

My younger sister constantly was watching me. I mean the second I did something wrong she was telling mom and dad. “Craig isn’t emptying the dishwasher. He’s not hanging out the clothes. He hasn’t cleaned his room.” It was frustrating. She already got everything and was the darling of mom and dad. Even more frustrating was she had her own things she was supposed to be doing. And she wasn’t doing them. But telling on her after she already told on me would only get this response, “Just do your own thing and don’t worry about what she’s doing.”

The crowd gathered around Jesus had a similar problem. They were more interested in the bad things happening or tragedy striking someone else. They figured surely God was angry with them and that’s why the tragedy happened to them. God must have lost his patience and struck people down, but they probably deserved it. Like drivers passing an accident, the people just couldn’t take their eyes off other people’s misery.

Life hasn’t changed. Still siblings want to tell mom and dad on each other. Still adults get caught looking into the lives of others and trying to figure out if they’re doing something wrong or not. When tragedy strikes, the explanations come out that it had to be something bad they did. God obviously was getting back at them and punishing them severely. In the gospel Jesus comes along and says something like what many a mother or father has said before...

Keep your eyes on your spiritual condition
You have a need for repentance
You have a need for fruits of faith

Whether it’s the World Trade Center on 9/11, the shootings at Fort Hood, the bombing here in Oklahoma City, or a robbery at a local bank there’s always the unspoken question. Sure everyone analyzes the tragedy from every angle. Experts investigate what led the perpetrator to carry out the action. Justice comes down hard on those who did it. Still there’s the unspoken question. It’s the same unspoken question Jesus seems to be answering, unspoken because the crowd hadn’t actually asked a question. **“Jesus answered, Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered in this way? 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?”** Have you asked that unspoken question about those who fall victim to tragedy? Was there something about those people who died or suffered that made them worse than me? Could it be that maybe they deserved it and I don’t?

Don’t kid yourself that you aren’t asking it. Our human nature wants to ask. And why? Because human nature wants to believe that in reality I’m better than most of you. Since God didn’t send the terrible thing into my life it must mean he thinks I’m better. It inflates my feeling of security. I’ve figured out that I’m not suffering because God’s not mad at me. And right there we feel self-righteous, secure based on what’s happening or not happening to us. That’s misplaced security based on looking at other people.

Twice Jesus answered the unasked question, twice telling them to keep their eyes on their own spiritual condition. **“I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”** That’s a strong warning. Perish. Yikes! My human nature wants to say “no”. Why would I perish? I’m still here and those people who died are gone. They must have been worse. Jesus speaks to each and everyone one of us individually. You! Quit looking at everyone else to feel comfortable with your spiritual condition. Evaluate your spiritual condition. Are you living as you should? Are you always showing care and concern? Are you always helping and serving? Are you always obeying every single one of God’s commands? Honesty with those questions will tell you why Jesus says what he says to you. Never mind how you stack up against others. Never mind what happens to others. You will perish for your sins.

You have a need for repentance. I have a need for repentance. Repentance can mean two different things in context. First it simply refers to feeling sorry for sins. Some call it contrition. It’s the sad face, the worried look, the crying. Feeling bad when I do something bad. The second understanding of repentance includes feeling sorry for sins but moves beyond that to a total change. Being sorry for sin and trusting in Jesus as the Savior. We feel sorry for sin when the Law of God challenges us to examine ourselves and see just how imperfect we’ve been. Then we know we’re sinful. We trust in Jesus because the Gospel of God tells us Christ Jesus lived a perfect life and died for us and for our sins. All our sins are gone. We have a reason to know we’re forgiven based on Jesus and his work. That’s something we can trust.

Jesus was calling for each of us to keep our eyes on our own spiritual condition. It’s repentance in both aspects. Christ Jesus calls you through his Word to a total change from sinner to saint. God calls you to recognize your sins, feel sorry for doing them, and trust in Christ Jesus. Christ is the only source of all of it. God works in you the sorry feeling for acting sinful and God works in you the trust you have for Christ. Jesus has already done everything to provide you with this change of life, a new life. He provides the perfection. He forgives in love. He won eternal life. He gives joy in that new life of repentance.

Fig trees produce figs. You don’t expect oranges from or grapes from fig trees. Any fig tree not producing figs is worthless because that’s its purpose. It exists to produce figs. Jesus explained in his story what a Christian’s life should look like after repentance, after they’ve been given new life. Christians brought to an understanding of their sins and trust in their Savior want to respond to this good news. They want to take action, to say thanks. They’re like fig trees that want to produce figs. The natural result of faith in a Christian is to produce fruits of faith.

While God expects to find fruits of faith in you, it's not difficult to remember times when we weren't producing like we wanted or like God would expect. Times when we lived how we wanted and didn't care about God. Times we might have been holding on to hatred, being jealous, living lazy, or just plain indifferent. We may have been lax in our production, turning out fruits of faith but only sporadically. We maybe even tried to be better or tried to work harder. The more we pressed the worse we failed. Motivation seemed far away because it only came from us.

You have a need for fruits of faith. But God doesn't expect from you what he doesn't also provide you the abilities and motivation to produce. God expects fruits of faith and he knows you need his working in you to accomplish that. Hear Jesus explain. **"Sir, the man replied, leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down."** The man is the one who cares for the garden where the fig tree is planted. He cares for the tree and wants to see it producing at its max potential. This man pictures Christ Jesus. He promises to work on each Christian in a special way. He gives you his Word and waters you with his grace. Right now, this morning, you're hearing of his grace, love, and compassion. He's building you up in the confession of your sins and the announcement of forgiveness. He's calling you to partake of his body and blood, bread and wine in the sacrament for the forgiveness of your sins. He's promising you a time of grace from God himself who loves you and wants to see you producing fruits of faith. He's working you, strengthening you, and showing you his care and concern so you bear these fruits of faith.

Anyone who grows fruit trees knows you don't have to go outside and give them hugs, pet them, or talk nicely to get fruit. It does what comes naturally. You have received forgiveness of sins from Christ Jesus. God loves you in Christ. He gives you his Word and sacraments. You have all that you need to do what comes naturally, bear fruits of faith. They're perfect in God's eyes because they flow from faith in Jesus who is perfect. We do them, we carry them out, we bear them in our lives, and God gets the credit, the praise, and the glory.

My mom and dad were serious about me keeping my eyes on my own life. It was worthless to always watch my sister and report her mistakes or when she did wrong. Brothers and sisters, Jesus is serious too. Keep your eyes on your own spiritual condition and make sure you're right with God. Those who reject God and his Savior are lost in hell. God doesn't want that to be you. You have a need for repentance. In Christ your life is completely turned around and connected to him. You have a need for fruits of faith. In Christ you can do what comes naturally as a Christian and produce those fruits of faith.