

WHEN CALAMITY STRIKES

I. Luke 13:1-5

A. It's been a very tough week. Besides the vast devastation of Hurricane Dorian, we had a mass shooting in Odessa, Texas and the California dive-boat tragedy. Wednesday is the 18th anniversary of 9-11. These calamities are all horrible! But death is a horrible calamity that strikes daily. We lose 151,600 people a day around the world. 55.3 million a year. We've lost over a million people around the world since last Sunday. Isaiah 45:7 (ESV) is therefore cryptic when God speaks: *7 I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things.*

B. Jesus was once asked about a couple calamities that occurred in His day. People errantly supposed that calamities and suffering were deserved and proportionate to one's sin. Job, the most upright guy on the planet, suffered terribly. His friends figured he got what he deserved. But how many wicked people in Job's days seemed to skate punishment? So listen to what Jesus had to say: Luke 13:1-5 (ESV): *1 There were some present at that very time who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2 And He answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? 3 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. 4 Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? 5 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."*

1) The late R.C. Sproul shares this insight on the above passage: "Those who were killed by the Roman troops and those who died when the tower fell may have been upstanding citizens. But in the vertical dimension, in their relationship to God, none of them was innocent, and the same is true for us. Jesus was saying, "Instead of asking Me why a good God allowed this catastrophe, you should be asking why your own blood wasn't spilled." Jesus was reminding His hearers that there is ultimately no such thing as an innocent person (except Him). Thus, we should not be amazed by the justice of God but by the grace of God. We should be asking why towers do not fall on us each and every day."

2) Jesus implies that these calamities should make us all take personal inventory of our hearts and where we stand with God! All tragedies should serve as warning signs for that coming great & terrible *Day*. Second death for many will be the outcome of that *Day* but the outcomes for that *Day* are being determined in this brief life.

C. Lamentations is a little book written by Jeremiah after the fall of Jerusalem. The city of God as well as God's temple lay in ruins, reduced to rubble by Nebuchadnezzar. God's people were taken into Babylonian captivity. The dire warnings from multiple prophets had long been ignored. Judah also had the vivid example of God's judgment on the northern tribes exiled into Assyria. Wake-up calls are often unheeded. Listen to Jeremiah in Lamentations 3:37-42 (NLT): *37 Who can command things to happen without the Lord's permission? 38 Does not the Most High send both calamity and good? 39 Then why should we, mere humans, complain when we are punished for our sins? 40 Instead, let us test and examine our ways. Let us turn back to the LORD. 41 Let us lift our hearts and hands to God in heaven and say, 42 "We have sinned and rebelled, and You have not forgiven us..."*

D. Hebrews 9:27 warns: "...it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment..." But calamity should produce something more than fear. The repentance it should prompt isn't just a turning away from sin and evil practices. It should turn us to God. It should propel us into His loving arms. It should cause us to hope in Him. And it should cause us to carry the news of hope, the Message of Jesus, to any and all who will listen. "Each day is a gift." But not just another day to suck in air and live aimlessly; rather a day to share hope with the hopeless, the Good News among all the bad news running rampant in our world.

E. Calamities should serve as wake-up calls for the perishing as well as clarion calls for the redeemed. They should humble us to turn. They should humble us to pray. And humble us to act. If calamities are merely prophetic samplings of what God has in store for the lost, shouldn't the least amount of love within us compel us to action?!

F. During heavy rains last week in Arkansas, a woman delivering newspapers accidentally drove into floodwaters and became stranded. She frantically called 911 for help. Despite telling the dispatcher she didn't see the water, the dispatcher scolded her harshly: "*This will teach you next time don't drive in the water!*" When help finally arrived 58 minutes later, the desperate woman who'd called 911 had drowned. I pray we as Christians do less scolding and more simple, loving and respectful sharing about *WHO* our Jesus is and how He rescues those bound for the ultimate calamity.

