

ICEBREAKER: Warren Wiersbe shared, "I asked a friend of mine what the death rate was in his city, and he replied, "One apiece." Then he added, "People are dying who never died before.""

"The Answer" (Luke 13:1–9)(3.14.21)

Luke 13:1–9 (NIV84) *Repent or Perish*

13 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."

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.' "

The word of God for the people of God.

LET US PRAY.

Title: **"The Answer"**

INTRODUCTION:

I'll bet you have questions. I know I have many questions. There is a need within us that wants to make sense of this topsy-turvy world. Wouldn't it be nice if we had a set of simple rules? Given set "A" of circumstances there would be a corresponding set "A" of explanation. Our lives would make sense. We could figure things out and we would feel like we had a grasp of the situation.

If that were the case, we could feel a sense of control, even if it was extremely limited. We might have to consult a friend. We might have to consult a manual. We might have to go to a so-called expert. BUT, a reason could be offered and we could find comfort – even if we didn't like the answer that was revealed.

It has been a year now that we have been dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. There may be more questions about it today than there were a year ago. Trillions of dollars have been spent and will be spent on what is called COVID Relief. I cannot even comprehend how much money that is and where does it come from. Are they using Monopoly Money? Then you look at what the money is allocated for and there is more mystery.

After a year, COVID has now hit close to home for my family. One of my grandson's tested positive and now my son has tested positive. When the government experts are consulted about contagious periods and quarantine time, different answers are given. So far, it does not look like there will be any lasting effects for our grandson, but it is too soon to say about my son. Certainly, I have some questions, probably similar to millions of other people across the globe.

An almost universal question for humanity since the beginning, "Why is there suffering?" Atheists and agnostics will ask, "If God is good, why is there suffering?" Likely, you have wondered: Why is there evil? Why does God allow the wicked to oppress the weak? Why is there death? And, is there anything after death? What answers are provided in this scripture?

BODY:

People were always bringing questions to Jesus. Sometimes their motives were wrong. At other times, they were serious inquiries. Often, Jesus answered questions with another question. He does that here in today's text, but goes on and answers it. There are layers to his answer. There are life altering answers to questions not asked but needed – layered answers.

We don't know why Pilate killed the Galileans. Because so many of the Jews were hoping for a militant Messiah, they might have been trying to appeal to Jesus' family and community roots. Surely, He would be outraged. Pontius Pilate was a local dictator with the authority of Rome behind him. The Roman soldiers' spears and swords were instruments of death.

Not only were the Galileans killed by this evil man, it was done egregiously. In a time of worship, when sacrificed animals were being offered up to Yahweh, these Galileans were struck down. They were in a holy place of God. They were doing what faithful Jews should do. And yet, they were killed by a cruel despot. Their blood was mixed with the blood of the animals by the pagan Pontius Pilate on the altar of power and oppression.

This makes no sense. Why did it happen? We all have an innate sense of justice within us. It is because we are made in the image of our Creator who is Holy, righteous, and just. The gyroscope of our sensibilities has been destabilized. We want a simple world where good is rewarded and the wicked are punished.

The wisest man that ever lived, King Solomon, wrote in Ecclesiastes 9:11 (NIV84)

I have seen something else under the sun:

The race is not to the swift
or the battle to the strong,
nor does food come to the wise
or wealth to the brilliant
or favor to the learned;
but time and chance happen to them all.

I have to admit that this scripture causes me angst. This idea of chance seems to refute the sovereignty of God, at least to some degree. Oh, but we, which includes me, tend to forget about free will. We are happy that the Lord gave us free will, but we question His judgment giving it to other people. And, the evidence seems to be on our side.

The underlying thought that Jesus addresses immediately is a common misconception, especially in the Jewish context. These Galileans must have died like this because they were sinners; that somehow they deserved to die an ignoble death. At minimum, they didn't deserve God's providential intervention.

Don't answer this out loud, but does that thought ever, in some way, at some level, cross your mind when you hear about such an incident?

Jesus says, "Absolutely and unequivocally, no."

Jesus makes this a teachable moment. "Okay, now that you have broached the subject, let me set you straight. You remember last week when the tower of Siloam fell on those eighteen people and killed them? Why do you think that happened? Yes, I know it is commonly believed that they must have been guiltier than other Jerusalem residents. Somehow, they got what they deserved."

Jesus says, "Absolutely and unequivocally, no."

So, why Jesus why? Accidents happen. There are hurricanes, tornados, fires, earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, and storms of all kinds. They often take human life, cause injury, and destroy property. Disease, car accidents, and allergic reactions take lives. The natural human response is to construct some type of psychological defense mechanism to cope with death.

What is Jesus teaching? "Unless you repent, you too will all perish," does not mean if you repent you won't die. It is obvious that no one gets out of this life alive. Jesus is saying that there is something after death to be concerned about – perishing. Every person, for all time, must deal with this truth. There are two alternatives. Perishing or not perishing. The determinant is whether or not we repent.

Jesus is adamant. This issue applies to ALL. Every single human being sins and every single human being will perish unless they repent. Jesus repeats this very strongly. Knowing the motivations of our hearts, Jesus says get your priorities straight. When you see or hear about human tragedy, do not assume a

place of judgment or waste time in philosophical mind bending. Look into your own heart and make sure you are right with your Creator and God.

