

Where Is God When Bad Things Happen?

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[0:00] As we were last week, we're also in Luke chapter 13 this morning. And we'll be in verses 1 to 9. I encourage you to open your Bibles along as we dive in this morning.

It's on page 1037 in your pew Bible, page 1037. Let us pray. Almighty God, we thank you for your gifts poured out upon your church.

Thank you for your promise to build your church so that the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

We thank you for your promised Holy Spirit that you've poured out on us.

Thank you for the Holy Scripture, your life-giving word with which you feed and equip us. Thank you that you know us in our frailties. You know our shortcomings.

Yet you love us and accept us. Help us now, dear Father, to know more of your heart for us. To know more of your heart for the world you created and for which you died.

[1:07] Lord, we pray that through the hearing of your word preached this morning, disabuse us of false presuppositions. Give us the heart of Christ, our Savior and Redeemer.

It is in his worthy name we pray. Amen. In this section of Luke, as we were reminded last week, Jesus is engaging different people.

And he uses his answer to these different questioners, different people that come before him, to reveal to us that our focus should be on the kingdom of God.

That this should be what occupy our thoughts foremost. And he stresses the necessity of repentance.

He stresses the necessity of repentance as the precondition for entering into this kingdom. Amen.

So Jesus, Jesus will, if Jesus were alive today, may be considered an influencer, or a thought leader.

[2:21] So, I think they had some of those in their days as well. Jesus will be considered, Jesus is a public figure. So he was being asked by the people to give an opinion about something that has happened in Israel, in Jerusalem.

Just like, you know, in the media today, you know, people ask famous people all the time, what do you think about this? Even when they have no expertise in that area at all.

The only difference is that Jesus has expertise. He is God, after all. But so they come to him and ask him this question. And we're not explicitly told why they brought this matter before Jesus.

But we can simply assume that they want to draw out a response from him. You can almost imagine a crowd with their, if they were today, with their smartphones, recording, as the question is being asked, jammed into Jesus' face to capture his answer and to live stream it for the rest of the world.

To make news, as it were, in our common usage. But the particular implicit question put to Jesus has to do with an age-old question question of why bad things happen in the world.

[3:37] We often ponder or make assumptions as to why evil, tragedy, calamity befall people. Jesus was told in this passage of Pilate's actions.

He had killed some Galileans. This was likely in the temple while they were worshipping. because we were told that their blood was mingled with the sacrifices.

Although this account is only here in the Bible, we have no other historical account of this incident. But there are historical evidences of Pilate's cruelty and its severity as the Roman governor of Judea.

He, after all, was the one who, under him, Jesus, the perfect, innocent man, was crucified. Pilate was known for heavy-handedness. So this would not have been beyond him to do.

So, you also have to see the complete sacrilege of this offense to the Jews. You can imagine how hard, how insidious and how revolting what Pilate did would have been to a Jewish population.

[4:55] It would have been an affront on their religion and their culture and their nation. He went into, Gentiles went into the temple. And not only did they go where they ought not to go, these Gentile Roman soldiers killed Jewish men.

So much so that they missed their blood with the sacrifices. So they come to Jesus asking, what do you think, Jesus, about this? So to say, to say that, to ask that question to any Jewish public figure, they say to him, say, Rabbi, have you heard about what Pilate did to those Galileans in the temple? To ask that to a rabbi, to any Jewish public figure, it would have been like throwing red meat to a lion. Here is a hissy pitch, lobbed down the middle.

And I bet his disciples, Peter and the rest, would they consider themselves self-appointed political advisors of Jesus anyway? They would be giddy when Jesus was asked that question.

They would be waiting for Jesus to hit it out of the ballpark. This is it. You know, just answer it, give them the red meat they want. But Jesus answered.

[6:17] Look at Jesus' answer. Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all of the Galileans because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you.

But unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. That's not the answer they wanted.

That was not the answer anyone probably was expecting. It was common in those days to think that when evil things happen, especially when it happens in such a calamitous way, when evil befalls someone, it is common in those days to think that it is a sign of God's judgment for that person's sin.

And that's not altogether a strange notion, even in our day. Unfortunately, many see natural disasters as signs of God's displeasure against the victims of such atrocities.

There's a famous evangelical leader who whenever natural disasters happen in a city or a nation or whenever there's a sudden death of a political, a public figure, this person would pronounce that it is God's judgment for the decisions or lifestyle of that person or people.

[7:45] That's the same kind of notion implied, implicit in this statement. What do you think, as if to say, what have those people, Jesus recognizes, what have those people done to deserve this evil that has come upon them?

