

How to respond to tragedy and unfruitfulness

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[0:00] pick one up during one of the hymns. They're just here or in the entrance of the main church. Shall we come to God in prayer? Let's pray, shall we? Father, we come this morning to seek you, to seek your face, the face of our loving heavenly Father. We've done much in the last week seeking after lots of things but today we set our face towards you. We thank you that you are a beautiful creator making the world we see, sustaining it. We thank you that you're a wonderful saviour. Our sins though they're many and our failings that we're all too aware of are not a barrier because of Jesus dying on the cross for us. And we thank you that when we feel dry and weary that you pour in your Holy Spirit and so we come as your people, thirsty and hungry for you. We pray that our worship will be pleasing to you as we draw near this morning. Amen. Now we're going to sing a song which is based upon

Hebrews chapter 4 and I thought I'd read you the verses that point us to this particular song. It says this in Hebrews 4 verses 14 to 16.

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are, yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. So I hope you're coming this morning to receive grace and mercy. Shall we stand and worship God as we sing this beautiful song?

Before the throne of God above, I have a strong, a perfect glee, a great high priest whose name is love, whoever lives and pleads for me. My name is graven on his hands, my name is graven on his hands, brother, a great high priest whose name is graven on his hands, my name is graven on his hands, my name is graven on his hands, I know that while in him he stands, no tongue can bid me dance depart, no tongue can bid me dance depart. When Satan tempts me to despair, and tells me of And held within, how would I look and see him there, who made an end to all my sin?

Because the sinless Saviour died, my sinful soul is counted free. For God the just is satisfied to look on him and harden me.

[3:59] To look on him and pardon me. Behold it there, the risen Lamb, my perfect, sportless righteousness.

The great unchangeable I am, the King of glory and of grace. One with himself, I cannot die.

My soul is purchased with his blood. My life is hid with Christ on high. With Christ my Saviour and my God.

With Christ my Saviour and my God. Beautiful truths. Do take a seat. My soul is purchased with his blood.

My life is hid with Christ on high. With Christ my Saviour and my God. With Christ my Saviour and my God.

[5:13] Beautiful truths. Do take a seat. So the Lord Jesus has done so much, hasn't he?

The word through which the whole of creation was made. And that work is completed, although he still sustains the creation by the power of his hand.

And also he came and he taught us when he was on earth. And he taught us wonderful truths. So he's an amazing teacher. But that teaching is written down.

It's in the Bible and we can receive it. He then died on a cross once and for all for our sins. No one else needing to die. Him alone, the perfect sacrifice.

And then he rose again. The firstborn from among the dead. Which means that death is not the final enemy. But a gateway into his presence. Now is there anything left for Jesus to do?

[6:09] Any thoughts? Is he now sitting down? He's sitting down at the right hand of the Father. We just said that. But is there anything he's doing at the moment? Any ideas? Absolutely.

Well done, Judy. Yes, he's praying for us. The continuing work of Jesus Christ is to pray for us. So when you feel you can't pray about a situation.

When you feel you don't know what to pray. You have an intercessor at the right hand of the Father who is praying. Isn't that a wonderful truth? Maybe you're sitting there and you're not sure what to pray.

And you say, Lord Jesus, pray for me. Isn't that a lovely thing to do? We're going to pray. We're going to pray a sorry prayer. Do you ever say sorry prayers?

Sometimes it's easier to say sorry to God than to one another. But we're going to say sorry to God. David, King David, he did many things wrong. But in Psalm 51, he says, against you, you alone have I sinned.

[7:09] So we're going to say sorry to God. We've got a few words which we're going to say on the screen together. So perhaps we can start with the first one. It says, I'm sorry, Lord. Should we say that? I'm sorry, Lord.

Sorry when I get scared. Sorry when I doubt you. Sorry when I feel alone.

Help me to turn back to you. That's your prayer. Thank you. We can turn back to you, Lord Jesus. You long for us to turn back to you. And you're already praying for us as we turn. We worship you. Amen.

We're going to stand again and continue that prayer as we sing, Purify My Heart. Shall we stand?

[8:08] Shall we stand? Shall we stand? Purify My Heart.

Let me be as gold. Let me be as gold. Let me be as gold. My precious silver. Purify my heart.

Let me be as gold. Your gold. Ring by the sky.

My heart. My heart's one desire. My heart's one desire. Is to be holy.

Set a blood for you, Lord. I choose to be holy. Set a blood for you, my master.

[9:23] Ready to do your will. Glorify my heart.

Cleanse me from within. And make me holy. Glorify my heart. Cleanse me from my sin.

Deep within. Deep within. With my love. Deep within. With my love. Deep within. With my love. My heart's one desire.

Choose to be holy. Set a blood for you, Lord. I choose to be holy.

Set a blood for you, my master. Ready to do your will.

[10:30] And as we stand, perhaps you can just in silence, hold our hands to the Lord. Ask him to wash you, cleanse you, heal you.

And pour in his spirit upon you. Thank you, Lord. Thank you.

Amen. Do take a seat. And I hand over to Kathy now, who's going to be telling us a little bit about some of the life group leaders.

Thanks, Kathy. Thank you.

Someone once said that disciples are not made in rows, but in circles. And that's not to take away from what we do here on Sunday. But real discipleship growth can happen in these life groups, where we really chew on God's word together.

[11:57] Seek to apply it to our lives. And encourage each other to live it out in our daily lives. And so these life group leaders have stepped up to this important leadership role.

