



8. REASSESSING

Stuck for answers. Struck by lessons.

Luke 13:1-9

Why did this happen? What shall we do?

The coronavirus pandemic has raised many questions. Questions for scientists, governments and economists. Questions about health provision, travel and the way we live today as a whole society in a global village. There will be no easy answers. There is much that will have to be reassessed and many lessons to learn.

– TO TALK ABOUT –

Q. What big questions has the coronavirus pandemic raised for you?

There is another set of questions that come our way as followers of Jesus in the wake of the period of pandemic. Where was God in the unfolding events? Why does a loving God allow suffering on such a massive scale? Perhaps closer to home, how do I relate to God as someone who has lost a loved one, or my business, or my job? These questions might arise in our own hearts, but they will definitely also show up in public debate and be part of our private conversations with unbelievers.

Again, there are no easy answers. Much as we need to be guided by the logic of the big story of the Bible about creation, sin, salvation, redemption and the restoration of all things in Christ, we will have to temper that with love. We will need to be careful not to attempt to treat the wounds of a hurting world superficially in our responses. To do so will leave us coming across as cold, harsh and shallow.

Let's have a look at some verses from Luke 13:1-9 to see how Jesus answered the question 'why did this happen?' in the context of two big news stories while he was here on earth.

PARALLELS AND

PATTERNS

Read Luke 13:1-9.

Do so slowly. Listen carefully. Pay attention to the details. Reflect on how things feel at different parts of the story. Let the story sink into your soul.

– TO TALK ABOUT –

PARALLELS

Line up the story alongside your recent experience of living through the coronavirus pandemic. Use the questions below to help identify and talk about some parallels.

Jesus responds to chatter about the two big news stories of the moment in this passage. In one, Pilate had killed some Galileans while they were worshipping and mixed their blood with the blood of sacrifices on the altar (v1). In other news, eighteen people had been killed when the Tower of Siloam collapsed and fell on them (v4). There was a lot of pain to be processed and a lot of questions hanging in the air.

Q. How are we processing the pain of the coronavirus experience? What questions has it surfaced for us? What has it left us struggling for answers or wondering about? What questions have we heard others asking? How have they made us feel?

The question on everybody's lips was 'why'? Why did these things happen? Why them? In both cases, Jesus turns attention away from the bigger 'why' questions – why this, why them - to a much more personal 'how' question. How shall we respond to living in such an evil and dangerous world in which life has been shown to be so fragile and perishable? This becomes the bridge to Jesus speaking about the need to consider and change our ways, reassess and repent (vv3-4).

Q. As those who believe in and love God, how might we respond to the question of why he allowed the pandemic to happen? What will we say about individual stories of suffering and death? Might we be tempted to imagine that those who suffered most had done something particular to deserve their fate? How comfortable, or uncomfortable, do we feel around such questions?

Talk about other parallels you can see between the story and our situation today.

PATTERNS *Line up the story alongside your recent experience of living through the coronavirus pandemic. Use the questions below to help identify and talk about some patterns for living as followers of Jesus.*

Jesus follows up with a parable about a barren fig tree (vv6-8). The use of a story again moves his response to what had happened to certain individuals to a more general consideration of the need to learn from suffering.

Q. In what ways might we be creative in changing conversations stuck looking for answers about why the coronavirus happened and God's part in it, to more general considerations of how recent events cause us to reassess our own lives?

The parable of the fig tree shows God's amazing patience and grace. The owner of the vineyard wants to cut it down there and then. He feels three years has been long enough to give it. He considers it a waste of soil (vv6-7). But the vine dresser advises him to replenish the soil, fertilise it and give it one more year.

Q. What might it take for us to give space for others to linger with their questions about God and suffering, resisting the temptation to give trite answers? How are we sometimes goaded into being less gracious than God by the questions others ask and ways they challenge us about what we believe? What is the difference between winning an argument and patiently pursuing a conversation that might not have easy answers?



Talk about other patterns of who God is and how he acts, or lessons that we can learn in living as his followers and his church, that emerge from this story.

**POSSIBILITIES AND
PERSPECTIVES**

– TO TALK ABOUT –

POSSIBILITIES

Take a moment to think about the initial impression this story made upon you as you read it and the discussion that you have just had. What sticks in your mind? What do you particularly sense God prompting you to think more deeply about?

Pause and take a moment on you own, or share with the person next to you, your sense of what God is saying to you from your reflections on this story?

PERSPECTIVES

Prepare to share with others what impression God has made upon your heart. Do your best to put this into words. Maybe it will be the same as others, maybe it will be different. Pay attention to the conversation that is about to start so that God can deepen and widen the impact of his Word.

Share with the whole group the lessons you think God might be teaching you through his Word, by his Spirit.

**PATHWAYS
TO PURSUE**

– TO TALK AND PRAY ABOUT –

Thinking

What has reading this story against the background of your experience of the period of coronavirus pandemic caused you to think again about?

Living

In what specific ways will that make you change the way you live as a follower of Jesus?

Praying

Pray together for strength to follow through on what God has taught each person.

**PROMISE AND
PRAYER**

PROMISE

When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say. Luke 12:11-12

PRAYER

Lord of winsome word,
listening in love,
creative in conversation,
prompting with picture and parable,
as you promised your first followers,
so teach us in these times,
what we should say.

We feel stuck for answers to many questions about the pandemic,
but are struck by many lessons to learn from it.

Give us patience in pursuing conversations,
rich in tenor, tone and texture,
not defending ourselves,
but befriending others,
on a journey towards Jesus,
in whose name we pray.

Amen.

