



November 7, 2021

“The Theology of Tragedy”

Luke 13:1-5

Pastor Gary Hamrick

All of our lives will be touched by something tragic at some point – death, disease, grief, sorrow, betrayal, abuse, etc. – you name it. We live in a world corrupted by sin and evil and it is unavoidable. And yet, how do we reconcile all of this with an all-loving God who allows these things to happen? In this message, Pastor Gary teaches from Luke 13 which describes two tragic events that resulted in the death of many people. Pastor Gary helps us understand how to deal with tragedy in our lives. ... At some point we will all be touched by tragedy to some degree or another, so it is important for us to study and understand this together.

1. Pastor Gary said, “This passage is [only found here] in Luke’s Gospel. ... [What] we have here are the mention of two specific events that were very tragic events, and when we study this together, [we] are going to notice that Jesus does not really answer the question, ‘Why did these things happen?’ but what he’s going to talk about is what we can learn from these tragic events.”
2. Pastor Gary said, “It shouldn’t really surprise us... that the biggest spiritual issue that doesn’t make sense to a majority of people is ‘Why is there pain and suffering in the world?’ ... ‘We read stories of the horrible evils of the Holocaust, the killing fields of Cambodia, the genocide of Rwanda... and we can’t help but wonder: Where is God? We watch television coverage of earthquakes and hurricanes in which thousands perish, and we wonder: Why didn’t God stop it? We read the statistic that one thousand million people in the world lack the basic necessities of life, and we wonder: Why doesn’t God care? We may suffer ourselves with persistent pain or aching loss or seemingly hopeless circumstances, and we wonder: Why doesn’t God help? If he is loving and if he is all-powerful and if he is good, then surely all of

this suffering should not exist. And yet it does.”<sup>1</sup>

3. Pastor Gary said, “The reality of pain and suffering in our lives will cause some people to question God on two levels... [the existence of God and the goodness of God].”
4. Some question the existence of God
  - a. Pastor Gary said, “When tragedy strikes, and difficulty and pain and sorrow fill a person’s life, sometimes that individual can ask the question, ‘Does God even exist?’ Suffering, to some, seems more compatible with a non-existent God than a loving God. ... [People who feel this way see pain and suffering] as evidence for the absence of God because a true God would not allow such suffering to exist and, therefore, God must not exist.”
  - b. Pastor Gary shared a list of questions that need to be considered:
    - i. What if evil exists apart from God?
    - ii. What if evil does exist, but the perfect world that [God] intended for us was spoiled a long time ago when mankind rebelled against God?
    - iii. What if, because of man’s rebellion against God, we have invited these things into our world, like death and disease and abuse and murder and betrayal and every other form of evil and suffering, and now it all affects us to some degree even if we were not part of the original ones who rebelled against God?
    - iv. What if, because God exists, and he sees our suffering, God also knows that because of our suffering we need a Savior, so he put in motion a way to redeem us from sin and to rescue us from this world?
5. Some question the goodness of God
  - a. Pastor Gary said, “Others might struggle with this question, ‘I’m not even sure that God is good.’ ... They would ask, ‘Why would a good God allow pain and suffering?’ ... It’s hard for us [because] our finite minds lack the full ability to fully comprehend what God is up to and why God allows what he [allows]. But our lack of understanding should not lead us to believe that God is not good.”
6. Two tragedies
  - a. Pastor Gary said, “One [tragedy] has to do with Pilate slaughtering people and one has to do with a tower falling on people. One [was the intentional

