

# Responding to Tragedy

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[ 0 : 00 ] Last week, a handful of us gathered here. And we gathered primarily to pray for our nation, and we gathered primarily to pray for our nation, but in particular to pray for the residents of Abaco and Grand Bahama.

And never in our wildest dreams could we have imagined the catastrophic destruction, nor the tragic loss of life that Hurricane Dorian would bring.

We're told that approximately 15,000 homes were destroyed, leaving approximately 70,000 people homeless, and in some cases, possessionless, minus the clothes on their backs.

The last count I heard is that the number of deaths stands at 43, and that number is expected to significantly increase.

In addition to the staggering death count, I've heard of dozens who have been critically injured, some resulting in amputation of limbs.

[ 1 : 22 ] And I'm sure, like me, many of you have seen the harrowing videos listing to stories of people who have told unimaginable stories of what they experienced on Abaco and Grand Bahama.

And some telling horrors of what some people are still continuing to experience as they scavenge for food, trying to survive.

In places where people have described it as Baghdad, where everything around them is destroyed. In the face of this heart-wrenching and tragic reality, I think the question that we should all consider is how should we respond?

How should we respond to this tragedy? And by we, I mean we who are on New Providence and other islands who have been spared, and indeed in the Caribbean and in parts of the United States who have been spared.

I'm not using we universally for all of us in the Bahamas because indeed if I was speaking to the people, some of whom were affected by the hurricane, I would not be bringing this message this morning.

[ 2 : 52 ] but I speak to those of us who have been spared. How should we respond? The online dictionary, Lexico, defines a tragedy as an event causing great suffering, suffering, destruction, and distress such as a serious accident, crime, or natural catastrophe.

What Dorian has wrought on our country is a tragedy. I think for those of us who have experienced the last week in our country, if someone were to say to us what is a tragedy, it would be honest to say Hurricane Dorian is a tragedy.

We don't need this long definition. We can simply say, Dorian, that's a tragedy. Brothers and sisters, as tragic as Hurricane Dorian has been to our nation, a small, little nation, here's the hard truth.

The hard truth is that as we live in this fallen world, as we live in this broken world, we will experience tragedy to different degrees and in different ways.

It's one of the realities of living in a world that is broken and a world that is fallen. So what I want to do this morning is I want to speak to us from God's word and seek to answer this question.

[ 4 : 39 ] How should people who escape tragedy respond to tragedy? How should people who escape tragedy respond to tragedy?

And I'm thinking primarily of Hurricane Dorian, but not exclusively about Hurricane Dorian. I'm thinking about tragedy in general. How should we respond?

And there's no doubt a lot that could be said in answer to that question. But this morning I want us to look to God's word and there are two specific ways that I want to encourage us in our response to tragedy.

I want us to consider these, receive these as two necessary ways to respond to tragedy. The first way is the way all people are to respond.

All people. And the second way is the way God's people are to respond. But before I do that let's take a moment to look to the Lord in prayer.

[ 5 : 53 ] Heavenly Father we are grateful this morning that we are able to gather in this place. And we ask that you speak to our hearts now Lord. God more than anything else we need to hear from you.

Would you speak through me above my voice and words speak to our hearts. Speak to our hearts for your glory and speak to our hearts for our good.

We ask these things in Jesus name. Amen. So how should we respond? Those of us who have escaped tragedy.

first let's consider the response of all people. Every single person who lives in the Bahamas or in the Caribbean where Dorian could have hit and Florida and indeed anyone who is watching videos and who is getting updates and seeing what has happened being aware of this tragedy this goes to every single person who is aware of this tragedy or any other tragedy.

This is how we should respond and for that we look to Luke chapter 13 verses 1 through 5 to hear the words of the Lord Jesus in terms of how we are to respond to tragedy.

[ 7 : 30 ] Luke chapter 13 verses 1 through 5 Luke writes there were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices and he answered them do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered in this way?

