

Title: Tragedy
Text: Luke 13.1-5
Theme: When bad things happen
Series: Luke
Prop Stmtnt: Unforeseen tragedies should motivate one to be ready to meet God.

If there is a God, then why does he allow bad things to happen? Three obvious possibilities: 1) There is a God, but he isn't good. 2) There is a God, he is good, but can't do anything about it. 3) There is no God. Let's take those in reverse order.

- There is no God.

Why is that not logical? If there was no God, then we would have no moral categories. We think in terms of right and wrong, good and evil because there is a God. If there was no God, then we would never even ask the question of why do bad things happen because things would just be things. The fact "bad" things happen and that we are bothered by them means that we have an internal compass that gives to each of us a sense of how things should be and when things are not what we think they should be, we are bothered by it. A tragedy is an event that causes great suffering either from pain, loss of life, or destruction of some kind. If there is no God, there would be no category for tragedy.

- There is a God, he is good, but not great. He lost control over things.

Why is that not logical? If God lost control over things and is at the mercy of the decisions of humans then God is not God, but humans are. If that is the case, then to put the best face on it, God is basically the EMT unit that shows up at the tragedy in order to help clean up the mess. God is not proactive, but reactive. If that is really the case, then God could never make a promise to us, because he wouldn't really know if he could keep it.

When we make promises, we say, "Lord willing" I will be there. "Lord willing" I will do that. However, if God has lost control over his creation, then we would not say that, and in fact, if God made a promise he would have to say, "Man willing" I will do that.

- There is a God, but he isn't good.

This is similar to saying there is no God. If there was a God but he was not good, then why do we have a category called good. Why do we aim for good and reward those who achieve it? If our Creator was not good, then bad would not bother us, but would fulfill us.

These 3 options are not satisfying, but the question remains: if there is a God, why does he allow bad things to happen? The word for this is theodicy. Theo is the Greek word for God and Dike is the word for justice. Theodicy is the defense of God's goodness and omnipotence in view of the existence of evil. It is not only a question that we ask, it is a question that should be asked and wrestled with as it has for thousands of years by faithful followers of God. The Bible

addresses this question a lot because God expects us to wrestle with this. He is not bothered by the question and you and I should not be bothered by the answer. If you had only one question that you could ask God, do not ask that one. Someone already did. And in our text, Jesus gave the answer.

Read text:

1. Two Tragedies (1, 4a)

Some in the crowd told Jesus about the people from Galilee who while offering sacrifices were executed by Pilate. These people who came to sacrifice ended up being sacrificed. Violence against the Jews by the Romans was nothing unusual even as violence by the Jews against the Romans was not unusual either. Note a couple of things: 1) These were people from Galilee. Pilate was the governor of Judea, not Galilee. Therefore, we can assume that these Galileans were coming to Judea, and likely to the Temple area to offer sacrifices. The Passover was the only time that people would bring their own animals with them to sacrifice so, it could have been at a recent Passover event when Pilate ordered the execution of these people. If these Galileans had been zealots and were attempting to create a disturbance, then there would not be the questioning on the part of the crowd. However, it appears to be a random act either of retribution or some statement on the part of Pilate to instill fear in the people. The fact that these people appeared to be killed by Pilate without any clear reason raises the question why?

While answering their question, Jesus raised another related incident. Pilate's act was the deliberate decision of a ruler. Jesus talked about the seeming randomness of a disaster that left eighteen people dead when the tower in Siloam fell. Siloam was also known as Shiloah. You have heard of the pool of Siloam. Siloam was a reservoir of water for the city and was located down where the south wall and the east wall of the city came together. A structure of sorts had fallen. It may have been some kind of scaffolding for workers that collapsed and as a result, eighteen people were killed. Why them?

2. Two Questions (2, 4b)

Jesus asked the crowd two related questions in order to expose an assumption that many of them had. *"Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered this way?"* and *"Do you think that they were worse offenders than all others who lived in Jerusalem?"* Jesus addresses the fact that we are tempted to think that this was some sort of karma. You know, "what goes around comes around"? It is true that you will reap what you sow, but there are many times when there is no direct link between the tragedy that happens to someone and to their actions that occasioned it.

