

The expansion of God's kingdom (Luke 13:1-21)

We have been studying the gospel of Luke together. Today, we will study cp 13. In the previous chapter, cp 12, we have studied the whole chapter has the airs of tension, with the awareness of death, second coming and judgment. If we interpret "this present time" wisely, we will know the Lord's second coming is definitely drawing near. So, the Bible teaches us not to spend days aimlessly, but to prepare for the Lord's coming and for the day of judgment. And we are also encouraged not to just repeat the same things without purpose, but to live as faithful and wise servants, effective witness for the Lord in this present time.

1. God's judgment

1-5

¹ Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. ² Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? ³ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. ⁴ Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them -- do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

This scene is continued from the last scene of cp 12. Jesus was talking to people. "You can predict the weather by paying attention to the sky and the earth, but why can't you interpret the urgency of this present moment? Why don't you see it for yourselves?" "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"(Mark 1:15)

When Jesus said this, some people told Him the latest news about a group of Galilean pilgrims in Jerusalem. They were a group of ordinary people who were just like Jesus' own disciples. Pilate butchered them while they were at worship, their own blood mingling with the blood of their sacrifices.

Jesus said to them, "Do you think that they were worse sinners than others because they suffered this terrible death? No! If you don't repent, you too will all perish."

We can learn several things from here.

First of all, there is no grade for sinners.

Each country has its own laws, and based on the law, crimes can be classified into minor offense, serious crime and so on, and penalties will also be different. And generally speaking, we somehow have our own standard for judging others as a little bad people, normal bad people and very bad sinners and so on. These concepts coincide with the idea like, "That person is very sinful. That is why God let him die that kind of cruel death. That is God's punishment."

Here Jesus is talking about God's judgment and eternal death. No matter how the society estimates nor how the law of the country classifies, the Bible says, "all have sinned." (Rom 3:23) "There is no one righteous, not even one." (Rom 3:10) And, "if you don't repent, you too will all perish." That is the message of the Bible.

Before God's judgment, what matters is not how much the person sinned nor what kind of sin he or she committed. But what matters is whether the person is a sinner or not.

In this world, there are some morally good people, merciful people, and people who do great works. There are many people who have no fault according to the national law, and who are loved and respected by others. But according to the Bible verses we just looked at, they are also sinners before God. No matter who they are, if they don't repent, they will also perish eternally.

Secondly, there is no sin which can escape from judgment.

I heard this story while I was in HCMC. A person was caught by a policeman because he ignored the traffic light. The policeman asked, "Did you not see the red light?" the man answered, "Yeah, I saw it." "Then, why didn't you stop?" the policeman asked. He answered "Because I didn't see you."

We may think, "It is okay if nobody finds out. It's no problem if we are not caught. Maybe they will overlook it, if I keep making excuses. Everyone is doing this. Because it's just one time, it should be okay." These thoughts may be accepted in the society.

But before God, there is no sin which can escape from His judgment.

God even knows the numbers of our hair. He knows our every action, and all our thoughts. Because God is holy, there is not sin which He can overlook. There is no sin which is too small to be judged. All sins must be judged. The Bible says, "The wages of sin is death. (Rom 6:23)" that is the eternal death. And

for this debt for his sin, a man "will not get out (of the prison) until he has paid the last penny." (Luke 12:59)

Everyone is a sinner before Holy God. There is no sin which can escape from judgment. It seems we are hopeless. But here is good news. Thirdly, there is no sin that cannot be forgiven. "The blood of Jesus, God's Son, will cleanse us from every sin." (1 John 1:9) "He entered the Most Holy place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption." (Heb 9:12)

There is no sin which is too great to be redeemed, too serious to be forgiven by redemption through Jesus' cross.

God will judge all sins. This is actually good news. When we are forgiven by salvation through Jesus' cross, there is no sin left which has not been forgiven.