John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus: Matthew 3:1–2 (NIV84) In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”

Matthew 4:17 (NIV84) From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”

Jesus sent out His disciples: Mark 6:12 (NIV84) They went out and preached that people should repent. And, Paul says in Acts 26:20 (NIV84) “First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.”

There can be no mistake that repentance is central to Christianity. Why? Because it is the key to eternity with our Lord Jesus and our Heavenly Father. The kingdom that is near is the rule of God. When we repent, we turn from the world, from worldly living and worldly thinking, and turn back to God. That transformation results in godly living and a renewal of the mind.

Let’s take a closer look at repentance. Seeing ourselves as we truly are, brings humility. The world wants to believe that people are basically good. Jesus tells us, as do the scriptures, that none is good, no not one. We must know that we need a Savior before we will come to Jesus. Then we can begin to live out our humanity as God intended us to be.

There must be true conviction of sin by God the Holy Spirit. This leads to sincere sorrow for sin and confession. Lord, have mercy on me. Now, we realize that Jesus must be our Lord and Master. We are born from above, born again. We become new creations in Christ. Like Zacchaeus, we make restitution to those we have harmed. We publicly declare our faith through baptism.

In our gratitude for the love of God, we want to share the good news of Jesus. Jesus tells us in Luke 15:10 (NIV84) “In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” Have the angels of God rejoiced over you?

Jesus provides us with an illustration of God’s longsuffering in this parable of the fig tree. The lesson given is certainly for the individual, but also there are larger applications. It has been interpreted in a few different ways. For today, it might be applied to a church or a nation. We must bear fruit for the kingdom of God.

In my study this week, I had my understanding expanded. Three years of looking for fruit seemed indicative of a very patient man. But literally, that was only the half of it. Leviticus 19:23–25 (NIV84) “ ‘When you enter the land and plant any kind of fruit tree, regard its fruit as forbidden. For three years you are to consider it forbidden; it must not be eaten. In the fourth year all its fruit will be holy, an offering of praise to the Lord. But in the fifth year you may eat its fruit. In this way your harvest will be increased. I am the Lord your God.’ ”

So, the man would not have expected to find fruit until the fifth year. No fruit the fifth year. No fruit the sixth year. No fruit the seventh year. And yet, the caretaker convinced the vineyard owner to wait another year. I know the Lord was patient with me. Let us not try our Lord’s mercy. Though God does not desire that anyone should perish, there will come a day when He will ask, “Why should they use up the soil?” If the fig tree does not produce what it was designed to produce, it will be cut down. Repent or be cut down.

Professor Dr. Jordan Peterson has come to international fame over the last six years. He is a clinical psychologist and has taught at Harvard and most recently at the University of Toronto. He is highly intellectual and his YouTube videos have had millions of views.

His lectures on the Bible have led some people to the Christians faith. Although, he is not a believer, he is coming closer all the time. In a recent discussion with Christian Icon artist Jonathan Pageau, Jordan shared his regular responses to whether he believes in God. His answers are typically like this: “No, but I am terrified that He [God] probably exists.” “No, but I try to live my life like He [God] exists.”

But then Jordan very reluctantly includes himself in the category of failing Christians. He goes on to wrestle with the truth of the melding of the mythical Messiah and the historical Jesus. He says, "I probably believe that and am amazed at my own belief."

Part of Jordan Peterson's struggle is that when he looks at believers, their lives do not seem sufficiently different, sufficiently transformed, that he believes they believe. The way they live is not sufficient testament to the truth. Jordan ponders, "There is no limit to what might happen if you acted like God existed."

I want to share two more things about Dr. Jordan Peterson with you. First, he has applied his superior intellect to an analysis of the Bible. His lectures on the Book of Genesis drew thousands to every session. These were in-depth sophisticated examinations. He compared the truths of the scriptures to what he has learned in his decades of clinical psychology and the study of human nature and found them highly compatible.

Second, Dr. Jordan Peterson has been through a long painful ordeal. He has experienced depression since childhood. He had some type of autoimmune deficiency related to his diet. His meteoric rise into the public eye came with a lot of controversy. Then his wife was diagnosed with cancer and he describes her survival as miraculous.

About two years ago, he realized that he had become addicted to the anti-anxiety medication he was taking. Many of those undesirable side-effects manifested in a very painful existence. Rather than take the American doctors' recommendation of more drugs, he went to Russia to undergo detoxification. He is still recovering and each day is a struggle.

I would be a fool to say I know what God is doing in Dr. Jordan Peterson's life. And certainly, the lesson from today's scripture is that those issues are above our paygrade. It may be that the vineyard caretaker is digging around in the soil of Jordan's life and fertilizing. May the fruit of repentance blossom in his life. That is my prayer for him and all those struggling with their faith journey.

CONCLUSION:

A great English thinker, poet, and clergyman from 400 years ago, John Donne, wrote:

Death, be not Proud BY [JOHN DONNE](#)

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, **we wake eternally**
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

Yes, our God is sovereign.
Psalm 139:16 (NIV84) tells us,
Lord, your eyes saw my unformed body.
All the days ordained for me
were written in your book
before one of them came to be.

The crucial question for you, and every individual, is when our spirit leaves our earthly tents, these bodies, where will we awaken for eternity? If our lives bear the fruit of repentance, we will dwell with our God. The otherwise is unthinkable. What's your answer?
Amen and amen. Let us pray.