



from the desk of . . .

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WHY?

Luke 13:1-5

Last Sunday morning was a busy time here. We sang our opening songs. I preached a sermon on "The Saints Of C.C.R.M." We had prayer & testimonies. We spent a few special moments remembering the 6 members of our congregation who joined the Church Triumphant during the past year, & we placed their names on the Memorial Plaque. And then we celebrated The Lord's Supper.

It was almost 11:00 by the time we sang our final song, "When I Survey The Wondrous Cross." And then most of us went back to enjoy some goodies before S.S. started.

And while we were having wonderful fellowship & laughing & talking, another congregation 1,205 miles away was just beginning their time of worship.

I want to play a little segment of the worship service from a couple of weeks ago at 1st Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, TX.

***(First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, TX
10-22-2017 0:00 to 5:14)***

As those dear people were walking around & greeting one another ... the worship leaders were singing:

"This world's not my home, I'm just passing through ...
I can't feel at home in this world anymore."

As they were singing that, none of them could have possibly imagined that the following week they would be leaving this "home" here for their Heavenly one.

What happened last Sunday down in Sutherland Springs has been on our mind a lot ... & in our prayers. And I wouldn't at all be surprised if some of you, during your times with the Lord, didn't ask ... "Why?" I confess that I did. "Why God, were 26 people in that congregation murdered? Why did that have to happen?"

For me, a week later, I'm still trying to assimilate what took place in that Church. As a Pastor, I can't imagine all that Frank Pomeroy has been dealing with ... the loss of $\frac{1}{2}$ his congregation, not to mention, his 14-year-old daughter.

Now I recognize that I'm not the only one to ask the question, "why"? And I also realize that this is not the only time in history that that question has been asked.

Once, when Jesus walked on this earth, He was approached by some people who wondered why some "innocent" worshipers were killed while they were offering sacrifices to God.

And while they were at it, they then questioned Jesus concerning an accident in which 18 people were killed when a tower fell on them.

In both instances, it seems like bad things happened to some good innocent people.

So, the question remains ... why?

Listen now to Good News from Luke to you who have gathered here this morning at C.C.R.M. to worship God.

Within your hearing comes the Word of the Lord ...

At that time some people were there who told Jesus about the Galileans whom Pilate had killed while they were offering sacrifices to God. Jesus answered them, "Because those Galileans were killed in that way, do you think it proves that they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No indeed! And I tell you that if you do not turn from your sins, you will all die as they did. What about those eighteen people in Siloam who were killed when the tower fell on them? Do you suppose this proves that they were worse than all the other people living in Jerusalem? No indeed! And I tell you that if you do not turn from your sins, you will all die as they did." (Luke 13:1-5)

May the Lord grant that we may engage in contemplating the mysteries of His Heavenly wisdom with really increasing devotion, to His glory and to our edification. Amen

Luke writes that some Galileans were offering sacrifices to God, & in the midst of that worship experience, Pontius Pilate, (X) the Roman Governor, apparently sent soldiers in & killed them.

Typically, we think of Pilate as having been a wavering, wishy-washy, "don't rock the boat" kind of guy. However, history shows us that he was such a bloodthirsty man, whose actions were so bad, that even the insane Roman Emperor, Caligula, would be appalled!

Josephus, the historian, writes of a time when Pilate was attempting to build an aqueduct from the Pools of Solomon to Jerusalem. In order to do this, he robbed the Temple Treasury. And then when a delegation of Jews went to him begging for their money to be returned, Pilate placed undercover agents in the crowd, & at a certain signal, bludgeoned the protesters.

Pilate, & all of Rome, thrived on intimidation & bloodshed. Evil men have always brought harm to others.
Terrorism is nothing new.

And last Sunday it reared its' ugly head up again in a small Baptist congregation. One that was committed to Jesus Christ, supported missionaries,
& was active in the life of their community.

Well, listen to what Jesus had to say about those Galileans ... I wonder if it relates to our situation?

"I tell you that if you do not turn from your sins,
you will all die as they did."

