

Sermon: *When Bad Things Happen*
Text: *Luke 13:1 – 9*
Date: *March 7, 2010 AM*
Place: *Jesup First UMC*

It is graduation weekend and two cars meet on a dark country road. In one car is a group of teenagers, coming home from a graduation party. They are happy and laughing; they have the world in the palm of their hands and their whole lives before them. In the other car is an alcoholic, coming home from Jimmy's Bar. And as they drove along, suddenly one of the cars crossed the center line, and in the head on collision that followed, the town drunk was hospitalized and four teenagers lost their lives. Now, who sinned? Were these teenagers so much more sinful than their classmates that they had to die?

On Thursday morning, a 6.4 magnitude earthquake hit the island nation of Taiwan. Last week, an 8.8 magnitude earthquake struck Chile. Last month, it was Haiti. Thousands have lost their lives; thousands have been injured. Now, who sinned? Were these poor folks so much more sinful than the rest of us that they had to suffer and die?

I guess it's only natural for us to ask that question, isn't it? We all want to know "why." There's something about each of us – even the least scientific of us – that wants to find answers to life's most difficult issues. We want to know why people suffer. We want to know why good things happen to bad people and bad things happen to good people. We want to know where God is when life is falling apart. We want to know that there is some answer, some reason, for even the most difficult experiences of life.

In our text this morning, some people who had gathered around Jesus began telling Him about a tragedy in Jerusalem. It seems that while some Galileans were worshipping in the Temple, Pilate sent a death squad in and had them killed right there in the Temple itself. In fact, the report was that the blood of the sacrifices intermingled with the blood of the Galileans. And Jesus was intuitive enough to know why they were telling the story. You see, what they really wanted to know was: why? They wanted to make sense out of it all. And Jesus responded by pointing out another tragic story in their recent past, and then, He asks: *“Do you think these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans ... and do you think those people that the tower fell on were worse sinners than everybody else living in Jerusalem? No! But if you don’t repent, you will perish just like they did.”*

Now, what is Jesus driving at? Well, there are some things here that just might help us find the answers we’ve been looking for.

First, we can’t always connect human suffering to human sinfulness! Now, there are some times when we can. When someone is killed by a drunk driver, we can see clearly the consequences of abusing alcohol, but when someone dies in an earthquake nobody sinned! Jesus said: *“No, those Galileans weren’t being punished for their sins; and no, those people in Jerusalem weren’t being punished for their sins.”* You can’t always connect human suffering with human sinfulness.

Craig was a member of one of the church's I served. He was a football coach and his wife was a teacher. And after trying and trying, they became pregnant. Well, during the pregnancy, there was a disagreement between Craig and another member of the church and Craig stopped coming. Well, the baby was born and they brought her to be baptized, but they really didn't come back to church. And then, one afternoon about six months later, the baby sitter went to wake the baby for her afternoon feeding and she was dead. I got the call and I followed the ambulance over to Sandersville and when I walked into the room Coach Craig fell into my arms – ALL 350 POUNDS OF HIM. And in the moments that followed he said: *"I just feel like I'm being punished for dropping out of church."* And I said, *"Oh Craig, at times like this, I'm not confident of very much, but I can tell you one thing for sure: God loves you and He's not punishing you."*

You can't always connect human suffering to human sinfulness.

Second, we live in a broken and fallen world! The Bible is very clear: God created everything out of nothing. John 1 says: **"All things came into being through Him and without Him not one thing came into being."** Now, it doesn't tell us how God created; that's for the scientists to figure out, but God created and **"It was very good."** But we look around and surely ain't good anymore. Something tragic has happened. Humanity sinned and disobeyed God and they were driven out of the Garden into a place filled with thorns and thistles. The Paradise of Eden was

replaced by a place where people suffer, and pain and tragedy happen.

We live in a broken and fallen world.

Now, what is our response? How do we respond to the suffering and pain that we experience? Well, the New Testament basically gives us two responses. *One way we respond is through holiness of heart.* Jesus said: “Unless you repent, you will perish just like they did.” You see, every tragedy can either draw us closer to God or driver us further away. Every tragedy, every heartbreaking experience, gives us an opportunity to look inside at our thoughts, words, and deeds and see how they line up with the Word of God. That’s why some preachers in the United States called for a National Day of Repentance after September 11 – not because sin causes terrorists to fly planes into buildings, but – because suffering gives us a chance to come face to face with who we really are – individually and as a nation. Repentance!

A second way we respond is through holiness of life, through acts of loving kindness. When tragedy strikes the world gets to see the church in action, caring for the victims, feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, taking in the homeless, loving the unlovely, and visiting the sick. In fact, we are the only “Jesus” some folks will ever see. We are His hands and feet. Loving kindness.

I walked into Jim’s hospital room. Earlier that day, I was with his family during his surgery. And the doctor came out and told us that the cancer had spread too far and it was inoperable. And Jim looked

up at me and said: “Preacher, I just can’t believe this! Why is this happening?” Now, I’m not a counselor, but I’ve been around long enough to know that sometimes this question is an expression of anger. And so, I tried to comfort him and keep him calm, but he asked me again: “Preacher, why is this happening?” So, after about the third time, I realized he really wanted an answer. And I reached over and took Jim’s hand and I said: “*Jim, I don’t know why this is happening, but I do know God is with us.*” And suddenly, tears filled his eyes as the very presence of God filled that hospital room and Jim discovered anew “*Yea, though I walk through the deepest, darkest valley I will fear no evil for you are with me. Your rod and your staff bring me comfort.*”

Oh thanks be to God for His immeasurable grace.