

Are You Perishing
Luke 13:1-5

May we begin our study of these blessed scriptures today with a simple observation. And it's this. When God reveals us to ourselves, our personalities, our motives, our behaviors, if we are willing to be really honest with ourselves, what we most often see is not a very pleasant sight.

But thankfully, God is loving and kind. And He has a very gracious purpose in revealing us to ourselves. He reassures us in 2 Peter chapter 3 that He is "patient toward us, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."

And that's the message the Lord Jesus has for each of us within this passage that we're studying here in Luke chapter 13. Follow along with me as I again read these words beginning in verse 1.

¹There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ²And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? ³No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. ⁴Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? ⁵No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." (Luke 13:1-5)

As we read words such as these in these gospels, we need to remember that Jesus was always aware of what the people around Him were thinking. And while it's not specifically being said to us in this passage, the Lord Jesus knew that the people who brought this news about the Galileans who died and also about those people who were killed when the tower in Siloam fell were assuming that those people's deaths were a direct result of some terrible sin they had committed. We can know that because of His response to them. Here, Jesus asked the questions, first in verse 2,

² . . . "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? (Luke 13:2)

And in verse 4 He asked,

⁴ . . . do you think that they (the ones who died when the Tower of Siloam fell on them) were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? (Luke 13:4)

And then note carefully, that after each question the Lord Jesus gave the response that those people then and each one of us now must follow. He said simply,

⁵No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." (Luke 13:5)

Again, as we said in an earlier study of these words, it does seem that at even the slightest suggestion of wrongdoing, it is the tendency of our minds to quickly choose to form judgmental thoughts about other people. We gather the few facts that we can muster and then we let our minds make up the rest of the story. And most of the time, we get it wrong.

And to make matters worse, we want to quickly share our thoughts with anyone who will listen. And with the voice of the Social Media that this generation has developed, we have found a convenient outlet for our judgmental spirit to freely express itself strongly, and often, and freely, and seemingly without consequence.

With only a brief observation of the various Social Media outlets, we can detect a very serious unrest within the culture of our day, an upheaval that roils beneath the surface daily, spilling out into a continual flow of opinionated and condemning comments being offered on most every matter of life.

But here in our scripture passage, the Lord Jesus is telling us that we should not, we must not, allow ourselves to be so consumed with such condemnation. It is neither our place, nor our duty, nor our authority to judge the actions and the behaviors of other people, at least not in the manner that we most often do. That authority and that responsibility should reside solely within the hands and the authority of the Lord Jesus.

Please understand that it really is enough for us to consider and to deal with the sins that reside within our own souls. It gains us nothing at all to busy ourselves with the sins of other people.

It really is as God warned Cain as Cain was about to go out and murder his brother Abel. He said to Cain, "Cain, sin is crouching at your door and it desires

to have you, but you must master it". And the same is so for each of us. Every moment of every day, sin is crouching at our own door, desiring to have and to control us, but we must master it.

And as concerns the matter that Jesus is speaking about here in this passage, one of the best ways for us to do that is to do as the scriptures command and to "take our imaginations captive", to take control of our opinionated imaginations and tongues, and to instead concern ourselves with things that are good and right.

That counsel from our Lord in Philippians 4,

⁸. . . brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.(Philippians 4:8)

These words of counsel about the way we should think are so appropriate for this circumstance that we are considering in our scripture passage for today. Here, with strong words of warning, Jesus is intimating that there is something more important at stake than just another opportunity to voice our personal opinions, that we should turn from opinionated and judgmental thoughts and behaviors concerning others and instead concern ourselves more with our own sinful shortcomings. That unless we confess our own sins and repent of them, we will likewise perish.

As we consider these words of the lord Jesus, may we pause for a moment and remember that all the words of the Lord Jesus are rich with meaning. And these words are no exception, and especially as we would ask ourselves the question, "what does the Lord Jesus mean in His use of the word 'perish'?"

Was Jesus here speaking only to unbelievers, or was He also intending His counsel for His disciples and other believers, because there really will be a different form of consequence for those of us who have Christ as our Savior? Listen again to Jesus' words.

¹There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ²And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? ³No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. ⁴Or those eighteen

on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? ⁵No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” (Luke 13:1-5)

No indication is given within these words that the Lord Jesus was speaking only to unbelievers. Some of His own disciples were surely to have been in the crowd that day.

