

Dear pilgrims of the heavenly pilgrimage, elect according to the foreknowledge of the Father, sanctified by the Spirit, and sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ, grace to you and peace be multiplied.

**PRAY: Lord, sanctify us by Your Truth, Your Word is Truth**

**Luke 13:1–9 (NKJV)**

- 1 There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.*
- 2 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things?*
- 3 I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.*
- 4 Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem?*
- 5 I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."*
- 6 He also spoke this parable: "A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none.*
- 7 Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, 'Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?'*
- 8 But he answered and said to him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it.*
- 9 And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.'* "

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

**PRAY: Let the words of our mouth and the meditation of our heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.**

### **God's Vineyard is All About Repentance**

1. He Seeks Fruit
2. He Labors More
3. He Produces Fruit

Being an amateur when it comes to gardening, it took me nearly half a year before I noticed the grape vines growing on the northern side of the property. Last year the vines were fruitless. Needless to say, it has taken me some time to begin to learn about the need to prune and fertilize, to watch over and care for the vine if we want it to produce fruit.

God is no amateur when it comes to His garden. He doesn't have to do wiki search to find out how to care for your spiritual needs. He knows you as He knows me. He

knows what we lack; He knows what we need. Our verse of the day summarizes God's gardening goals: *The Lord is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.* (1 Peter 3:9) **God's Vineyard is All About Repentance.**

## 1. He Seeks Fruit

A magazine article speaks of how wine fraud has significantly increased in the last decade. "The sweet scent of deception permeates the wine trade from tip to toe." In the last few years, investors have lost hundreds of millions of dollars to bad wine investments.

The owner of a vineyard is deeply invested in fruit being produced. God, above all others, is the most deeply invested. He has staked His very Son on the survival and growth of His vineyard. He seeks fruit.

Part of the source of wine fraud is that it is fairly easy to pawn off cheap wine for a high price by giving it an expensive label. God knows well our sinful inclination toward fraud. Our natural way of thinking is nothing more than outright fraud. We try to pass off what is worthy of God's acceptance, when really we are just slapping a fancy label on cheap, in fact, worthless wine.

*v.2 ... "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things?"*

Many in Jesus' day supposed that earthly wealth and power were signs of God's favor. If you were poor, if you were of a lower caste, if you were one of the Galileans murdered by Pilate while gathering for worship, then God must be holding something against you. On the other hand, if you live a rather comfortable life, then God must be blessing you; He must consider you righteous. The Hindu religion teaches this exact thing. Joel Osteen teaches the same theology. They make outward status into a sign of spiritual standing.

"What do you suppose?" Jesus says. What do you suppose? ... that they deserved what the got?

Let us not be so quick to say that we don't think this way. For example, if I told you that one of those children who lost their life in Newtown, Connecticut was going to grow up to be a serial killer; or if I told you that one of those who lost their life on 9/11 abused children, would that change your perspective on the event? Do you suppose these were worse sinners?

***3 I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.***

On the other hand, others suppose is that tragic events are a random result of fate; that no one deserves to have their life cut short by having a tower fall on them.

***5 I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."***

Jesus refutes the thinking that we really don't deserve to die a tragic death. Whether by a hurricane at home, a violent shooting at school, or planes flying into the place of work – we all deserve it. But not because of one particular sin. Those who have their lives cut short are not paying for a particular sin they committed. They are receiving the results of everyone's sin, all the way back to Adam and Eve.

The Law is not pretty or petty. It reveals our sins not neither pretty nor petty. Down to the smallest sin, the Law reveals debt. The New King James translation uses the same word "sinners" in verses 2 and 4. However the Greek uses a different word in verse 4. Jesus says "do you think they are worse debtors?" That idea of debt is central to an understanding of the Law. It leaves us under a debt to be fulfilled. Even before we are born, we carry a debt. We do not inherit spiritual riches from our parents, we inherit original debt. So from the moment we enter into this world we are incurring debt. Personal debt.

This is not about them. This is about me. Righteousness cannot be measured by tasting other people's bad wine. What I mean is, I cannot determine how good I look in God's eyes by looking at how bad other people look in my eyes.

As God said to Ezekiel – 13 *When I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, but he trusts in his own righteousness and commits iniquity, none of his righteous works shall be remembered (Ezekiel 33:13).*

In regards to righteousness that pleases God, He will measure it by the only standard that He can accept: Himself, His Law, His holiness.

We read in our Epistle reading of how those who fell in the wilderness were "our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted."

Demonstrations of God's judgment serve to remind us that God is concerned about one thing – the urgency of your soul's salvation. He reminds us that our time here is short, and, without Christ, the curse of sin looms over us. Every day, God is laboring intensively for your soul.

*'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?'*

God's vineyard is all about repentance. He seeks fruit.