Let's put it this way. Do you think that those scores of girls at those camps in Texas who were swept away by the flash flooding, many of them Christians, were worse than others? Story after story about them has said the opposite. Closer to home a 19-year-old man was killed last year when he was hit by a cannister that flew ¼ mile from an explosion at a cannabis store. The

victim was at a car wash. He was by all accounts a great young man. We could talk about Patrick, a former associate pastor here who was diagnosed with ALS and died 13 months later. It is true that if I smoke cigarettes and work with asbestos, that I should not be surprised when I am diagnosed with a lung disease. If I drink like a fish and take a lot of meds I should not be surprised if my liver decides to go on strike and not come to work. Those rules have plenty of exceptions. What are we to think when solid young ladies and young men die in the prime of their lives in the middle of doing really honorable things? In my sarcastic moments I am known to say, "no good deed goes unpunished." It's like Murphy's laws. I shouldn't say that. I really shouldn't, but it can seem that way, when you really try to help someone and either they turn on you and try to blow you up, or something else goes horribly wrong that seems to make things even worse. Are these victims getting karma? Are these victims receiving some divine judgment for some secret sin? Jesus answers the question: NO!

3. One critical truth. (3, 5)

Jesus says it twice: "*No, I tell you, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.*" That is the one critical truth. Let's park it here for a minute. Jesus challenges some of our assumptions. We are tempted to believe that if we follow Jesus and learn the "secrets of faith" that we will unlock the treasures of long life, health and prosperity. Good things happen to good Christian people and bad things happen to others. That is the assumption and there is some truth to this. For example, if you are a follower of Christ and you realize that your body is the temple (dwelling place) of the Spirit, that truth helps give you a theology of the body. Therefore, if you take reasonable care of your body, it will likely be healthier than if you didn't and likely be healthier than others who don't. The key word is likely. It is no guarantee.

When Jesus said, "NO!" He was confronting and correcting a misperception which was/is: If you are a worse sinner, you will suffer an untimely death. Karma will always get you. NO! If being a "worse sinner" does not mean that you will face an untimely death, then neither does it mean that if you are a righteous person, you will not suffer an untimely death or tragedy. So, what are we to think about what happened to these Galileans or victims of the tower collapse? What are we to think of victims of seemingly random acts of violence that we hear about on a daily basis? When government officials give statements on these things, they express sorrow for the victims, which is a good thing. Jesus could have done that, but instead, Jesus tells us. "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." Is Jesus being dismissive of the tragedy? No, not at all. So, what does he mean by that? Jesus says so much in every statement and he does it again, so, let's think with him. By saying this Jesus was helping us see reality.

1) Sin has warped our world and our lives deeper than we imagine.

When Adam rebelled against God in the garden, Adam's sin was credited to the human race and to the creation that Adam was given to rule over. This earth groans under the curse of sin. Romans 8.22, "*the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.*" Earlier in v. 21, Paul says that the earth is in bondage to corruption. That's on us. Why did John Newton write, "the earth shall soon dissolve like snow, the sun, forbear to shine? But God

who calls me here below, shall be forever mine.” He wrote that verse to Amazing Grace because this earth, as we know it, is perishing. It is under the curse of sin. Bad things happen on earth. 8.7 earthquakes destroy towns and trigger tsunamis. Buildings collapse and people die. Life is not predictable nor pain free. We live with the consequences of a sin-cursed world. And there is more. When Cain killed Abel and pretended that he didn’t know what happened, God told Cain that he knew what happened and that the voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground. (Genesis 4.10)

When you eat bad food, you get sick. Food poisoning has a violent effect on our bodies. Our sin has a violent effect on the earth. The earth groans together in the pains of childbirth. Natural disasters are this earth’s revulsion against our sin. We should expect creation, plant, animal, fish, bird, earth and human to be warped by sin. This earth is a dangerous place. One day, the lion will lay down with the lamb. We’re not there yet. This is not a safe place. It is in bondage to corruption.

