



**March 11, 2007**

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Luke 13:1-9

## “Who is Worse?”

A couple of weeks ago, I got an e-mail from someone in our congregation. It was a story about an interview with God. I want to share some of it with you.

I dreamed I had an interview with God.

"So you would like to interview me?" God asked.

"If you have the time," I said.

God smiled. "My time is eternity...what questions do you have in mind for me?"

"What surprises you most about humankind?"

God answered.

"That they get bored with childhood, they rush to grow up, and then long to be children again."

"That they lose their health to make money...and then lose their money to restore their health."

"That by thinking anxiously about the future, they forget the present, such that they live in neither the present nor the future."

"That they live as if they will never die, and die as though they had never lived."

Wow, it is so profound. It leads us to think so many things of our life.

What if you have an opportunity to interview with God, what would you like to ask God?

According to the Bible passage we read today, there were some people who had an opportunity to interview Jesus. They told Jesus about an incident that happened in Galilee. Pilate killed the people in Galilee and mingled their blood with sacrifices. We don't know what happened there exactly. And also we have no clue why those

people reported the story to Jesus. But it seems like they might have had some question about the terrible death. We can guess that they were asking this question, "Why were the Galileans killed?" "Were they worse sinners than others?"

Who are the worse sinners?

Let's think about this question, "Why were they killed?"

Did they die because they were terrible sinners? That was what the people who interviewed Jesus believed. Whether it is true or not, there are some stereotypes which dominate people's mind and life unconsciously. This kind of fixed thought hugely influences our life. For example - Women like shopping, Women are talkative. Sometimes it is true, but not always true.

There are also many fixed thoughts or prejudices about our Christian belief or religious life. One of them may be about the connection between human tragedy and sin. People have a tendency to think the reason of human tragedy is from their sin. When they are sick or something bad happens, or when they see someone who is suffering, they are trying to think they have done a wrong, sinful act.

This is a very dangerous thought. Why? It makes us judge others.

A few weeks ago, there was a sensational controversy in Sidney and the whole world. I want to quote an article of AP news.

(AP) A sign saying "Jesus Loves Osama" outside some churches in Australia drew criticism from the prime minister and other religious leaders, though they conceded it was probably true according to Christian beliefs. Prime Minister John Howard said something else would have been better.

"I understand the Christian motivation of the Baptist church," Howard told reporters. "But I hope they will understand that a lot of Australians, including many Australian Christians, will think that the prayer priority of the church on this occasion could have been elsewhere."

I don't want to argue about that issue. I don't want to say that Osama is a good man. I don't want to say that he is doing right things.

But the truth is that the sign of the Baptist church posted made many people including Christians feel uncomfortable. Why do they feel bad? What made them feel uncomfortable?

We don't have any power and authority to judge others because every human is an equal sinner in front of God. So, we cannot say to anybody that you are a worse sinner.

I've seen so many great people who do not know Christ, do not go to church. As far as I know, we are not able to say that we are better than them. I was a military chaplain from 1992 to 1995. I served there at the regimental headquarters as a staff officer and a lieutenant. I met so many different kinds of people there, officers and soldiers and staff sergeants. I still remember one guy who was a master sergeant. His name was Yang. He was a great and honest man. Everybody loved him. But He was not a Christian. One day I was trying to encourage him to come to church. I was thinking how it would be great to have him in my congregation. But he said, "Sorry I can't, I don't want." I wondered why. He answered me "I do not trust the people called Christian." They were lying, cheating, doing everything that I hate to see. How I can trust the God they believe in." I could not say anything to him anymore. But I wanted to give something to him he needed because I loved him. At that time he got a health problem. It was very hard for him to work there because our base was located in a highland, top of the mountain. So he requested our commander to move him to the division headquarters in a big city to get some medical benefits. But his request was not accepted because there were so many people who wanted go there. One day I heard from a chaplain of the division headquarter that he was looking for a sergeant to help him and his ministry. I said "Save your time, I got the right person." He said, "Well, I have many applicants for this position. But tell me about him." I gave some information about sergeant Yang. After he listened to me, he asked me a question, "how long has this guy gone to church?" I said, "Never." He was shocked, little silence. And said, "Why do you think he is the right person?" I said, "He is better than us." Now? He is serving at division headquarter as a sergeant helper of the chaplain.

Yes, it's true there are so many great people outside the church whom we can't say you are worse than us. Sometimes they are much better than us. We are not able to say you are a worse sinner. Whoever they are, what religion they have, God loves everybody. God loves Buddhist, Islamic people, and also Christian. We are the same sinners. The only difference between them and us is the fact we are a forgiven sinners in Christ. The fact we are forgiven does not give us any authority to judge them. It gives us a duty to love them.

## 2. The thing we need to repent

Chapter 13 verse 2;

Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.

In this verse, Jesus calls us to repent. What do we need to repent? There are so many things we need to repent. Our Christian tradition tells us the 7 deadly sins. The Seven Deadly Sins are as follows: lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy, and pride. But according to the scripture we read, these are not the things Jesus wanted us to repent. Jesus is telling us what we need to repent through the parable of fig tree. The thing we need to repent is our reality, not producing fruit. Why is Jesus calling us to repent about this, and not other sins?

Look at the parable. A man planted a fig tree in his vineyard. He was coming over several times looking for fruit on it. In other word God has a certain expectation of us. This world is God's vineyard. God planted us in his garden. We are the trees, God is looking for fruit. Bearing fruit, this is the reason God calls us, planted us here. If we are not able to bear any fruit, we will lose the meaning of our existence.

At seminary, I studied the systematic theology in a graduate program. But I love to read some books about church history. In the long history of 2000 years, I learned one thing that there is not an eternal church in this world. So many churches, Christian sects, and denominations have risen and disappeared. The Jerusalem Church, the first church in this world does no longer exist. The Antioch Church which has given to us the name Christian does not exist anymore.

The fact we exist here does not secure our future. If we would exist in the future, the only reason is God still has an expectation on us. We are worshipping God here because God expects something from us, Baker Memorial tree.

Our church started a vision team meeting. We have this meeting regularly since last year. The purpose of this team is finding new vision and dreams for our church. We are trying to find what expectation God has to us. I see a hope in this kind of meeting. We will exist as long as we seek God's purpose and expectation of us.

This is also true in our personal life. We live here because God wants to see something in our life. If tomorrow will be the last day of my life, the expectation to us still exists. Please remember, today, this day is one more chance God allows to be here to bear fruit.