**The Gospel of Luke**

**Witness to the Gentiles - #36**

**Sin and Suffering, the Fig Tree, Heals Woman on the Sabbath**

**Luke 13:1-5, 6-9, 10-17**

**Luke 13:1-5 – Sin and suffering**

***1*** *There were present at that time some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.* ***2*** *And Jesus answering replied to them, “Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all the others Galilee, because they suffered such things?* ***3*** *No I tell you, unless you repent, you shall all likewise perish.* ***4*** *Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, do you think that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?* ***5*** *No I tell you, unless you repent, you shall all likewise perish.*

**Notes and Studies**

1. Jesus did not teach by using abstract ideas. We have to notice that Luke introduced this portion by ***en auto to kairos****,* “at that time,” the occasion itself where some people were present and asked about the killing of some 18 persons.

2. Only Luke reported this incident. It is possible that these are Galileans who went to Jerusalem for the Passover. Sacrificing a lamb was permitted by the head of the family, and it seems that these were in Jerusalem and went to the Temple to sacrifice but something happened there. O Cullmann understood that the Zealots who were an organized group and were in constant war with the Roman Army must have killed one or more of the Roman military men and Pilate decided to punish those responsible. (*The State in the NT*, p 14)

3. It is necessary for us to remember that Peter was from Galilee (John 22:59), as was Jesus (John 23:6, Acts 5:37). The Romans had to watch this movement, the Zealots, carefully. The above study by O Cullmann has these listed among them: Peter, Judas Iscariot and Simon the [Zealot](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zealot) (in [Luke 6:15](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=luke%206:15&version=NRSV) and [Acts 1:13](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=acts%201:13&version=NRSV)) who was Simon Kananaios or Simon Cananeus ("Simon" signifying **שמעון** "hearkening; listening", [Standard Hebrew](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Standard_Hebrew) *Šimʿon*, [Tiberian Hebrew](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiberian_Hebrew) **Šimʿôn**; [Greek](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koine_Greek): ***Σίμων ὁ Ζηλωτής***) “Cananeus” did not mean from Cana of Galilee but is the name used for Zealots. The name comes from [Hebrew](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_language) [***kanai***](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanai_%28Judaism%29) (***קנאי***, frequently used in plural form, ***קנאים***, *kana'im*), meaning “one who is [zealous](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/zealous) on behalf of God.”

**Sin and Suffering**

1. Who is the greater sinner? No one was and is. Calamities were considered to be a result of past sins. This was old attitude and was expressed in Job 4:7; 8:4, 20; 22:5).

1. What did Jesus actually say? He neither analyzed nor disputed the idea but requested repentance by saying, “*I say to you … “*

a. It is not “who is the greater sinner”, but “who is ready to repent?”

b. Unless you repent all will come to a face death.

3. Suffering was never a punishment for sin in the entire teaching of the Lord, yet this common attitude prevailed even in our time. Behind this attitude is the God of Vengeance who visits sinners with suffering. But such attitude is in sharp contrast with the teaching of Jesus who carried the cross and marked carrying the cross as a true mark of discipleship.

**The Tower in Siloam**

This must have been part of the old wall of the old Jerusalem at the part of wall when it turned from the east southward where was the fountain of Siloam.

**Luke 13: 6-9 – The Parable of the fig tree**

***6*** *He spoke also this parable: “A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came to it looking for fruit, but found none.* ***7*** *Then he said to the gardener, of his vineyard, ‘Look here, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why should it even use up the soil?’*

***8*** *And he answering said to him, ‘Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and put some fertilizer:* ***9*** *And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that you can cut it down.*

