

Jesus and the Fallen Tower

9/11/11

There was that day, years ago, that the tower fell – a disaster that stunned the city and shocked the nation. The first responders ran to the site and frantically began removing rubble – they knew some were already dead – but were hoping that many might be rescued. Try as they might, many lives were lost that day. Everyone in the city knew *someone* that had died in the tower's collapse. Many more families were affected by this tragedy. The trauma of this disaster was carried in the hearts and lives of many for years afterward, but the hard questions began immediately:

- How could this tragedy happen?
- Where was God when the tower fell?
- How could a loving God allow this disaster to occur?
- Why God? Why did these people have to die?
- How can we possibly work through this tragedy? How can we possibly find meaning in all this? How do you heal the loss of the families? Or the trauma of the first responders?

Jesus Himself responded to this tragedy - ***Luke 13: 1-5**

That's right – a different time, a different tower, a different tragedy – but, 2000 years later – the response from Jesus remains the same “unless you repent, you too will all perish.”

I do not mean to belittle the World Trade Center tragedy in any way – or make any less of it than it was. 9/11/01 was a day of tragedy in New York City, Washington D.C., Shanksville, Pennsylvania & the entire United States. There would have been many more deaths that day if it had not been for the heroes on United Airlines Flight 93, the first

responders, the rescue teams & countless other unknown individuals whose stories we don't even know yet.

In comparison – the collapse of the Siloam Tower in Jerusalem in the 1st century – may have been just as devastating in the city of Jerusalem & in the nation of Israel. 18 people died that day – a good proportion of the city at that time. Probably everyone in Jerusalem knew *someone* who died that day. There were probably heroes that day as well – there might have been many more who died if it had not been for the first responders and unsung heroes.

And just like 9/11/01 – people were wondering aloud, in front of Jesus – did these people *deserve* to die?

Now – we don't know exactly the circumstances surrounding this accident in the 1st century. The Pool of Siloam was located at the edge of the ancient City of David on Jerusalem's south side. Just in the last decade or so, archaeologists have excavated this area, including the Pool of Siloam. Siloam may have actually been a small town here. The modern-day Arab section of Jerusalem is named Silwan. One supposition is that there was a guard tower by the Pool of Siloam, constructed centuries before (the Pool of Siloam is mentioned in Nehemiah's reconstruction in the 400's BC) and it was used to watch over the city's important water source. We don't know if there was a construction crew refurbishing the tower in Jesus' time and something happened during construction that caused its' collapse – or maybe after several centuries, it just weakened and fell. Or maybe there was an earthquake that caused its collapse. We don't have any way of

knowing for certain, but evidently this tragedy was weighing on the minds and hearts of people around Jesus.

A prevalent belief in those days (and if we are honest with ourselves, this belief still bothers us today) was that somehow, tragic accidents, death or disease was the result of sin – God’s punishment for your sin. A cause-effect relationship between sin and certain punishment for that sin. Jesus seems to rebuke that belief – do you think this happened because these were the worse 18 sinners in Jerusalem? I tell you, NO!

This happens to be the same response He gave to the question about the man who was born blind. ***John 9: 1-3** Did his parents sin? Or did the man sin while he was still in the womb? He is blind – what was the sin that caused it? Jesus says ‘neither.’

And, in both cases – Tower of Siloam & boy born blind – Jesus actually points away from the “Why?” of the moment toward a bigger answer – an answer that addresses God’s greater purposes & eternity. For the man who was blind since birth – it wasn’t because of sin that he was born blind, but so that the glory of God might be displayed in him. We don’t know how old this man was, but just think – maybe he had been blind for 20? 30? years just for the purpose of “such a time as this” that the Messiah could spit in the dirt, make mud, rub it on the eyes of the man and then tell him to go & wash in the very same Pool of Siloam – just to demonstrate at that precise moment in history, the glory of God and the fulfillment of Isaiah’s 700 year-old prophecy that the Messiah would give sight to the blind. I wonder if the first thing the blind man saw was the Tower of Siloam? (or maybe the rubble of the collapsed tower?)

And He points toward eternity in the tragedy of the Tower of Siloam when He says – It wasn't because they were worse sinners than anyone else, but “unless you repent, you too will all perish!” Don't waste your time trying to figure out if their deaths were in proportion to their sin – as horrible as their deaths were, don't suppose that they were any worse sinners than anyone else in Jerusalem. But YOU need to decide where YOU are going to spend eternity!