The leaders have had four training sessions so far, including training on group dynamics, creating trust and open sharing in groups, confidentiality, one-to-one meetings, and attentive listening.

And we'll continue to support them with training once every six months. So I'd like to start by inviting Mark and Sheena, Louis, and Tim up.

We're going to tell us a little bit about the course, the Grow No course, and the special focus groups. So Mark and Sheena, can you tell us about this Grow No course that you're leading?

Yeah. Actually, this is not a life group, the one we're leading. It's the Grow No course. There we go. So we're first. So it's a slightly different type of a group, a bit more inquiring, a bit more exploratory, limited in length.

[13:00] And if you're still getting to grips with the Christian faith, or if you've got some questions, or you've been a Christian for a while, and are looking to brush up your basics, then we'd love to have you along.

The first five sessions are about growing as a Christian. What is God's plan for my life? Why pray when you can worry instead?

I love that one. And my favorite is talking about God without sounding religious. So that's growing as a Christian. And the second five sessions look at the central beliefs of the faith, who God is, and how he relates to us as humanity.

Knowing the character of God enables us to live with confidence, strength, and joy. Yeah, so the group is called Grow and Know. We aim to run it in the hub on Monday afternoons or evening, depending on what suits.

Now, Sheena and I have been doing groups for quite a long time, and we believe it's important to keep things down to earth so that everyone feels comfortable enough to contribute, no matter what stage they are at.

[14:02] So we hope to see you. Okay, so that's a perfect thing for anyone who's new to the faith or new to the church, if you want to get to know people in the church better.

Or if you're finding your faith has become routine, the course is perfect. So we have three special focus life groups. And I'm going to let Louis tell us about his group.

Yeah, I don't have a double act like that, the two of them. But, yeah, so we have a... Our life group is for parents or singles with children with primary age or early secondary age school.

We meet on Thursdays from 7.45 to 9 in the evening, and we meet for Bible study, encouragement, prayer. So you are very welcome to come.

And we also alternate between men and women. So one week men, the other week women. And at least, I would say, once a month of every five, six weeks, we also meet for a social.

[15:07] So we can come together as families with the children and all that. So, yeah, very welcome to come Thursday, 7.45 to 9. So that's what it is. Thank you. And Louis is leading this with Salome, his wife.

Salome, can you stand? I don't know if you can come up. Can you come up also? And Tim, tell us about your group. Yeah, good morning, everyone.

I lead the young adults small group. We meet on Thursday evenings. And the focus of the young adults group is not that much different from any other life group. We meet to spend time together, getting to know one another as we study and apply the Bible to our lives, as we pray for each other and just have a good time together.

So, yeah, if you're a young adult and you want to grow as a Christian alongside other young adults, then, yeah, come and find me. Let's have a chat. Great.

Thank you. Thank you. We also have one other special focus group. Jenny Rook, who's not here today, will be leading a women-only group on Wednesday from 11 to 1.

[16:18] So, with that, I'd like to invite the other life group leaders, Gary and Judith Hamilton, and the leaders, and O'Brien, co-leader if he's here.

Roger and Judy Pantridge. Anthony and Chris Croft. And Ollie Walbank. Oh, Sarah Atwell, too. Sorry. So, yeah, Sarah is co-leader. I'm missing out on the co-leaders. Sarah is co-leader to the Croft group, and I'm co-leader to Ollie's group.

And we also want to acknowledge Pete and Wendy Montague and Paul and Linda Farncombe, as well as Jenny Rook, who aren't here today. So, we're going to pray for our leaders, but first, we encourage you to pick up one of these brochures.

Again, they'll be around for the next few weeks. There are a few up here. There are a few at the entrance to the church. Or you can take a look at it on the website. Please feel free to speak with any of the leaders if you have any questions about their groups or the Grow No course, which is also up on the website now.

[17:33] And we really encourage you to seek God's guidance. And pray about the group he's guiding you to, where you'll be able to grow and also encourage others to grow as disciples of Christ.

And you'll be able to sign up for these groups between September 3rd and 17th. So, with that, I'd like to invite Andrew up to pray. Okay, let's pray for our brothers and sisters here who've been called by God and willingly stepping forward to take on this role.

So, let's pray for them. Father God, I want to thank you so much for our brothers and sisters here who've heard your call and obeyed your call to serve you in this ministry of leading life groups. And I pray that as you have commanded us to make disciples and teach them to obey everything you've commanded us, that they would be equipped by you to do that, Lord, to make disciples who follow you and go on to make disciples.

And I pray that you would give them a passion for your word and an ability to lead those groups exploring your word and what it means to all of us as we live out our lives.

[18:48] And I pray that you would give them your love for their group members as they serve them, as they love them, as they support them living out their lives on their front lines. And I pray in Jesus' name that you would fill them with your Holy Spirit to equip them for this task.

And I pray that they would know that they're doing it for you, that they'd be equipped with everything that they need from you, Lord, and that they'll be blessed as they serve you in this way. We pray that in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Thank you. Thank you very much. At this point, we'd like to invite Chris Mantelow up. For those of you who haven't met Chris, Chris is our ministry trainee. He's been serving us with the church since September last year and serving in all kinds of areas, doing a lot with the children and young people and all kinds of things.

And Chris, could you tell everyone, who people may not have heard, where are you going on Tuesday? So I'm going to Tanzania, which is very exciting.

[20:02] That is exciting. And just very briefly, what are you going to be doing there? So I'm going to be visiting some of the churches that Emmanuel International work with.

