

## **Selected Sermons #8**

The Festival Half of the Church Year by E. Schaller

### **LUKE 13:1-5 New Year's Day**

Now there were some present at that time some who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. 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? I tell you, no! But unless you repent you too will all perish."

### **Dear fellow citizens of heaven and of the ageless Kingdom of God -**

As we enter in upon a new year today, common honesty compels us to face the lessons, however unpleasant they may be, which the events of the old year force upon us. God spoke to us with the beating of his hands upon humanity; he has hammered the earth until it vibrated like a drum. He wanted our attention; he had something to tell us – and it is unbelievable that we should pretend we had not noticed it. Today of all days we would be dishonest in doing so.

We know, of course, that today the eyes and thoughts of many people are turned toward the future with interest and with hope – but unless their ears are turned back to catch the sounds of the past, to pick up the thunderous roar of God’s voice, the real future will not be as they picture it. Indeed, that is by all means the most unhappy, most tragic fact of this New Year’s day – that so many are busy with a hopeful future which becomes more hopeless day by day for them and for us all unless we all are willing to learn the lesson that God has been teaching with such terrible vigor and earnestness.

I believe that this year can be framed and hung on the wall as the year in which more terrible things happened to more people than at any other time in the world’s history. The Flood destroyed only a small number of people, by comparison. The burning of Sodom and Gomorrah was a little thing – but in this year things took place on Earth the horror of which is so great that our minds are not big enough to grasp it – and we have been far away from most of it. Have we been too far away to hear and to learn? As we are alive and well today, shall we pretend that it all means nothing to us? Let us today meditate upon –

**God's dreadful visitation upon others  
as our New Year's reminder:**

**I. Our Gospel text causes us to reflect upon the  
terrible experience of others in the past year**

**II. Our Lord urges us to profit by them**

I. Our Scripture text concerns itself with the story of **two serious tragedies that took place at Jerusalem** in Jesus' day. One of them was what people would call an atrocity. Some Jews of Galilee had come to Jerusalem to bring sacrifices to God in the temple, and while the offerings were being slaughtered, some of Pilate's soldiers broke into the temple and slew the Galileans, so that their blood flowed with the blood of their sacrifices. It was a shameful, cruel act, a murderous attack. We know nothing of the reason for it or anything further of the event that was being discussed with our Lord and his disciples.

The other catastrophe was what men like to call an act of God. It occurred when a tower in Jerusalem suddenly gave way and crumbled, burying eighteen people in its ruins and crushing their lives out. Again, we know nothing more of this incident than what Luke reports. Evidently it was just one of those things that happen now and then the world over. But though they are common, should we let

them pass without notice, simply because we were not hurt?

Consider the tragic nature of these events. People were so suddenly and so unreasonable torn out of life – they never knew why or how. Reflect on the grief, on the scars left upon many families – yet no matter how much we say about these tragedies, they remain small and unimportant in our eyes. Why is that?

Because we have become used to something much bigger and stronger; because they are **like child's play compared with** the events that were almost daily companions of our waking hours during the past year. There was a time in our age, too, when the falling of a tower upon eighteen people would have made news for a week – but not any more. By the very fact of what has happened to our feelings in those things, we ought to be forced to realize the enormity of what has been taking place in our world. To say that it has been a year of tragedies would be to understate the truth. Surely, there have been acts of God in which men have lost their lives. There have been earthquakes and great storms. There have been great fires of unknown cause and tremendous railroad accidents.

But the acts of men have outstripped God's; have put him in the shade. When millions died of **starvation** in India that was not an accident – that was “**war**”. And when we say “**war**,” the whole picture comes back to us. We used to think that the death of 30,000 people in an earthquake was a world record. Then let us go to Berlin, to Hamburg and Bremen and Cologne and Essen and Düsseldorf. Or let us go to **Stalingrad**! No human mind can possibly grasp what mankind has caused there! Pilate was just a child playing with death.

The world of 1943 was bathed in **wholesale, violent death**, in torture beyond words to tell of it. There has been as yet no book written or picture taken which could begin to convey to us the full horrors of that year. We have almost forgotten how to shudder, yet **million of lives are lost in terrible deaths** month after month. No one will ever count them; men grow weary from the telling of it. That was 1943; and here we sit, untouched almost all of us. We live like the Israelites in Egypt during the plagues, when Egypt was three days in utter darkness while over the homes of Israel the sun shone. Are we not going to understand the meaning of all this torment?