**Notes and Studies**

1. The fig tree was a symbol of Judah and Israel, (Hos 9:10;Mic 7:1; Jer 8:13; 24:1-10).
2. Jesus was hinting to the whole people, not just the Galileans of those who died when the Tower fell on them.
3. He seemed to be saying you have a time to mend your life. You have three years, and this was the time of his ministry.
4. This parable comes also as a warring of what will happen after our Savior’s crucifixion, where Israel and Jerusalem were doomed to fall into miseries, Jerusalem being captured, and its inhabitants slaughtered by the sword of the enemy. Nor were they to perish thus only, but their houses were to be burnt with fire, and even the Temple of God demolished. It is probable therefore that Jesus was capitalizing on the Symbol of the Fig Tree in the prophet Jeremiah and at one time says of Jerusalem, or rather of its inhabitants; *“Israel is a vine with many branches.”* And again at another place addressing it, he says; *“The Lord has called your name a beautiful olive tree, well shaded in appearance: at its pruning time a fire was kindled in it: great was the tribulation that was upon it; its branches were destroyed.”*
5. Jesus was talking about fruit and in the old homilies of Cyril of Alexandria the three years were the three periods during which Israel bore no fruit. The first of these was that in which Moses and Aaron and his sons lived: who served God, holding the office of the priesthood according to the law. The second was the period of Joshua, the son of Nun, and the judges who succeeded him. And the third, that in which the blessed prophets flourished down to the time of John the Baptist. During these periods Israel brought forth no fruit.
6. Then the time of seeking fruit on this fig tree, and finding none. “*Cut it down therefore: why does it make the ground also useless.*” As though He would say, “Let the place of this barren fig tree be laid bare: for then there will come up (or may be planted there) some other tree.” And this too was done, for the multitude of the Gentiles was summoned into its kingdom, and took possession of the kingdom as their inheritance.

**A Note from Philemon**

**The Church and the Fig Tree**

The Church is the fig tree of Christ for it is the plant of Paradise. It is here in the world to bring forth fruit. Christ gives the church fertilizer when the tree does not have fruit. Our Lord intercedes for the church and asks the Father being the Gardner, for Jesus is our Advocate with the Father, “and our propitiation,” and the husbandman of our souls, “Who prunes away constantly whatever is to our hurt, and fills us with rational and holy seeds, that so we may bring forth for Him fruits.”

**Luke 13:10-17 – Jesus Heals a Woman on the Sabbath**

***10*** *And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath.* ***11*** *When a woman, who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself.* ***12*** *And when Jesus saw her, he addressed her and said, “Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity.”* ***13*** *And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.*

***14*** *And the leader of the synagogue however became annoyed that Jesus had healed her on the Sabbath day, and said unto the people, “There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day.”*

***15*** *But the Lord then answered him, and said, “Hypocrites! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the manger, and led it away to watering?* ***16*** *This woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?”*

***17****And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him.*

**Notes and Studies**

1. The healing took place at a time when Jesus was teaching and it was a Sabbath where normally all communities would meet.
2. A woman was bound up with a “spirit of infirmity” which means illness, as the Aramaic would be ***ruach shehlanaya***, “spirit of illness.”
3. “She was bent and could not stand up straight.”, W. K Hobart (*The Medical Language of St Luke*, pp. 20-22) identified this illness as “spondylitis ankylopoietica” a fusion of the spinal joints.
4. Jesus called her and told her that she has been released and this is by laying his hands on her. She instantly was healed and the evidence was she straightened up.

**The Law of keeping the Sabbath**

1. Work was prohibited on the Sabbath (Exod 20:9 and Deut 5:13). The head or the leader was annoyed for he regarded the healing as a “work.”
2. Blind reading of the Law avoids always:

a. The purpose of the commandment.

b. There is no commandment that prohibits meeting human needs especially urgent ones like eating.

1. Jesus appealed to domestic work, which is necessary and can’t wait.
2. A comparison of the domestic work with healing is based on the fact that the human person is more valuable and was put into a very precise stament, “*the Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath*.” But this needs a merciful heart who values human life.

**Satan**

No doubt that spirit of sickness is not just an evil spirit but is the work of Satan himself. This is just an old archaic attitude, but has three points that can’t be separated.

