

Breaking News

LUKE 13:1-5

**Baxter T. Exum (#1661)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
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We'd like to welcome you to the Four Lakes Church of Christ this morning! We are glad that you are here, and if you are joining us online or on the phone today, we are also glad you could join us today, and we would love to hear from you. You can let us know you are here by heading over to www.fourlakescoc.org/visitor, or you can also send an email to fourlakeschurch@gmail.com or make a call or send a text to 608-224-0274.

You may be able to help with something today – those of you who are here in person or joining us online! Once we get to 100 subscribers, YouTube gives us the ability to customize the address of our YouTube channel. As of this morning, we are now at 90! So, we are almost there. We would invite you, then, to go to YouTube, search for “Four Lakes Church of Christ” and subscribe to our channel, and we would greatly appreciate it.

We are here today to hear the good news – to share it with the world around us, but also as a reminder that Jesus came to this earth to die in our place, he was buried, and he was raised up on the first day of the week. We obey this good news by believing it, by turning away from sin, by confessing our faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and by allowing ourselves to be buried with him in baptism, imitating his death, burial, and resurrection in our own lives.

And we do have several examples again today, starting with an update from Melody Sudhoff, from Tennessee, who recently traveled to Florida to help with some hurricane relief. She says,

This is why I came to Florida. Souls first always. Yes, we're giving away stuff, but sharing the gospel is ALWAYS the goal. What a precious blessing to study the Word of God. We are still without power, the room was dark and HOT, but we studied the Word for hours. At 1:31am she had discovered the truth about God's word and salvation. Every question was answered with scripture, no opinions, just the word of God. She asked to be baptized for the remission of her sins and start to walk in newness of life. Our newest sister in Christ is forgiven, loved, and about to have the best night of sleep in her life. God knows her, she is His. But, please remember her in your prayers. I'm so thankful for the ladies who joined in our study and their examples. What a wonderful night. The angels are rejoicing!

Great things happening in Florida this week!

We also have an update from Fredrick Starks out of San Antonio, Texas. He says that "Phillip decided to obey Christ by being baptized tonight after Bible class. Every day is a good day to be baptized. They didn't wait in the first century and neither do we. Welcome Brother Phillip we rejoice with God and the angels in heaven."

We also have an update from Brent Missildine, who preaches in Prattville, Alabama, where Laverne Becker (one of our former members now lives). Brett says that "Heaven rejoices and we rejoice too! Cheryl Robinson was buried with Christ in baptism today. She has been worshiping with us regularly for almost a year and having weekly Bible study with Lisa and me at our house for over six months. She has some mobility issues and the chair lift to our baptistery was out of order. So, Rob and Maria Ohnemus allowed us to use their spa pool at their home for her baptism. We welcome Cheryl into God's family and our congregation at Prattville!" I am now getting hot tub ads in my Facebook feed, but it's so good to see this out of Alabama this week!

We also have some good news from the church in Cowan, Tennessee. They say that "The angels in heaven are rejoicing! Stephanie obeyed the gospel today. We first met Stephanie at our [clothing] giveaway. We have been in contact the last few weeks and had an opportunity to study. It's always a blessing to open the Word of God with others. Please join us in welcoming her and please pray for her as she begins her walk in Christ."

And then we have one more update, also from the church in Cowan, Tennessee, but this one is a bit more complicated. They ask, "How many Christians does it take?" And then they say,

As many as are needed. Let me tell you about our newest sister in Christ, Janet. Years ago, Larry, one of our members at Cowan began sharing his photography. In his photography group he met Janet. They became friends. About 17 months ago we started this Facebook page to share our sermons and lessons. Larry shared the page and a lesson with Janet, and she began to watch each and every service. Recently, Janet began to question her salvation and she reached out to Larry. He talked with her and told me that she would benefit from a study. The hard part of this, is that Janet lives in Texas, and we're in Tennessee. Even more, we're out of town this week in North Carolina visiting family. Earlier today, I called Janet in Texas from North Carolina. Melody and I began to study with her over the phone. We studied the Bible and the Bible alone. I told Janet that every question we were going to answer would be answered by the word of God. There would be no opinion, just book, chapter, and verse. Thus says the Lord! At the beginning of the study Janet asked: Am I too old to start this now? Of course not, God is faithful! We studied for three hours, and we ended with Acts 22:16. Janet, and her sweet honest heart had been taught Jesus and she wanted to obey the gospel (Romans 6:3-4). Here's the tricky part, we were 891 miles apart. The Lord's church wastes no time when someone expresses interest in obedience. I reached out to our good brother and friend, Marco Arroyo in Seagoville, TX. He found a way to get out to Janet. He and Freddie Lorick talked with Janet to make sure she understood her commitment to Christ. Janet was overjoyed to put her Lord on in baptism. A few other members from the Seagoville church of Christ were able to be present with Janet and share in her great joy! Praise the Lord, Salvation has been brought down. Never underestimate the power of sharing a scripture-based lesson on Facebook. It may help change a person's eternity. And remember, you may take a vacation, but the Lord's work always comes first. All glory goes to God. He is amazing!

