

1. Why Do Tragedies Happen to Some People and Not Others?
 - a. Evil people bringing tragic injustice
 - i. Pilate destroyed his political enemies by killing them while they were worshipping, so that their blood was mixed with the sacrifices in the Temple
 - b. Natural disaster bringing tragic destruction
 - i. Where the South and East wall meet in the wall of Jerusalem, near the pool of Siloam, there was a tower that collapsed, s
 - ii. So great was its tragedy, it was apparently very well known (18 dead).
 - c. **The question that is being brought up is, basically, “What did those people do to deserve such a grisly and atrocious destruction?”**
 - i. The basic assumption is that tragedy is the result of *greater* sin, not merely the presence of sin
 1. This assumption is so strong that it may be that the original question, regarding Galileans, was really a slight on Jesus and His disciples, who were from Galilee
 2. **“It’s obvious that the Galileans are worse people because look what God did to them while they were worshipping!”**
 - ii. Why do such tragedies happen to some people and not others?
 1. Why do atrocities happen at the hands of evil people?
 2. **Why do atrocities happen as the result of “accidents” or “acts of God”?**
2. How NOT to Respond to Tragedies
 - a. **They don’t happen because of greater sin: Karmic Approach**
 - i. **“You think that these Galileans were worse?” v2**
 - ii. **The common lie: “If you live a good life and think positive thoughts, good things happen to you.”**
 1. This can be Christianized, **“God will bless you if you do right.”**
 - a. **Thus, if tragedy strikes, it must be because you aren’t living right, and this tragedy is *fair* because you deserve it.**
 - b. **You’re being punished for some kind of horrendous sin in your life.**
 2. This can be spiritualized, **“Life goes well if you think positive thoughts.”**
 - a. **Thus, if tragedy strikes, it’s because your aura was misaligned by negative thinking.**
 3. We all, naturally, tend to have this view, with or without God, that you get what you deserve, you get out what you put in, your work is rewarded.
 - a. **“If my career is going well, it’s because I’ve worked hard and seized the day.”**
 - b. **“If my children are turning out well, it’s because I’m a great parent who restricted my children or didn’t restrict my children” etc.**
 - c. **If something good happened to me, it’s because I must have done something good in the past, and if something bad has happened to me, I must have done something bad in the past.**
 - d. The concept of karma permeates not only Hindu or Buddhist thought, but the human heart in every culture, for we are self-righteous and think of ourselves as having way too much power over our own fate for good or for ill
 - i. We take way too much credit
 - ii. Grace is unnatural, then, for grace is good that arrives unearned and without cause from within us, from nothing, as it were, and for which we cannot take credit.
 - iii. So, the crowd wondered, **who is to blame for the mingling of victims’ blood with their own sacrifices or for the tower which fell on the 18?** The victims are to blame, for their sin must have been greater than mine, because I still live.

- b. **They Don't Happen Because God is Unfair: Cynical Approach**
 - i. This could be called the irreligious view or the cynical view
 - 1. For while the first view placed blame under the tower, on the victims, this view look above the tower at some higher force which is simply *unfair*.
 - ii. Some power, i.e. God, Fate, the Universe, Chance, etc. is simply unfair and bad things happen to *good* people.
 - 1. Life is absurd and unfair and it just plain stinks.
 - 2. God is absurd and unfair and just plain stinks.
 - 3. Life is tough and then you die.
- c. The two approaches are both trying to find someone to blame, either the ones under the tower or those one over the tower, but neither onlooker is looking at his own need!
- d. Neither of these responses are right
 - i. The first leaves you proud and smug, treating tragedy with a heartless arrogance and self-righteous and loveless superiority
 - ii. The other view will leave you unbelievably hopeless, faithless, and despondent.
 - iii. The odds are that you bounce from one to the other

