

# Third Sunday in Lent

## DEATH BECOMES US

Luke 13:1-9

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## Analysis by Mark Marius

At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? 3No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. 4Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? 5No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”

6Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. 7So he said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’ 8He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. 9If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

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## DIAGNOSIS: Judge or Be Judged

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *Living Is Better than Dead*

It's not the fact that we all die. Ignore it as much as we like, deep down we know this to be true. Death comes for all living creatures. But even when death (God's judgment) comes and equalizes all things, while we are living we try and justify ourselves by pretending we are better than others. Especially when it comes to death. We like to think there are better ways to die: There is un-honorable versus honorable, deliberate versus accidental, painful versus less painful, long suffering versus quick, death that comes way to soon versus death that won't come soon enough, murder versus being killed, disease versus natural causes. We, the living, would rather judge our dying than be judged.

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) :** *The Law Yields No Grace*

What will save us? What we do? Gun laws? Prayer in school? Reading your Bible? Going to church? The Lenten disciplines? There is a lot of hope placed in these as means for grace. Whatever we can do to look better to God. But Jesus knows that the law will even convict law abiders. So his advice is to repent. When we hear of senseless violent killings—repent. When a loved one dies—repent. When an accident happens—repent. Many times we are too focused on accusations and assigning blame to heed Jesus' advice. Which is deadly.

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) :** *Cut Down*

God will meet us in death, whenever that may be. However that may be. He will judge us. He will measure us—not by the length of our life, or the quality of our death, but by the law and the fruit that we bore in this world. And we all fall short. We all fail at keeping God's law. And so, left to our own devices, God sees that we are barren and cut us down.

## PROGNOSIS: Alive or Be Live–Believe

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Wasted***

Jesus wastes his life to save ours. Jesus knows there is nothing we can do or say to spare our lives from being cut down. Even our repentance won't produce the fruit we have been created to produce. So Jesus steps up and gives us the ingredient we need—his life. He becomes the waste, the manure that our roots so desperately need in order to bear fruit for the kingdom. By wasting his life on an orchard that can't repay he gives us that new life in which we can bear fruit. Yes death, God's judgment, was taken by Jesus for us. And his resurrection is the hope we now share for our lives. Jesus is risen for us to trust and believe.

### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis: (Internal Solution) : *Grace Yielded from God's Law***

We do not waste the grace Jesus gives us. We soak it up every chance we get. We are happy to repent in the confidence of God's forgiveness. We take in the water of our baptism daily in order to go about our business of bearing fruit. We take in Jesus's body and blood every chance we get in order to get the real nutrients we need for living productive lives, trusting we have been given all we need.

### **Step 6: Final Prognosis: (External Solution- for one another) : *Dead Is Better than Living***

What?!? Well, when that death is the one we share with Christ then, you bet! (Romans 6:3-11). Because in the paradox of the Christian life, Christ's death and resurrection becomes true life, and life without Christ becomes death. So by living in Christ's death, we reach out to all who are living in death's dark shadow of the law. We don't mention laws without mentioning Christ first. We don't judge others but rather share God's forgiveness with them. We don't condemn others but offer new

life. We don't exclude others but include them in sharing our God given fruit. We tell them not to fear death but embrace the life it yields because of Christ.