1. Evil became part of the “fallen world,” the disharmony that has entered with sin. Satan was and still is part of this disharmony where evil has a shelter in the disharmony that comes with the struggle between life and death.

2. Illness was associated with evil and also with the imperfection and the “futility” that came with alienation of creation as a result of the “fall of Adam”, recounted by Paul in Romans 8:

 ***18*** *For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.* [***19***](http://biblehub.com/romans/8-19.htm)*For the earnest expectation of the creature waits for the manifestation of the sons of God.*

[***20***](http://biblehub.com/romans/8-20.htm)*For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope,* [***21***](http://biblehub.com/romans/8-21.htm) *because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.*

[***22***](http://biblehub.com/romans/8-22.htm) *For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now.* [***23***](http://biblehub.com/romans/8-23.htm)*And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, that is, the redemption of our body.”* (Romans 8:18-23)

3. The fear of suffering and of death both have created in us the panic and the rejection and both make illness terrifying. This has become the image of Satan, the one who can’t be seen as far away from death but as part of the dilemma of the struggle between life and death. But we have the hope, as we read in Hebrews 2 that:

*“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil”* (Hebrews 2:14).

**The Bond**

1. The woman was liberated or released from the bond. Jesus was and is merciful and did not wait for the woman to ask for healing. His compassion moved him to volunteer and release her. The verb used here is very important for to release from the “bond” is to free.

2. Sadly, while those in the crowd were amazed, all his adversaries, who are not named, were ashamed.

3. We must notice that all humans do not receive God’s work equally. Here as in other occasions it is the misunderstanding of the Law that has created this division of a crowd who saw the same wonder or miracle, but their perception was different because of their attitude to the commandment.

**A Story about Evil**

**Evil enters from cracks**

Theophan the holy man was praying one day that Jesus in his love for humanity may destroy Satan so humans can live happily and peacefully. But before he ended his prayer, Satan appeared to him and said “I am innocent” and “I am not the cause of all the evil in the world.”

Theophan told him, “You are the Liar and I don’t believe you,” but Satan replied, “Ah, you have sinned by accusing me of something I don’t do. But come with me and I will show you how evil can happen.”

Both entered a village and there was somebody carrying uncovered a plate full of honey. Satan put his finger in the plate and took some honey and put it on a wall of a house nearby and said to the holy man, “Is this evil?” But the holy man was silent at first but looking at the drops of the honey on the wall added, “Let us see.”

Soon, flies gathered to take their share of the honey. A lizard saw the flies and began its attack on the flies. A cat saw the lizard and wanted to eat it, but a dog saw the cat and tried to attack the cat. This ended with the owner of each animal, the cat and the dog, trying to protect his property. So they began to fight, and some of their friends were passing by and joined them in the fight. It was not too long that the whole village became involved in this fight.

Then Satan said to Theophan, “Did I do anything wrong or evil? I only put drops of honey on a wall.”

Evil creeps on us from the cracks that do exist in creation.

(From the book *The Wisdom of our Fathers*, translated by GHB)

**Who has created the cracks?**

Theophan the holy man could not help but ask how evil creeps in in such a way? Who made these cracks? He went to see his Mentor, an old wise holy hermit and put this question to him. The wise man looked at the sky and pointed to the clouds and said,

“Theophan, these clouds can be a blessing to a dry land, and can bring a flood that destroys life. Who is responsible? No one is, but creation is in travail, for corruption has taken control in all of us because of the disharmony between all creatures. Now, who brought this disharmony? It is my opinion that all came with death and with death we all have to protect our life and seek our interest. When the struggle between life and death is halted then harmony will abolish the root of evil.”

Theophan asked, “When this will happen?”

His mentor answered, “I am waiting for the manifestation of the Risen Lord who is the first fruit of life eternal.”

(From the book *The Wisdom of our Fathers*, translated by GHB)

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