But Jesus offers a different outlook for us this morning about the judgment of God. He tells the crowd around him. These Galilean men who died are no worse sinners than all other Galileans. It's interesting that he himself is a Galilean. And all his closest disciples are all men from Galilee. So, if you were Jesus' disciples hearing that statement, it would have been very pointed.

If you think the same way like the rest of the crowd think, and we know the disciples sort of think that way, because there's an account in John, when they saw a blind and deaf man, and said, is it because of this man's sin or the sin of his parent that he was born this way?

But Jesus here says, these men are no worse sinners than all other Galileans, including these 12 ones behind me here.

[9:01] These men are not worse, implies, they're not worse sinners, implies that there is nothing about these men who just died that is uniquely damning, that damned them to be killed in this way.

Nothing made them more deserving of death. More than these Galileans who are following me, or the rest of you hearing my voice. Notice here that Jesus does not deny, he does not deny the consequence of sin.

What is the consequence of sin? Death. Jesus doesn't deny that, he doesn't explain it away. Notice here that he doesn't deny that death and disaster are things that are allowed by God.

God is sovereign after all, all-powerful. He doesn't deny God's sovereignty. In fact, Jesus says to them, while we're at it, remember those 18 people who the tower in Siloam fell upon and killed them?

Do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? them? And he repeats it again, no, I tell you, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

[10:22] So the previous example are those who were victims of a tyrannical and murderous ruler. The second example that Jesus gives are those who were victims of an accident that was not of their own doing, just being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

But Jesus says, whatever the circumstances of these events, whether the first one or the second, there is only one conclusion that it should generate in us.

And that conclusion is repentance. Repent or you will likewise perish. That is the first and foremost that we shouldn't feel sorrow, that we shouldn't actually seek out what is wrong, to redress the

wrong.

But the first and primary thing Jesus is saying, when you see these things happen, the first thing that you should think is repentance. You see, Jesus' view of the world and of history is that it is heading to a conclusive end.

Jesus sees God as the main actor in history. And he sees that all events, all occurrences, all circumstances in the world and even in our own personal lives, must be seen in light of who God is and what God is doing in the world.

[11 : 46] This means Jesus, in his earthly life, sees all of his life circumstances primarily through the lens of God's plan of salvation.

Jesus, who after is the truest hearer and doer of God's word, reveals to us what we know from God's self-disclosure in the Bible.

We know that the world was created by God. And we know that it is our sin that has poisoned God's creation and poisoned us. Sin ruins us as male and female created in God's image.

Sin ruins the created world. So much so that when disaster occurs, when death, the great enemy, strikes, we are to think that it is because of Adam's sin that this is happening.

And it is because of our sin that this is happening. And we are not to exclude ourselves from culpability when we see the result of sin around us.

[12 : 56] It is not just their sin out there, it is our sin. It is our sin that throws nature into disorder. It is our sin that makes it so the ground does not produce its yield and causes famine and starvation and death.

It is our sin that causes wars and murder and rape and hatred of all sorts. We stand together with the murderer and the rapist, with the warmonger.

Although you are not either of those things, but we all stand together, even along with those people, guilty before God. Your sins might be different.

Your sins might be pride and anger or self-righteousness. But none of these will send you to prison. Pride, anger, self-righteousness might even be celebrated in the world that we live in.

But before holy God, it does condemn you to death. death. So Jesus cries to all of us. His cry is this.

[14 : 05] When you see these things happening, your first thought really should not be, why has this happened to these people? That shouldn't be your first thought.

What sins have these people committed to result in this befalling them? That shouldn't be your first thought. you should instead ask, why is this tower of Siloam not falling on me?

Why was I not there that day when Pilate's soldiers desecrated the temple with the blood of his Galilean worshippers? Why was I spared? The message of Jesus is this, you and I have escaped the fate of those who have endured hardships and famine and natural disasters for now, not because we're better off than them, but because God has extended his mercy to us.

It is all of mercy. We are to say along with Jeremiah in Lamentations chapter 3, because of the Lord's faithful love, we do not perish, for his mercies never end.

They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. That's our cry in the world. God is faithful and he is merciful.

[15 : 31] It is his mercy poured out on us that causes us to stand. This is true of every living soul in the world without exception. Whether you confess Jesus is Lord or you do not, you exist and you are sustained by his mercy.

you exist solely because of the mercy of God. But mercy, you know, mercy is not something that we can claim or demand as a right from God.

God said to Moses in Exodus, I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy. I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. And Paul explains in Romans that this means that it doesn't depend on human will, Paul says.

All human effort, but on God who shows mercy. So God's mercy is on prerogative. We can't make demands on it.

We don't deserve it. But in his goodness, he shows it to us. This is the answer to those in our post-murder age who will say, as often as you've all heard this, where is God when bad things happen to good people?

