

Home Church Study Guide—May 2, 2010
Repent or Perish: Get Over It! (Luke 13)

In this week's study, Jesus calls us to a new perspective for our lives. He reminds us of the fragile nature of life as well as its only purpose. He again calls us to repent of our narrow view of life. God "planted us" in "His vineyard" for the purpose of bearing fruit for the world to His glory.

When death occurs, especially unjustly or because of a seemingly random event, is it some kind of punishment or a sign of judgment against those who die? Two events are mentioned in this text, however neither are really startling. Jesus asked, "Do you think somehow these Galileans were more sinful because they were killed? No, unless you repent, you too will perish." Jesus made it even more difficult by reminding them of eighteen who were killed by just being in the wrong place at the wrong time—a tower falling on them as they passed by. His message was the same after the mention of that event—"unless you repent, you are in for the same ending of life as they." Clearly Jesus was pointing out the importance of turning away from their self-focused lives. There is only one safe place to be, and it is offered to all—it is within the gates of the kingdom of God. What does that mean for those who are living? If we are not living under the rule and for the purposes of God, we are in grave danger. We most desperately need to repent of living for anything or anybody but God!

This is made clear in Jesus' next teaching. It is a parable telling of the owner of a vineyard inspecting his work. The one working the garden for the owner is standing with him. The owner sees a fig tree planted several years before that is still not producing fruit. One plants a fig tree for the purpose of producing figs. If it is not productive, then it must be cut down in order to make room for a tree that will produce. The gardener asks for mercy for the tree. He will work with it one more year, then, if it does not produce, it will be cut down. The message is this: if you are not producing kingdom fruit, "the fruit of the Spirit", and you are still living, it is only because you are in a state of extended grace that will not last forever. In other words, if you are living for anything except God's purposes for your life, you are in serious trouble. What does this mean to us, personally? Remember, the calling to the kingdom has nothing to do with your vocation (unless you are involved in something that is not compatible with God's kingdom). It is not about what you do, but for whom you do it. If you are self-focused, you are taking the gifts of God given for the intention of bearing the fruit of the Spirit for the ultimate good of the world (and yourself), and defeating God's purpose for your life. If He were to visit the vineyard in which you live, would he find fruit in your life? If not, we need to repent immediately and begin living for God's glory.

I believe it is valid to ask the question, "If I were to die right now, would I have any regrets?" Or, "What would I do if I knew that today were my last day on this earth?" I believe we would live with a great desire to serve God and serve others. Life is fragile. It is a gift of mercy. Living in the kingdom is the only way to escape the fear of losing life. For in the kingdom, one is living to God's glory. Physical death will occur unless the Lord returns first, but there is no fear—for when the owner comes, those in the kingdom will be bearing wonderful fruit to the glory of God.

The next event shows the ugly reality of people living in their own self-righteous world rather than under God's rule. Jesus catches them in their hypocrisy. They would care for their animals on the Sabbath, but helping one of their own people was considered work. We are quick to judge and slow to praise. Luke included this story to remind us of what a kingdom heart looks like. It looks for hurt and searches for ways to deliver those in pain. The fruit for which God looks in his children is the natural love we should have for those around us—love which motivates us to love and serve.

The end of this text talks of the incredible nature of the kingdom. If we would only see it for what it is, we would give our all to see it grow and expand. Some have suggested Jesus' reference to the mustard seed is intended as a general principle in the kingdom. Even small, insignificant gestures of love and generosity can become incredible blessings in the kingdom. Little becomes big when placed in the hands of God. So, the kingdom is compared to yeast. Not ordinary yeast, mind you—but super yeast! Some have suggested the three measures of flour represents enough bread for 150 people! That is some yeast! But so it is with the kingdom of God. It doesn't take much on our part for God to do incredible things. Amazing things can be done in God's kingdom, even with the little good we sometimes have within us. In the kingdom, don't measure possible outcome by your own resources. Just be faithful, and watch with wonder what God can do.

"So What" for Home Church discussion:

1. Do you fear death? Why or why not? Do you live in the kingdom that removes the fear of death?
2. Do you see the only purpose of your life as being a producer of "kingdom fruit?" Why or why not?
3. Create a project in your small group where you are all intentionally mustard seeds or super yeast. What can you do to make a kingdom difference in your lives?