

# Stories from the Road #4

## Stories Jesus tells as he is on his way to die outside Jerusalem<sup>a</sup>

13 Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans<sup>b</sup> whose blood Pilate<sup>c</sup> had mixed with their sacrifices<sup>d</sup>. <sup>2</sup> Jesus answered, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? <sup>3</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent<sup>e</sup>, you too will all perish<sup>f</sup>. <sup>4</sup> Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”

<sup>6</sup> Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. <sup>7</sup> 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 fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’ <sup>8</sup> “‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. <sup>9</sup> If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’”

10 On a Sabbath<sup>g</sup> Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, <sup>11</sup> and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. <sup>12</sup> When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.” <sup>13</sup> Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God<sup>h</sup>. <sup>14</sup> Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue leader said to the people, “There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.” <sup>15</sup> The Lord answered him, “You hypocrites! Doesn’t each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? <sup>16</sup> Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham<sup>i</sup>, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?” <sup>17</sup> When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing. *(Luke 13:1-17)<sup>j</sup>*

**Q. What surprises, shocks or startles you from the passage?**

**Q. Which character in these stories do you most identify with?**

**Q. What question would you like to ask Jesus?**

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<sup>a</sup> Luke interviews eyewitnesses and writes his biography of Jesus to a particular person – Theophilus - to add confirmation to what Theophilus already believes about Jesus (Luke 1:4). This story is from a collection of stories Jesus tells to his followers on the road as he heads towards Jerusalem to die (a journey which begins in Luke 9:51). Jesus is explaining what it will mean to follow him – and not just in a physical sense.

<sup>b</sup> The “Galileans” were Jewish people who lived around the lake of Galilee.

<sup>c</sup> Pilate was the Roman Governor. Palestine was a remote outpost of the Roman Empire.

<sup>d</sup> Presumably Pilate had these Galileans killed as they were offering their sacrifices in the temple at Jerusalem.

<sup>e</sup> To “repent” is the idea of someone changing their mind and turning back to God.

<sup>f</sup> By “perish” Jesus is talking about an eternal “disaster” where one is separated from God, the source of goodness and life.

<sup>g</sup> The “Sabbath” was the Jewish day of rest, when no work was to be done.

<sup>h</sup> Notice who it is the woman praises.

<sup>i</sup> Abraham was a patriarch or founding father of the Jewish people.

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That disaster was punishment for sin / wrong-doing was a commonly held view at that time. It's not surprising given all that Jesus had been doing and teaching that someone would ask him about it.

Jesus says that those who suffered because of the deliberate actions of another (Pilate) or an accident (a tower falling) didn't suffer because they were worse sinners. Those who are listening should "read" these disasters as warning signs: life is short, they don't know when it will be over, so they should change their mind about God while they still can (repent).

The point about the fig-tree is to show that God is patient when it comes to repentance. He gave the fig-tree three years to show signs of fruit (repentance). He then gives it another year – that is merciful, because a fig-tree that has not born fruit for three years is unlikely to do so. However there is a point though where God's patience runs out (the tree will be cut down).

So far Jesus has described God as both exacting and merciful. We see these themes in the next story. Jesus is kind to a crippled woman and heals her on the Sabbath. The religious leaders are indignant because healing someone is technically working on the Sabbath. It is the religious leaders who are exacting – and hypocritical in the process! (They would respond to the need of their animals for water, but not the greater need of this woman who has effectively been "dead" for 18 years). This is the kind of opposition Jesus is up against.

Repenting before God is a way of avoiding eternal disaster. But it is also turning towards the one who is merciful and kind.

**Q. What surprises, shocks or startles you from what you have just read?**

**Q. In what way has this story confirmed or challenged your understanding of Jesus?**

**Q. What do you want to take away and ponder further?**