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<sup>1</sup>[https://books.google.com/books?id=KaANAgAAQBAJ&pg=PT27&lpg=PT27&dq=strobels+We+read+stories+of+the+horrible+evils+of+the+Holocaust,+the+killing+fields+of+Cambodia,+and+the+genocide+of+Rwanda,+and+we+can%E2%80%99t+help+but+wonder,+%E2%80%9CWhere+is+God&source=bl&ots=RILL-Mu2PT&sig=ACfU3U1\\_0lk\\_iYugAbBRdgXHSf9peKzE4w&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewiR7tDQ15D0AhW0gnIEHfAmBG0Q6AF6BAgfEAM#v=onepage&q=strobels%20We%20read%20stories%20of%20the%20horrible%20evils%20of%20the%20Holocaust%2C%20the%20killing%20fields%20of%20Cambodia%2C%20and%20the%20genocide%20of%20Rwanda%2C%20and%20we%20can%E2%80%99t%20help%20but%20wonder%2C%20%E2%80%9CWhere%20is%20God&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=KaANAgAAQBAJ&pg=PT27&lpg=PT27&dq=strobels+We+read+stories+of+the+horrible+evils+of+the+Holocaust,+the+killing+fields+of+Cambodia,+and+the+genocide+of+Rwanda,+and+we+can%E2%80%99t+help+but+wonder,+%E2%80%9CWhere+is+God&source=bl&ots=RILL-Mu2PT&sig=ACfU3U1_0lk_iYugAbBRdgXHSf9peKzE4w&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewiR7tDQ15D0AhW0gnIEHfAmBG0Q6AF6BAgfEAM#v=onepage&q=strobels%20We%20read%20stories%20of%20the%20horrible%20evils%20of%20the%20Holocaust%2C%20the%20killing%20fields%20of%20Cambodia%2C%20and%20the%20genocide%20of%20Rwanda%2C%20and%20we%20can%E2%80%99t%20help%20but%20wonder%2C%20%E2%80%9CWhere%20is%20God&f=false)

murder of Galileans and the other happened with no known cause]. But both tragedies were painful because both involved human suffering and even death. ... [Sometimes we will experience tragedy and suffering that is intentional on the part of others, and other times we will experience tragedy and suffering with no known cause.] ... There is no other historical mention of these incidents, and there's no other biblical reference [of these] incidents outside of what Luke [wrote]. We don't have any of the details, which actually tells us something. God has allowed it to be included in the pages of the Bible not so we could understand the details [about what happened]. ... [The reason God included mention of these incidents in the Bible] is so that we could learn the lessons from these incidents."

- b. Pilate slaughtered Galileans
  - i. Pontius Pilate was the one who had Jesus crucified.
  - ii. Pilate was made procurator of Judea in AD 26.
  - iii. Pilate's reputation was one of cruelty and bloodthirst, particularly against the Jews.
  - iv. Pastor Gary said, "Tragically, history records... that Pontius Pilate, four years after Christ was crucified, [was recalled by Rome, end up in Gaul... and he committed suicide there."
  - v. The account tells us that the Galileans were offering sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem and something happened that initiated Pilate's murderous response.
- c. Tower of Siloam
  - i. Siloam was a small region outside of the walls of Jerusalem, southeast of the old city.
  - ii. Siloam had a spring-fed pool, which was the location of one of Jesus' miracles as told in John 9.
  - iii. It's possible that the tower mentioned in this account was part of the structure around the pool.

## 7. Tragedy is the natural consequence of a world polluted by sin

- a. "But given the fact that we live in a fallen world, God still permits suffering to occur, especially in the lives of His people in order to 'accomplish that which He loves.' " - Joni Eareckson Tada <sup>2</sup>
- b. [John 16:33b](#) - *"In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."*
- c. [John 16:33b](#) - *"Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."* (NLT)
- d. Pastor Gary said, "We have to accept this to some degree; it's just reality. ... There's hope and there's a promise of an eternal future for us, but in the meantime, we have to deal with what reality is. ... [Things that happen to us]

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<sup>2</sup> <https://old.joniandfriends.org/radio/4-minute/god-permits-what-he-hates/>

may be the natural byproduct of living in a fallen world. ... We may be a part [of these things] even though we may not have contributed directly to it. ... The good news is that rather than leave us to ourselves with no hope or a future, God sent his son to redeem us from sin and to rescue us from this world so that one day we can leave this place and go to heaven where there is no more death, or crying, or pain because the old order has been replaced with a new order of things. So, that is what is to come. ... [Living] in this world will be hard... and yet [we] should not live for this world, [we] are only passing through. ... Our hope is not here! If this is as good as it gets, [we] are in trouble. This is as bad as it gets for those who know Christ.”