[16 : 50] Maybe you've asked that question yourself at one time or the other. But Jesus shows us a great way to answer and to think about that question.

First, notice that he doesn't feel the need to defend God to these people. He doesn't defend God. As true man, that is Jesus, as a true man, second Adam, he lives in complete confidence in God's goodness and justice.

He lives in complete confidence of God's goodness. Remember Job? Job was tormented by the devil with God's permission and he suffered calamity upon calamity.

And throughout the book of Job, he questioned God and his friends. The friends did even more explicitly what these people are doing here. They accused him.

It's because of a sin, Job. Fessa. God wouldn't do this to you because unless you're a sinner, he's displaced with you. So his friends accused him. And he questioned God.

[17 : 55] He didn't deny God, but he questioned God. And he questioned God's plan and God's intentions, God's purposes. But when God kind of responds to him in chapter 38, I encourage you to go home and read Job from chapter 38 all the way to the end of the book.

And then God questioned him. After the whole book has been mostly Job questioning God and his friends questioning God, now God responds, responded to them.

And here are the first four verses of chapter 38 of Job. Then the Lord answered Job from the whirlwind. And he said, Who is this who obscures my counsel with ignorant words?

Get ready to answer me like a man. When I question you, you, Job, will inform me. Where were you when I established the earth? Tell me if you have understanding.

the questions from God continues to Job for the next few chapters. And at the end of all the questioning, this is Job's response to God.

[19 : 11] Surely, Job says to God, I spoke about things I did not understand, things too wondrous for me to know. Therefore, I reject my words and I am sorry for them.

I am dust and ashes. This is Job's response before holy God. Who are we to question God?

Who are we to question his plans and his purposes? We have to respond like Job at the end of the day. We will confess like Job that we are dust and ashes.

Jesus, unlike us, assumes and trusts in the sovereignty of God, he knows that God is in control no matter what happens. But he also shows confidence in the goodness of God.

Not only is God's sovereign, God is good. Jesus reinforces his call to repentance by telling this parable in verse 6-9, which buttresses God's call to repentance and then also God's goodness and mercy.

[20 : 25] He told this parable. A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vine dresser, look, for three years now I've come seeking fruit on this fig tree, I've found none, cut it down.

Why should it use up the ground? And the vine dresser answered the owner, sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure, fertilizer.

fertilizer, then it should bear fruit. And then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good. But if not, you can cut it down. What's the point of this parable that Jesus done?

The parable is for all of us who are still alive. It's for every living soul to hear that the owner of the vineyard, look here then in this parable, the owner of the vineyard has every right, every right to expect that the fig tree that he planted, that he put resources into making sure it grows, he had every right to expect that that tree should bear fruit at the appropriate time.

Doesn't he? In the same manner, God, who created you and sustains you, who sustains your very life, has a right to demand that your life bears fruit for his glory.

[21 : 54] He has that right upon every living soul in the world. But in this parable, the tree is barren for three years, growing, no fruit.

So the owner is just and right in cutting it down. He doesn't want it to just use up space and resources. But look here in this parable, the plea for mercy.

He promised, the Vandrissal promises to tend and to fertilize this tree so that he would yield fruit in the coming year. Perhaps he will yield fruit in the coming year.

And if it should yield fruit, well and good. It survives. It lives according to the purpose for which it was created. But if it doesn't in the coming year, it will be cut down.

This is the goodness of God. That's what this parable is about. It is God's forbearance, God's mercy to all of us. Look in Psalm 103 that we read this morning.

[23 : 00] The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. This is our God. This is his character. Don't lose sight.

Of the call to repentance and the call to bear fruit in keeping with repentance that we're being called to do here. The two go hand in hand.

It might seem like being a dead horse at this point to be harping on the message of repentance for two Sundays in a row. By the way, we're going to still be there next Sunday, so be prepared.

But as Luther said, the whole life of the Christian is one of repentance. Jesus spoke of repentance above all things.

He proclaimed and called people to repentance. It is the state that we come to. We come to God every time we come to God in a state of repentance.

[24:00] repentance. So I want you to hear God's call to repent this morning so that you may not perish. Now is the time of mercy. Now is the time of grace.

Notice the urgency in the final parable. The goodness of God is seen in his mercy and grace. But the urgency is there. That goodness and mercy will not always be so.

God will one day come and judge wickedness and sin and rebellion against him. One professor once asked his students, what's your definition of grace?

And the students gave all the theologically astute answers of what grace is. But then he said to them at the end, my definition of grace is everything outside of hell.

everything outside of hell is grace. Because all we deserve is judgment from God. Do you want to make demands of God?

[25:04] Do you think God holds you anything? He does. He holds you as wrath. Because you are a sinner. A rebellious creature before a holy God.

