



# THE NONCONFORMIST

THE **PUZZLING** STORIES  
OF JESUS

# 6



## YES, NO + MAYBE

1. I've done a lot of good stuff within my lifetime!
2. If you live a sinful life, in time, you will experience the tragedies that come as a result.
3. When you walk away from God, you also walk away from God's protection.
4. God's greatest desire is for you to live a sinless life.
5. When God brings more chances of grace into your life, it often stinks like fertilizer.

## DIG DEEPER

● **READ Luke 13:1-9** (NLT)

*1 About this time Jesus was informed that Pilate had murdered some people from Galilee as they were offering sacrifices at the Temple. 2 "Do you think those Galileans were worse sinners than all the other people from Galilee?" Jesus asked. "Is that why they suffered? 3 Not at all! And you will perish, too, unless you repent of your sins and turn to God. 4 And what about the eighteen people who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them? Were they the worst sinners in Jerusalem? 5 No, and I tell you again that unless you repent, you will perish, too." 6 Then Jesus told this story: "A man planted a fig tree in his garden and came again and again to see if there was any fruit on it, but he was always disappointed. 7 Finally, he said to his gardener, 'I've waited three years, and there hasn't been a single fig! Cut it down. It's just taking up space in the garden.' 8 "The gardener answered, 'Sir, give it one more chance. Leave it another year, and I'll give it special attention and plenty of fertilizer. 9 If we get figs next year, fine. If not, then you can cut it down.'"*

### + 1 Pilate had murdered some people -

The atrocity mentioned in Luke 13:1 may have taken place when Pilate "appropriated" money from the temple treasury to help finance an aqueduct. A large crowd of angry Jews gathered in protest. The literal Greek reads, *hōn to haima Pilatos emixen meta tōn thusiōn autōn* "whose blood Pilate had mixed with (the blood of) their sacrifices."

As best we can reconstruct the bloodshed took place in the temple at Passover, because that was the only time laymen, Galilean or otherwise, were involved in the slaughter of animal sacrifices. So the victims were Galilean pilgrims offering Passover sacrifices in the temple. Evidently Pilate thought they were guilty of sedition and had his soldiers attack them when they least expected. In the ensuing melee human blood mixed with lambs' blood in a time of sacrifice.

+ 2 "Do you think those Galileans were worse sinners...?" - The people were evidently raising a question, not about Pilate, but about whether this must be taken as an indication that these were particularly sinful men who died. Would God have allowed such a tragedy to have occurred otherwise? This is the philosophy reflected in Job when Eliphaz falsely accused Job of being an especially bad sinner because of the severity of his suffering (Job 4:7; 22:5). Jesus' answer on this occasion was to redirect the crowds' attention.

● Does tragedy come into people's lives because of their level of sin?

## DIG DEEPER...CONTINUED

**+ 2 Jesus asked. “Is that why they suffered?”** - Since Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, anything He said about Pilate was sure to get there before Him. If He ignored the issue, the crowd would accuse Him of being pro-Roman and disloyal to His people. If He defended the Jews and accused Pilate, He would be in trouble with the Romans, and the Jewish leaders would have a good excuse to get Him arrested.

Our Lord moved the whole issue to a higher level and avoided politics completely. Instead of discussing Pilate’s sins, He dealt with the sins of the people questioning Him.

**+ 3 Not at all! And you will perish, too, unless you repent of YOUR sins and turn to God.** - Jesus went on to show the logical conclusion of their argument: if God does punish sinners in this way, then they themselves had better repent because all men are sinners! The question is not, “Why did these people die?” but, “What right do you have to live?” None of us is sinless, so we had all better get prepared. It is easier to talk about other people’s deaths than it is to face our own sin and possible death.

- Why do you think it is so difficult for us to see the sin in other people than our own?

**+ 4 What about the eighteen people who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them?** - Some suggest that these men were working on Pilate’s notorious aqueduct, which caused trouble because it was erected from temple funds. The pool of Siloam was to the west of the town on Ophel. Jesus’ answer to this question was the same—look at your own sins and repent (what evidence is there that God is producing fruit in your life?).

**+ 6 But he was always disappointed** - To refrain from evil is not enough, God’s people should be active in bearing fruit, not in avoiding wrongdoing.

- What does it say about God that He is more concerned with the “fruit” you are bearing than with the sins you are avoiding?

**+ 7 I’ve waited three years, and there hasn’t been a single fig! Cut it down. It’s just taking up space in the garden.** - The sabbath day was an epitome of Jewish religion: a gift from God, full of spiritual meaning, but so fossilized and encrusted with traditions that it had become practically lifeless. To Jews such as the ruler of the synagogue, ‘indignant because Jesus had healed on the sabbath’ (13:14), the healing of the crippled woman, so far from being most appropriate to the day, was most inappropriate to it—a complete inversion of the truth, which in practice not even the hypocritical Jews themselves really held to (13:15–16).

Again the judgment of Jesus is dividing between those whose religion is a mere show of leaves, and those who really produce fruit; between those whose religious observance is a travesty of the ‘sabbath rest’ of ‘the people of God’; and those for whom it is a matter of rejoicing and praise to the Lord (13:13, 17).

- How do Christians today, in their best efforts, simply take up space rather than fulfill the desires of God?

**+ 8 Sir, give it one more chance. Leave it another year, and I’ll give it special attention and plenty of fertilizer.** - This is astonishing mercy and grace. Astonishing because it means that the Lord of the universe, who transcends, sustains, and maintains the vast cosmos (cf. Colossians 1:15–17), gives us an extended period of grace during which he painstakingly does what he can to bring forth the fruit of repentance. Such mercy is awesome!

- What does it tell you about God that at a time where He is justified to destroy, He begs for an extended period of grace and mercy to invest in us?

**+ 9 If we get figs next year, fine. If not, then you can cut it down.** - The parable has an application to individuals and to the nation of Israel. God is gracious and long-suffering toward people (2 Peter 3:9) and does more than enough to encourage us to repent and bear fruit (Matt. 3:7–10). He has had every right to cut us down, but in His mercy, He has spared us. Yet we must not presume upon the kindness and long-suffering of the Lord, for the day of judgment will finally come.

- What does it say about God that He still maintains a final judgement?



## MY PRAYER...

1. How am I bearing fruit?
2. Why is it so much easier to avoid sin than to bear fruit?
3. What new aspect of God’s character does He want me to know?