I don't know how that strikes you ... but, it's certainly not the answer I was looking for. In some ways, it almost sounds as if Jesus is avoiding the issue. Here we come with a deep, troubling philosophical question ... "why do good people suffer?" ... & instead of answering it, He turns the question into a theological statement about our own spiritual condition.

(You know, conversations with Jesus are never boring!)

This idea of suffering has puzzled human beings since the time of Job. (Job 3:20) There's a theological/philosophical study called theodicy. It asks the simple question ... "If God is all knowing, all powerful, & all good, why is there suffering?"

There are those who read what the Bible says about God, & then look around at the world & conclude ...

"The character of God & the reality of suffering contradict each other!"

They take what happened last Sunday in Sutherland Springs & ask ... "if God is all good, all powerful, & all knowing, how do you explain 1st Baptist Church? ... Well, maybe your God is 2 out of 3. Maybe He's all good & all powerful, He just isn't all-knowing.

He didn't "know" about that congregation.

"After all, He's got a lot on His plate. There are earthquakes in Indonesia, famine in Africa, war in the Middle East, hurricanes in the Atlantic, so maybe that little congregation in TX simply escaped His notice.

"Or possibly your God is all good & all-knowing, He's just not all powerful. There's a bunch of crazy people running around out there, & they're so determined & focused that even God can't prevent their sadistic acts.

"Or possibly your God is all powerful & all-knowing, He's just not all good. He's like one of those fickle Greek gods. Some days they like you & some days they don't. Some days they care about what's going on in your life. Some days they just thumb their noses at you.

Maybe that's what your God is like.

"But a God who's all good, all powerful, & all-knowing is an impossibility. What happened last Sunday in Sutherland Springs proves that."

Well, the truth of the matter is ... God is all good.
God is all powerful. And God is all-knowing.

At the Methodist Church where my mother-in-law attends, the Pastor begins their worship service with the affirmation ... "God is good!" ...

& then the people respond ... "all the time!"
to which the Pastor then states ... "all the time"
& the people announce ... "God is good!"

The 1st prayer I ever learned to pray proclaimed that theological truth simply ...

"God is great, God is good"

God is not the source of evil; **Satan** & **sin** are responsible.

One of the 1st "real" novels I ever read was "Robinson Crusoe (X) by Daniel Defoe. It's a deeply spiritual book because Defoe was a committed Christian, who also wrote hymns & sacred poetry.

When Defoe's character, Robinson Crusoe, is shipwrecked on an island, he discovers a native & names him "Friday". Crusoe teaches Friday to speak English, & tells him about God & the importance of trusting Jesus Christ for salvation.

In one of their theological discussions, the following dialogue occurs:

Friday to Crusoe ... "But, if God much stronger, much might as the wicked devil, why God no kill the devil, so make him no more do wicked?"

Crusoe's reply ... "You may as well ask me, why God does not kill you or me when we do wicked things here that offend Him."

That short conversation provides an inciteful & effective response to the question of ...

"How can a loving, knowing, powerful God allow evil?"

The truth of the matter is, **suffering** is part of a **fallen world**. There was no suffering in the Garden of Eden that God created. (Genesis 1:31) It was a paradise.
It was Heaven on earth.

But when our ancestors, Adam & Eve, chose to disobey a loving God, suffering became a reality. (Genesis 3:16,19) And because of that, the consequences throughout history have been horrible. We're living in a world totally affected as a result of their sin. (Romans 5:12)

After a nuclear explosion, "fallout" lingers for many years. In the same way,
we're living in the "fallout" from that initial sin.

Now human suffering is produced from 2 different sources, both of which,
Jesus addresses in our Scripture passage.

1st, we live in a world full of **moral evil**. We share this planet with some really wicked people. Pilate was a viciously cruel Roman governor. He didn't give a 2nd thought to even killing worshipers as they were innocently offering sacrifices to God.

Humanity has always had to deal with depraved, callous people like Pilate. Whether it's Hitler ordering the death of 6 million Jews, or a gunman rushing into the 1st Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs ...
this world is just full of brutal, ruthless people.

Scripture speaks of the depravity of the human heart.

(X) "Who can understand the human heart?
There is nothing else so deceitful;
It is too sick to be healed." (Jeremiah 17:9)

Jesus picks up on that ...