We must never make light, or lessen any tragedy – but, as Christians, we must also realize that there is a bigger picture in this life – a bigger answer that has to do with eternity. As Jesus taught in ***Matthew 10: 28 - “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”** The bigger question is – since our bodies are a temporary, physical existence – where is our soul going to spend eternity? For those who repent and believe in Jesus Christ, their souls will spend eternity in heaven AND we will also get new bodies! For that reason, we should never be afraid of anyone who can only harm or kill our bodies – they have no power over our souls.

Until then – we believe that death, disease and world upheaval is the ultimate outcome of the sin that entered the world through one man, Adam. SO, yes, **all** disease, **all** death, **all** earthquakes, tornadoes, wildfires, floods, droughts and tsunamis ARE the result of sin. HOWEVER, it is wrong to point to a particular tragedy or hurricane and say, “That event is a direct result of that person's sin. God is punishing them for that sin.” Jesus Himself rebuked that specific teaching. HOWEVER, it is equally wrong to say that a hurricane, earthquake, or wildfire is NOT the punishment or admonishment of Almighty God.

And since we, mere man, obviously cannot answer the “Whys?” behind these events, we have to leave the greater purpose and reasoning to God. As Job responded to God, so we must also say:

Job 42:2-6

"I know that you can do all things;
no plan of yours can be thwarted.

³ You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?'
Surely I spoke of things I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me to know.

⁴ "You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak;
I will question you,
and you shall answer me.'

⁵ My ears had heard of you
but now my eyes have seen you.

⁶ Therefore I despise myself
and repent in dust and ashes."

We are incapable of answering “why?” But we *must* answer the bigger question;

“Where am I going to spend eternity?”

This world is falling apart – mankind is falling apart – death, disease, wildfires and falling towers – all these things are NOT a part of God’s original intent for this world. Indeed, ‘all creation groans,’ (Romans 8) the earth itself is in pain waiting for the redemption, the completion to come about – when things will once again be put right. Then the earth itself will come to rest – it will be comforted.

Until then, there is evil in this world. Sometimes it comes out as wildfires and falling towers. Sometimes it is carried out against innocent people at the hands of terrorists acting in the name of Allah. Sometimes, it is carried out by deluded people thinking they are acting in the name of Jesus Christ. Regardless, evil has its’ same source –

“the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.” (Ephesians 2:2) BUT, for those of us who believe in Jesus Christ, we can KNOW that:

- the prince of this world “is being driven out” (John 12: 31)
- the prince of this world “has no hold on Christ” (John 14: 30) and therefore, he has no hold on those who belong to Christ. “Greater is He that is in me than he who is in the world.” (I John 4: 4) AND...
- the prince of this world “now stands condemned” (John 16: 11) Whatever acts satan commits – however he harms our bodies – he has been pre-condemned. We KNOW that his outcome is eternity in the lake of fire that was prepared before time just for him and his demons.

There will be falling towers in the 1st century and there will be falling towers in the 21st century. There will be tragedies, terrorists, death and disease. There will be heroes and there will be cowards. Our hearts will soar at the stories of the heroes and our hearts will be crushed at the actions of the cowards. It will hurt our hearts to watch these things injure people’s lives. It will bring joy to our hearts to see how people step in to help heal those wounds. It will bring tears to our eyes to remember these things - tears of pain and tears of joy. It will cause us to grieve over the loss of life and of innocence. It will drive us to pray for forgiveness for turning away from our God. We will be angry toward the actions of 19 Muslim pilots who terrorized our nation and we will celebrate when we hear that a terrorist somewhere has come to know Jesus Christ. These things will happen.

But the larger issue to ponder is – “unless we repent, we too will all perish.”

- do we know where our eternity lies?
- do we know how to have hope beyond the pain of this life?
- do we know the One who can save both our bodies and souls from eternity in hell?
- do we know the One who can rescue us from this pain of the moment and deliver us into the joy of eternity? *John 17:3 – “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

There really is something worse than crushing towers, drowning tsunamis, raging wildfires and uncontrolled disease – it is an everlasting punishment at the hands of evil itself – the very same evil that brought down the towers!

And, we have a way out. We thank profusely the rescuers and heroes of 9/11. We are forever grateful to our military who act and protect daily. We hurt over the loss of life – the horrors of crashing planes and exploding jet fuel – collapsing towers and our loss of security. We agonize over the souls of those who did not and do not know Jesus Christ.

God have mercy on them all. But we thank God, through Jesus Christ that He has rescued us, and can rescue others from these bodies of death. (Romans 7: 24-25)

We thank God, through Jesus Christ, that we can repent and we will not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3: 16)

And we thank God for His mercy, grace, and love which are “things we do not understand, things too wonderful for us to know,” but these are the very things that give us joy, courage and hope for the present - and will carry us through the hard times, through this temporary life and into eternity in God’s peaceful, comforting arms.