G. Mark 4:35-41 (ESV) is about the Calmer of the Storm: 35 On that day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." (Of the Sea of Galilee) 36 And leaving the crowd, they took Him with them in the boat, just as He was. And other boats were with Him. 37 And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. (Fierce storms are still common on the Sea of Galilee.) 38 But He was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" (Calamity!) 39 And He awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. 40 He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" (You'll notice Jesus first performed the rescue before scolding them.) 41 And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"

H. Their response was twofold: one of great relief that Jesus had intervened; and one of reverent fear, realizing *WHO* was in the boat with them. Not long after this event, Jesus would calm the storm of sin & death and God's fierce wrath against us. But on that dark and stormy day on the cross, Jesus did not rebuke the wrath, He absorbed it! The calamity fell upon Jesus! A.W. Tozer said it so well: "*The cross is the lightning rod of grace that short-circuits God's wrath to Christ so that only the light of His love remains for believers.*" So who do you know still under that wrath? Who do you know still needing rescued from the calamity of all calamities? 151,600 people are going to die before today is over; who do you know and love that dare not yet be in that number?! What might God have you do? To whom might He have you go?

*** Close with Prayer...**

[Scriptures, Videos, & Bonus Stuff](#)

Isaiah 45:7 (ESV)

7 I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things.

Luke 13:1-5 (ESV)

1 There were some present at that very time who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. **2** And He answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? **3** No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. **4** Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? **5** No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

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Quote by R.C. Sproul

"Those who were killed by the Roman troops and those who died when the tower fell may have been upstanding citizens. But in the vertical dimension, in their relationship to God, none of them was innocent, and the same is true for us. Jesus was saying, "Instead of asking Me why a good God allowed this catastrophe, you should be asking why your own blood wasn't spilled." Jesus was reminding His hearers that there is ultimately no such thing as an innocent person (except Him). Thus, we should not be amazed by the justice of God but by the grace of God. We should be asking why towers do not fall on us each and every day."

- R.C. Sproul, Excerpt from "When the Towers Fall" Tabletalk Magazine, August 1, 2012.

Quote by A.W. Tozer

"The cross is the lightning rod of grace that short-circuits God's wrath to Christ so that only the light of His love remains for believers."

Bonus Stuff

"True and Better" - Dan Stevers (A Powerful Animation about the Bible and Christ)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGFtfqgBQkM>

When Towers Fall - R.C. Sproul (The Hard Sayings of Jesus) - Ligonier Ministries
https://www.ligonier.org/learn/series/hard_sayings_of_jesus/when-towers-fall/

Who Causes Your Suffering? Article by Christopher Ash - Desiring God
<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/who-causes-your-suffering>

Five Purposes for Suffering - A Devotional by John Piper (Audio & Script)
<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/five-purposes-for-suffering>

Amos 3:6 (ESV)

6 Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid? Does disaster come to a city, unless the LORD has done it?

Lamentations 2:20-22 (ESV)

20 Look, O LORD, and see! With whom have You dealt thus? Should women eat the fruit of their womb, the children of their tender care? Should priest and prophet be killed in the sanctuary of the LORD? **21** In the dust of the streets lie the young and the old; my young women and my young men have fallen by the sword; You have killed them in the day of Your anger, slaughtering without pity. **22** You summoned as if to a festival day my terrors on every side, and on the day of the anger of the LORD no one escaped or survived; those whom I held and raised my enemy destroyed.

Psalm 107:23-32 (ESV)

23 Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters; **24** they saw the deeds of the LORD, His wondrous works in the deep. **25** For He commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. **26** They mounted up to heaven; they went down to the depths; their courage melted away in their evil plight; **27** they reeled and staggered like drunken men and were at their wits' end. **28** Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and He delivered them from their distress. **29** He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. **30** Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and He brought them to their desired haven. **31** Let them thank the LORD for His steadfast love, for His wondrous works to the children of man! **32** Let them extol Him in the congregation of the people, and praise Him in the assembly of the elders.