No I tell you but unless you repent you will all likewise perish or those 18 on whom the tower of Siloam fell and killed them do you think that they were worse offenders!

than all the others who lived in Jerusalem no I tell you but unless you repent you will all likewise perish the answer that Jesus gives to those who told him about what Pilate had done helps us to see that in their statement they had an assumption there was an assumption that they were making about those who suffered tragically when Pilate killed them took their blood and mingled it with the blood of the animals that they were sacrificing their assumption was an old assumption and that assumption is that tragedy comes to those who sinned and you know what that's our typical assumption that is the most frequently repeated assumption and statement that I've heard during the course of this week if it wasn't a statement it was certainly a question but it's not new every time we have tragedies every time a hurricane hits when Katrina hit New

Orleans it was because oh New Orleans is a sinful place so the hurricane went to New Orleans but friends this response is not just a response in our time this is an ancient response we find this response in the book of Job when Job suffered calamity after calamity and his friends came to him and his friends began to accuse him of sins he never committed they accused him of stripping the naked of their clothing they accused him of withholding bread from the hungry and water from the weary and not caring for the widows and turning away the orphans and yet when we look at the opening of the book of Job what we see is that the Lord himself commends Job as a man who is blameless and upright as a man who fears God and turns away from evil but his friend said to him Job you are suffering because you sinned acknowledge you Job tragedy only comes to those who sin and you did all these things and that's why you're suffering there's an account in the gospel of Mark where Jesus and his disciples came to this man who was blind in Mark chapter 9 verses 1 through 3 and this is what in John sorry John chapter 9 verses 1 through 3 this is what John records as he passed by he saw a man blind from birth and his disciples asked him Rabbi who sinned this man or his parents that he was born blind and Jesus answered it is not that this man sinned or his parents but that the works of God may be displayed the disciples asked the question Lord who sinned somebody had to sin either him or his parents that he was born blind that was the general assumption that if you have tragedy if you have some suffering in your life the reason is you must have sinned and Jesus says neither he says you're wrong on both scores it's not him it's not his parents this was because

[ 11 : 53 ] God desired to display his mighty works and so here in Luke 13 Jesus corrects this assumption of those who brought this story to him about what Pilate did and in his correction the way he corrects them is he corrects them by asking them a question and essentially the question that he asked them is if they thought that the people who suffered this great tragedy at Pilate's hands were worse sinners than all the other Galileans who were spared who did not suffer that

tragedy and Jesus was making the point that they were not he was making the point that they didn't suffer because they were sinful or they did some wrong thing his point is every single person in Galilee is no different and could have happened had the same fate happen to them as those who Pilate killed but Jesus goes further they told Jesus about one event and Jesus picks upon another event he says what about when the tower of Siloam fell and killed 18 people do you think that they were he says do you think that they were worse offenders than all the other people who lived in Jerusalem and again his point is clear no they're not worse you're not better just because! you were spared! Jesus is essentially saying those who die tragically are no different from those who are spared they're not more sinful you're not more righteous and friends in his response to those who told him about Pilate's atrocity what Jesus was really saying to them is look don't speculate about them but turn your eyes to yourself turn your eyes to yourself and evaluate your own life notice what Jesus says two times in verses three and five he says the exact same thing in response to each of those scenarios he says no I tell you they're not worse sinners they're not worse offenders no

I tell you unless you repent you will all likewise perish in other words take your eyes off of that tragedy put your eyes on yourself and realize that you're no different that that could have been you and that you need to repent unless you are going to perish you will likewise perish if you do not repent now what was Jesus saying to them was Jesus saying to them look if you don't repent Pilate could likely take you and mingle your blood with your sacrifice or if you don't repent maybe a tower is going to fall down on you he's not saying that at all Jesus is not having in view that this similar tragedy could happen to them no Jesus had another tragedy for another day in view and that is a far greater tragedy and that is the day of judgment the day when the wrath of God is going to be poured out on the ungodly and in light of that coming tragic day Jesus says instead of focusing on the present tragedy and wondering about the people in that tragedy focus on yourself and think about a coming day the most tragic day in all of human history when God's wrath will be poured out on the ungodly and in light of that you need to repent two times he says it you need to repent and brothers and sisters and friends what Jesus said to them he is saying to us as we contemplate hurricane everything else let us not be so preoccupied with it that we're not thinking about the implications of our own lives and we are not saying that we're being called as well to repent a lot of times when we hear the word repent in particular those of us who gathered this morning we tend to think oh that's a word for unbelievers unbelievers they need to repent but that's not true the

[ 17 : 08 ] Christian life is repentance from start to finish the Christian life is a life of repentance and so when we come to Christ we repent we turn from our sin but we continue every single day because we don't cease to be sinners we don't cease to sin and we need to continue to repent and to turn from sin in an ongoing way you know the God tells us that we are to pray daily give us this day our daily bread meaning it's to be prayed daily in that same prayer he says we are to pray and forgive us our debts as we forgive those who are indebted to us or forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us and that's not just mouthing that that's not just saying oh Lord forgive me no what that is is that is repenting so that we can turn away from sin because that's the only way that we turn away from sin it's not just say but I confess it true confession is from our hearts true confession is based on repentance and turning away from sin if it's not based on repentance it's not true confession and so this call to repentance in the face of tragedy is not just fun believers who run the risk of dying and going to hell without

