:9, Psalm 96, Isaiah 11:9-10, Isaiah 49:6, 22, Isaiah 60:1-3, Jeremiah 4:1-2, Jeremiah 16:19-21, Ezekiel 36:22-23, Daniel 7:13-14, Zephaniah 2:11, Zechariah 2:10-13, Malachi 1:11...to name BUT A FEW.) God's heart for the nations/peoples of the earth drips all over the pages of Scripture. Israel's role was to make Him known through their faithful worship of Him and obedience to Him.

But instead...they just wanted a better situation for themselves. Think about it. What could be more strategic in fulfilling God's will for them to be a light to all nations than having the greatest, most powerful, foremost nation/empire of the world at that time in their own backyard? Had the Jews played their cards right, had they understood their purpose better, they could have influenced the entire Roman empire. But instead the Jews wanted them out...by any means necessary. And that is why Jesus had such a stern warning for them. If they continued down this path, they would be on a collision course that would not pan out well for them. They would indeed perish. In 70 AD due to Jewish rebellion, the Romans sacked Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. But, of course, by then the New Testament church was well underway, and the mantle of being a light to the nations had been passed to them/us. And we see through the apostle Paul, the strategic use of proximity to the Romans as a means of spreading the Gospel.

*****This might be a good time to advertise the Perspectives class coming in the Fall. The sort of Biblical, historical, cultural and strategic perspective just briefly mentioned above is what the class is all about. Registration is underway. See the email this discussion guide came in for a link to the class.*****

Jesus illustrated His warning with a parable. The point of the parable of the fig tree is simple. A fig tree exists for one reason...to produce figs. Likewise, Israel existed for one reason...to be a witness of God to the world. And just as a fig tree that doesn't produce figs has no reason to exist, Israel had no reason to exist apart from her God-given mission/purpose. And that same point holds true for the church. We exist for that same reason...and that is our only purpose for existence.

Sometimes the external situations/circumstances we find ourselves in are easy and favorable, sometimes they are challenging and difficult. But our situation/circumstances don't change our purpose or reason for existence. Our focus and energy needs to be on faithfully fulfilling our purpose, not changing our situation/circumstances.

- Q. Describe a time when you, or someone one close to you, experienced suffering. How did you mentally process through that? Did you catch yourself asking the question, "Why God?" or "What have I done that brought this on?" Explain.**
- Q. (From the sermon) living in a universe of cause and effect (by God's design) how have you come to terms (or where are you in coming to terms) with the idea that we are simply not privy to all the possible causes for suffering? Does it bring you comfort/understanding or distress/more questions to think that we live in a war zone with unseen forces trying to take us out?**
- Q. What are some of the ways (historically and presently) that Christians/the Church get off focus in faithfully fulfilling our purpose/mission/mandate to take make known the Gospel?**
- Q. What do you think Christians/the Church need to repent from today?**
- Q. The Church at-large exists, Riverside exists, your Home Group exists, YOU exist for the purpose of making God known. What kind of priority is that to you? Explain. What can we do to help each other 1.) make it top priority, and 2.) do it well?**
- Q. Consider how you/we are positioned in society and in the world. What strategic advantages might we have in advancing the Gospel?**
- Q. Why are you a Christian? (Not how did you become a Christian.) How is God's purpose of reaching ALL peoples a reason for you being a Christian?**