We share all of this as an encouragement: To us, as a reminder that the Lord's church is growing, but especially, as an encouragement for those of you who have not yet obeyed the gospel – these are normal, regular, everyday

people who have heard the good news and have obeyed it all over the United States, men and women from all racial and ethnic backgrounds, in various financial situations, those who somehow heard the truth of God's word and obeyed it. What they have done, you can also do today. If you'd like to study, if you have any questions or concerns, please get in touch with me or one of the other shepherds of the church here. Our contact information is always on the front of the bulletin, on the wall right inside the front door.

We live in a world of breaking news! And much of it is what I might refer to as "breathless reporting," the idea that every new thing is the most terrible and outrageous thing we have ever heard. And we see every terrible thing almost instantly, don't we? Just over the past two weeks, we have seen every aspect of Hurricane Ian, almost as it happens – the forecast, the preparations being made, the storm, the track, the surge, the flooding, and now the ongoing recovery. And in an attempt to sell advertising space on their online platforms, everything is either the best or worst thing ever (usually the worst). And the same goes for every calamity, every disaster, every terrorist attack, every plague, every famine, every fire, every war, every mass killing – it's all out there in every gruesome detail. And it seems that news these days is often pitched in such a way as to generate outrage, to generate division, to create controversy. And with social media the way it is, it seems that we are almost constantly pressed to have an opinion on everything. You must tell the world what you think on these things!

I hesitate to mention this, but as I was thinking about all of this early this morning, a note about Saturday Night Live popped up on my feed. Last night, they did a cold open where they interviewed the four remaining people in the nation who have not yet snapped, and they read them headlines from the news this week until they snapped.

And it's interesting to me that this is not new. We may think it's new, but it's not. This morning, I'd like for us to take a few moments to think about something I realized as we were looking at the beatitudes over the past few weeks, and that is: When Jesus was pressed to have an opinion on the latest tragedy or moral outrage or social injustice, he always seemed to turn it and make it very personal for whoever it was who brought the concern to him in the first place.

In Matthew 22, for example, the Pharisees came to Jesus with the latest hot-button political issue (whether Jews should be paying taxes to support the Roman occupation of Jerusalem), and Jesus turned it right back on them, asking for someone to bring him a denarius, asking whose inscription is on that coin, and then answering, ***"Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's."*** I hope we see what he does here. They come to Jesus with the latest controversy, pressing him to take a stand on it, and Jesus turns it right back on them. He completely avoids the political aspect of that question, and he makes it practical for them personally: I don't need to be outraged against Caesar, but this is what YOU need to be doing!

We see something similar in Luke 12, where a man comes to Jesus, complaining about his brother not sharing the family inheritance, and the man wants Jesus to take a stand, he wants Jesus to have an opinion on this late-breaking controversy, but Jesus turns it right back on the man and says, ***"Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions."*** Jesus then goes on and tells the parable of the Rich Fool, and he turns this potential for outrage into a warning about the danger of greed. And Jesus does this over and over again.

Well, this morning I would invite you to turn with me to one of the most striking examples of Jesus doing this. It is found in Luke 13. And once again, Jesus takes the latest breaking news, the latest outrage, the latest tragedy, and instead of having an opinion on the event itself, he turns it into a demand for personal repentance. And he

does this, because souls matter. Souls are more important than having an opinion on the latest breathless reporting. With this in mind, let's look together this morning at Luke 13:1-5. According to Luke 12:1, ***"...so many thousands of people had gathered together that they were stepping on one another,"*** and when we come to Luke 13, Jesus is interrupted. Again, this is Luke 13:1-5,

¹ Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. ² And Jesus said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? ³ I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. ⁴ Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? ⁵ I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

As we think about the constant cycle of breathless reporting, I'd like for us to go back and look at the two examples here in Luke 13 – starting with the one that is brought to Jesus, then the one Jesus brings up in response, and then I'd like to learn something from how Jesus reacts to these two examples.