Christ it's a call to us as well it is a call to us as well to take inventory of our lives I want to ask you this morning has hurricane Dorian and all this devastation prompted! rethinking of how we live as I think about this I'm trying to illustrate it in a way that may be helpful I believe that if any of us this morning was told you have one month to live with certainty you're going to die in a month here's what I know every single one of us will make some drastic changes every single one of us if we know Christ we will be seeking to draw nearer to God we will be seeking to pray we will be seeking to get into his word we would be seeking to forgive others we would be seeking!

forgiveness! from others we would radically change so many things in our lives from a spiritual perspective material things will not have as higher place in our lives we would have a totally different outlook on life life will begin to be precious the mercy of God will begin to be precious the grace of God will begin to be precious if we were told that we have a month to live I say that

because sometimes we could think well I don't have anything to repent about well if we could make those changes if we learn that our day of death was impending upon us brothers and sisters as we contemplate this tragedy we can repent there are things in our lives we need to repent about we need to turn from sin and it's not just see this is where

I think we get into a lot of difficulty as those who follow Christ we make great efforts to forsake what we consider the big sins the sins of sexual immorality for example we make great effort to avoid them but we don't make the same effort to avoid what one author referred to as respectable sins if you want to see a list of respectable sins turn to Proverbs chapter 6 Proverbs chapter 6 and verse 16 says there are six things the Lord hates that are an abomination to him haughty eyes or pride a lying tongue and hands that shed innocent blood a heart that devises wicked plans feet that make haste run to evil a false witness who breathes out lies and one who sows discord among brothers brothers and sisters we need to forsake sin we need to ask ourselves what about if that were me who perished in Abaco or perished in

[ 22 : 16 ] Grand Bahama and didn't even have the time or the presence of mind to be thinking about repenting and turning to God just thinking about survival where would that have put us and not to say that we can find ourselves at any moment in time where we are perfectly righteous in and of ourselves to deserve to be in God's presence I'm not saying that at all but what I'm saying is this is a call to us to repent from spiritual carelessness spiritual indifference and really draw near to God says if you draw near to me I will draw near to you and so Jesus says in the face of tragedy we need to respond with contrition our first response needs to be contrition and repentance and contrition because our hearts can be hardened by sin our hearts can be hardened where we know something is wrong but there's no remorse and that is a very dangerous place to be in where I can acknowledge this is sin there's no brokenness there's no contrition in our hearts because it is that contriteness that would lead us to repentance to really turn away and so we need to ask the Lord

Lord would you break my heart with the things that it should be broken by help me to see my sin the way I need to see my sin so that I may be contrite so that I may be repentant and I might turn away from my sin we all believer and unbeliever need to hear and heed this warning from Jesus as he calls us to repent if you're an unbeliever this morning your response is for the first time to repent and turn away from sin and to the rest of us this morning our response if we will hear Jesus is to do business with him with sins that we are aware of in our lives asking him for the grace to turn away from them and to renounce them and to hate them and to love the things that he loves

I'm pretty sure that some are probably thinking wondering well what do you have to say about hurricanes and natural disasters can they be the judgment of God or can they be the destructive work of the devil I find the response of Jesus to the people who asked him this question to be very insightful I want you to look at it again do you notice that Jesus never answers their question he never answers it they come to him well they didn't make a question but they made a statement that had assumptions in it where they said to him Pilate mingled the blood of animals with the blood of the people who were offering those animals as he killed them Jesus never addresses it he turns the attention away from that tragedy to the people and you know what that's the reason this morning I will not even seek to venture to talk about what does that mean what about this what about that not going to talk about that following the example of