- i. **Romans 8:18** – *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”*
- e. God and Job
  - i. In chapters thirty-eight and forty-one, God asked Job seventy-seven rhetorical questions that helped Job understand that God created the earth, limits the ocean, regulates the sun and the moon, creates constellations, controls the weather, brings the morning dew, waters the earth, and feeds all creatures.
  - ii. In all of the questions God asked Job, he did not address suffering directly.
  - iii. Pastor Gary said, “What God ended up saying to Job was this, ‘Job, if I’m sovereign over the cosmos, and if I hold the world together by my sovereign power, don’t you think that I can hold your life together during this season of your suffering?’ ”
- f. Pastor Gary used the illustration of an egg and a potato being submersed in boiling water; one becomes hardened and one becomes softened, as a way to illustrate that for us, the difference is how we respond to difficult times and experiences.
- g. Pastor Gary said, “[This] is so true for all of us because when faced with similar trials or tragedies, some people become hardened towards God, and some people become tender towards him. It really has to do with how [we] respond. ... [We] can either choose to react towards God when he doesn’t make sense and we don’t understand with a hardened heart, or [we] can become tender towards him. I have seen over thirty-plus years that I have been in ministry, when tragedy hits [a family], some families explode, and some families draw closer. Some marriages break apart [and] some marriages get closer. Some people run from God and get angry with God, and some people draw near to him and they are tenderhearted.”
- h. “The same sun which melts wax hardens clay.” – Charles Spurgeon <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons46.xxiii.html>

8. Tragedy does not mean that someone is a worse sinner
  - a. [Luke 13:2, 4](#) - *"Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? ... Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no..."*
  - b. Jesus made it clear that these tragic events had nothing to do with one or some being worse sinners than other people.
  - c. Pastor Gary said, "Now, it is true that we are all sinners, and it is also true that sometimes our sinful choices can lead to hardship in our own lives."
    - i. [Proverbs 13:15](#) - *"... the way of transgressors is hard."* (KJV)
    - ii. [Galatians 6:7](#) - *"... for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap."*
  - d. Pastor Gary said, "Tragedies happen because we live in a fallen world, not because God is punishing [people] because somehow they are worse sinners. Jesus [was] setting us straight right here. We need to look at tragic events and not start to get judgmental in our hearts and think [that the people involved are worse sinners]. In the same way, if we escape the tragedy, we can't think [that we are more righteous than others]. ... Tragedy and death [happen but these] are not a pronouncement by God about who is good and who is evil."
    - i. [Matthew 5:45](#) - *"... He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."*
9. Tragedy is not all related to God's judgment; however, God's judgment is the ultimate tragedy
  - a. [Luke 13:3, 5](#) - *"... unless you repent you will all likewise perish. ... unless you repent you will all likewise perish."*
  - b. Pastor Gary said, "We should worry less about whether some tragic event befell our neighbor [because it was] God's punishment, and [we] should be more concerned about whether we, ourselves, are ready to face God's ultimate judgment. ... There could be a tragic story written about your life if you don't repent and get right with God. ... If we repent and turn from our sins and turn toward God, receive Jesus as our Savior, [and] put our faith and trust in him, the grave cannot hold us, and when [we] die a physical death, [our] spirit goes to be with the Lord, and [we] will be forever with him. [We] will be exiting this world, and [we] will be entering paradise forever and ever to be with Jesus in heaven!"

#### Discussion Questions

1. Read [Luke 13:1-5](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.

2. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's opening remarks about the questions people ask when they hear about tragic events. (See #2 above)
3. Allow the people in your group to share experiences they've had when they questioned the existence of God. (See #4a above)
4. Spend time talking about the questions in Pastor Gary's outline. (See #4b above)
5. How did you come to understand that God exists?
6. Allow the people in your group to share experiences they've had when they questioned the goodness of God. (See #5 above)
7. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's comments about the fact that we may never know the reason or reasons tragic events happen in our lives. (See #6a above)
8. Provide an overview of the two events Jesus spoke about in Luke 13. (See #6b and #6c above)
9. Read and discuss [John 16:33b](#). (See #7b and #7c above)
10. What does it look like for a Christian to "*be of good cheer*" in the difficult seasons of life?
11. Spend time talking about Pastor Gary's remarks concerning the reality of hard times in life. (See #7d above)
12. Read and discuss [Romans 8:18](#). (See #7d-i above)
13. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's comments about the way different people react toward God. (See #7g above)
14. Read and discuss [Proverbs 13:15](#), [Galatians 6:7](#), and [Matthew 5:45](#). (See #8c and #8d-i above)
15. Spend time talking about Pastor Gary's remarks about repentance and being in right relationship with God. (See #9b above)
16. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

\* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)