

**REPENT OR PERISH**  
**Sermon for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Lent 2022**  
**Luke 13:1-5**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the first part of our Gospel we just heard read, Luke 13:1-5, where Jesus is asked about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices: <sup>1</sup> **At that time some people were present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.** <sup>2</sup> **Jesus answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way?”** <sup>3</sup> **I tell you, no. However, unless you repent, you too will all perish in a similar way.** <sup>4</sup> **Or do you think that those eighteen who were killed when the tower at Siloam fell on them were guiltier than all the other people who were living in Jerusalem were?** <sup>5</sup> **I tell you, no; but, unless you repent, you will all perish in the same way.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Whenever there’s a mass tragedy in the news, no matter what it is, it seems to be the custom in our society to get opinions and comments from various high-profile individuals, celebrities, or influential public figures. Everyone has an opinion. That’s what happens in our culture now, and it’s also what we see going on in Jesus’ time.

As Jesus was an influential public figure and was a Galilean, some people had asked Him for His view on such a great tragedy that had just taken place, the mass murder of some Galileans at the temple in Jerusalem. They were slain, cut down, by Pilate’s soldiers. Some people wanted to know what Jesus thought about this tragedy. Jesus does comment, but His remark is not what the people were expecting to hear. In fact, *it’s not what we are expecting.* What was Jesus’ thought on mass tragedies? **“Repent or perish.”**

“Repent or perish”? That sounds rather abrupt. Almost cold and heartless. How could Jesus say such a thing? Well, as we shall see, it’s not cold and heartless. Let’s back up for a moment and set the scene.

Apparently, some Jews from the region of Galilee had recently gone to Jerusalem to offer up sacrifices at the temple. There was nothing unusual about that; it happened all the time. However, on this occasion, Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, had sent in his soldiers to the temple grounds, where they had killed a bunch of those Galileans, struck them down, and shed their blood. That was a terrible mass murder. We’re not told why Pilate did this - maybe he suspected them of being insurrectionists or something. Whatever it was, the Romans didn’t mess around.

So it was that **“At that time some people were present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.”** They figured that Jesus would be interested in this news - if He hadn’t heard it already. And it seems they wanted to get His take on the matter. By this point, Jesus was a high-profile individual, known to be rather outspoken. To their ears, He often said controversial stuff.

But the first thing Jesus says in His answer tells us something about the people asking Him the question. He says, **“Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way?”** Now that may strike us as odd. The people asking Jesus the question apparently thought the victims of this mass murder somehow must have been worse sinners because they had suffered such an awful fate. In other words, if this sort of bad thing happened to them, it must be because they were *especially bad people.*

That was a view that was going around in that culture, in that day. Or think of Job’s friends, who believed that Job must have done something horrible for him to be suffering as he did. Or think of the man born blind. Jesus’ own disciples had asked Him, *“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”* (John 9:2). Bad things happen to bad people - that was the idea.

But Jesus disagrees with that notion. He answered them, **“Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way?”** <sup>3</sup> **I tell you, no.”** Jesus wasn’t buying the idea that because some people die in a particularly violent or tragic way, therefore, they must have deserved it because they were worse sinners than anyone else. No, and it goes the other way too. If people are innocent victims of terrible tragedies, it must not be assumed that they are automatically in heaven - that they must have been pure and innocent before God. That is a notion that is the most prevalent in our society today.

You see, many like to say that innocent victims of evil and violence, innocent victims of disasters and catastrophes, innocent victims of terrible tragedies, are all automatically in heaven, automatically with God, whatever you conceive God to be. They will say things like they have “gained their angel wings,” or their “spirits are now free” and so on. The term for this view is universalism, and it is a false teaching. It tries to give people comfort, but it does so in the wrong way by misleading people.

That’s the heresy of our day. The error back in Jesus’ day was to *assume* that victims of tragedies must have had it coming, that they must have been worse sinners than the rest of us. To that, Jesus says no.

Jesus goes on to add something surprising. He says, “**<sup>5</sup> I tell you, no; but, unless you repent, you will all perish in the same way.**” Where is that coming from? And then He even adds on to their Galileans-killed-at-the-temple example with an example of His own: “**Or do you think that those eighteen who were killed when the tower at Siloam fell on them were guiltier than all the other people who were living in Jerusalem were?**” Well, you can predict Jesus’ answer: **<sup>5</sup> I tell you, no; but, unless you repent, you will all perish in the same way.**”

“**Unless you repent, you will all perish in the same way.**” This is not what we would expect mild, gentle Jesus to say in the wake of these terrible tragedies. “Repent or perish”? This is not what we like to hear. But Jesus isn’t being cold and heartless. Indeed, it’s just the opposite. Jesus here is giving us a wake-up call, which is actually a good thing.

