

First, Repent

Luke 13:1-5

1. Two Calamities

Vv. 1, 4

- In this section of Luke's gospel, Jesus has been teaching about being prepared for the Day of Judgment. Jesus' preaching was peppered with warnings, pleas, and parables dealing with the necessity of being prepared for the coming of the Lord. He regularly warned his hearers about hell and told them to flee the coming wrath of God.
- At some point in this midst of these warnings about preparedness, Jesus is asked about a particularly heinous act on the part of Pilate, the Roman governor of Judah. Jerusalem was likely crowded with pilgrims who had travelled there to offer sacrifices at the temple. At some point – perhaps to assert his dominance or perhaps because of some perceived threat – Pilate gave the order to attack some of those gathered at the temple. The result was that certain Jews from Galilee were murdered and their blood mingled with that of their sacrifices. It was a stunning act of violence and cruelty.
- The second calamity is mentioned by Jesus. He refers to a tower at Siloam which collapsed, killing 18. This calamity may be classified as a natural disaster while the first is an example of human evil.

2. The wrong responses

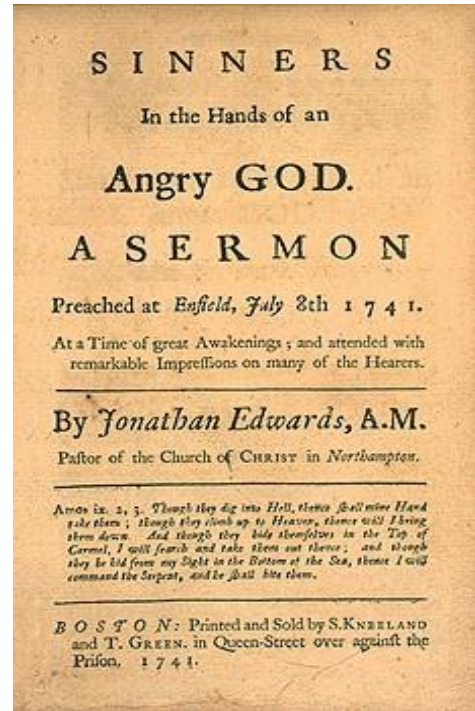
Vv. 2, 4

A) Claiming to know what we cannot know

- It seems like every time there is a calamity whether it is a tsunami or a hurricane or a virus run amok, there are TV preachers out there ready to assign blame.
- Something not unlike that is happening in the passage from Luke. Jesus is in the midst of a multitude teaching. He's already said to them some very strong words about the fact that they don't seem to recognize the signs of God's judgment. It seems as though some of Jesus' hearers decide to defend their ability to understand the signs of the time by bringing up the tragic events at the temple. It seems as though they offer up the poor dead Galileans as an example. As if to say, "See, those Galileans were judged by God." But how does Jesus explain the event? He does not justify any attempt to make a direct connection between what befell them and any particular sin on their part: "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans?" Like everyone, the Galileans were sinners. But Jesus does not allow any of his hearers to claim a false comfort by assuming that they must be lesser sinners since they have not suffered a similar calamity.
- This is why we must reject those voices which claim that a particular earth quake or tsunami occurred because the nation affected was guilty of a particular sin. The fact is, we are not at liberty to make such judgments. We don't possess such knowledge.

B) Denying what Scripture actually says

- We must avoid claiming knowledge of God's secret providence including claiming that particular calamities are God's judgment for particular sins. We must, however, not make the mistake of



claiming that God has nothing to do with calamities or that calamities are not judgment from God. We know from Scripture that God is sovereign over all people, places, and events. Whatsoever comes to pass does so by the sovereign hand of God. That includes calamities. Remember Job's words when a series of calamities befell him – "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." Or, "shall we accept only blessing from the Lord and not calamity?". Job rightly located the ultimate source of calamity in the sovereign decree of God.

- People typically do not take kindly to the preaching of God's judgment. And many churches have indulged this aversion in warnings to flee the wrath of God. It has been a long time since the vast majority of Christians have heard a sermon remotely like Jonathan Edwards' *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*. We are today a very long way from an excessive preoccupation with damnation. We could all benefit from hearing our Lord's urgent warning, so impressively stated and repeated in this section of Luke: "Unless you repent, you will all perish." It was the worst crime of the false prophets of Israel's history that they proclaimed peace with God when they should have warned their congregations of the coming wrath of God.
- Those who died in Siloam and at the temple may have been no more guilty than others at that time. But those calamities should have sparked sober introspection and repentance in the heart of God's people because those events certainly were foretastes of the coming judgment of God.

3. The right response

- Vs. 3 – "No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."
- Vs. 5 – "No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."
- Notice that Jesus repeats himself in rather quick succession. Grammatically, the two calls to repent have interesting features. In verse 3 Jesus speaks in the present imperative tense which indicates an action with continuous force. In verse 5 however Jesus speaks in the aorist tense which indicates a single decisive action. Both tenses capture the nature of repentance. It is simultaneously a decisive act and an ongoing action. Repentance is both punctiliar and ongoing.
- The Greek word translated "repent" (*metanoia*) means literally to turn. In the Bible repentance carries with it sorrow over sin, turning away from sin, and turning in faith and obedience to God. Think of David's grief over his sin expressed in Psalm 51. Think of the prodigal son grieving his sin, returning to his father with only the expectation to be a slave. Repentance is both grief and change.
- John Calvin called repentance:
 - "...the true turning of our life to God, a turning that arises from a pure and earnest fear of him; and it consists in the mortification of our flesh and of the old man, and in the vivification of the Spirit" (*Institutes*, 3, III, 5).
- *The Westminster Shorter Catechism* asks, "What is repentance?"
 - "Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, an endeavor after, new obedience."
- Jesus appeals to the tragedies in Jerusalem and Siloam as a warning to his hearers about the consequences of an unrepentant heart. This is not a statement about the hearts of those who perished in the two calamities. Rather their deaths serve as a warning about the often times surprising nature of death. Jesus wants his hearers to know that the time for repentance is now, not later.
- As we consider the challenges of our current crisis let us not fail to consider our own sin; our own need for repentance. Since there are some rather famous people on social media asking us to "Imagine" certain things, let us imagine this – Imagine what God might do in the world with a truly repenting church.