3. The Gospel is the Third Way

- a. **Look at what Jesus says, "Were they worse? NO! But Repent!"**
 - i. This seems, at first glance, to be contradictory
 - ii. Are they to blame? NO!
 - iii. Repent, or you will perish likewise!
- b. **"NO"**
 - i. When people suffer, is it because their sins are worse, or even that they are in some way particular paying for their sins? NO!!
 - ii. If you think that when a tower falls, or a tsunami floods, or an earthquake crushes that it is because that tragic death implies a punishment for their particularly heinous sin?
 - 1. **You could ask the opposite: "Does a long, prosperous, enjoyable life imply a sinless, righteous, God-honoring life without sin?"**
 - 2. John 9:2-3 **"Who sinned, Jesus, this man or his parents?"**
 - a. Jesus: **"Neither! His blindness is for the glory of God to be revealed"**
 - 3. **One of the main points of the book of Job is how upset God is with Job's friends, who assumed that Job's suffering was related to his sin, when it was not!**
 - a. Instead, it was to show Job who God is, a much higher good than a life without tragedy! (THIS IS THE POINT OF TRAGEDY!)
 - iii. **Jesus very clearly states that the death and tragedy of these peoples' deaths were not due to the quality or quantity of their sins by answering the question with a strong negative, "NO!"**
 - iv. When you see people suffer it is not retribution for their sins
 - 1. There is a judgment for that – a second death
 - v. However, He also follows this up with the necessity of repentance
- c. **"Repent, lest you perish likewise!"**
 - i. There is another side to the reality of death and tragedy
 - 1. **If Jesus had just said "NO"** then we would be left with option #2 above, a careless heartless God who unjustly and unfairly crushes people or He has no power over our circumstances and cannot help us in our perishing
 - 2. But that is not reality, either, for simply because tragedy is not the direct result of sin does not imply that sin is not a problem, it is THE problem
 - ii. Every person on the face of the earth deserves a tragic and atrocious death by tower
 - 1. Jesus is showing us something that the human heart resists to believe
 - a. We like to think that God is full of grace and love *and that means that we're not that bad, that we are lovable fools, not rebellious enemies*

- i. **“If I’m really that loved, I must not be that bad.”**
 - b. We assume that if we admit how desperately sinful we are, how selfish and monstrous and profane and loveless, that God would not really love us
 - i. **“If I’m really that bad, then God must not love me that much.”**
 - c. But what Jesus is saying is that, yes, God is gracious and loving, thus you have not perished yet, but that does not mean that you are lovable or simply foolish, but rather that He is gracious towards monstrous sinners
 - i. **“If God really loves monstrous sinners, then I can face into my sin’s monstrosity with hope and humility”**
 - d. The gospel lets us answer both in the affirmative and lead us to a deeply humble response to the severity of His love and grace, to face into my sin with clarity without being crushed by His tower because of the greatness of His love and patience and persistent grace
 - 2. **Think about all the sins that you’ve never suffered for**
 - a. What towers would fall if you got all that you deserved?
 - b. Nobody has ever received the full consequences of their sins upon this earth?
 - i. No tragedy ever fills that fully
 - 3. At the same time, if you ever saw the depths of the sin within your heart, you would **know that God doesn’t owe you safety from towers or comfort or security from hard-hearted or evil people**
 - a. **God doesn’t owe you that, but He yearns to be gracious**
 - b. In other words, the gospel is that you are much more monstrous than you have ever believed, AND you are much more loved and cared for and desired than you have ever dared to hope (adapted from J. Miller)
- iii. Only in the gospel can we both see and deal with reality with hope, rest, and peace
 - 1. Gospel Irony:
 - 2. Only if you see the depths of the monstrosity of your own sin will you recognize the **immensity of God’s love for you**
 - a. **You cannot truly plumb the depths of God’s love apart from seeing the depths of your brokenness and self-centeredness and ugliness in sin underneath the covering blood of Jesus provided solely by the grace and love of God.**
 - 3. **Unless you see the depths of God’s love for you, you will never be able to face into the reality of your heart’s brokenness and need for transformation and ugliness and see it changed.**
 - a. You will be trapped beneath the weight of your failures and struggles and powerlessness, paddling against the tide of your own heart
 - b. You will either give up trying, pretending to be fine, even deceiving yourself into believing things are OK
 - c. Or, you will be utterly and catastrophically despondent, hopeless, and trapped in the darkness of despair
 - i. You may even vacillate between the two.
 - 4. Without the gospel you will shuttle between being a proud smug Pharisee or a skeptical cynic, but in neither way will you be able to handle the tragedies and troubles of life.
- iv. **Don’t get smugly judgmental of the people to whom tragedy falls, and don’t get mad at God, but rather get upset with sin in the world and its destruction and see your own sin as part and parcel of this great problem.**
 - 1. Evil and sin has broken this world! Hate evil! Hate brokenness!
 - 2. Jesus says that He has come to deal with evil, brokenness, by dealing with sin. Get on his side!

4. Where Shall I Look When Tragedy Strikes?

- a. This passage is not really written to the people on whom towers have fallen or who are experiencing **great suffering, but rather He is addressing the people who are observing others' tragedies but are living** a fairly trouble-free life
 - i. This is important to point out, for there are great passages of comfort and rest for those undergoing the trials of Job
 - ii. **This is not one of them, so don't try and apply it to one on whom Pilate's forces of evil have** attacked or on whom trials and suffering have befallen
- b. **"Perish Likewise"**
 - i. Each of these examples (Galileans & Tower) show that destruction came 1) unexpectedly, 2) suddenly, and 3) catastrophically
 - ii. Jesus is warning that without repentance, the fiery wrath of God will come unexpectedly, suddenly, and catastrophically (perish)
- c. How shall we escape so great a wrath?
 - i. These examples are lesser perishings that cast forth the greater perishing and the necessity to **"make right with your accuser before you reach the King"**
 - ii. Thus, tragedy is not a particular judgment for particular sins, but rather a lesser judgment against sin in general which we ought to view as a warning to the greater judgment yet to come
 - 1. **"Read the signs of the age"**