When Towers Fall

by R.C. Sproul

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/when-towers-fall/>

When a catastrophe happens in our world, it is virtually certain that a question will come up: “Where was God?” People always seem to question how a good God could allow a terrible thing to happen.

The same question came up in Jesus’ time, as we see from an incident recorded in Luke’s Gospel: *“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 eighteen on whom the tower in 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.”* (Luke 13:1–5)

Some people asked Jesus a question about an atrocity that had occurred at the hands of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea. It seems that some people who were in the midst of worship were massacred by Pilate’s soldiers. The people who came to Jesus were troubled about this and asked Him how God could have allowed it to happen to His chosen people.

Jesus answered their question with a question: “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way?” This response shows us that those who brought the original question to Jesus were assuming that all the suffering that people endure in this world is proportionately related to their degree of sinfulness, an idea that remains pervasive today.

Of course, suffering and death came into this world in the first place because of sin. So, Jesus’ questioners were correct in assuming that there is a connection between moral evil and physical suffering. But Jesus took that opportunity to remind them that we cannot leap to the conclusion that all people suffer in direct proportion to their degree of sin.

The Bible makes this point very clearly. It shows that the wicked sometimes prosper and the righteous sometimes suffer deeply. The book of Job especially belies the idea of a proportionate relationship between sin and suffering by showing that even though Job was the most upright man in the world, he was visited with untold misery, and then had to endure the questioning of his “friends,” who assumed he must have fallen into terrible sin.

Thus, when Jesus asked His disciples: *“Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way?”* the answer was obvious. No, they were not worse sinners than anyone else. Jesus wanted to get the idea of a proportionate connection between sin and suffering out of the disciples’ minds

lest they think that they were better people in God's sight because they had not suffered and died. So, He warned them: "unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

To drive His point home, Jesus mentioned a similar incident: *"Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem?" Again, the answer was clearly no. These victims were no worse and no better than any other Jews. So, once more He warned them: "unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."*

Those who were killed by the Roman troops and those who died when the tower fell may have been upstanding citizens. But in the vertical dimension, in their relationship to God, none of them was innocent, and the same is true for us. Jesus was saying, "Instead of asking Me why a good God allowed this catastrophe, you should be asking why your own blood wasn't spilled." Jesus was reminding His hearers that there is ultimately no such thing as an innocent person (except Him). Thus, we should not be amazed by the justice of God but by the grace of God. We should be asking why towers do not fall on us each and every day.

When anything painful, sorrowful, or grievous befalls us, it is never an act of injustice on God's part, because God does not owe us freedom from tragedies. He does not owe us protection from falling towers. We are debtors to God and cannot repay. Our only hope to avoid perishing at the hands of God is repentance.

Jesus was not being insensitive or harsh with His disciples. He simply had to jolt them out of a false way of thinking. We would do well to receive His jolt with gladness, for it helps us see things from the eternal perspective. We can deal with catastrophes in this world only by understanding that behind them stands the eternal purpose of God and by realizing that He has delivered us from the ultimate catastrophe—the collapse of the tower of His final judgment on our heads.

- R.C. Sproul, Ligonier Ministries, *Tabletalk Magazine*, August 1, 2012.

The Old Cross and the New

by A.W. Tozer

ALL UNANNOUNCED AND MOSTLY UNDETECTED there has come in modern times a new cross into popular evangelical circles. It is like the old cross, but different: the likenesses are superficial; the differences, fundamental.

From this new cross has sprung a new philosophy of the Christian life, and from that new philosophy has come a new evangelical technique—a new type of meeting and a new kind of preaching. This new evangelism employs the same language as the old, but its content is not the same and its emphasis not as before.