Jesus he says is not important what you need to do is you need to take your eyes off of that and put it on yourself because you're no better off than those who perish you're no better off than those who lost everything that they own and you need to remember that that tragedy is not the greatest tragedy the greatest tragedy is the coming one the day of the wrath of God that will be poured out on the ungodly so that's the first response the response of all people in the face of tragedy tragedy that they've escaped is contrition and repentance looking at our lives more than speculating about the tragedy the second response is for God's people this is those who know the Lord and for this response we look to the words of the psalmist in Psalm 131 Psalm 131 the psalmist writes oh Lord my heart is not lifted up my eyes are not raised too high I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me but I have calm and quieted my soul like a weaned child with its mother like a weaned child is my soul within me oh Israel hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore the response that God's people are called to in this psalm is in two parts it's a two part response that we are called to the first part is in verse one it's a call to humility when we occupy ourselves with things that are too great too marvelous for us is the way the psalmist describes it things that we just cannot understand things we cannot comprehend when

we do that it is an expression of pride notice what the psalmist says he says oh Lord my heart isn't lifted up my eyes are not raised too high

[ 29 : 17 ] I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me and brothers and sisters I want to say to us this morning hurricane dorian is too great and too marvelous for us not to think about but to be preoccupied with to occupy ourselves with it don't do it don't do it because the minute we try to explain what is too marvelous for us what is too great for us we're going to get ourselves in great difficulty in the face of this tragedy and all other tragedies we would be wise to follow the example of Job's three friends initially when they came to him when Job's three friends came to him initially here's what it says in Job 2.13 and they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights and no one spoke a word to him for they saw that his suffering was very great they were wise for seven days they sat with him and zipped their lips and did not seek to try to speak to his situation because they saw that his suffering was very great but then they got themselves in trouble as they began to try to explain what happened to Job they weren't privy to the conversation that Job and Satan had but yet they interjected themselves to explain to Job why he suffered the calamities that he suffered and what we see is in the end at the end of the book of Job in Job 42 verse 7 we see the Lord rebuking them and this is what the Lord says to them you see this in

Job 42 7 after the Lord has spoken these words to Job the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite my anger burns against you and against your two friends for you have not spoken of me what is right as my servant Job has brothers and sisters things that are too marvelous for us things that are too great for us when we speak we will not speak right of God we will not speak what God will have us to speak because it's beyond us and God wants us to keep silence God wants us to zip our lips and watch and observe and consider and repent now this doesn't mean that we cannot think about it it doesn't mean that questions would not arise in our minds questions arose in my mind questions still arise in my mind I still wonder why did Hurricane

Dorian pass New Providence it was forecasted to hit us and then we watched throughout the day Friday and Saturday it began to shift and shift more to the east of us I wonder why little children died in Abacón Grand Bahama especially as I watch videos of people hardened sinners who were spared some cursing in the videos even after they were spared I'm saying Lord how is that I heard the story of a man who lost his five year old son and then you watch these other people cursing ungrateful seemingly not remembering that they were just saved from death you wonder! why? it's fine to have those wonderings but let's not preoccupy ourselves with them and let's not try to find answers for them it's too great for us there are people sheltering in a church the church crashes down on them turn with me to Ecclesiastes and here is part of our dilemma Ecclesiastes chapter 8 here's what the writer the preacher in Ecclesiastes says in verse 14 Ecclesiastes 8 14 there's a vanity and this word vanity is it's a mist it's a vapor and the idea that he's talking about is it's something that you can't grasp but it's something you can't wrap your hands around you can't understand it any more than you can grasp mist in your hand so he's essentially saying there's something that is impossible to understand that takes place on the earth that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous

I said this is also an impossibility to understand and then he says this in verse 17 then I saw all the work of God that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun however much man may toil in seeking he will not find it out even though a wise man claims to know he cannot find it out he can't find it out so let us not be preoccupied with this let us not take time to sit around and say is it because of this or is it because of that no brothers and sisters that's not a profitable use of our time let us keep our mouths closed let us not show ourselves to be proud but show ourselves to be humble by saying

[ 36 : 13 ] God it's so marvelous for me to understand I don't understand that but here's what we can't be preoccupied with we can be preoccupied with knowing that God is perfectly sovereign that God is perfectly wise and that God is perfectly good we know that to be true despite all that we see despite all that we don't understand despite all that we will never understand we know this to be true and this is where our preoccupation must be mistrust in the Lord who is perfectly sovereign perfectly wise and perfectly good and we who are not perfectly sovereign and not perfectly wise and not perfectly good are in no position to critique him!

we do well to be like Job's friends and keep our mouths closed I'm going to say this is one of the comforts of believing in a sovereign God God believing in a God who is in absolute and total control of all of his universe and not one single piece or part at any moment in any time ever falls outside of his sovereign sway and his sovereign rule so first we're called to humility the second part of the psalm verses 2 and 3 we go back to Psalm 121 Psalm 2 and 3 call us to trust the psalmist writes but I have calmed and quieted my soul like a man child with his mother like a weaned child is my soul within me oh