Jesus is taking these examples of a sudden, unexpected death, and He’s using them to call our attention to matters of our own life and death. Are any of us ready for our death? We must be prepared because these examples of tragedy recorded by Luke tell us that death could come at any time.

The suddenness and nearness of death, which could strike unexpectedly at any time - should be a wake-up call to all of us. Don’t get caught up in whether those people killed in this or that tragedy were worse sinners - or conversely, that they all must now be angels in heaven. That is not what Jesus is driving at. He is stressing *the urgency of our own repentance*. He’s warning us that there is judgment coming, something worse than being cut down by Pilate’s soldiers or having a tower fall on us. Are we ready for that? If not, then we too shall perish.

Now, the fact that Jesus is telling us this, that He’s alerting us to our need and calling us to repentance, is a good thing. It is part of His grace that He does so. We need to know that we need help, that we need rescuing.

And Jesus is just the man to do that rescuing. That is why He had come into the world. That is why He continues to come to us and call us to repentance; so that we too would be saved and not perish! God’s will is to save. Earlier today, we heard it in Ezekiel: “*‘As surely as I live,’ declares the Lord GOD, ‘I certainly take no pleasure in the death of a wicked person. Rather, I take pleasure in the wicked person’s turning from his way that he may live’*” (33:11). The Apostle Peter writes in his Second Letter, “*(The Lord) is patient with you, because He does not want any to be lost but wants all to come to repentance.*” And of course, John 3:16: “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life.*” God does not want any of us to perish! God wants us to have eternal life, and this life is in His Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

In the slaughter at the temple mentioned in our text, Pontius Pilate had mixed the blood of the Galileans with their sacrifices. But there was one more Galilean whose blood Pilate would shed, and that would be this man, Jesus of Nazareth. His blood, Christ’s blood, is the sacrifice! It is the one supreme sacrifice to end all sacrifices. For His is the blood of the holy Son of God, shed on our behalf, that cleanses us from all our sin. His blood has universal effectiveness: It covers the sins of the whole world.

Now God is calling us and all men everywhere to repent and believe in Christ. We are to trust in Him alone, not in any gods of our own making. Christ alone is our righteousness, our salvation, our one and only reliable “ticket to heaven.” In Him, through faith in Him, we do have everlasting life. We can count on Him.

Thank God that He does call us to repent and to put our trust in Christ, so that we shall not perish but instead be saved! Christ Jesus is our one hope in the midst of all tragedy and loss. Christ Jesus is our one sure and lasting comfort, who will carry us through this vale of tears and bring us to Himself. He will wipe away every tear from our eyes and give us a joy that lasts forever. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

## PRAYER FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

Lord God, heavenly Father, limitless in love, and perfect in power, receive our worship and praise. Our eyes always turn to You, for without You there is no help, and with You there is no danger. Be the guardian and defender of all who lift up their hearts to You, of all who seek Your help in times of need.

We confess that we fully deserve Your wrath for breaking Your holy commandments. Therefore we thank You for Your great love in Jesus, who in His compassion and grace sacrificed Himself for our sins. With grateful hearts we praise You for His finished work: His holy life, His blessed example, His gracious teaching, His loving companionship, and His atoning death, and the place in Your kingdom that He has won for us.

Grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may follow the example of Jesus, and walk in love. Grant that, as Your children, we may continue to repent of our sins, give up the ways of darkness and error, and walk in paths that are good, righteous, and true. Fill our lives with holiness, with love of Your Word, and with every grace and virtue.

Prosper and protect the work of Your Church. Give success to all who proclaim the glorious Gospel of salvation. Give conviction and faithfulness to all Your people, that they may work with zeal to gather in the harvest of Christ's redeemed people.

Rule and direct our government. Give wisdom and integrity to all in our police and armed forces, that our nation may be kept in peace, and that righteousness and justice may hold sway everywhere.

We pray for all in any need of body or soul, for all loved ones in distant places, for all who have strayed from Your truth, for all who are in temptation, for all who are suffering sickness and pain, and for all who mourn. We remember especially those in Ukraine suffering under the terrors of war. Bless and help them according to their need. Hear their prayers. Comfort them with Your presence.