And all that God holds any of us is judgment. The fact that we are not consumed is mercy. mercy. Don't lose sight of the call to repentance.

Here's the truth. There is no such thing from God's perspective. From God's perspective, there is no such thing as good people. All have sinned, Paul tells us in Romans.

All have fallen short of the glory of God. All but one righteous is righteous before God. All deserve judgment. All deserve to perish.

But here is the one righteous man. The only one who stands blameless and spotless before God calling us to repentance.

[26:00] Repent so you may not perish. He calls out to you. Come to me. He calls out to you. The arms of flesh will fail you. Your comfort and influence are not indicative of God's pleasure.

nature. No matter what you think you faced in this world, no matter what you think you deserve, the truth is the only thing God owes you is his wrath poured out on you as judgment.

But in his goodness he comes among us. God comes among us. He took on our flesh, our humanity. He lived and suffered and endured pain.

Shame, betrayal, and ultimately he bore upon himself the full wrath of God over sin, over our sins.

And he calls you to come and repent and turn to him. So when you hear someone ask where is God when evil happens? When you hear someone ask that question, when seemingly good people suffer unimaginable pain, where is God?

[27:15] you can point those people to the cross. There he is. There is God. He identifies with us in our pain, in our sorrow, in our calamities.

I can't help but think of Shilido's poem. Shilido was a pastor in England during World War I. And a time of great suffering World War I was.

A time of great death when many questioned the existence of God or the goodness of God. And he writes this about God, by the Christian God.

Our wounds are hurting us. Where is the balm? Lord Jesus, by thy scars we claim thy grace. If when the doors are shut, thou drawest near to us, only reveal those hands and that side of thine. we know today that what wounds are, we know what wounds are, have no fear, show us thy scars, we know the counter sign.

[28:29] The other gods were strong, but thou wast weak. The other gods rode, but thou did stumble to a throne. But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak.

and not a god has wounds, but thou alone. This is the god we serve. A god who identifies with us in our wounds.

The gods of other religions, the pagan gods out there, they rule triumphant. The idols, they're not gods after all, they're just idols, but the idols of human imagination, they rule over man.

But our god has wounds. He came as one of us, bore the brunt of our shame upon himself. He identifies with us in our pain and tragedy.

Hear Paul's warning to us in Romans 2. do not presume on the riches and kindness of this god. Do not presume that his forbearance and patience.

[29 : 49] Do not presume on it. Know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance. God is merciful.

He opens his arms out. He's kind. For what purpose? that he may lead you to repentance. The kindness of God is grace shed abroad in the world so that we might cry out to him.

It is also for those who are no longer under judgment. That cry is also for those who are no longer under judgment. You, if you come to Jesus Christ, you're no longer under the judgment of God. You have received mercy. You've been abducted into his family. For God's forbearance, God's kindness, kindness, is so that you may echo to the world out there the words of your Savior, to the world in need.

With every urgency, repent and believe that you may not perish. That's our cry to the world. That's our cry in the face of grievous pain and calamity.

[30 : 59] That's our cry even when evil and tragedy befalls us in our own personal lives. We look to God. This God who has come and identified with us with our pain.

Not only identified, carried our pain, our ultimate judgment upon himself. This is our cry.

Let us pray. God God to have to We to abide in you. We have told us to abide in you. We are thankful that you want to abide with us.

You also said that if we abide in you and you are what abides in us, then we would produce fruit that would last. Those words comfort us.

We know that it is only in you that we can bear fruit, but we also know that you are the God who says come repentant. You will forgive. You have promised forgiveness for all our sins. Thank you, Lord, that you are the Lord who came to bear the brunt of our sins upon yourselves.

[32 : 09] And because of what you've done, we have access to God. We have mercy and grace for us in time of need. So help us, Lord, to take a hard look at ourselves, Lord, both as individuals and as the church.

Help us to honestly take account of what fruit we produce. Help us to take account of how we loved one another. Help us to take account of how we love those who are out there in the world who are perishing.

Help us to take account of our faithfulness in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. Help us honestly, Lord, to go about putting it into action.

Not only be hearers, but doers of your word. Lord, we pray that you will make us anew. We want our lives to be fruitful. Lord, we also pray, Lord, that if there are any here who hasn't heeded your call to repentance, that you will draw them, Lord, Holy Spirit.

Break down all their defenses. Draw them to yourselves. Have them to see in you the God who loves, who cares, who is compassionate, who is ready to redeem and save.

[33 : 31] We cannot be anything other than what we have always been unless you remake us, Lord. So help us, Holy God, to fill our need to be nourished, shaped, transformed, and reconnected, and help our lives to bring the harvest of righteousness to your glory.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Thank you.