

The title this morning's sermon is, "*Are We Suffering for Sin?*"

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's gospel verse by verse and we find ourselves at **Luke 13**. We will look at verses one through five.

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Many times I have responded to people's questions by asking them a question. Someone asked me why I do that so frequently and I said, "Why shouldn't I?"

If you respond to people's questions by asking a question you shouldn't feel too bad about it, because Jesus seemed to do the same thing. In these few verses he responds to the news about two calamities, not by explaining what happened, but by asking two questions.

Look with me at verse one...

**Luke 13:1 There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.**

Instead of simply saying Pilate murdered some Galileans who were offering sacrifices in Jerusalem, he uses this vivid way of describing the violence.

This incident is not recorded anywhere else in Scripture, but it is not out of character for Pilate. Josephus, the great Jewish historian, records several incidents in which Pilate murdered Jews.

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These people weren't just talking to Jesus. They were giving him an important news update for two reasons:

1. First, he and most of his followers are from Galilee, so people would assume he'd be interested in this news.
2. Second, he's perceived as a leader and people would want to know his thoughts. It reminds me of press conferences with political leaders who are being asked their take on some controversial situation.

It's also possible that they might have been warning Jesus because he was heading to Jerusalem where the violence took place.

Whatever the case, receiving this news put Jesus in a difficult situation because:

- If he ignored what Pilate did the Jews would accuse him of being pro-Roman and disloyal to the Jews.
- If he defended the Jews and criticized Pilate he would be in trouble with the Romans and the Jewish leaders would have a good excuse to have him arrested.

So look how he responded...

**Luke 13:2 And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way?"**

Now if you weren't familiar with this account this isn't how you would expect Jesus to respond. Imagine you were just told about a number of people being violently murdered.

Wouldn't you say something like:

- *This is terrible.*
- *I'm so sorry to hear this.*
- *What a horrible tragedy.*
- *I can't believe this happened.*

Instead, Jesus turned it around on the people and asked them if they thought the Galileans who were murdered were murdered because they were worse sinners than everyone else.

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There's plenty of application in these verses, but I would like to read through them first because the second account is so much like the first.

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Look at the next thing he says to them...

**Luke 13:3 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.**

With Jesus being a prominent spiritual leader who lived a perfectly righteous life and taught so much about righteousness, when he was told about Pilate's evil actions wouldn't you expect him to condemn Pilate?

Instead, he says something that seems almost bizarre and insensitive:

- Instead of talking about Pilate's need to repent, he talked about the people's need to repent.
- Instead of talking about Pilate's sins, he talked about the people's sins.

Look at verse four to see him make the same point again...

**Luke 13:4 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."**

Apparently, there was a tower that fell and tragically killed 18 people. It doesn't seem like the people told Jesus about this situation. Instead, it seems like he brought it up to further emphasize his point.

In doing so he introduced two situations that complement each other very well:

- In the first situation people died while doing something religious. In the second situation people died from something that seems fairly natural: a tower collapsing.
- The first situation could be blamed on a wicked man. But when a disaster like the second situation takes place, who do people typically blame? They blame God. They say things like:
  - *Why did God allow this to happen?*
  - *How could a good God let these people die like this?*

In using both of these situations Jesus seems to encourage his readers to look at death from pretty broad angles.

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Again, Jesus answered his own question and told everyone that unless they repented they would also perish.

In saying this he elevated these two dramatic, well-known, physical tragedies to a higher spiritual level.

And because Jesus wanted his listeners to look at these events spiritually, we should do the same and consider what we can learn from what he's saying...and this brings us to lesson one...

**Lesson one: suffering isn't always the result of sin.**

When I read this account about the tower falling and killing these people, I think of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Many people claimed God was judging America. I wasn't a Christian at the time, say nothing about a pastor. I hope if I had been a pastor I wouldn't have said God was judging America, because maybe he wasn't judging America any more than he was judging Galilee when the tower of Siloam fell.

If we think about the first account, we would say that a wicked man, Pilate, was acting wickedly, and similarly when the Twin Towers fell we could say that some men wicked men were acting wickedly.

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If we say that God was judging America on September 11<sup>th</sup>, it leaves us with some troubling questions...I would say they are the same troubling questions Jesus was trying to get his listeners to consider:

- Do we think the people who died in the Twin Towers were worse sinners than all the other people, because they suffered in this way?
- If God was trying to punish America, then why were the people in the Twin Towers the ones who died versus all the other people who lived?

The point is, suffering isn't always the result of sin.

But notice the lesson says suffering isn't ALWAYS the result of sin. I worded it this way because sometimes suffering is the result of sin. We can suffer because of what we have done. Consider these verses:

- **1 Peter 2:20 What credit is it if, WHEN YOU SIN AND ARE BEATEN FOR IT** (in other words we suffer for sinning), **you endure?**
- **1 Peter 3:17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, THAN FOR DOING EVIL** (again suffering for sinning).
- **1 Peter 4:15 If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler.** If we are going to suffer, hopefully it's not because of our sin.