Emmanuel International are a charity that do development projects with the local church and to things like clean water projects, sustainable agriculture projects, community banking.

Yeah. Yeah. And so I'm going to be visiting some of the things and looking at some of what they're doing, helping to evaluate some of those projects. And yeah, and just meeting some of the amazing people there and spending some time worshiping with them.

That's fantastic. Well, we would love to pray for you. We're going to pray for you now. I'm going to invite Roger Mundy. Roger's our missions coordinator. And he's going to pray for you and then I'll pray for you. And we're going to be continuing to pray for you as you go out there and spend time there.

And is it okay to say if people want to hear, get updates from you, can they come and find you afterwards? Yeah, of course. Yeah. So if you want to get some updates on what I'm doing and to pray for me whilst I'm there over the six weeks, I've set up a little WhatsApp group.

[21:11] So if you want to join that, come and speak to me after the service and I can add you to that. Brilliant. And perhaps to say if you can't find Chris after the service, just email the church office and we'll get you onto that.

So yeah. Okay. Well, let's pray for Chris. Just before I pray, let me say that both Andrew and I have had the experience of serving overseas. For Chris, this is going to be a month, only a month, to try and get involved and used to a lot of new people.

Another language, another culture. So this is going to be a challenge. So do please pray for this young man. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that wherever we go in the world, we do not go anywhere where you are not.

And Jesus promised to be with us always. So we thank you for the promises that Chris, when he's on the flight on Tuesday, when he arrives in Iringa, and when he starts to get to know the place and the people and try to use Swahili and so on, Lord, we know that you're going to be with him and that

you're going to give him all the energy, all the resources that he will need for this short time. So, Father, we pray that you will give him the health and strength that he needs, that you'll help him to adjust quickly to the climate, to the food, to everything else that will be different.

[22:35] And we pray for the people that he will be with, for the leaders of Emmanuel International and for all the other people that he's going to meet in the churches, in Iringa, in Tonga, in the north.

Lord, may all of those people give him such a good welcome, and may he soon settle and enjoy that time. It's going to go very quickly, but we pray that it will be very informative, very beneficial, both to the people in EI and also to Chris himself.

So, Lord, we commission him, we commit him to you now, as he goes out on this challenging, but very worthwhile month of adventure in Tanzania.

And we commit him to you in the name of Jesus Christ, who is Lord over all. Amen. Amen. And Lord, yeah, we do pray that you would soften Chris's heart as he travels to Tanzania and as he sees you at work in a different context, in a different culture.

I pray that he would discover more of you and grow closer to you and, yeah, just hear from you, perhaps about how you want him to serve now and in the future as well. And we thank you so much for him. We thank you for the way that he's served us here and been such a blessing to us as a church family, particularly to our children and young people.

[23:50] And we want to pray now for our children and young people before they go to their groups and for their leaders, that you'll bless them as they spend time together in their groups this morning. We pray that in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. God bless you, Chris, as you go. Exciting, exciting trip. We're going to sing as the children and young people go to their groups the beautiful song, Just As I Am, I Come Broken To Be Mended.

Shall we stand and worship God? Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. amount of mustard. Amen. Amen. Just as I am without one plea But that thy blood was shed for me And that thou bidst me come To thee, O Lamb of God, I come I come Just as I am, I'm waiting not To rid my soul of warm, dark blood To thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot

[25:42] O Lamb of God, I come I come I'm not broken to be mended I'm not wounded to be healed I'm not desperate to be rescued I'm not empty to be filled I'm guilty to be pardoned By the blood of Christ the Lamb I come, and I'm welcome With open arms, praise God Just as I am Just as I am, I would be lost But mercy and grace my freedom bought And love to glory in your cross

O Lamb of God, I come By the blood of Christ the Lamb By the well-known will open arms Praise God, just as I am I come broken, to be mended I come wounded, to be healed I come desperate, to be rescued I come empty, to be filled I come guilty, to be pardoned By the blood of Christ the Lamb And I'm welcomed with open arms

Praise God, just as I am Praise God, just as I am Beautiful, do take a seat And Hannah's going to come and lead us in prayer We will have another time of prayer for fellowship prayers a little bit later Bless you Let us pray Father God, we come before your throne today Just as we are In our struggles and in our joys We ask that you would meet each of us today where we are Sometimes in life it can be hard to see the bigger picture We can be so hemmed in by the everyday struggles Or crushed by mental or physical pain Or just lost in the overwhelming fear for the state of the world But you do not give us a spirit of fear

But of power, Father We declare our trust in you We trust that you see what we cannot That you are in control And reigning over all that we cannot fathom And that your plans are to prosper us And not to harm us Today we thank you for the long life of our dear sister in Christ, Margaret We thank you for the blessing that she was to so many And to this church We rejoice that she is now with you in paradise We ask for your comfort and peace for her family As they prepare for her funeral And we also lift up Eduarda and Catalina As they mourn the loss of Eduarda's father And we pray for their safety as they travel to the funeral For all those in our church family grieving We pray that they would know your presence with them And feel the comfort of your loving embrace We thank you,

Lord, for the blessing of our ministry trainee, Chris For all that he has done to build up your kingdom In our church and our community