Unite in one spirit through the truth all in Your Church on earth, and finally bring us to Your joys in heaven. We pray for these things in the name of Your Son Jesus Christ, who, together with You and the Ho-ly Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

**THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT**

Ezekiel 33:7-20

<sup>7</sup> "As for you, son of man, I have appointed you as a watchman for the family of Israel. You shall listen to what I say and give them a warning from Me! <sup>8</sup> When I tell a wicked person, 'You wicked person, you will certainly die!' and you do not speak to warn the wicked person to turn from his way, that wicked person will die in his wickedness, but I shall hold you responsible for his death. <sup>9</sup> However, if you warn a wicked person to turn from his way, and he has not turned from his way, he will die because of his sin. However, you yourself will have saved your own life.

<sup>10</sup> "As for you, son of man, tell the family of Israel, 'This is what you have been saying: "Our wrongdoings and our sins are weighing us down. We are wasting away because of them. How, then, can we live?"'

<sup>11</sup> "Tell them, 'As surely as I live,' declares the Lord GOD, 'I certainly take no pleasure in the death of a wicked person. Rather, I take pleasure in the wicked person's turning from his way that he may live. Turn back! Turn back from your evil ways! Why, then, will you die, family of Israel?'

<sup>12</sup> "As for you, son of man, tell your country-men, 'The righteousness of a righteous person will not deliver

him on the day when he rebels. On the day when a wicked person turns from his wickedness, he will not stumble because of his wickedness. The righteous person will not be able to live because of his righteousness on the day when he sins. <sup>13</sup> When I promise a righteous person that he will certainly live, and he then trusts in his own righteousness and commits evil, none of his righteous deeds will be remembered. Rather, he will die because of his evil, which he has committed. <sup>14</sup> When I tell a wicked person, "You will certainly die," and he then turns away from his sin and does what is just and right, <sup>15</sup> if the wicked person returns the security for a loan, makes restitution for what he has stolen, lives by the Statutes of life and does not commit evil, then he will certainly live. He will not die. <sup>16</sup> None of his sins, which he has committed, will be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right. He will certainly live.'

<sup>17</sup> "However, your countrymen are saying, 'The Way of the Lord is not just,' when it is their own way that is not just. <sup>18</sup> When a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and commits evil, he will die because of it. <sup>19</sup> When a wicked person turns away from his wickedness and does what is just and right, he will live

because of it. <sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, you are saying, 'The Way of the Lord is not just.' You family of Israel, I shall judge each of you according to his own ways."

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

<sup>1</sup> I want you to know, fellow-Christians, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea. <sup>2</sup> They were all baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. <sup>3</sup> They all ate the same spiritual food <sup>4</sup> and they all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that accompanied them, and that Rock was Christ. <sup>5</sup> Yet God was not pleased with most of them. For they were scattered over the desert. <sup>6</sup> Now, these things happened as examples for us, that we might not covet what is evil as they coveted them. <sup>7</sup> Do not be idolaters, as some of them were, as the Scripture has said, "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to play"! <sup>8</sup> Let us not sin sexually as some of them did! Twenty-three thousand fell on one day. <sup>9</sup> Let us not put Christ to a test, as some of them did! They were destroyed by snakes. <sup>10</sup> Do not grumble, as some of them grumbled! The angel of death destroyed them. <sup>11</sup> These things happened to them to give examples to others and were written down to warn us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come. <sup>12</sup> Therefore, the one who thinks that he is standing firm should beware that he does not fall. <sup>13</sup> No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to all human beings. However, God is faithful. He will not allow you to be test-ed beyond what you can bear. Rather, when you are tested, He will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

Luke 13:1-9

<sup>1</sup> At that time some people were present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup> Jesus answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? <sup>3</sup> I tell you, no. However, unless you repent, you too will all perish in a similar way. <sup>4</sup> Or do you think that those eighteen who were killed when the tower at Siloam fell on them were guiltier than all the other people who were living in Jerusalem were? <sup>5</sup> I tell you, no; but, unless you repent, you will all perish in the same way." <sup>6</sup> Jesus told them this parable: "A man had a fig tree that had been planted in his vineyard. He came looking for fruit on it but did not find any. <sup>7</sup> He told the man who worked the vineyard, 'Look here! For the last three years I have been coming here looking for fruit on this fig tree and have not been finding any.

Therefore, cut it down! Why does it keep using up the ground?"

<sup>8</sup> "However, the man answered him, 'Sir, allow it to stand this year also, until I dig around it and put fertiliser on it! <sup>9</sup> If the tree bears fruit in future, fine. However, if it does not, you will cut it down.'"