

### Luke 13:1-5

<sup>1</sup>There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup>And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? <sup>3</sup>No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. <sup>4</sup>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?

<sup>5</sup>No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

### TEN YEARS CLOSER TO ETERNITY

*"Father: Today we remember those who are suffering because of September 11. We remember those who lost loved ones and friends. We remember those whose health has been shattered. We remember those whose emotions and thoughts have been scarred. We remember the fearful, the unforgiving, and, yes, we remember our enemies. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer."*

9/11 has affected each one of us in different ways. There are some of our brothers and sisters who have to leave town on this date every year. Remember them in prayer. Remember those who still guard and protect us. And pray for wisdom and courage for our leaders.

I was just arriving at my church office for a staff meeting when my friend Liz got out of her car and told me a plane had hit the World Trade Center. When I saw the first tower collapse on TV, I know I would be going back to the New York area, but not when.

Nine days later Marcia and I landed at Newark Airport. We disembarked from an empty plane to an airport filled with armed troops and almost no passengers. I was to speak at the Men's Retreat at Tuscarora. (We had a daughter living in Pennsylvania, and there was no way I was going to cancel.) There were only about half the men there as usual, and our sessions were held in the old chapel. The atmosphere was charged with emotion. I remember putting my prepared notes on the pulpit shelf and just trying to minister to the men there.

After the last service on Sunday morning, several men from Bethany sort of blocked the front door as I was ready to leave. I believe it was Eddie Jensen who said, "God is calling you to the city." That hit me like a blow to the heart. The next year we came to Bethany.

Each of us could tell our own story this morning. But we all have one element in common: Events as terrible as this cause us to ask questions of God. Why did this

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happen? Where were You?

Did you hear about the poll that asked in people approved of the job God was doing? This is true. It occurred a couple of weeks ago. From what I heard, 52% of the respondents approved of God's handling of His job. That's better than Congress or the President! But, still, you have to wonder what the other 48% were thinking. What did they suppose God's job description was?

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At the very least, most people suppose it is God's job to prevent people from hurting (or dying?). And I'll bet the most popular version of God's job description goes something like this: It is God's job to make me happy, comfortable, secure, and always feeling good.

But this is just a made-up idea. The Bible never says that. God's job (He wrote the job description Himself) is to GLORIFY HIMSELF. Isaiah 42:8: ***"I am the Lord, and my glory I will give to no other."*** What? Be careful that you don't think of God as some egotistic old guy on a cloud demanding that everyone applaud and praise Him. No, God glorifies Himself because that is the only moral and righteous thing He can do. To do anything less would be unrighteous.

What is God's glory? The revelation of His magnificence: wisdom, power, holiness, righteousness, beauty, justice, mercy, and so on. These are so wonderful that the most loving thing God could ever do is to reveal them to us, and allow us to bask in His beauty. He is glorified when His creation (humans, angels, and any other beings out there) responds in praise and thanksgiving, enjoying His glory.

Now we need to be clear that God's glory and our good are not two different things. They are one and the same. Imagine the most beautiful picture you've ever seen. Then imagine stepping inside...into a sunset, into a rainbow, walking beyond the picture into beauty itself—and then being filled with glory. (I owe that metaphor to C.S. Lewis.) Could there be anything more wonderful? Could anything in the whole universe give more pleasure and happiness? That's what God invites us to experience, a little bit down here, and infinitely more in eternity.

**GOD GLORIFIES HIMSELF IN THREE WAYS:**

- 1. Through His creation.** Atheists claim that material stuff is all there in the universe. There are no thoughts or ideas that exist apart from matter. I counter: what is it that organizes all this matter? Where is the amazingly complex math (information) which shapes the universe? Ideas, information, truth, numbers –these have to exist somewhere in a Mind. This Mind we call God. "The heavens declare the glory of

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God...” Psalm 19. Astronomy, biology, chemistry, physics, geology, mathematics— what are these but attempts to mimic the mind of God? And when our souls bask in the sheer beauty of creation—for example, a beautiful sunset over the Pacific Ocean— God is also glorified.

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- 2. Through His redemption.** Creation doesn't show God's mercy, His grace, or His forgiveness. In fact, our creation in this planet is fallen, warped, broken. The math still works, but evil is abroad. Why should God pardon evil? There is no other way to reveal mercy and grace! And so every time a sinner is forgiven, every time a soul is healed, every time a life is made new, the angels rejoice and glorify God (Luke 2:14; 15:7).
- 3. Through His condemnation.** This is a tough one. This is not popular religion. We are told that we have moved beyond the idea of an angry God. But wait a minute! Think about what has gone in the world throughout history. This world is piling up a huge debt of sin and evil. Oppression, violence, hatred, cruelty, selfishness... What is a just and righteous God supposed to do about that? Just ignore it?

Dear ones, one day every debt will be paid and every sin atoned for. Not only will God judge men and women individually, He will bring the whole world to destruction (2 Peter 3:11-13). Only those sins which have been paid for by the precious blood of Christ will escape His wrath (already poured out on the cross).

That's not the only story: there are “good people” who show mercy and compassion and heroism and courage. There are laws and governments which still restrain evil and fight against injustice. God's “common grace” is also here. But the debt is piling up.

When the human race fell into sin, God began a process of judgment. He began to execute justice. There are terrible consequences for sin. There are natural disasters (“acts of God”). These have been unleashed into the world partly to drive people to repentance. There are violent and horrible acts of human beings and demonic forces. God allows these things to warn us of His coming judgment.

How do we respond when terrible things like 9/11 happen?

- 1. Remember that God has not revealed to us the pattern of His justice.** We can't say about any catastrophe: “Oh, this was because of a certain evil, like abortion...” We don't know that. We can't even say that a particular nation is being singled out for special punishment because all the nations of the world are guilty. We don't have the wisdom to understand the “why's.” We have to leave them in God's hands.

2. **Realize that God is warning us of coming judgment.** Jesus was asked about two terrible events. One of them involved oppression and violence, the other an accidental disaster. Were the people who Pilate killed more sinful than others? Were the people who died under the falling tower being singled out for special judgment. “No,” Jesus answered. “But unless you repent, you too will perish.” Every disaster should serve as reminder that judgment is coming some day.
3. **Remember that the Body of Christ is in the world to show God’s mercy.** We are called on respond to human suffering with the compassion of Jesus Christ. We are called to demonstrate His mercy and grace. That’s who we are, dear ones. That’s what we do.
4. **Remember that God’s love for us cannot be demolished by evil.** God has promised to be faithful: I want to you remember these verses: *Isaiah 43:1-3a*.

<sup>1</sup>But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob,  
he who formed you, O Israel:

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by name, you are mine.

<sup>2</sup>When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;  
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,  
and the flame shall not consume you.

<sup>3</sup>For I am the LORD your God,  
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

This is not a promise to give us Superman qualities that make us immune from pain and death. The Bible doesn’t teach that. But this promise is for that real part of us that will live forever. No matter what is in store for America, no matter what lies ahead on your own life’s journey, “I have called you by name, you are mine.” That is the fortress upon which we face the future.