We lift up the final preparations and logistics As he prepares to travel to Tanzania on Tuesday We thank you for the work of Emmanuel International in Oringa And we pray for the new projects that Chris will be helping with We ask that you keep him in good health And that he would be challenged and inspired by what he sees Grow his faith and strengthen his trust in you As the school and university terms come to a close this week We pray for a restful and joyful summer break We pray for relaxation and rejuvenation to those who need it And we pray especially for those who will be making the transition Between schools or leaving home for university May your spirit go ahead of them, Lord Preparing the ground for meaningful friendships Opportunities to speak of you And for a smooth transition for both parents and students We thank you for the many Christian festivals and summer camps Which seek to glorify you And to provide a fun, kingdom-seeking atmosphere For all ages over the summer months

[30:50] We pray that those attending would grow in faith and love of you We lift up those who are leading these events May they be grounded in your word and equipped by your spirit We pray that people of all ages would come to know you As their Lord and Saviour Father, as we come to learn how to look to you in tragedy and trials We rejoice that you are a God who understands our pain and our struggles You who suffered persecution, loss, torture and death For our sake, so that we might be saved and adopted as your children Through your precious grace We lift up to you all those in and linked to our church family Who are struggling with their mental health at this time We pray for those who feel lost in a desert place Alone and unable to see you We ask that you would break through to them today We ask that you would surround them with your love and hold them close We thank you, Lord, for the advances in psychology and medicine We thank you for therapists and counsellors

Who help and equip those suffering with tools to help themselves We ask that you would help us as a church body To recognise those suffering in our congregations To love them and listen without judgement Help us to walk with them and love them where they are, Lord Let us pray for Lynn as she brings your word to us And to Andrew as he unveils your message today Open our hearts and minds to hear your words afresh As we come together at your communion table May we commit ourselves to you again And may our wells of your living water overflow As we rejoice in your gift of grace to us We ask all this in your precious name Amen Thank you The reading this morning is from Luke chapter 13 verses 1 to 9

And if you'd like to follow it, you'll find it on page 1046 In the church Bibles Now there was some present at that time Who told Jesus about the Galileans Whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices Jesus answered Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners Than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?

I tell you no But unless you repent, you too will all perish Or those 18 who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them Do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?

I tell you no But unless you repent, you too will all perish Then he told this parable A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard And he went to look for fruit on it But did not find any So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree And haven't found any Cut it down Why should it use up the soil?

[34:09] Sir, the man replied Leave it alone for one more year And I'll dig round it and fertilise it If it bears fruit next year, fine If not, then cut it down We give thanks for God's word Thank you, Lynn Good morning, everyone It's good to see you I'd like to thank you all for your prayers And words of encouragement for me Following my accident In which I fell off my bike and broke my elbow When I sent a message to my mum Saying I'd fallen off my bike and broken my elbow Her reply was I told you you shouldn't be doing wheelies So just for the record I wasn't doing a wheelie at the time But I was reminded a couple of months back I was preaching on Jonah I think it was And I shared a quote

God sometimes lets you crash But he always provides a hospital Now I didn't expect that to come to fulfilment In physical terms But I have been really assured of God's presence with me Through this physical difficulty And I'm so thankful for the wonderful NHS And the care I've had in this situation We're going to be looking through this passage That Lynn just read to us This is the last session in the series we've been doing Listening to Jesus In which we've gone through this part of Luke's Gospel It's kind of less well-trodden ground in the Gospel And some interesting teachings Some unusual teachings in some ways And some challenging teachings I think that's certainly the case today But we're going to look at that passage together So if you turn with me in the Pew Bibles To page 1046 We can look at that together Now people tell Jesus in verse 1 of chapter 13

Of a tragic incident that had occurred recently In verse 1 Now there were some present at that time Who told Jesus about the Galileans Whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices Now just a bit of background On what was going on here It's about Pilate The Roman governor The same guy that we meet later on in Luke's Gospel Who proceeds over Jesus' trial Now sources other than the Bible Show that Pilate was an unpopular And an unpleasant governor of Judea Now one of the historians who wrote at the time Josephus records incidents in which Pilate seems to deliberately provoke the anger Of the local Jewish population And it seems that what happened on this occasion There was a group of people who were on pilgrimage From Galilee Who went into the temple To offer their sacrifices And in what was We guess a politically motivated action Pilate Perhaps because he feared a riot

Sent troops in and slaughtered them Now verse 1 speaks of Their own blood mingling in the temple courtyard With the blood of their sacrifices So on top of the human horror and tragedy Of these lives lost There was this issue of ritual pollution Of defilement of the temple It was deeply offensive From a religious point of view Now in our world today It seems that we don't go more than a couple of weeks Without hearing about another mass shooting Or another massacre somewhere And some of the massacres Recently have occurred in places of worship If you remember the shooting of nine people Doing a Bible study at a church in Charleston, South Carolina In 2015 Or the Easter Sunday bombings At churches in Sri Lanka A couple of years ago Or the massacre of Catholic worshippers At a church in Owo, Nigeria About a year ago These things happen very much today They were happening very much in Jesus' time Why do these people tell Jesus About this particular tragedy Of the Galileans being killed?

Well, at this point in the Gospel Jesus is heading to Jerusalem At the head of a party of Galileans So there's an underlying question About whether he intends to continue his journey Given the dangers The dangers that he faces there And there's another question About the people who were killed And we'll come on to that point in just a moment But I want first to note the other tragedy That's mentioned in this passage Because in verse 4 Jesus refers to another tragedy Verse 4 says Of those 18 who died When the tower in Siloam fell on them Now this is a different kind of tragedy The first one is what we might call An atrocity A disaster caused by humans This one is what we might call A natural disaster Everybody seemed to know About this incident which had occurred at Siloam It's the place where the southern and eastern walls Of Jerusalem come together And it seems there was a tower On the corner of these two city walls Which collapsed and crushed 18 people

[39:14] And again, we live in the same world Where natural disasters occur We've been praying in recent weeks For the situation following the earthquakes In northern Syria and southern Turkey Where literally people were crushed Beneath falling towers And I think it's important to note That Jesus lived in a world Where man-made disasters happened And people had And natural disasters happened And people had questions About those disasters About those tragedies Questions like Why do bad things happen?