"For from the inside, from your heart, come the evil ideas which lead you to do immoral things, to rob, kill, commit adultery, be greedy, & do all sorts of evil things; deceit, indecency, jealousy, slander, pride, & folly - all these evil things come from inside you." (Mark 7:21-23)

Think about what's in your pocket or purse right now. If you have a key with you today, it's a testimony to the fact that we have to lock things up. Why? ... Because there are evil people out there who will steal our car or our possessions.

We have to lock this building for the same reason.

I believe that the heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart. Human beings are **sinners**, (Romans 3:23) who must have a life-transforming encounter with Jesus if they have any hope of overcoming sin.

(Romans 8:13-14)

So, don't blame God for the actions of wicked people. When God created us, He gave us the freedom to choose ... & like our original ancestors, we all choose disobedience. And there are some people out there who choose to commit acts of horrendous evil & violence.

A 2nd source of suffering is that we also live in a world of **natural evil**.

Sometimes we suffer not because of some wicked person, but what could be termed accidents or disasters.

We can even include disease in this category.

Why are there hurricanes, tornados, earthquakes, floods, & accidents in which people are hurt or die?

Why is there cancer, disabilities, & disease?

It's because we live in a fallen, messed up world. When Adam & Eve sinned, they opened a Pandora's Box of troubles for them ... & for their descendants.

The world's shortest poem, entitled "Troubles" puts it perfectly ...

"Troubles - Adam had 'em!"

Adam had plenty of troubles ... & so do we.

The World Trade Towers fell because of evil men flying fuel-laden airplanes into them. We don't really know why the tower of Siloam fell;

we just know that 18 people died.

Perhaps it was human error ... it wasn't built well. Or maybe it was simply one of those unavoidable accidents that occur in life. Regardless, Scripture teaches that disasters, disease, disabilities, all those things, weren't part of God's original design.

We introduced all this into the world through our sin.

The Apostle Paul puts it this way ...

"We know that up to the present time all of creation groans with pain, like the pain of childbirth." (Romans 8:22)

This is a beautiful world in many ways ... the spacious skies, the amber waves of grain, the purple mountain's majesty, the fruited plain ...

but it's also a world that's not perfect.

Scripture teaches that creation itself has been whacked out of kilter; we can almost hear it groaning like a woman in pain.

Creation isn't running right because of **sin**. (Romans 8:20)

However, the day is coming when all this will be fixed & redeemed. (The Revelation 21:1) But for the time being we have to live in an imperfect world where there are: storms, accidents, disease, & terrorism. (Romans 8:23)

Don't blame God ... we messed it up.

Christian Pastor & broadcaster Tony Evans (X) says ...

"Have you ever cleaned up your house in preparation of receiving guests or visitors & when they arrive, they begin to mess up your house? You know it's a good house; it's just been messed up by these visitors.

This can be annoying! Now think about how God feels about mankind messing up His perfect creation!"

That brings us to our next point ... suffering is **unrelated** to **goodness**.

The question in the minds of Jesus' audience was ...

"Did those people suffer & die from Pilate's cruelty
& from the tower falling because they were bad
& were being punished?"

There's this tendency for "religious zealots" to look
at someone when they're suffering & think ...

"Maybe they're just getting what they deserve."

John records the story of Jesus walking along &
coming across a blind man. The disciples immediate
thought was ... "Teacher, whose sin caused him to be born
blind? Was it his own or his parents' sin?" (John 9:2)

(That was a common 1st century notion that every
calamity had its' roots in sin.)

Let's be honest ... don't we sometimes think the same
way? ... What did this person do that caused their
suffering? Or, what did I do? ...

Listen to what Jesus told His disciples ...

"His blindness has nothing to do with his sins
or his parents' sins. He is blind so that
God's power might be seen at work in him." (John 9:3)

Wow! This is where we separate the men & women
from the boys & girls when it comes to faith in God. We
think bad people should be the ones to suffer & good
people shouldn't. That's fair ... isn't it? ...

And God's got to be fair, right? (2 Thessalonians 1:6) ...

