

**Sermon theme: God's patience. Occupational hazard 4 for disciples:  
Fanatical impatience**

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**Text: Luke 13:1-9**

Introduction

If you and the family or friends are on the road and cruising, or a little behind schedule, there is currently a typical road-sign in South Africa that is likely to bring you back down to earth:

STOP/GO. WAITING TIME 20 MINUTES. SINGLE-LANE TRAFFIC DUE TO ROADWORKS.

This may try your patience. And it seems, every time you have to stop, it's the on-coming traffic which seems to have been lucky.

We become impatient and irritable. The worst is that we realize it is necessary and a good thing: the road is being repaired and if the single-lane is not controlled the accidents would pile up. However, the fact is: our speed is broken and that is a source of frustration for many and causes impatience.

This is what we are talking about this morning: PATIENCE. Great, you think to yourself: Now he's talking to my husband / wife who is always so impatient. Or, perhaps you realize: Yes, I know I'm really impatient. One of our leaders mentioned this week how he is trying to work on his impatience, especially his "road-rage". He says he is progressing a little: he still sticks his hand in the air but no longer folds in certain fingers; so he just waves. Perhaps you are like the man who prayed: "Lord make me patient, and do it NOW!"

To be patient is, according to Galatians 5:22, part of the fruit of the Spirit; a wonderful gift we all wish and strive for.

But patience is not simply an opposite of anger. Patience is also an antidote to discouragement: the ability to try again. That's what God's patience is all about.

We have been on a journey with Luke in Jesus' school of discipleship and today we tarry at Luke 13. Last week, in Luke 12, Jesus reminded us about the danger of becoming lukewarm. This week it is a surprising new angle.

Luke 13 opens with an urgent request: Repent. But then a turning-point.

Let's read Luke 13:1-9 in our Bibles.

With Jesus and His disciples on the road, some people arrived to report a terrible thing that happened to certain Galileans. The cruel Pontius Pilate had them killed while they were offering sacrifices. They reported this because they wanted an answer to a typical Jewish theological problem (still asked today): Did these Galileans die because they had sinned or were they bad? Were they not busy with something good (sacrifice)?

Jesus refers to another such incident. In Siloam there was an accident in which a falling tower killed 18 people.

He does not discuss the justification of the issue. He uses the shock-effect of death to prompt them to repent. It could have happened to you, He implies.

Prosperity in life does not necessarily indicate God's favour; and adversity is not necessarily the consequence of sin. Prosperity and adversity in this life are actually of less importance. What IS important is repentance: to TURN TO God.

This is a tremendously important message.

But the way in which He follows this up with the parable of the fig tree is just as significant and almost surprising.

Right in the middle of this vital message of repentance, He raises the need for being patient. He speaks of God's patience.

Disciples of Jesus, especially new followers, are full of zeal and passion for God and for the Gospel. So often, God calls us to action – repent, follow me, I send you, go, make disciples, pray without ceasing, etc.

Disciples of Jesus are also often frustrated today. Frustrated because “people don't want to change”, “preachers don't preach repentance and conversion often enough”, “people just want to be pampered”. Especially those who have recently made a new commitment to God are impatient with the church and those in it whom, they feel, are not getting on with it; who do not look as if they understand the urgency of the situation.

Jesus tells the parable of the fig tree getting another chance in order to give His energetic disciples a sense of perspective. Of course their energy and zeal are valuable but they must not become lax and lukewarm. But God is working with the bigger picture. In this picture, “Cut it down!” is not the first solution. We are so caught up in zeal that we overlook the patience in this parable. We only see the ultimatum: “If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.”

Here is a unique occupational hazard of disciples of Jesus, “fanatical impatience”. We almost want to bully people into the Kingdom and if he or she is reluctant or battles to get there, then we want to “cut it down”.

Discipleship training is training in patience. God's ways are not characterised by heavyhandedness and premature interventions (as people suspected of the incidents concerning the Galileans and at Siloam in Luke 13:1-5). God is teaching us not to seek overhasty and heavyhanded solutions. The Kingdom usually comes like fertilization (v.8) – slowly, naturally, - not dramatically.

The parable of the fig tree is a story of "fertilization"; a story of urgent patience: to do everything necessary, without cutting it down. For some of us "cut it down" is a way of solving problems. People who are different, or who do not believe with our type of conviction, or who test our patience must be cut down, cut out of our circle. "Why should it use up the soil?" – is our reasoning. Jesus' fertilization story suggests there is a better way.

Yes, God's patience has its limit. The owner returns. In the meantime it's fertilizer time.

Fertiliser is not instant solution. It will be a while after the soil has been fertilized before we see a difference. And to work the fertilizer into the soil is not the dramatic new start of cleaning out the land to plant anew.

If we consider all that can be done about what's wrong in this world, we see Jesus' attraction to small things – the unseen, the silent and slow: yeast, salt, light, seed – and fertilizer.

That is why He uses these as symbolic of the Kingdom: seed (13:18-19), yeast (13: 20-21), light and salt, etc.

God is a God Who works, a jealous God, but a God Who exercises patience (II Peter 3:9)

Those who wait on the Lord are renewed:

Power to be like fertilizer – humble, not high-and-mighty, willing to be "dissolved".

There are many stories of parents who prayed patiently for their children. You could relate them. There is the beautiful story of Monica, mother of the church father, Augustine, who prayed 33 years for him before God turned his life around.

The zealous followers of God said: "Crucify Him!"("Cut him down") and His reaction was: "Forgive them". The same expression is used here for the fig tree: "leave it alone".

That is the patient Grace of God and it is the way He wants His disciples to operate.

Today we have someone, Efraim Goldstein, who works in Israel as a leader of the organization: Jews For Jesus.

Their work is an example of the urgency, but also of the patience necessary to be disciples of Jesus.

Let's listen to Efraim.



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