And more commonly The question that we might hear Or might have at some stage On our journey of faith is If God is real Why does he let bad things happen? Now if you're a believer You would have had this question asked of you At some point If not, you will I'm sure at some point But how do we answer questions like that When they come up?

Well part of the answer can be That if we look back to the beginning Of the Bible in creation When God created the world The world was perfect There were not tragedies There were not natural disasters But things changed when sin entered the world When people started turning their backs On God and rebelling against that That started a spiral of man-made tragedies Man-made disasters

But also One of the effects One of the symptoms Of sin entering the world Was that the world The creation itself Has become broken And we see natural disasters As a result of that Now that can be a helpful starting point In answering those kind of questions That's not what Jesus uses In answering these questions here So I'm not going to say any more About that We're going to have a look At what Jesus' approach was What Jesus does is I'll tell you the stages And then we'll go through them One by one He asks a question He gives an answer So we'll go through these When we come up to them He asks a question He gives an answer And then he makes a point Of application And in fact he does this twice He repeats it twice So let's first of all Look at the question So the question Is in verse 2 Jesus answered Do you think That these Galileans Were worse sinners Than all the other Galileans Because they suffered In this way So Jesus' question Actually addresses The underlying worldview That the people Who asked the question had Because it was A commonly accepted notion At the time That whenever calamities Happened to people The reason was that Because those people Were exceptionally sinful And therefore God had chosen To allow them to suffer In this way And Jesus Had posed this simple question To them Do you think this happened Because these people Were worse sinners And then he gives A very simple answer In verse 3 He says I tell you no Very simple answer The answer is no Those Galileans Who died in Jerusalem Were no more sinful Than any other Galileans

Now I just want to Pause for a moment To add some nuance here Because you may well be thinking Doesn't God Sometimes Punish or discipline people By bringing calamity On their lives And the answer to that Is yes If you read the whole Bible You will see that Occasionally In particular situations With particular individuals God sometimes acts In judgment or discipline Towards people As a result of their Disobedience There are examples of this In the Old Testament There were Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu They disobeyed God's instructions In Leviticus 10 They were consumed by fire There's a few other examples Through the Old Testament There's one notable example In the New Testament Ananias and Sapphira In Acts chapter 5 You can look these up If you're interested But So yes God sometimes punishes People By bringing disasters Onto their lives But That is not the same As saying that disasters Only come to those

[43:10] Who are disobedient And in fact When you take the big picture The amazing truth Is that God So rarely acts In this way The reality is that These are The exceptions And Very often Most of the time He acts in mercy And prolongs His kindness To give people An opportunity To respond Now Jesus is saying here That when bad things Happen to other people You must not think It's because of Particular sin It's not okay To think like that So Jesus says this In verses 2 And in 3 And then he says The same thing About the falling tower In verses 4 to 5 Don't think the victims Were more guilty Than the rest Of the population But having Given his simple answer Referring to each Of these disasters Jesus makes a point For his listeners To take home The point he makes Is surprising It's unique It's completely Counterintuitive And completely contrary

To the wisdom Of the world In verse Second half of verse 3 He says But unless you repent You too Will all perish And in verse 5 Second half of verse 5 But unless you repent You too Will all perish Now the world Has two normal ways To view And respond To tragedies If we can go on To the next slide Thank you Sandy Two normal ways To view and respond To tragedies And Jesus contradicts Them both And I'll explain The two normal ways The ways that the world Sees and responds To tragedies Using the falling tower As a motif So the first way Is to focus on Who's under the tower Now According to this Under the tower approach This is the approach That we've seen That Jesus has addressed It's looking at people Who were under the tower And saying This happened Because of something That they did Now it's based on A very simplistic assumption That if you live A good life You'll have a good life If you obey God He'll bless you And if so If things are going Wrong in your life And if your prayers Aren't being answered Then it must be That you're not living right Now at some level Or another We all tend to Naturally have that view To a certain extent And it reveals itself In different ways Most advertising That we see Has this underlying paradigm That we're good And we deserve good things Take the slogan Have the holiday you deserve It's the underlying paradigm Behind that On the other hand Often when bad things happen We do start to say Am I being punished For something Whether we verbalise it or not It's often there Often when I've been Talking to people Who've been going through Difficult times This question has come up