Let's think about our question again ... "why do good people suffer?" If you want me to get truly theological here ... that's actually not a very good question, because no one is "good" in the 1st place!

Once a man approached Jesus & called Him "good." Listen to Jesus' reply ... "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." (Luke 18:19)

The Psalmist writes

"There is no one who does good." (Psalm 14:1)

Why do bad things happen to good people? I was telling you last Sunday about my favorite present-day theologian, R.C. Sproul. (X) He writes this ...

"In effect what Jesus was saying was this: 'You people are asking the wrong question. You should be asking me, 'Why didn't that tower fall on my head?'"

Now all of us have pondered at one time or another the mystery of, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" But, have you ever stopped to wonder,

"Why do good things happen to bad people ... like me?"

Throughout my ministry I've had countless individuals ask me ... "why doesn't God save everybody?" But I can't remember an instance where someone has come up to me & said ... "You know, there's something I just can't figure out. Why did God save me?"

We're not really surprised that God has redeemed us.

Somewhere, deep inside, in the secret chambers of our hearts we harbor this notion that God owes us His mercy. Heaven wouldn't quite be the same if we were excluded from it. We just expect to be there.

We know that we're sinners ... but we're surely not as bad as we could be. There's enough redeeming features to our personalities that if God is really just He will include us in salvation.

Our tendency is to take **God's grace** for granted.

Well, suffering is no respecter of persons. In fact, Scripture promises that those who follow Jesus will, indeed, suffer. (John 16:33)

Paul teaches ... "If we share Christ's suffering, we will also share his glory. I consider that what we suffer at this present time cannot be compared at all with the glory that is going to be revealed to us."

(Romans 8:17-18)

We will **suffer** in this life ... but this life is **not all there is!** "This world's not my home, I'm just passing through."

The other evening, I was cleaning up the dishes after supper. We have a TV in the kitchen, so I turned it on while I was working. I flipped through the channels & came upon an old "All In The Family" episode. Archie & Michael were having a "discussion" about the reality of suffering & belief in God.

And Edith makes a powerful observation.

Here's the conversation: (X)

Michael: "Tell me, Archie, if there's a God, why is this world messed up?"

Archie: "Why do I always have to give the answers? Edith, tell this dumb _____ why, if God has created the world, it's in such a mess."

Edith: "Well, I suppose it's to make us appreciate Heaven better when we get there."

In the midst of that irreverent show, the writers actually wrote something theologically profound in the script. My guess is they wanted the audience to think most Christians were simplistic "dingbats" like Edith.

But for me, I say to her ... "good answer."

There will be no suffering in Heaven. (The Revelations 21:4)

(X) C.S. Lewis wrote ...

"God whispers to us in our pleasures,
speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains:
it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

And God's message is ... "turn away from your sins."

God wants us in His eternal home. (2 Peter 3:9)

When asked why Pilate killed the people or why the 18 died when the tower fell, Jesus gave the same reply twice ... "if you do not turn from your sins,
you will all die as they did."

So, I suspect, if Jesus were standing here this morning, & we were to ask Him ...

"Lord, why are there evil men who storm into a Church building & kill 26 individuals?"

He would look at each of us & say ... "Wrong question ... but if you do not turn from your sins, you will all die as they did." That's His message: repent or perish!

After the 9/11 attack, Billy Graham (X) spoke on the mystery of suffering. This is what he said ...

"I've been asked 100's of times why God allows tragedy & suffering. I have to confess that I really don't know the answer totally, even to my own satisfaction. I have to accept, by faith, that God is sovereign, & He's a God of love & mercy & compassion in the midst of suffering."

At which point he said ... "For the Christian, the Cross tells us that God understands our sin & suffering, for He took upon Himself in the person of Jesus Christ our sins & our suffering. And from the cross, God declares, 'I love you. I know the heartaches & the sorrows & the pains that you feel. But I love you.'"

Every tragedy is a reminder that Judgment Day for all of us is coming closer. There's no one innocent before a holy God. One day it'll all end, we'll face that holy God & no excuse will matter then. "Turn from your sins or you will all die." It's your choice. ...

MARANA THA