I. But first, let's notice the first example (in verses 1-2), where some people come up to Jesus wanting him to react to AN ACT OF MASS MURDER BY AN UNPOPULAR GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL.

I've labeled this as "temple terror," because really, that's what it is. And these people apparently interrupt Jesus as he preaches, seemingly demanding that he say something about it: Look, Jesus! Governor Pilate has done this terrible thing! What do you think about it? And the way this is presented, it seems as if they want Jesus to share in their outrage. We are mad about this, and we think you should be also. We might compare it to somebody coming up to us today and saying, "So, our Vice President had something to say about hurricane relief this week." That's not so much an invitation to a rational discussion as it is an invitation to share in somebody's outrage. That's an invitation to an argument, and I hope we realize: We don't need to attend every argument we're invited to! And that's what seems to be going on here. Jesus, as a popular teacher, is speaking to many thousands of people, something outrageous happens, and people run up and they want his opinion about it. They want him to have an opinion on this hot-button political issue.

And what happens is truly outrageous. The report is that Pilate (the Roman governor) has apparently slaughtered some Galileans as they were worshiping in the temple. And not only that, but he has them killed as they are offering sacrifices, so that their blood mingles with the blood of those sacrifices. It is hard to imagine anything more outrageous than this. We might compare it to a psychopath coming in here, killing us, and mixing our blood with the Lord's Supper. We can't even imagine such a thing. And just based on what we know here, this seems to take place during the Passover. As I understand it, this was the only religious holiday where worshipers were actively involved in making their own sacrifices in the temple. The place was like a slaughterhouse: Blood everywhere! Hundreds of thousands of pilgrims in town to do this, and for some reason, Pilate comes in and slaughters some visitors from Galilee right there in the temple, mixing their blood with the blood of the sacrifices.

And remember: Jesus is from Galilee. These are his people. So, this is personal. And I think they are saying, "Have an opinion on this, Jesus!" And they are putting him in a tough spot. On one hand, we have some people murdered as they are worshiping, and on the other hand, they are murdered by Pilate, the Roman governor. So, either Jesus sides with his own people, "Oh this is a terrible thing, and Pilate is the most evil ruler to ever walk

the face of the earth,” or he sides with Pilate, “Yep, those Galileans really had it coming,” which would truly put Jesus at odds with the thousands who have gathered to hear him speak. Do we see the dilemma? We want you to be outraged, Jesus! And there is no good answer to this shocking news.

And yet, Jesus does answer, doesn’t he? We’ll save most of our discussion on his response for just a bit later, but his immediate response comes in the form of a question of his own. He throws it right back on these people, ***“Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate?”*** The implication, then, is that these people from Galilee probably deserved it, or maybe they just wanted Jesus to SAY that these people deserved it. It’s similar to the thought in John 9, when Jesus sees a man blind from birth, and his disciples want to know, ***“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?”*** And as he does in John 9, Jesus responds here by denying the assumption: This is not what is happening here. ***“I tell you, no,”*** he says (at the beginning of verse 3). So, his initial response is: Let’s not blame this on the dead guys! But he puts this in the form of a question: You tell me, based on your own sick and twisted way of looking at situations like this – Did these Galileans deserve getting slaughtered? This then puts the breathless reporters in the dilemma. Now THEY are put in the position of choosing sides. Now THEY must come down on the side of Pilate or these men from Galilee. Jesus, then, avoids the politics of this breaking news report, and he starts making it personal (and we will get back to that in just a moment).

For now, though, this almost seems like those times as a dad when one kid would run in, reporting on something the other kid did. After a few of those interactions, I learned that the initial sensational report is often incomplete, and that first report is sometimes even intended to deflect attention from something that might have even CAUSED the whole mess. Does that make sense? Sometimes, the one who makes it to dad first is simply the one who can run faster! I think I realize why God says that elders must be men with children! Not that this happens in the church or anything! But that first report is not always an indication of innocence. And maybe in the same way, Jesus sees through what these people are doing, and he turns it back on them. He doesn’t fall for it, but he makes it personal. He avoids the politics and makes it personal.

II. So, let’s go back to the text, and let’s notice how Jesus gives an example of his own as he asks them about the **COLLAPSE OF THE TOWER OF SILOAM**.