It's there somewhere Inside us It's expressed by The famous song By Travis in the 90s Why does it always Rain on me The next line of that chorus Is Is it because I lied when I was 17 But the second approach Looking at above the tower Is very very common In our world today Rather than blame The people on whom The tower falls You blame Who's above the tower You blame life You blame the universe Or you blame God If you believe in God Now This approach Starts again With the assumption That most people are good And most people deserve A decent life So if bad things happen Then you blame the one Above the tower You blame God He must be doing Something wrong These are the two Alternative views That the world gives us In looking at Why tragedies happen Neither of these Are helpful According to Jesus Both of them Will be damaging To you One of them Will make you Smug and proud The other will make you Despondent And bitter And Jesus Demolishes These two views With his statement Which is so important That he makes it twice Unless you repent You too Will all perish And he talks about The reality of what we deserve And what he shows us First of all Is that we're all Sinners The comprehensive nature Of our sinfulness Is emphasised With the fact that He repeats the word All in verse 2 In verse 3 In verse 4 And verse 5 This is a universal Condition Jesus is saying On the one hand Don't you ever think That these people are worse Because they suffered But on the other side Of this And this is This is the bombshell Really That's going to be Quite hard for us To take It's hard for me to take But I'll drop the bombshell And then I'll try And pick up the pieces What Jesus is saying here Is that Every person On the face of the earth Deserves to have a tower Fall on them So he says Don't feel smug That you're better Than those who have suffered And don't say How God can you let this Happen to them Because you deserve A tower To fall on you If God gave you What you actually deserve You'd have a tower Fall on you I'd have a tower

[48:11] Fall on me Now if we could Truly see our own hearts See all the selfishness And rebellion And dishonesty The extent to which We offend God We would know That God does not owe us A comfortable life At all This is hard For us to take Because we want to believe That God is a God Of grace And love But if we're really That bad Then surely God can't love us Tim Keller The preacher Who died a couple Of months ago Famously said We are more sinful And flawed in ourselves Than we ever dared believe Yet at the very same time We are more loved And accepted in Christ Jesus Than we ever dared hope We are more sinful And flawed in ourselves Than we ever dared believe Yet at the very same time We are more loved And accepted In Jesus Christ Than we ever dared hope It's only if you see The depth of what's wrong With you That you can really appreciate

The unbelievable patience And grace Of God But it's only if you see The grace and patience Of God You'll have the ability To be honest with yourself About what's wrong with you When I see the grace of God In those terms It doesn't make me feel Oh I must be okay Instead it gives me The freedom to admit That I'm not It gives me the freedom To admit that I'm wrong Without me being devastated Because I know That God still loves me So what's the application Jesus is saying Very starkly Unless you repent Your fate when you face Eternal judgment Will be as grave As dire as those people Who you've seen Wiped off the face Of the earth So what he's done Is to redirect People's astonishment They were astonished That people were murdered So cruelly And crushed So meaninglessly But Jesus says What you ought to be Astonished at Is that You were not the ones Murdered Or crushed

And in fact If you don't repent You yourselves Will meet a judgment Like that Someday Now God has a message About mercy Towards us In all disasters That we see And hear about A message about mercy And about our Need for repentance Now that's not to say That we don't have A response of justice And concern For victims Of tragedies And remember here That Jesus is talking To people for whom They have not had A tragedy to happen Happened to them It's happened to other people And Jesus is full Of words of encouragement To people who have had Tragedies happen to them This is not one of those sections But there is a message About mercy for us As individuals An individual message for us That we are all sinners We are all heading For judgment And tragedies Are a gracious reminder From God To repent And be saved While there is still time The word translated Repent in the New Testament

Means, literally it means Turn around It's a change of heart And mind A change of direction Jesus goes on To explain what this Looks like with the parable In verses 6 to 9 He says A man had a fig tree Growing in his vineyard And he went to look For fruit on it But did not find any So he said to the man Who took care of the vineyard For three years now I've been coming to look For fruit on this fig tree And I haven't found any Cut it down Why should it use up All the soil Sir The man replied Leave it alone For one more year And I'll dig around it And fertilise it If it bears fruit next year Fine If not Then cut it down Now at that time Fig trees were commonly planted In vineyards Alongside the vines They were known to be Good for the soil Good for the growth Of the vines The vineyard owner Looks at an unfruitful tree And says to the one That he's put in charge Of caring for the vineyard This has got to go Effectively it's a waste of space The vineyard keeper Doesn't argue With the conclusion Of the owner But he says Let's give it one more chance I'll give it every opportunity To turn around And start producing fruit But there will come a time When if there's been no change Then we will cut it down Now last year in springtime For my birthday I was given a clematis plant To climb up a trellis That I've got in my garden And I planted this clematis It was quite small And it came out It did a little bit of growing I think it had one flower And then after that Last summer It just kind of It wilted It looked really manky And horrible All the leaves turned brown And then the whole thing Just turned brown And it just looked Completely dead And at the start of this year I looked at it It just looked completely dead I said to Miriam Let's dig this up It's obviously It's just not survived It hasn't worked in this location Let's replace it with With something else And we decided this I hadn't actually got round To do anything about it And then just a couple of weeks later I just looked And I just noticed

[53:13] There were just the tiniest little Green shoots Coming out of this clematis plant Well a couple of weeks later It transformed completely It had grown It had turned green This isn't the best picture of it This doesn't really do it justice But if you actually see the flowers And it ended up with like Twelve or thirteen of these flowers That is deep kind of magenta With a hint of blue Colour on there It was amazing And I think that's just a reminder Of that's what God wants to do In our lives You know We might feel like Our life is dead spiritually That we're going nowhere We might feel wilted Ugly But God wants us to flourish He wants us to blossom He wants to bring out the beauty In our lives God in his mercy Calls us to repent So that he can do that Repentance is turning our lives around