And because we know that we who have the Lord Jesus as our Savior cannot ever lose the salvation that He has given to us, what can Jesus intend as He gives this warning to us that we might perish?

Unfortunately, as I pause to consider my own personal behaviors and also the behaviors of many of my fellow believers, I find that too often, without our even realizing what we are doing, we will behave as if we have somewhat of a “free pass” on sin.

And it really is true, we who are truly saved can't ever actually lose our salvation. These scriptures clearly declare that truth to us. We are eternally saved.

And because that is so, we who trust in the Lord Jesus as our Savior will never eternally perish, at least not in the same manner or in the same way that unsaved souls will perish.

And if that be so, what then does the Lord Jesus intend by His use of this word “perish”? I must confess to you that I don't have as clear an understanding as I would like to have of why Jesus gives this particular warning.

But based on other similar warnings in these scriptures, perhaps our best understanding might be that the “perishing” that Jesus is speaking about here can take place in many different forms depending upon the nature and condition of our soul.

Yes, an unsaved soul will perish eternally. But perhaps the perishing that will take place within a believer's soul will be sufferings that will be more temporal in nature rather than eternal, perhaps beginning with a kind of blindness that keeps us from seeing our own sinful state.

May I suggest that most all of us believers, you and I, do suffer daily under the powerful effects of that special kind of blindness. And as we suffer under its power, we slowly but surely experience a unique form of “perishing”, “Spiritual perishing”.

And again, while this kind of “perishing” will not take us into hell, it will nonetheless serve as a continual barrier to our enjoying all the many blessed benefits available to us in the grace and mercy of Christ.

In the Old Testament Book of Proverbs chapter 29, we find this word “perish” used. There we read,

¹⁸ Where there is no vision, the people perish. (Proverbs 29:18)

In the context of this verse, the word “perish” has the sense of meaning of being loosened and untethered from a secure base or mooring. Similar perhaps to the way that an astronaut might become untethered while on a spacewalk, leaving the astronaut helplessly drifting and in dire need of help.

Also, my thoughts go to the manner in which some people live long lives with severe physical disabilities, not actually dying from their disability, but suffering severely from it every day. And the same can be so with our salvation and with the “eternal life” that we have in Christ.

Remember that our eternal life really does begin here and now, in our living years. And it can have great gain and great benefit for all of us who submit ourselves to it.

But, within that one simple word, “submission”, lies all the difference between the joy-filled eternal life that we are intended to experience, and the more usual joyless and frustrated, and sometimes “severely disabled” daily Christian life that many of us actually experience. And all because of a simple, but devastating “lack of submission”!

And unfortunately for us, our “lack of submission” to Christ comes about in ways that we often don’t even recognize is taking place. We can become “untethered” from our secure mooring to the Lord Jesus and begin to drift. We don’t necessarily sin. We just simply get about our busy day, using our common sense, thinking and doing our own will and plans and purposes. And sadly, too

often allowing those more perfect and beneficial plans of God to not take place.

With that being so, and with whatever form it takes, our behavior is still nonetheless, a lack of submission. And along with our lack of submission comes wrong choices, causing us to quietly miss out on all those benefits that God's eternal life offers to us.

The best example for me of a "lack of submission" in these scriptures is the behavior and the consequences that took place with Moses and his people, the Israelites. Because the people of Israel were unwilling to trust God for His protection and His watchcare over them, refusing to go on into the blessed Promised Land as He had directed them, they instead lived a "perishing" kind of existence for forty years there in that wretched wilderness.

And please understand dear Christian that that same kind of consequence can take place with you and me today if we refuse to submit to the authority of our Lord and to repent of our own sins, especially the sin of "hypocrisy" like that spoken about here in our passage, the sin of condemning other people for their sinful behaviors while not even "seeing" our own.

And as we live daily in that kind of hypocritical blindness, despising others while hanging on to our own lack of submission to our Lord, we can live a wretched kind of "perishing" existence within our own personal "wilderness". Again yes saved, but still living a daily "perishing" kind of life.

What Moses and his people did was sin. And yes, I am confident that God did forgive most of them, especially Moses. But unfortunately, consequences for sin are often irreversible. Moses' personal behavior was a form of rebellion against God and for that rebellion, God said to Moses,

¹² . . . "Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." (Numbers 20:12)

The consequence for Moses personally, and for his "lack of submission" to God, was that Moses would not be allowed to lead his people into the Promised Land. That was a very painful chastisement for him to endure.