When our Lord spoke of the two events in Jerusalem, he did not distinguish between man-made and God-made destruction. He simply said, “*Do you suppose that these*

*Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”*

**I urge you to mark those words** – they do not blame Pilate; they do not blame the suffering people, but they say that it should and it could happen to any and all of his hearers. We are left to understand that those accidents (if you wish to call them that) were neither man-made nor accidents, but that his hearers must see in them **the judgment of God upon sin.**

You will find that the people of the world generally are going to view the terrible events of 1943 as belonging in one of two classes; unavoidable accidents or wicked deeds of great evil-doers like Hitler and Horopito. Such short-sightedness is more terrible for us than all the bombs that were ever dropped. The almighty God is pounding upon the earth with great hammers held in either hand; he is bringing home to mortals the consequences of humanity's sin. According to mysterious rulings of his own unsearchable mind, he strikes here and there, crushing this people and that people. We cannot understand the pattern. God chooses where he wills to strike, according to a law of his own. The sins he is visiting are the world's sins of idolatry, greed, lust, and pride. **Those whom he has stricken were guilty, but no guiltier than anyone**

**else.** Do not think that they were sinners above all others! Why he chose to let the blight of sin's curse fall first and heaviest upon Europe, Asia, and the islands of the sea during WWII – that is a knowledge locked in his wisdom.

But know this, and know it well: **the sins he is visiting are world sins!** They are our sins! If we do not see that, then you are lost. If others were stricken first, is not that our great advantage? We are hearing God's voice; we are seeing what sin can and must bring. "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked" (Galatians 6:7), and that is bearing fruit. We have lived to see the new year only because by God's grace he has chosen us to be the ones who shall learn and profit by the experiences of others.

**II. How may we profit?** What will a review of the wrath of God over sin show us? Some people are actually using the terrible visitations of God only in this way, that they figure the chances they have of not being touched themselves. The story is told of a Marine in a foxhole on some Pacific island that had just been captured. He heard Japanese planes approaching, and for a moment he was very frightened. Then he began to figure that he was safe unless a bomb fell within twenty feet of his shelter. The island was one mile wide and two long; what chance was there of a bomb falling inside his twenty-foot safety zone? Allowing the Japanese to get in close enough to be able to

drop six bombs before being driven off, the Marine figured that the chances of a bomb falling in his foxhole were one in 12,500. Out of 12,500, only one bomb would hit him. This comforted him so much that he turned over and went to sleep.

That marine is a good example of what most of the living are thinking today. Believing that the chances are very slim of their being stricken as others have been, they calmly turn over in their sins and fall asleep. *"It won't happen to us,"* they say. What fools these mortals are! The certainty that **God's judgment will strike those who continue to sin is the great lesson** of the past year! God does not work in averages nor does he strike by the laws of chance. There is no chance of escaping from his hands – as Jesus said, *"You will likewise perish."* Unless we **learn to profit rightly** in this our time of grace, our day of wrath is coming.

Destruction is the final result of sin. Sooner or later, it must come. Our nation, our people, and we ourselves have been setting the time-fuse for the bombs of God's wrath that must fall. **Our hope is repentance.** We cannot escape feeling and suffering with others for sin's corruption, but we can escape our own final destruction if we but hear what God is saying and turn our hearts and lives toward him.



But am I so wicked? Am I not a child of God? My friends, do you think there were no children of God caught and burned and crushed under the great hammer that pounded the world in 1943? When children of God permit their flesh to share in the sins of the world, when they so often forsake and deny the Lord that bought them, do they not share the guilt of the world with which they run?

Who is to repent, if we do not repent? Who is going to lead the way to safety if we do not? Who is going to learn the lesson being taught at such a price to others, if we do not learn it first? **Repentance must begin with the house of God**, or it will not begin at all. Also for us a complete revolution is needed in our way of thinking. We have been too much thinking worldly thoughts. There has been too much idolatry among us, too much of selfish and fleshly greed. We have loved the world; our thoughts have not been thoughts of peace with God; we thought of dollars rather than of spiritual values. A check in our hands has meant more to us than a treasure in heaven. It is for these things that wrath has come down elsewhere in the world.

What about a new year? **A revolution in our way of doing things must follow.** The things we know are right and we have the power from on high to do what must be done; a greater devotion toward our Lord and toward hearing and heeding his Word is in order; a greater sharing

of our earthly riches with the God who gave them; a greater love toward other people. Do we not realize that these very things were lacking in those parts of the world where destruction walks? And if we do not resolve that the new year will find us much more diligent, much more concerned with the spiritual issues of life, much more interested in our souls and in those of our children, we will be inviting the same deaths that has struck so many others.

**This is our year of grace.** My friends, may we not fail! Every bomb is a cry to wake up, to readjust our lives to the way of Christ. Every highway accident, every earthquake, every tornado, every flood is a blow from God's hammer to awaken us! Every obituary notice is a bell God is ringing for you, for me. Let us hear and heed, for Jesus' sake and our own salvation! Amen!

Help us, O Lord! Behold, we enter #120

O Lord, our Father, thanks to thee #124

For thy mercy and thy grace #121