To make our lives centred Not on ourselves But on Christ If we do that There will be fruit that shows God in his mercy Gives us time to repent But our time Will run out As we saw in Luke 11 verse 20 A couple of weeks ago From the sermon About the guy Who built a big barn None of us know How long we've got So we mustn't delay Jesus calls us To repent To repent of what? Now remember Jesus was talking To good people Who kept the rules largely But repentance Is not so much For doing bad things As for Over trusting The good things Because Breaking the rules Is just a symptom of sin But the disease of sin Is acting like You're good enough It's It's the self-righteous notion That you can be Your own saviour We need to respond To failure With repentance But we need to respond To success With repentance We need to respond To everything With repentance Jesus is the proof That the under the tower Response to tragedy Is wrong And the over the tower Response to tragedy Is wrong In the over the tower Response we say God how can you Let that happen Nobody deserves that God says Everyone deserves that Apart from one man And that's why I sent him to you The under the tower Response says They must have Deserved that Well Jesus turns That upside down Because he was The best man Who ever lived He lived the most Wonderful and perfect Life He got the most Pain and suffering That anyone's ever had As a result And he says If you repent The ultimate tower Won't fall on you Because the ultimate Tower has fallen On him The tower Of eternal justice What we deserve For what's wrong With us It fell on him When he hung On the cross And he was crushed Crushed for our Iniquities For our selfishness For our self Righteousness He did that for you Are you ready To repent today We're going to have Some time To respond to that I'm just going to Invite Marianne Who's going to come And play the Piano quietly As we Spend some time In response To God Amen Amen Thank you.

[57:33] Lord, so often we've thought we don't deserve bad things to happen to us. And probably most of us at some point, we've looked at something that's happened to someone else and we've thought in our minds, he or she deserved that.

We're so sorry, Lord. We thank you for your message to us, although we admit it's not easy for us to hear. It's not easy for us to hear the truth that we deserve to be punished.

We deserve to be the victim of tragedy. And yet, Lord, we're so thankful to you. You give us the opportunity to respond to you, to be saved from that judgment which is due to us.

Lord, we thank you for what Jesus has done for us. We thank you that he was crushed instead of us. Lord, we want to turn our lives around.

Would you help us to turn around? To put our trust in you? To make you our saviour, not to try and be our own saviour.

[58:48] Please help us, Lord. Amen. Can I invite you to stand?

When I surveyed the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of Glory died
My richest kid I count but last
And for contempt On all my pride
Forbid it all That I should boast
Save in the death Of Christ
my God All loving things

That tell me most I sacrifice
Them to his blood See from his head
His hands His hands His feet
Sorrow and love Flamingled down
Did as such love And sorrow meet
All thoughts compose So rich
are crown Were the whole realm

Of nature mine That were an awful
Wearing love to small Love so amazing
Amazing So divine
Delance my soul While I'm alone Amen.

Do take a seat. Thank you so much, Andrew, for opening up God's Word so powerfully to us,
Preparing us to take bread and wine as brothers and sisters bought at such a high price.

[62:01] The whole building fell on Jesus. He bore our sin, our judgment,
our shame. He loves us that much.

So gone any pride. Let us be humble as we come to this meal. We invite everybody who believes in Jesus, has turned away from what they know to be wrong.

We invite you to this meal. You have a special gift, a little one of these today. So do make sure you have one. If not, there's some just here.

And in a moment, I'll invite you to unpack that. We've confessed our sin. We've recognized that we deserve judgment in our sermon, but that Jesus took it all for us.

So this meal is both looking backwards at the sacrificial death of Jesus on a cross, his body broken for us, his blood poured out, his life poured out, so that we might have life.

[63:12] This meal results in our hearts being changed or needing to be changed. And it also moves us to action in response and service.

Can I remind you some of the words of Jesus as he approached this cross? You see, it was a matter of the heart for him.

Then he said to them, My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death, as he was struggling in Gethsemane.

And yet he says to us, Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you, you will find rest for your souls.

And yet Jesus continued on that path to Jerusalem, despite what was overwhelming him. And in Hebrews 12 verse 2, it says this, It shows how much he wants to serve, how much he wants to love, how much he wants us to respond to him.

[64:29] For the joy set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame. Let's once again confess, repent before Almighty God.

There's a certain point in this, I will say, In your mercy, forgive us. And if you can reply, Lord, hear us, help us. So we'll just try that.

In your mercy, forgive us. Lord, hear us, help us. Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires are known, and from whom no secrets are hidden, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name. Through Christ our Lord. Amen. And then prayers of penitence. Jesus, we have lived by our own strength and not by the power of your resurrection.

In your mercy, forgive us. Lord, hear us and help us. We have lived by the light of our own eyes, as faithless and often not believing.

[65:58] In your mercy, forgive us. Lord, hear us, help us. Amen. In your mercy, forgive us.

Lord, hear us, help us. Amen. Amen. I, before the service, put a slice of bread on this particular plate.

And my slice of bread has turned into a roll. So I just want to say thank you. Thank you, Lord, for your provision. Clearly, a slice of bread is not right.

So let me remind you, dear brothers and sisters, that the Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when he was betrayed by a friend, took a loaf of bread and he broke it and said, this is my body given for you.

Receive it, all of you. And after they'd eaten, he lifted up a cup and said, this cup represents a whole new agreement, a covenant between heaven and earth, sealed by my blood.

[67:24] He drank that cup of God's judgment down to its very last, so that we can drink a cup of thanksgiving. The blood of Christ was shed for you.

Now, we come to little thimbles here. Can I invite you to just take off the first thin bit and you come to a wafer.

Just take that out. Get ready to eat that in a moment. And then you can, if you're able to do this, just pull back the second and you're ready to take the wine.