The old cross would have no truck with the world. For Adam's proud flesh it meant the end of the journey. It carried into effect the sentence imposed by the law of Sinai. The

new cross is not opposed to the human race; rather, it is a friendly pal and, if understood aright, it is the source of oceans of good clean fun and innocent enjoyment. It lets Adam live without interference. His life motivation is unchanged; he still lives for his own pleasure, only now he takes delight in singing choruses and watching religious movies instead of singing bawdy songs and drinking hard liquor. The accent is still on enjoyment, though the fun is now on a higher plane morally if not intellectually.

The new cross encourages a new and entirely different evangelistic approach. The evangelist does not demand abnegation of the old life before a new life can be received. He preaches not contrasts but similarities. He seeks to key into public interest by showing that Christianity makes no unpleasant demands; rather, it offers the same thing the world does, only on a higher level. Whatever the sin-mad world happens to be clamoring after at the moment is cleverly shown to be the very thing the gospel offers, only the religious product is better.

The new cross does not slay the sinner, it redirects him. It gears him into a cleaner and jollier way of living and saves his self-respect. To the self-assertive it says, "Come and assert yourself for Christ." To the egotist it says, "Come and do your boasting in the Lord." To the thrill seeker it says, "Come and enjoy the thrill of Christian fellowship." The Christian message is slanted in the direction of the current vogue in order to make it acceptable to the public.

The philosophy back of this kind of thing may be sincere but its sincerity does not save it from being false. It is false because it is blind. It misses completely the whole meaning of the cross.

The old cross is a symbol of death. It stands for the abrupt, violent end of a human being. The man in Roman times who took up his cross and started down the road had already said good-by to his friends. He was not coming back. He was going out to have it ended. The cross made no compromise, modified nothing, spared nothing; it slew all of the man, completely and for good. It did not try to keep on good terms with its victim. It struck cruel and hard, and when it had finished its work, the man was no more.

The race of Adam is under death sentence. There is no commutation and no escape. God cannot approve any of the fruits of sin, however innocent they may appear or beautiful to the eyes of men. God salvages the individual by liquidating him and then raising him again to newness of life.

That evangelism which draws friendly parallels between the ways of God and the ways of men is false to the Bible and cruel to the souls of its hearers. The faith of Christ does not parallel the world, it intersects it. In coming to Christ we do not bring our old life up onto a higher plane; we leave it at the cross. The corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die.

We who preach the gospel must not think of ourselves as public relations agents sent to establish good will between Christ and the world. We must not imagine ourselves

commissioned to make Christ acceptable to big business, the press, the world of sports or modern education. We are not diplomats but prophets, and our message is not a compromise but an ultimatum.

God offers life, but not an improved old life. The life He offers is life out of death. It stands always on the far side of the cross. Whoever would possess it must pass under the rod. He must repudiate himself and concur in God's just sentence against him.

What does this mean to the individual, the condemned man who would find life in Christ Jesus? How can this theology be translated into life? Simply, he must repent and believe. He must forsake his sins and then go on to forsake himself. Let him cover nothing, defend nothing, excuse nothing. Let him not seek to make terms with God, but let him bow his head before the stroke of God's stern displeasure and acknowledge himself worthy to die.

Having done this let him gaze with simple trust upon the risen Saviour, and from Him will come life and rebirth and cleansing and power. The cross that ended the earthly life of Jesus now puts an end to the sinner; and the power that raised Christ from the dead now raises him to a new life along with Christ.

To any who may object to this or count it merely a narrow and private view of truth, let me say God has set His hallmark of approval upon this message from Paul's day to the present. Whether stated in these exact words or not, this has been the content of all preaching that has brought life and power to the world through the centuries. The mystics, the reformers, the revivalists have put their emphasis here, and signs and wonders and mighty operations of the Holy Ghost gave witness to God's approval.

Dare we, the heirs of such a legacy of power, tamper with the truth? Dare we with our stubby pencils erase the lines of the blueprint or alter the pattern shown us in the Mount? May God forbid. Let us preach the old cross and we will know the old power.

- A. W. Tozer, Man, *The Dwelling Place of God*, 1966.