The first half of **Hebrews 12** is about God's discipline, or we could say suffering we experience because of our sin...

**Hebrews 12:5 Have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. 6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."**

Here we've got suffering because of discipline.

So clearly there is suffering that takes place because of sin.

But with that said there's plenty of suffering that has nothing to do with our sin. Human tragedies are not always divine punishments.

Briefly turn one book to the right to **John 9**...

**John 9:1 As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"**

This captured the thinking of the day that Jesus was trying to correct here and in **Luke 13**: if there is suffering – in this case this man's blindness – there must've been sin involved. Either he sinned or his parents, but someone sinned.

Look at Jesus's response...

**John 9:3 Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.**

I don't want to sidetrack the sermon with this point because it's not central to the verses we are looking at, but this is one of the reasons suffering takes place: to reveal **the works of God**, or so God can be glorified.

This is important to understand, because I think it is bound up in us to believe that good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people:

- Good things happen to people and we wonder, "What did they do to deserve that?"
- Bad things happen to people and we wonder, "What did they do to deserve that?"

But Jesus corrected this thinking with these verses. Two times he asked the same question:

- 2 **“Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? 3 No.**
- 4 **[Do you think that] those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them...were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? 5 No.**

Bad things happened to these people and they weren't worse than anyone else.

Job's friends made the mistake that Jesus is trying to prevent us from making. They said Job was suffering terribly because he sinned terribly, but when God talked to the devil about Job, twice he said...

**Job 1:8 “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?”**

When we consider that the man most associated with suffering was also one of the most righteous men to ever live we have to acknowledge that suffering is not always a result of sin.

**Hebrews 11** contains the hall of faith. Of all the great people in Scripture this chapter is a record of those God chose to highlight. He discusses many of them and then listen to what he says at the end...

**Hebrews 11:35 Some were tortured...36 Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated.**

These great heroes of the faith suffered terribly despite their godliness...or often because of their godliness.

Second only to Christ, the apostle Paul might be the greatest man in the New Testament and listen to what he experienced...

**2 Corinthians 11:23 Far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. 24 Five times I received...forty lashes less one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; 27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.**

Seems like all Paul's righteousness brought much suffering into his life.

You get the point that people can suffer terribly and be very godly and have done nothing to cause the suffering. As Jesus said, **“[They are not] worse sinners than all the others.”**

And Job, the heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11, and Paul are far from the only examples. Most of the greatest men in Scripture suffered terribly: the prophets, the other apostles, and Christ himself.

If we look at church history, some of the most wonderful Christians, whether they were missionaries or church leaders, suffered terribly. Yet they did nothing to cause the suffering they experienced.

Personally speaking, some of the godliest people I have known, people I have greatly respected and desire to be more like, have suffered terribly. They have gone through things and I haven't had the slightest idea why it was allowed to happen to them. I could just tell that they didn't do anything to cause it. In many instances they were suffering because of other people's sins...sort of like the people who suffered because of Pilate's sins.

Let me conclude this lesson by saying this...

The popular tendency in the event of a tragedy is to think the suffering people did something to deserve it. If they didn't sin to cause the suffering this thinking must be resisted as strongly as we resist believing the superstitious:

- Good things happened to these people because they're lucky
- Bad things happened to these people because they're unlucky

As Christians we reconcile all tragedies and suffering with God's sovereignty over what has taken place.

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The next lesson...

### Lesson two: all suffering is the result of sin.

All suffering is not the result of sin, but it is equally true to say that all suffering is the result of sin...if the sin we are talking about is the sin that occurred at the fall.

Take your minds back to creation...

For six days, God created land, sun, moon, stars, sea creatures, birds, and animals. At the end of each day God said that it was good: **Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25.**

Then **Genesis 1:31** says...

**God saw everything that he had made, and behold, IT WAS VERY GOOD.**

When everything is very good we know suffering must not be involved. But then Adam and Eve sinned and all of creation was corrupted.

After the Fall God spoke to Adam and Eve about the suffering they would experience as they lived in a sinful, fallen world.

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Adding to the corruption and suffering is the fact that every human being who has ever lived has worsened the situation through their sin, each of us included.

Sin has ripple effects. It always affects more than just the sinner. Think of everyone Pilate's sin affected. There's obviously the Galileans he murdered, but how many family members and friends did they have who suffered as well?

Becoming a Christian does not insulate us from the ugliness and suffering in the world, nor does it protect us from the natural, temporary consequences of sin.

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Lesson three...

### Lesson three: we don't always get to find out why we are suffering.

We all have to be careful of thinking we understand why people are going through difficult experiences.

Bad things happen, we want to know why, and if there was one person in all of human history we would talk to for answers it would be Jesus. He's really the only one who would know.

But based on these verses he probably wouldn't give us the answers we are looking for. He discussed these tragic events, but gave no indication why they took place.

So let me say like this...