In a moment, we're going to eat the wafer. So, just a prayer before we do. Lord Jesus, these are glorious emblems and reminders of your unspeakable love, of your immense sacrifice.

We pray that we would receive them in such a way that our hearts will be changed and we will live in loving service towards you all of our days.

[68:36] Amen. The body of Christ was broken for you. Let us eat and be thankful. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. let's respond in prayer. That's just a moment of quietness where you can express your thanks to God for this unspeakable, wonderful mystery of the sacrifice of Christ.

Almighty God, we thank you for feeding us with the body and blood of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

[70:18] Your heart of love and kindness in Christ has led us to repentance, heartfelt repentance and faith. Christ's unspeakable act of service in giving his life on the cross propels us to serve in his name.

Please empower us by the Holy Spirit to love and to serve you all our days. Amen. God the Father, by whose love Christ was raised from the dead, open to you who believe the gates of everlasting life.

God the Son, who in bursting from the grave has won a glorious victory, give you, as you share in him, faith.

God the Holy Spirit, who filled the disciples with the life of the risen Lord, empower each one of you with Christ's peace.

Amen. I'm going to pray for our fellowship, for those we know and love, and particularly we are, as a church, going through a time of sadness because of the deaths of so many.

[71:44] I'm just going to remind you of some of those who have died, but also just really feel for Phil today because Alex's father died at four o'clock yesterday, Alex Brown's father.

So we particularly think of the Brown family. Let's pray, shall we? And I'll remind you of those that we're remembering. We remember Joan Glasgow, who has died, and lift Bill to you.

Thank you. You've helped him to prepare for the funeral, and we pray for Mike Birmingham, who will be leading that funeral on the 24th. We thank you, Lord, for the life of David Bowen, and today we want to pray for Alan and Anne and Kevin and Mark as they prepare for the funeral on Tuesday at 12.30 at the Crem, and then two o'clock here.

Meet with them, Lord. Comfort them in their loss. Give them faith. We pray for Margaret Cunliffe, who died earlier this week at the age of 101.

We pray for her daughter-in-law, Christina, and her nephews, Gene and Jeanette. We thank you for the life of Peter Ellens and continue to pray for Pauline, Vanessa, and Joe.

[73:20] Comfort them in their loss, dear Lord. And yes, so recently we do pray for Phil and Alex on the death of Alex's father just yesterday at four o'clock.

We pray for them, comfort them, pour out your love upon them, help them to support one another and care for the children and for Alex's mother and the whole family.

We do pray for Edward's father who passed away and for Edward and Catalina going to Romania to be there for the funeral.

And finally, we do lovingly commend to you Ron. We pray for joy in Ron. Ron's really not well in Wexham Park Hospital.

We pray, Lord, have mercy upon him. And we thank you that those who die in the faith have the joy and the knowledge of everlasting life in your eternal kingdom.

[74:40] So in our sadness, Lord, may there be bursts of light and joy knowing that we will see our loved ones again in your eternal kingdom.

Amen. Amen. Well, do comfort one another, love one another, particularly at this time. And let's complete or bring our gathered worship to a close as we sing a glorious song.

King of kings, majesty, God of heaven living in me, in you. Let's stand and worship God and then I'll bring a blessing and then we'll have some notices.

King of kings, majesty, God of heaven, King of kings, majesty, God of heaven, King of kings, majesty, God of heaven, living in me.

Gentle Savior, closest friend, Strong deliverer, beginning and end.

[76:11] All within me falls at your throne Your majesty, I cannot bow I lay my all before you now In royal robes I don't deserve I live to serve your majesty I live to serve your majesty King of earth and heaven Worship you Love eternal, faithful and true Who brought the nations Who brought the nations

Ransomed souls Brought the sinner Brought the sinner Near to your throne All within me Cries out in praise Your majesty Your majesty Your majesty I am the crown I lay my all before you now In royal robes I don't deserve I live to serve your majesty I live to serve your majesty Your majesty Your majesty I live to serve your majesty Your majesty Your majesty I can't bow I lay my all before you now I lay my all before you now

I lay my all before you now I lay my all before you now In royal robes I don't deserve I live to serve your majesty I lay my all before you now And as we stand We ask the Lord to come and use these hands That we have raised to you Come and use them Lord In your service May it just be the outflow of the love that you've poured in That we can pour out And may the blessing of almighty God Who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit Be with you each Always Amen Amen We do take a seat And if you would value prayer afterwards

Do ask somebody who you've seen leading up front Or someone with a praying hands badge And they'll be delighted to pray with you Just a few notices This week we have a church members meeting On Tuesday at 7.30 That's also a special church meeting So if you are a member of the church Do come on Tuesday Next Sunday is a bit of a bumper packet Because we've got our picnic on the rye We also have our outreach on the rye Which was delayed from yesterday Why didn't we do it yesterday?

I can't think why we didn't do it yesterday on the rye But it was a little bit wet A little bit wet So yeah, we're looking forward to that And also next week We are really excited at Anora And Samuel's dedication So really looking forward to that next week So do come and celebrate With two young families Dedicating themselves to bring up their children In the knowledge and love of God Isn't that wonderful to do that?

[80:25] Also you are all invited If you are free on Tuesday At 12.30 at the Crem Chilton Crem Or 2 o'clock here for Thanksgiving For the life of David Bowen So yeah, do remember the family on that day in particular God bless you all And I think we've got coffee upstairs Have we got ice lollies out the front?

I think we have Yes Possibly Yes Okay, God bless you Yes