6-9

⁶ Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. ⁷ So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' ⁸ " 'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. ⁹ If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.' "

There was a fig tree which didn't bear any fruit for three years. It is natural for the owner of the vineyard to think that it should be cut down immediately. But the man who took care of the vineyard asked the owner, "Please wait for one more year. I will try my best, dig around it and fertilize it. But if it still doesn't bear fruit, then cut it down."

What can we learn here? The time will come. No one knows when the Lord returns, but the day is definitely drawing near. Make peace now before it is too late!

If we know that we are subject to God's judgment, then we need to plead for mercy now while there is still time to receive mercy. Jesus is God's offer of mercy. We're fools if we don't reach out to him and receive mercy and forgiveness through him.

God has a case against every sinner. We owe Him for our debt of sin. Jesus' death on the cross is the only acceptable settlement. If we discerned the

times, we would know that now is the day of salvation. God is offering to settle in full His claim with any sinner who will trust in Jesus Christ. But if we do not settle, there will be no escape on the day of judgment. We will never get out of hell because our debt is infinite since it is against an infinitely holy God. The person who discerns the true situation will be quick to get on Jesus' side.

The second coming of the Lord is definitely drawing near. What does it mean? His second coming has not yet come. We who believe in Jesus are also still in the race to reach the Day of the Lord.

Apostle Paul says this,

"I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize." (1 Cor. 9:27)

If Apostle Paul can be disqualified, no one can say "I am all right."

When we read this parable of a fig tree, I think the biggest mistake we Christians might make is that we might try and bear fruit of righteousness, fruit worthy of repentance, which is pleasing to God by our own strength, instead of repenting and restoring our relationship with the Lord.

In fact, no matter how hard we try, we cannot bear that kind of fruit by our own strength. So the harder we try, the more we will be disappointed about ourselves. And we think, "God must also be disappointed about me." And we will try hard to recover his favor and acceptance. We will try hard to keep up our appearance.

Have you ever thought about what makes God sad about us? Brennan Manning expresses God's feelings in his book, *The Ragamuffin Gospel*. "I [God] am sad when you do not believe that I have totally forgiven you or you feel uncomfortable approaching Me."¹

"Repentance is not what we do in order to earn forgiveness; it is what we do because we have been forgiven. It serves as an expression of gratitude."²

"Yes, we feel guilt over sins, but healthy guilt is one which acknowledges the wrong done and feels remorse, but then is free to embrace the forgiveness that has been offered. Healthy guilt focuses on the realization that all has been forgiven, the wrong has been redeemed. ... Miracle_of miracles, you can forgive yourself because you are forgiven, accept yourself because you are accepted,

¹ Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel*, Multnomah Books, 1990, p.155

² Brennan Manning, p.75

and begin to start building up the very places you once tore down. There is grace to help in every time of trouble. That grace is the secret to being able to forgive ourselves."³

It is God who makes us grow. (1 Cor. 3:6) And it is also God who prepares us to bear fruit. (John 15:2)

When we become aware that we are on the way to the day of God's judgment, what we need to do is to make sure our relationship with God is right. Hasn't our relationship with God become a mere formality or duty? Are we putting off fixing our relationship with God to a later time? Or do we think our relationship with Him doesn't really matter.

Jesus said, "If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. (John 15:5) Remain in my love. (John 15:9) "

2. Liberation by God

10-17

¹⁰ On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, ¹¹ and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. ¹² When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." ¹³ Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God. ¹⁴ Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath." ¹⁵ The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? ¹⁶ Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?" ¹⁷ When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.

There was a woman who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. Jesus healed her, and the synagogue ruler got angry. "Today is the Sabbath. It is not the day for work. So, it is not right for you to come to him and be healed today. You should know the law," he said to the people, "He heals because you come.

³ Brennan Manning, pp.117-118

So don't come." He claims, "We are people who know the law. It is not right for us to set this woman free from the bondage of Satan today."

To this, Jesus answers, "You hypocrites! You untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water even on the Sabbath." What is the point? They didn't apply their law for themselves. But they used the law to keep her under the bondage of Satan. Or, they used the law to justify why they didn't set her free from the bondage of Satan.

Jesus said, "This woman has been bound by Satan, but she is also a daughter of Abraham."