When bad things happen like the stabbings in the checkout line at Walmart last weekend up in Traverse City, was that random? In the immediate sense, yes. The man who did this, was not rational. Does following Jesus give me protection from all random acts of violence? No. A few days ago a man takes a rifle into a reasonably secure Manhattan office building and starts shooting people. Was that random? Not to him, but certainly to the people who were going to work there that day. These kinds of things happen over and over and we want to know why as if we can figure out the why and fix people like that so that our world will be safe and we won’t have to worry about these things.

Our world is not safe because humans are not safe. We are sinners. We sin against others and others sin against us. For whatever reason, Pilate executed these Galileans who appeared to be doing a righteous thing by coming to the Temple and offering sacrifices. That would appear to be totally unjust. These God-worshippers were executed and this pagan government official got away with it. Why doesn’t Jesus go off on Pilate? Why doesn’t Jesus offer condolences to the families of the victims? Most of the time, we sin against others who sin against us. Our sin affects us physically. Romans 8.23 says that even we who have the Spirit groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. When you come to faith in Christ, you get a new life, a new heart and a new mind. You will get a new body. You don’t have that yet. You will get that later. Right now, you have the old one and that is why you groan.

A friend of mine said that he made it a goal not to moan every time he stood up. He (or members of his family) noted that when he got up from a chair, he would moan, and thought that this was an old man thing, and he wanted to stop it. It’s a thing, isn’t it? We moan, we sigh, we exhale all because we feel the weight of the hardness of life. Sin causes our bodies to weaken and in many cases our brains to malfunction. The legal system is trying to deal with the guy who was stabbing all the people at Walmart a week ago. He is not rational. He was not making any sense. At some level his brain was not working. At some level, we are all messed up to some degree. We live in a sin-cursed earth in sin-cursed bodies. Bad things are going to

happen around us, to us and in us. Life is not predictable or pain free. Life is hard and painful. Life is not guaranteed, but death is.

2) Death is certain, get ready for it.

Every one dies and because this world is prone to disasters and we live surrounded by people who can be distracted, violent, negligent, diseased, addicted, and unhinged, you have no guarantee that you will live through this day. And you and I have no idea what is happening inside of our bodies right now. Aneurisms, heart conditions, stroke, cancer happen to old people and young people. You will not escape death. But you may think that when you get closer to it, that you can get serious about God then. Friend, that is highly unlikely and exceedingly dangerous. Sin is damning in the eternal sense and it is dulling in the immediate sense. The more you reject Christ, then the darker your mind and the harder your heart gets. So while you may think you have time, for all intents, you may not. And if you do not repent, you will perish. This word that Jesus uses does not simply mean to die physically, it means to die without God, without hope and without end. Hell is terrifying and Jesus is warning us about it while we can do something about it.

Why would you buckle your children into a car seat when the chances of being in an accident are nearly zero? Well, one, it is the law and two, there is a slight chance and you don't want to take the chance. Ok, but why would you not buckle your soul to Christ when the chances of you dying are 100%? Why would you bother to wear sunscreen when only 20% of Americans develop skin cancer. Look, I know that 9,500 people are diagnosed with skin cancer every day, but that simply means that billions more don't. 20% may get skin cancer but 100% will die. Why would you protect your skin but not your eternity? Why would you bother to get health insurance when if you are 64 or younger you have a 95% chance of not being hospitalized this year? 5.1% of the population 64 or younger are hospitalized but 100% of people will die. The very fact that you think you can delay this is evidence of how sin has already deluded your thinking. Anyone who rejects Christ is simply not rational.

Given the 100% certainty of death, Jesus calls us to repent. Even though death is certain, for the follower of Christ, it does not have the final word. Here is the good news. Christ came in order to live a perfect life in our place. He then offered up his life as the full and final payment for our sin. His death paid our debt. When you repent of your sin (turn away from it in attitude and action) and put your faith in Christ alone, you will be forgiven and declared righteous. Even though our bodies, like this earth, are under the curse of sin and will die, we do not. And just as God will one day recreate the earth, the bodies of all genuine believers will be resurrected into perfect glorious bodies. Christ died for us and we get credit for his death when we trust him. Christ rose again and one day, we will rise as well. You do not have say in what happens to you in this short life, but you can be certain about what happens in the forever life to come. It feels tragic when a life is cut short for no legitimate reason. The greatest tragedy is for someone not to be ready.