5. Repentance is Always the Response to Tragedy

- a. Repentance is not a doing, but rather an undoing
 - i. It is taking your weight off of your own legs in order to lean upon Christ, to cling to Him
 - ii. If repentance is taking your weight off of your own legs, faith is putting your weight upon Christ Jesus
 - iii. Thus, repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin
- b. **It's during the good times, when it is not our lives that** are undergoing towers falling, that we must strive for repentance
 - i. **To see God's grace as the sole reason and foundation for any good in our lives**
 - ii. Because our hearts will tend to deemphasize the sin of others and are blind our own failures and weaknesses
 - iii. **It is in these good times that we must strive to see God's grace for ourselves**
- c. **That is Jesus' point!!**
 - i. **Don't you dare presume that any good thing in your life is anything but a sheer act of God's** grace
 - ii. As you meditate upon His great grace towards you, you are led to worship Him adore Him and are functionally turning from trusting in your own strength (which is a façade) and your own righteousness (which is insufficient) and are only seeing Him!!
 - 1. I want Your honor and Your pleasure and Your renown!
 - 2. If we fail to do this in the good times, what happens *when* bad times come, which they inevitably will?
 - a. You will perish under the weight
 - iii. There is no more important time to repent than when things are going well and you *feel* strong and good and right and others around you have fallen!!
 - 1. The default mode of the human heart is self-salvation, self-love, self-trust, and there is no greater time for that to come to the surface than when your life is going well and others is not.
- d. Gospel repentance is far different than religious repentance
 - i. Religious repentance is only when you blow it badly, it is abnormal for life and sporadic
 - ii. Gospel repentance is *all the time*
 - 1. You respond to success with repentance, to prosperity with repentance, to comfort with repentance

2. **Martin Luther's first thesis that he nailed to the Wittenberg door was , "All of the Christian life is repentance!"**
3. Repentance is to stop trusting in your own goodness and instead to trust in the One who was baptized in your fire and had His blood mixed with your sins
- iii. Thus, repent of your own righteousness and believe in Jesus Christ as your salvation
- iv. Repentance is not only to stop doing bad things, but also to stop trusting good things (this is the far deeper repentance)
 1. Because evil behavior and self-centered actions are the symptoms of the deeper problem, self-salvation and self-trust
 2. Therefore, repent of your strength, relying upon your own righteousness
- e. Repentance brings joy
 - i. When things go well, I am humbled and grateful **for God's grace**
 - ii. When things go poorly, I am affirmed because it is not due to my sins
 - iii. Thus, repentance gives me reason to rejoice always, to not worry, and to persevere with gladness
 1. How can repentance be this way?
 2. Look at Jesus
 - a. Was there anyone more righteous? More humble?
 - b. Was there anyone who suffered more? More joyful, peaceful, perseverant, and good?
- f. The reason that you can know that repentance works this way is because of the cross of Christ
 - i. The best person died the worst death – The Tower of **God's wrath fell on Him instead of us, He** mingled His holy blood with our sinful record that we would be pure before the Lord
 - ii. The one person who really deserved God to listen to Him was rebuffed at the cross
 1. So, when little towers fall on me, I can deal with it reliant upon the One who took upon Himself the only tower that can really destroy me, which is eternal judgment, knowing that He is for me
 2. And when life goes well, I can humble myself under His grace, recognizing that God can be good to me justly not **because I'm a great lovable good** or successful person, but because the Tower fell on Him in my place.

We repent when we see the glorious holiness and the glorious grace of God

Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? (Rom 2:4 ESV)

God is patient now, so you have not perished – **don't take it lightly but let that kindness lead you to repentance**, Christ-reliance with no self-reliance! See the grace of God for you now, in this moment, in this hour, when things are not **falling upon you. Don't act as if you're doing fine in your own strength. You and I live** in repentance; that is desperate reliance upon only the grace of God, in full rest knowing that if I am in Christ I will never be punished for my sins, and any towers which may befall me in this life are the loving discipline of the God who gave His Son for me. And, if I am not in Christ, if I continue to set my mind upon my own strength and my own righteousness and my own self-worth, I **will bear the Great Tower's fall upon myself, the fire kindled and thrown down to the earth, and I will perish. Thus, take advantage of today's patience of God and repent.** Will you hide in Him or trust yourself? Today is the day of choosing. Repent, and LIVE!

Romans 5:1-10 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. ⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person-- though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die-- ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.