

WHERE IS GOD IN TRAGEDY?

A question many ask when tragedies occur is “Where is God in this?”

Many are living in a time of great fear because of the coronavirus and the recent murderous rampage in the United States. Surely things won't get so out of hand in our country? But of course illnesses are nothing new and neither is the evil of murder. The history of the human race is filled with plagues and tragedy, and violence and murder both from organised governmental regimes and individual perpetrators.

Our natural reaction is to question God when these things happen. That's what our sinful flesh always does. “How could You let this happen?” “Why?” Part of it is seeking answers and part of it is not understanding why there is evil in the world. We may even think we know better than God and that we don't deserve anything bad to happen to us.

The fact of the matter is that God created the world perfect, but man has ruined it with his sin. We are all sinful. We have all fallen short of the glory of God. We all deserve tragedies and disasters piled upon us. Really, our question should be, “Why am I so blessed and protected from tragedies and disasters? Why have I not had to face more tragedies in my life?”

The thing is that we cannot get very far with this particular line of questioning. We know that all plagues and tragedy are the result of sin, both our own sin and the sin of others. We also know that God works good even from tragedy, but we cannot know why God allows any particular tragedy because He doesn't tell us. We cannot answer what particular good He is working in any particular instance because He doesn't tell us. “*For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His adviser?*” (Romans 11:34).

So, we cannot answer in particular, but we can answer in general. In general, tragedies are calls for repentance.

As recorded in Luke chapter 13, some people told Jesus about Galileans who had been massacred by Pilate while they were offering their sacrifices. Jesus responded by saying, “*Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? I tell you, no. However, unless you repent, you too will all perish in a similar way. Or do you think that those eighteen who were killed when the tower at Siloam fell on them were guiltier than all the other people who were living in Jerusalem were? I tell you, no; but, unless you repent, you will all perish in the same way.*”

In other words, we cannot say that because tragedy falls upon someone they deserved it more than anyone else. You cannot say that based on what happened to someone they must be worse sinners. Jesus simply says, “No.” That is not how we are to look at the tragedies around us. We are not to look around us and think about the sins of others. The fact that someone dies in a tragedy is no indication that they were punished by God for their sins. The righteous suffer with the unrighteous.

Tragedy around us are not a call to repentance for those who died. They are a call to repentance for us. Unless we repent, we will all likewise perish.

To repent means to be sorry for your sins and to trust that your sins are forgiven on account of Jesus' death for you. It is a turning away from sin to Jesus, our Saviour from sin.

Again, we cannot answer in particular, but we can answer in general. In general, tragedies are used by God to work to strengthen our faith and trust in Him. In tragedy we see how fleeting this life is and we thus long for heaven. We see how unreliable and untrustworthy everything on this earth is. We see the face of evil in what takes place.

In tragedy, God also reminds us that there is a remedy for death. There is a remedy for sin. There is a remedy for evil.

This is where we move away from what God doesn't tell us to what God does tell us. He tells us that He loves us so much that He has sent His only Son to die for us to save us eternally. He is our Saviour. Jesus, the Son of God, has willingly come to take on our flesh and suffer and die in our place. He has come to save us from this world of sin and suffering. He has come to save us from the hell we deserve because of our sin.

In Baptism we were united with Jesus' death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5). Thus, our Baptism is God's promise that we shall rise from the dead as surely as Jesus rose from the dead. The forgiveness of sins Jesus earned on the cross is given in Baptism, so as forgiven believers, we shall be raised to eternal life when we die from this life. That is God's promise to us.

Until Jesus returns, we shall all face death, whether through a tragedy or otherwise. We will be ready for death through repentance and the forgiveness of sins. We will be ready for death because Jesus died our death in our place and has earned for us His inheritance – the inheritance of eternal life.

Eternal life is promised to all believers where there will be no more hunger or thirst (Rev. 7:16) but a feast of rich food (Is. 25:6). There will be peace and weapons will no longer be needed as swords will be turned into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks (Is. 2:4). Death will be swallowed up as there will be no more sin, and God will wipe away tears from all faces (Is. 25:8).

In the midst of things we cannot know or understand, we cling to the promises of God. They are sure and certain. Psalm 46 tells us, “God is our Refuge and Strength, a very present help in troubles. Therefore, we shall not be afraid, although the earth quakes and the mountains topple into the middle of the seas, although its water roars and foams, and the mountains quake with its surging.”

May God comfort you with His promises and strengthen you through the days ahead.