In verse 4, Jesus throws it right back at them by asking, ***“Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem?”*** So, if we are talking about guilt perhaps leading to death, you guys bring me those Galileans, but what about your own people right down the street here? What did they do to deserve getting crushed to death by a tower collapse? They must be really bad? And, of course, once again, the answer is ***“No.”*** These people died, not because they were so evil; no, they died, because a tower fell! Sometimes, terrible things happen.

I find it interesting that Jesus uses two of the most common words for ***“sin”*** in this passage. In the first example (in verse 2), he uses a word referring to those who “miss the mark.” That’s what sin is: Sometimes, we aim to do what is right, but we fail; we miss the target. Here in verse 4, though, Jesus uses another word for sin, referring to sin as a “debt.” The NASB translates this using the word “culprits.” And this is simply another aspect of sin. When we sin, it’s like we rack up a debt that we are completely incapable of paying back. We are “culprits,” bankrupt, deadbeats. Maybe some of you have been in a really bad place financially. In over your heads. In a sense, that’s what sin is. We sin, and we owe God more than we can ever repay.

The other thing I notice here is that Jesus (once again) steers this away from the political issue of Pilate murdering those men in the temple, and he uses a common example that didn't have a cause at all. The tower thing is just a disaster, a catastrophe, a tragedy. Sometimes, terrible things happen to people who are minding their own business (and not necessarily guilty of something). Jesus, then, uses this terrible tragedy (with no real cause), and he plugs it in to their flawed theology: If you people think the Galileans were sinners, then the tower people must really be sinners! And that conclusion, of course, is ridiculous. Sometimes, terrible things just happen. And these are not Galileans (outsiders visiting from way out in the boondocks); no, these are your own people. So again, Jesus makes it personal. He's aiming for something here.

III. And this is where we come to where Jesus really brings it home, and the message from both tragedies is: UNLESS YOU REPENT, YOU WILL ALL LIKEWISE PERISH.

In fact, he repeats it word for word in both verses (in verses 3 and 5), ***“Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”*** What does he mean by ***“likewise”***? Is he saying that if they don't repent they'll be either murdered by Pilate or crushed by a falling tower? Maybe the lesson here is: Stay away from the temple and steer clear of sketchy-looking towers. If that's the case, I'm thinking most of us here today are probably safe. We can read this account, take note of the dangers of evil governors and tall buildings, and we can back away slowly, having learned our lesson. But that's not the point here, is it? No, when Jesus warns about ***“perishing,”*** he's not talking about ruthless leaders or collapsing towers, but he's talking about something else.

Often, the word ***“perish”*** can refer to physical death. We can ***“perish”*** in this life; in fact, all of us will perish at some point, but the ***“perish”*** in this passage refers to something we have a choice in. The ***“perish”*** in this passage is the kind of ***“perish”*** that happens only if we don't ***“repent.”*** And we know that even those who ***“repent”*** will eventually die physically, so this is apparently referring to the kind of perishing that takes place for eternity. This is the kind of ***“perishing”*** we read about in John 3:16, when Jesus says, ***“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”*** There is a contrast between ***“eternal life”*** and ***“perishing.”*** And this ***“perishing”*** is the kind of perishing Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 1:18, when he says, ***“For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”*** In this context, ***“perishing”*** is the opposite of ***“being saved [by] the power of God.”*** This ***“perishing”*** is the ***“eternal punishment”*** referred to by Jesus in Matthew 25:46. This applies to all of us. Those who refuse to repent will ***“perish.”*** The guy across the street will ***“perish.”*** Our children will ***“perish.”*** Our grandparents will ***“perish.”*** Anyone who refuses to repent will ***“perish.”***

What, then does Jesus mean when he says that if we don't repent we will ***“likewise”*** perish? If one is physical and one is spiritual, how are the deaths in Luke 13 similar to the perishing of those who refuse to repent? I would suggest that the ***“likewise,”*** probably refers to the fact that these people died tragically and unexpectedly; they died with unfinished business. So also, if we intend to repent but put it off, there is a sense in which we, also, will be caught off guard; we, also will die without accomplishing what is truly important in this life.

So, what does it mean to repent? It means to have a change of heart, to see sin for what it really is (a transgression of God's law), and to turn away from it. As God says through the prophet in Isaiah 55:7, ***“Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the LORD, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.”*** Or through Ezekiel in Ezekiel 18:30-31, ***“Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct,” declares the Lord GOD. “Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to***

you. Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? To “repent” is to have a change of heart, the kind of change that causes us to actually change the way we live.