And while you and I might not understand why God could not just have given Moses a “break” for this one small act of rebellion, we need to understand and accept that our God is always, always, always absolutely Holy. And He cannot give up His holiness for even one moment, for any reason, or for any one person.

Thankfully, later on, God did grant another way to provide grace for men's sins. And that was through the suffering and the blood of the Lord Jesus on the cross.

But still, even with Christ's loving provision for us, if we continue to insist on keeping our rebellious behavior, there surely will be consequences for us, just as there was for Moses. And our consequences will, in fact, be much like those that Moses suffered.

In the New Testament Book of Hebrews, we find that God has graciously restated His call to you and me to hold onto righteousness at all times. And He also warns us about the same consequences that were meted out to Moses.

Let me read that account for you. And as I read, remember that God is not saying that Moses could not go into heaven. He was, without doubt, welcomed into heaven. How do we know that? It's because, later on, on the Mount of Transfiguration, we again see Moses, there ministering to the Lord Jesus.

So, no, Moses was not sent to hell for his behavior. He believed in God as his Savior and was welcomed into heaven. And the same will be true for you and me who have His blessed salvation. But . . . Moses still did suffer a great penalty for his rebellion, a form of “perishing”. While still in the flesh. His penalty, and the penalty for many of his fellow Israelites was that he would not be allowed to enter into and to enjoy the benefits of the Promised Land.

Listen to the way that God expresses that special truth to you and to me now in our day, given here in the Book of Hebrews. And as we read, know clearly that these words are given specifically to you and to me, in our New Testament belief in Christ.

Hebrews 3 and 4, beginning with Hebrews 3:15,

¹⁵ . . . “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion.

¹⁶Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? ¹⁷And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it

not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? ¹⁸And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? ¹⁹So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

¹Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. ²For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.

And folks, please listen carefully to these next words.

⁹There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; ¹⁰for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. ¹¹Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience. (Hebrews 3:15-18, 4:1-2, 9-11)

What is God speaking about in these words? He is saying simply, plainly and strongly, that there is still yet remaining an opportunity for those of us who have Christ as our Savior to enter into a very special relationship with Him by which we will find the "rest" that is offered within His "Promised Land", a form of rest that surpasses all understanding. And it is available to you and to me within this lifetime, within our living years.

It is a form of "rest" that our human minds cannot fathom or comprehend. It is a relationship with the very person of Christ in which our loving submission and obedience guides us through all of the activities and behaviors of our day.

But unfortunately folks, even many of the most devout of believers do not live as if this is possible. And by not believing it, they experience a lifetime of "unrest", a form of "perishing", and they miss out on all of the benefits of God's special blessed "rest".

And I confess that I am often one of them. I don't want to be one of them, but by my lack of faith and lack of submission, I acquiesce to not entering into God's "Promised Rest". Like Moses, I can stand here today on the top of Mount Pisgah, looking over into that wonderful and precious land of "rest", knowing

that yes, I am eternally saved, but that even so, I might never, in these living years ever be able to truly experience God's blessed rest.

And folks, I really don't want to live this way anymore, "one foot in heaven, but the other foot in this world of unrest". And I believe that these words here in Hebrews 4, tell me, us, that we truly can be different. Listen!

⁹There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; ¹⁰for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.

¹¹Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience. (Hebrews 4:9-11)

These words tell you and me clearly that there still remains the opportunity for us to enter into God's "rest", here, now, in our living years. We don't have to drift aimlessly, untethered from our secure moorings in the Lord Jesus, slowly, day after day perishing within our sins of disobedience, of hypocritical pride, of obstinate behavior.

Instead of living a life in a "wilderness" filled with "perishing", we can join with Christ in a very special relationship of "rest", "rest" from all of the struggles that so often entangle us.

Yes, yes, more than anything else, we do want to go to live forever in Heaven with the Lord Jesus. But God is also promising us that we can begin even now, that we can join Him in a Promised Land of "rest" while we're still in this life. Does that not just excite you beyond measure? It does me, and I want to go there.

And I want you to go there with me. And I invite you to join me today in praying fervently that God will reach into our souls and show us each step that it will take for us to get there, living with Him in His Promised Land of "rest" while still in this life.

Listen as I close and please, believe these words with all your heart. Hebrews 4,

⁹There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; ¹⁰for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.

¹¹Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.

Let's pray!