First, let's see what does the word "Abraham's descendent" mean?

Gen.12:1-3

¹ The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. ² "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

This is God's covenant spoken to Abraham. God promised that 1) I will bless you, 2) you will be a blessing, and 3) all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

"Abraham's descendent" is the one who inherits or takes over this promise of God.

However, this woman is crippled by an evil spirit right now. She is bound by Satan. So, she cannot live in God's rest and bring blessings to the people. She wouldn't truly be able to live as a daughter of Abraham until she is set free. It is not appropriate for a daughter of Abraham to be bound by Satan. Moreover, they used their law wrongly and selfishly. She shouldn't be left like that. She should be set free.

Now next, let's think about Abraham's descendent and their liberation in the context of the New Testament.

Gal. 3:7

⁷ Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham

Those who believe Jesus Christ are descendants of Abraham.

Redemption through the cross of Christ redeems those who are under law. (Gal 4:5) By believing in Redemption by Christ, a man can become a child of God (Gal 3:26), an heir of God (Gal 4:7), a child of the free woman (Gal 4:31). It doesn't just apply to the Jews, but also to the gentiles. For redemption, there is no distinction by social status, gender, age and so on. (Gal 3:28)

We used to be slaves under law. But we have been set free by believing in Christ. We were redeemed, accepted as God's Son, and became heirs of God. Those who believe are descendants of Abraham.

Gal 5:1

¹ It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Why did Paul warn like this? It is because it is possible for us to slide back into slavery even after we are redeemed, set free, became God's children by believing in salvation through the cross of Jesus.

The Bible says that we were sinners before God, but have been saved by grace of God, through faith in Christ Jesus, and it is not by works. We know this very well as words. However, there is something to hinder the truth of God's Word from coming straight to our heart. That is self-centered pride based an idealized fantasy self.⁴

Self-centered pride is the very nature of sin itself.⁵ At the same time, the self-centered pride has been repeatedly experienced in our relationship with others, and recognized as a pattern and established in our heart in the process of our growth since we were born.⁶

For example, there is a man, let's call him Jack. Jack grew up, never feeling he was accepted as he is, or he was loved as he is. Only when he didn't trouble his parents or didn't cause inconvenience to them, or did something to give them a good reputation or did what they expected him to do, then he could

⁴ David Seamands, *Healing Grace*, Scripture Press, 1988, p.106

⁵ David Seamands, p.30

⁶ David Seamands, pp.103-109

be treated as if his parents needed him.⁷

In that kind of environment, Jack grew up without experiencing the true love. And he starts to form a false recognition that he is not worthy to be loved. To be loved is a basic fundamental human desire. To satisfy this desire, he starts to demand that he be perfect. By doing that, he tries to acquire love from others.

In the environment where he couldn't receive true love, he starts to have false self-image that he is not worthy to be loved, and this low self-image drove him to be a perfectionist, an "activist" and a performance-based man.⁸ And perfectionism⁹ and "activism"¹⁰ and performance-based life will actually never be achieved because they are unreachable goals and unrealistic standard.¹¹

There are always feelings of guilt and defeat. So he needs mental filter to deny these feelings. He needs thought system to make him feel he is perfect, and doing well.¹² That is the self-centered pride. In other words, pride is the other side of low self-esteem. Self-centeredness is the means to satisfy the desire to be loved while he feels he is not worthy to be loved. In this way self-centered pride captures, binds and controls a person as if it were his personality itself.¹³

In a way, self-centered pride is a pattern of thinking, a system of recognition which we unconsciously choose. These thought patterns soak through our whole being, and they start to work automatically. As a result, though we want to live by faith, we end up fall into "activism" and performance-based life, legalism and religion. And this has a great influence on our relationship with God.¹⁴

For example: I have to do something because I've been saved. It depends on my good work whether I can gain God's forgiveness for me. If I do more good, I can receive God's love, I'll be rewarded more. My prayer is not answered because God doesn't like me. I am ashamed to meet God as I am. I can come before God because I do this and that.¹⁵

⁷ David Seamands, pp.54-56

⁸ David Seamands, pp.105-109

⁹ David Seamands, p.100

¹⁰ David Seamands, pp.37-38

¹¹ David Seamands, p.111

¹² David Seamands, pp.109-111

¹³ David Seamands, p.106

¹⁴ David Seamands, p.30

¹⁵ David Seamands, pp.40-43

Unconsciously we think that's what faith is. Pride in us hinders us from receiving grace.