It is worth noticing that Jesus, God in the flesh, with all the knowledge, understanding, and wisdom he had only recounted that these tragedies occurred. There is no hint of explanation in anything he said. In that sense these verses are very much like the book of Job.

One of the interesting, and I would even say ironic aspects to the book of Job is that although it is the book most commonly associated with suffering, it does very little to EXPLAIN SUFFERING. Job spent the book wanting to know why he was suffering so terribly, but he never found out.

Was it because God didn't answer him?

Not at all!

God had what might be the longest conversation recorded in Scripture between him and a person ...yet he gave Job no indication why he was suffering.

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The longer I'm in ministry, and the more suffering I experience personally and witness in the lives of others, the more convinced I become we often don't get to find out why:

- I have had to watch godly people suffer, sometimes even terribly.
- I have watched wicked people doing wicked things - sometimes even to righteous people and to the church - and seem to get away with it.

And I don't understand, which means I'm forced to walk by faith. We don't always get to find out why suffering occurs, so we must simply trust God.

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Lesson four...

**Lesson four: we must all repent or perish eternally.**

If Jesus wasn't explaining why these two tragedies occurred, then what was his point?

His point is that asking WHY these things happened is the wrong question. The right question is...

*"Have I repented?"*

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Two times Jesus pointed out that those who died were not worse sinners than everyone else, but let me be clear about what he was NOT saying...

He was not saying that those who perished were innocent. He's saying that they weren't worse, or guiltier, than everyone else...but they were still plenty guilty...just like all of us.

**Romans 3:23 all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.**

God doesn't single anyone out in terms of falling further or shorter than others. Similarly, Jesus doesn't single anyone out in terms of needing to repent more or less than anyone else. Instead, we must all repent or perish.

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Earlier I said that Jesus took what happened physically and encouraged his listeners to apply it spiritually.

If you write in your Bible, you can circle the word perish at the end of verse three and at the end of verse five and draw a line and write, "eternally."

Jesus isn't talking about perishing physically. He knew all of them were going to perish physically, and even if they repented, they couldn't stop that.

Instead, Jesus is saying:

- *“These people perished physically, but if you don't repent you are going to perish in an infinitely worse way. You are going to perish eternally.”*
- *“You think what happened to these people is bad, but you need to think about what could happen to you if you don't repent, because it is even worse.”*

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Here's what else I think Jesus is doing in these verses...

He uses their argument to bring them to two logical conclusions:

- He's looking at people who believe certain people perished because of their sinfulness, so it's as though he says, *“If these people perished because they are sinners, then all of you are going to perish as well because you are also sinners.”*
- He's looking at people who believe God punished these people because of their sin, so it's as though Jesus says, *“If God does punish people because of their sin, then you better repent because of your sin.”*

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John Milton was an English poet most well-known for writing the epic poem, *Paradise Lost*. This past week I read that when he was old and blind Charles II, the son of the king that the Puritans had beheaded, visited John Milton and said, “Your blindness is a judgment from God for the part that you took in beheading my father.”

John Milton replied, “If I lost my site because of God's judgment, what can you say about your father who lost his head?”

Jesus's point to his listeners is pretty close to John Milton's point: “If God does punish sinners like you think he does then you have even more reason to repent because of your own sin.”

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Like most people, I don't like funerals. I don't like attending them and I don't like officiating them.

But one of the wonderful things about out them is they cause people to:

- Think about the end of their lives
- Evaluate where they are at spiritually
- Consider whether they are ready to stand before God

And that's what Jesus did with these two accounts: people died and he wanted the people living to think about their deaths and meeting God.

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I read another story this past week about a man who was entertaining moving to a city. He wanted to see whether the city was violent, so he contacted a friend who lived there and said, “What is the death rate in the city?”

The friend said, “One death per person. Also, I should let you know that people are dying who have never died before.”

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Last week I told you that when pastors are attempting to evangelize they will say something about people's lives possibly coming to an unexpected end in the very near future...such as when they are driving home from the event. I told you that I think what is more terrifying is saying no to Christ today and then having a harder heart toward him in the future.

But then we reach these verses and Jesus is making the same point as pastors evangelizing people: our lives can come to an end unexpectedly.

Why should we think we have lots of time when they didn't have lots of time?

- Did they wake up on their last day thinking it was their last day?
- More importantly were they ready?

Probably not. That's why there is urgency.

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For a moment let me get you to think about appropriate responses to death...

When Paul talked to the Thessalonians about the people who died he said...

**1 Thessalonians 4:13 [do not] not grieve as others do who have no hope.**

So grief is an appropriate response to death. We just have to make sure we grieve, but with hope.

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After my dad passed away, I preached a sermon titled, "Can Christians Get Angry at Sin Death?"

I talked about Jesus being angry following Lazarus's death, and how anger is an appropriate response to death.

But it seems to me in these verses Jesus tells us the MOST appropriate response to death: repentance.

Because death should cause us to consider our own mortality and what will happen to us when we die.

That's what Jesus wanted his listeners to take away from these accounts and it's what I hope we take away.

Let's pray.