Israel hope in the Lord from this time forth and forever more the psalmist uses this picture of a weaned child and his mother to communicate to us the quiet trust that God's people must have when they face things that are too great and too marvelous for them things like hurricane Dorian tragedies like that I think most of us know that weaning is the process by which a child is gradually taken off of milk and put on solid food and I think most mothers who have had more than one child would know that children are different and they wean differently and for some it's shorter some it's longer some it's harder some it's easier and in the case of some breastfed babies think you mothers who have breastfed for any length of time

I'm sure that you could recall some situation some circumstance where a child wanted to be breastfed and it just wasn't convenient to do it but children they just don't care you could be in public you could be in the food store in the car you could be on the bank line wherever you are they won't care the breast they will be crying out for it and in such a way that if you don't appease them people will look!

think you are harming your child or doing child not that kind of child who is treating the mother relating to the mother as if the mother will never give the child anything to eat the psalmist says no he says what I've done is I've calmed and quieted my soul like a weaned child with its mother a child that's been weaned is able to trust the mother because he has some history to know that he has been fed and so the mother is going to feed the child and we've all seen this sometimes when a child has been weaned and the child can wait sometimes the child wants to eat but the mother may say give me a second I have to do this or that and the child patiently waits because he knows he's going to be fed that's!

[ 40 : 56 ] the! psalmist that's the trust he's calling us to in the midst of things that we don't understand things that are too difficult for us to comprehend but the picture here still is not where the mother says to the child I'm going to get you something and the mother disappears and the child doesn't see the mother the child is seeing the mother so the child knows in a matter of time my mother who I can see is going to give me the food that I need and that presence brings comfort that presence brings great comfort and so the picture that the psalmist is communicating in the face of these circumstances that are beyond our comprehension is that not only must we be humble but we must trust in God we misrepose our trust in the

Lord trusting in his goodness trusting in his sovereignty trusting in his wisdom and not acting like a child who has not been reigned a child who is acting like he's never eaten before is calling us to a place of trust and so we who belong to God in the face of these tragedies in the face of these situations that we don't understand we are called to respond with humility before God and trust in God brothers and sisters I must say that as I considered the tragedy of Hurricane!

Dorian as I considered tragedies in general bad tragedies and I call them bad tragedies because it caused me to think of what I would describe as a good tragedy the destruction of Hurricane Dorian is a bad tragedy but the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is a good tragedy it's a tragedy because he who knew no sin became sin for us the one who alone deserved to live died because he took the place of sinners and so the good tragedy took place on Calvary's hill when Jesus ascended it and when Jesus was nailed to a cruel cross and God the Father poured his wrath out upon him for the sins of sinners and there

Jesus was suspended between heaven and earth he was extended between these two thieves and God poured out his wrath upon him I was thinking about that picture of that good tragedy that took place on Calvary you know what struck me it struck me that the two thieves one on either side of the Lord Jesus Christ is a representative of every single one of us the two thieves one of them is a representative of every single human being because one of them put his faith in Jesus and repented and was given a promise that he would be with the Lord Jesus after death and the other remained unrepentant the other saw the good tragedy of

Christ being a substitute for sinners and looked no different to him than all the other crucifixions that had ever happened and he didn't repent and so he was lost but the other one repented he turned from his sin and that good tragedy amounted for his benefit and this morning for all of us we need to consider which one of those thieves is representative of us will the good tragedy of Jesus Christ dying on the cross be of benefit to you like the thief who believed in him or would the good tragedy of Jesus dying on the cross be of no benefit to you like the one who remained unrepentant and who cursed up to the moment of his last breath

[ 46 : 01 ] I pray that God would grant us all repentance I pray that God would grant us all the ability to humble ourselves to trust him and to focus ourselves and occupy ourselves with the fact that he is perfectly sovereign perfectly wise and he is perfectly good let's pray Lord we thank you this morning for your word and we thank you for speaking to us in the midst of a great tragedy Lord help us to join all people who you are called to repent help us to be contrite help us to repent and then Lord for those of us who are your people would you help us to humble ourselves and to trust in you and to acknowledge that we cannot know the work of God we cannot know why the way of the wicked happens to the righteous and the way of the righteous sometimes happens to the wicked Lord help us to be content to rest in you and to trust in you we pray in Jesus name amen