Gal 5:4

⁴ You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.

That means those who try to come near God by works have been alienated from Christ and have fallen away from grace. Having been alienated from Christ, we have no relationship with Christ, and can't experience love of Christ. Having fallen away from grace, we have no conviction of salvation, no joy of salvation. Not only that, we hinder the others from coming to Jesus, grace and truth, just like the synagogue ruler and many of Jews.

"Activism", legalism and religion are not faith. We need to be set free from them. We need to be liberated from the control of self-centered pride about which we can't do anything on our own.

"Freedom in Christ produces a healthy independence from peer pressure, people-pleasing, and the bondage of human respect."¹⁶ "Living by grace inspires a growing consciousness that I am what I am in the sight of Jesus and nothing more."¹⁷

Satan tries to bind us to the self-centered pride, the past and false self-image. And we need to be set free from these bondage of Satan. The power of God can set us free. Unless we are set free, we cannot truly trust in Jesus. We cannot enjoy peace with God. We will not have peace in our heart. We cannot accept ourselves, nor build healthy relationship with others.

"The disciple living by grace rather than law has undergone a decisive conversion – a turning from mistrust to trust..... Trust in the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. .. I am a beloved child of this Father, and hence, free to trust."¹⁸

Those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. (Gal 3:9) And all nations will be blessed through them. (Gal 3:8)

¹⁶ Brennan Manning,p.152

¹⁷ Brennan Manning,p.154

¹⁸ Brennan Manning,p.76

3. The expansion of God's kingdom

18-21

¹⁸ Then Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to?" ¹⁹ It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches." ²⁰ Again he asked, "What shall I compare the kingdom of God to?" ²¹ It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."

Here the kingdom of God is compared to a mustard seed and yeast. A mustard seed is very small, so when it is sown on the ground, we cannot see it any longer. When we knead flour and mix yeast into it, we cannot see where the yeast is any longer. We cannot see both a mustard seed and yeast, but they are surely there. Those who sowed the seeds know that there are seeds in the ground. Those who mixed the yeast know that there are yeast in the flour. It is the same for the kingdom of God. We cannot see it but it is surely there. Those who live in the kingdom of God, those who live with God know that there is the kingdom of God.

A mustard seed was sown in the garden and it grew and became a mustard tree. Yeast was mixed into the flour and it worked all through the dough. Both a mustard seed and yeast, if they are left alone as they are, nothing happens. They cannot play their role alone. It is not until a seed is sown on the ground, and yeast is mixed into the flour that they work effectively.

Jesus said to his disciples, "the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:21) And he sent them to the world so that they could proclaim the coming of the kingdom. (John 20:21)

We are the light of the world, the salt of the earth. (Matt 5:13-14) We are being sent in the world to show the reality of the kingdom of God. We cannot influence the world as the light and the salt unless we go into the world.

A mustard seed doesn't remain a seed, but it grows and becomes a tree. Yeast works all through the dough, and it becomes nice bread. We also don't remain the same as when we were saved, but we will grow in Christ, by the Holy Spirit. And the kingdom of God shown through us will also become clearer and

more powerful.

We were set free from the bondage of the law by the cross of Christ so that we might bear fruit to God. (Rom 7:4) We were set free from the bondage of the world by the cross of Christ. (Gal 6:14) We can refuse to be swayed by the current of the world, while in the world. On the contrary, we can bring the blessings of the kingdom of God to the world. The influence may seem small and tiny. But by the resurrection power of God, it will never die nor wither, but will continue to grow and spread until it works all through the world.