So, Jesus isn’t focusing on the dead in these two scenarios; he is speaking to those who are still living, and he takes this speculation concerning who did what and who’s to blame, and he turns it into a warning to us – a message of repentance: Repent, or else! ***“Repent, or you will all likewise perish.”*** Someone once said that “every deadly calamity is a merciful call from God for the living to repent.” And what is truly amazing, the real “breaking news” in this passage, is not that people were murdered or died in a tragic collapse – the amazing thing is that all of us here today have apparently been given another chance! Those of us who have not yet died, we have one more moment living in the grace period. And if we are not actively repenting, if we see something in our own lives that needs to change and we are not changing, we are in grave danger, Jesus says. This is the lesson from these two examples.

So, what holds us back? What keeps us from changing, as we should? Pride, for one. Most of us don’t like admitting we’re wrong. And pride, of course, can lead to a hard heart, a heart that no longer cares. Or maybe we just love what we’re doing too much to repent. Or maybe we just put it off. But every time we see some tragedy in the world, we need to take it as a reminder that we are living in the grace period. Every tragedy in the world around us should remind us that we personally have been given another chance to repent.

Conclusion:

So what? What does all of this mean for us? I’d like to close with a few practical thoughts:

First of all, in a world where it’s so easy to be constantly bombarded with negative news, I would suggest that we be **DISCERNING** with what we consume and with what we share. News sites exist to make money, and bad news sells. I have worked for two newspapers – the Crystal Lake Times and the Northwest Herald (just northwest of Chicago). At the Northwest Herald, we had a police scanner in the darkroom. You know why? So we could beat the police to whatever terrible thing was happening, so we could get pictures of it. Bad news sells. And yet, there is so much more happening in the world than what we see on the news. I scroll my feed, and I can be almost overwhelmed with death, and war, and corruption, and politics, when what I really need is a walk in the woods. I don’t know how all of this impacts you, but a year or two ago I discovered 1440 news, and I honestly cannot tell their perspective on things, but every morning around 6 a.m., they send out a summary of what’s happened in the world over the past 24 hours, they even include some good news here and there, and my life has been better because of it. Let me know if you’d like to know more. Do whatever works for you. But we need to find a way to be discerning with what we consume and with what we share with others. My life cannot take a constant barrage of murder and tragedy. Several times on my recent trip out west, I had no cell signal, no wi-fi, and when I hit “scan” or “seek” on my car radio, I had absolutely nothing on either AM or FM. Nothing! I was completely disconnected from what was happening in the world, and it was awesome! We must be discerning.

Secondly, as we do hear about terrible things happening, let’s **PRAY**. Somebody once said that “to clasp hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world.” I love that. Pray for the people involved. Ask God, “How can I help with this?” and so on. Look for good news. Look for what God’s people are doing. But pray about it. As Paul says in Philippians 4:6-7, ***“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”***

And finally, instead of obsessing, instead of worrying about everything going on in the world today, let's do what Jesus does here in Luke 13 – **HE TURNS IT BACK TO US**. When we hear of some tragedy: Think souls. And specifically, we need to be thinking about our own souls. These people came to Jesus with terrible news, and Jesus, instead of assigning blame, he made it personal. I would suggest that we can do the same. Terrible evil isn't just out there in the world, it can be in here as well. And I would be much better off changing my own heart than worrying about everything else in the world. Jesus was speaking to us when he said, ***"Repent, or you will all likewise perish."*** Did our president talk about nuclear Armageddon this week? Yep, ***"Repent, or you will all likewise perish."*** Did somebody blow up a bridge in Ukraine a few days ago? Yep, ***"Repent, or you will all likewise perish."*** Will something terrible happen in the world this week? Yep, ***"Repent, or you will all likewise perish."*** And when we truly fear God and repent, we have nothing to worry about. In Psalm 112:7, the Bible says that the one who fears God ***"...is not afraid of bad news; [but] his heart is firm, trusting in the Lord."*** I need that reminder! And this is the point of this passage: When confronted with news of some terrible tragedy, we examine our own hearts.

As we close this study, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

You are truly a God of patience and great mercy. We truly stand amazed in your presence. You've given all of us here today yet another opportunity to repent, to turn away from sin. We are thankful for the good news in a world that seems to have so little of it. We pray that we would not get overwhelmed or discouraged, and we pray that we would always put our trust in you, especially in difficult times. We have no idea what terrible things might happen in the world around us this week, but we ask in advance that we would use whatever happens as a reminder to turn to you.

Thank you, Father, for Jesus. We come to you in his name. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com