



March 4, 2007

At That Time

Our Gospel reading this morning begins with an unusual phrase, “at that time”. Upon hearing that phrase you might ask, “well what time was that?” The phrase itself begs us to look at the preceding verses to see what time it was. Prior to these verses Chapter 13 records three distinct events. The first event finds Jesus telling the people to repent or they will perish. Much like today I think the average person didn’t think too much about what repent really means. It means to confess, seek forgiveness and change. Jesus wanted to make this final part very clear to the people so he told them a parable, about a fig tree. He said, “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. 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 tree but haven’t found any cut it down. Why should it use up the soil? Sir, the man replied, leave it alone for one more year and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year fine, if not then cut it down’. So what did this parable have to do with repentance? Well, first of all we have to identify who the major players are.

We are the fruit trees however sin prevents us from bearing good fruit. We might look good and healthy we might even give shade which looks good like a good thing to everyone but the farmer because he wants fruit from the fruit tree. The farmer is God and notice that God is patient. He waits for three years for the tree to bear fruit but finally he says, “cut it down”. The man who cares for the tree is Jesus. Jesus says to his father, “Let me try to get it to produce fruit if it does that will be great but if it doesn’t then cut it down”. Notice how Jesus will get the tree to bear fruit He’s going to give it fertilizer in other words He is going to do the work. God had sent the people a prophet they hadn’t listened that’s the three long years. They didn’t repent and therefore they weren’t bearing fruit so God sent His son to tend to the trees. If the people will listen to Him

that will be wonderful they will be saved they will bear fruit but if not destruction looms.

In the next section we see that the ruling religious leaders just didn't get what Jesus was saying. Jesus heals a woman who had been suffering from a debilitating back problem for eighteen years. Notice the response, "indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath the synagogue rulers said to the people, 'there are six days for work so come and be healed on those days not on the Sabbath'. Can you believe it? He tells the people go away God will show mercy to you on all the other days but not on the Sabbath. Jesus is quick to rebuke the synagogue ruler He says, " You hypocrites doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman a daughter of Abraham whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen years be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?" Jesus looks at them and says you hypocrites you yourselves work on the Sabbath and show mercy to a thirsty donkey or to a thirsty ox why shouldn't I show mercy to a daughter of Abraham? Please remember the religious leaders saw themselves as children of Abraham as the sons of Abraham when Jesus says this He's saying to them, "Why won't you show mercy to your very own sister?" The result of this rebuke, when He said this all his opponents were humiliated but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things He was doing.

Jesus begins Chapter 13 first with a call to repent and bear fruit, when this doesn't happen He takes the next step and He rebukes then again He calls for repentance and bearing fruit. He says that we are to be like mustard seeds or yeast. A single mustard seed grows into a tree, which provides sanctuary for many birds. A little bit of yeast will permeate a whole loaf of bread and cause it all to rise. We are to bear fruit and help the kingdom to grow.

And finally the third section Jesus begins by telling them God knows everything, He knows who's bearing fruit, He knows who's like yeast. He says to the people in verse 24, "Make every effort to enter the narrow door because many I tell you will try to enter and will not be able to." You see, people want to get to heaven and Jesus says they're going to try and they're going to try to look like a fruit tree and they're going to look good and they're going to try to enter but many will not be able to. Why not? They're trying to earn their way to heaven they're trying to do it themselves. They don't want to deal with the very first message that Jesus had, "repent". They don't want

to bear fruit. They are in it for themselves. This is what Jesus is saying and He says this is how it is or once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door you will stand outside knocking and pleading, "sir open the door for us", but he will answer, "I don't know you or where you come from", then you will say, "we ate and drank with you when you taught in the streets", but He will reply, "I don't know you or where you came from away from me all you evil doers". There will be weeping there and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves thrown out. People will come from east and west and north and south and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God indeed there are those who are last who will be last and first who will be last. There will be weeping there, there will be gnashing of teeth because you religious leaders will see your forefathers and all the prophets and all the people from the north, south, east and west gentiles and Jews coming from all over and entering God's heaven but you religious leaders who were the first to hear God's call will be the last to face Him. Those who are last face Him as the judge.

There's the definition of "at that time". Jesus has called for repentance, He has rebuked in the absence of it and He has judges those who have refused to do so. So, the religious leaders, the Pharisees now come to Jesus and say, "Leave this place go somewhere else Herod wants to kill you." Why would they tell Jesus this? Very simple, they want Jesus to leave He's causing too many headaches. So they try to scare Him away. Herod was a scary individual he killed John the Baptist, he killed two of his own sons and know he wants to kill you Jesus. It would appear that this is a lie. Luke 23 records that when Jesus was taken before Herod, Herod was greatly pleased because for a long time he had been wanting to see Him. Doesn't sound like someone who wanted to kill Him. So Jesus calls the Pharisees' bluff and he says, "Go tell that fox I will drive out demons and heal today and tomorrow and on the third day I will reach my goal". Lets break that down.

"Go tell". If you know that Herod is trying to kill me then you must be working with him yet you Pharisees preach that you despise him because he represents the Roman government. So you go right ahead and tell him let your true character come out. Let the people see what you Pharisees are really all about. Tell that fox, a cunning animal, but Jesus probably says this sarcastically he's not really

trying to kill me but tell him I will continue for three days if you want to kill me because I'm making life better for your people so be it but now we have to ask, "Why did Jesus say it?"

When we look to the Gospel of Matthew, Matthew records that this dialogue happened on the Tuesday of Holy Week. Three days later would be Friday, Good Friday and so Jesus says, "In any case I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day for surely no prophet can die outside of Jerusalem." Why? He's going to die in Jerusalem that's where the prophets had also died. Killed by the ancestors of the Pharisees, the scribes, the chief priests. Killed because the prophets said repent and bear fruit and when the people didn't the prophets rebuked them and when they still didn't change the prophet spoke judgment and then the people the leaders killed them. Jesus is saying, "You will kill me too."

How does Jesus feel about this, knowing that in three days He will be arrested and then executed? He laments but not for Himself for them He says, "O Jerusalem you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings but you were not willing. Look your house has left you desolate." Jesus says I've sent prophets because I loved you he says I have longed to gather your children. This is God Jesus is saying I am God and I've longed to gather you together and put you under the shelter of my wing but you're not willing. And the result is you will be desolate.

During Lent we prepare to see Jesus to see Him set His face toward Jerusalem to bring salvation as we do He's calling us too and He's saying repent, bear fruit and come under the shelter of my wings. My prayer is that we will heed His call and that we will be true producers. We will be like the mustard seed, we will grow into a tree that reaches out and provides for many. We will be like yeast that is infectious so that God's kingdom may grow and so that glory will be brought to His name as people are saved.

In our Savior's name, Amen.