## **2. He Labors More**

"2009 Bordeaux" is apparently one of the more well known examples of recent wine fraud. The title "Bordeaux" carries a certain aura of prestige because it comes from one

of the largest and most ancient of vineyards in France. Many false labels have claimed “Bordeaux” status, fooling investors out of millions.

*7 Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, ‘Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?’ 8 But he answered and said to him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. 9 And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.’ ”*

Scripture sometimes uses the number “three” to signify completion, fullness, the end. What a demonstration of God’s grace! Even after the impenitence is complete and at the vine has met its end, still He labors another year. This is the cry of Jesus. One more year! Intercession is being made. He labors more.

God leads us tear off the false labels we wear, so that He can paste a new one on.

The preaching of the Law has one goal: the preaching of the Gospel and salvation.

In John 9, Jesus’ disciples ask Jesus a question about a man born blind. They ask whether it was the parents’ sin or his own that caused him to be born blind. Jesus responds that it was neither his sin nor his parents, but that the glory of God would be displayed. God works through loss and weakness to display the power of His salvation.

“Let it alone one more year.” Jesus uses a word which could be translated “forgive.” So when you consider it in contrast with the “debt” already mentioned – perhaps the extended meaning is: “Release the debt for one more year.” See this as the year of Christ’s work – the year of God’s good grace where He has come to you in the preaching of the Gospel. He has come to give you all that Jesus has labored for.

It was dirty, hard labor. It was beyond any spiritual or physical struggle we’ve ever faced. And when Jesus came out on the other side – He came out spotless. The salvation He won on the cross was perfect. It paid for your every sin. In Christ, God’s labor is complete. He demonstrated this by raising Jesus from the dead. Jesus is the first-fruit of God’s labor.

So what do you suppose? Do you suppose that they deserve what they got? Do you suppose that we deserve what they got? More importantly, don’t suppose, rather know: Christ got what we all deserve, so that we get what we don’t deserve. He will not leave us to a lost investment. He provides the real deal; the best of the best. God has relabeled you: “Bordeaux.” He has made you a member God’s vineyard, where the righteousness of Christ is yours. By faith in Christ, those tragic events – shootings, collapsing buildings – take on a new perspective. Yes they are still sad; yes, they are painful; but for those who trust in Jesus, the departure from this world is a departure from the curse of sin, a departure to the glory of God’s eternal harvest. For this He labors.

### 3. He Produces Fruit

To avoid being taken by fraud, experts have encouraged investors to deal only with well established merchants. Well, we have found the only established merchant that can be trusted – Christ. And He has given a guarantee of His credentials in writing. Only the Word of God can produce something genuine. Our repentance is more than mere lip-service; God produces fruit.

As the John the Baptizer said, “bear fruits that are comparable to your repentance.” God is calling into action the response that agrees with your salvation.

For instance, when the Spirit comforts someone who sorrows over having committed fornication, will the Spirit then lead that same person to keep on living with someone who is not their spouse? When the Spirit gives redemption to someone guilty of stealing 20 dollars from work, will He then direct that person to go spend the 20 bucks on dinner that night? The fruits of the Spirit flee sin, remove temptation, and avoiding offense, all for the glory of Jesus.

Repentance is most literally “a change of mind” or a “turning away.” We should remember, however, that this is not just a turning away from something, but a turning toward something. It is a turning toward the forgiveness that is freely and unconditionally yours in Christ. Being powerless to do this on our own; God provides the strength to turn. The powerful message of Christ’s labor compels us. ... *for [the gospel] is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes. (Romans 1:16).*

Sin is more powerful than we are; it is more powerful than anything we could hope to achieve; but it is not more powerful than God. God not only calls us to turn from sin and believe, He provides the power of the gospel to make it happen. God brings forth this life from the roots He has established. *“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)*

When you find yourself being tempted to return to the ways of sin, don’t look to yourself, look to the cross. When you find yourself caught in sin, don’t look to yourself, look to the cross. Look to Jesus who said: ***“Sir, forgive its debt this year also...”*** Repentance is not about your righteousness; it is about the vineyard of God’s righteousness given freely this year also. It is not just a one time thing; this is God’s daily, life-long labor. It is His fruit. ... *for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. (Philippians 2:13).*

As I am learning with my gardening, there is a lot of ongoing work needed to keep a garden healthy and growing. As a church, as elders, as pastors, as individual Christians, let us keep this vineyard work before us. Let us abide in the soil of the gospel. Let us labor more fervently for those who stray, for those who are lost. May

God give us the endurance of Christ. “One more year.” We labor on with Him. We use the means by which God cultivates – a clear message of sin and salvation, a call to repentance, a proclamation of Law and Gospel. And still we pray for one more year; we pray that more souls would realize the three years of our sin are up, but the extra year of God’s salvation never ends. *The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)* Our gardening goals should be the same as God’s – A vineyard which is all about repentance. Amen.