

How to Respond to Tragedy (Don't Be Stupid)

Luke 13:1-9

People sure do say the dumbest things, especially following tragedy! Immediately following the Super Bowl, a reporter asked Ray Lewis, "How does it feel to be a Super Bowl Champion?" He responded, "When God is for you, who can be against you?" **Don't be stupid!** Candidate Richard Mourdock while campaigning for a Senate seat in Indiana said, "Even when life begins in that terrible situation of rape, that is something that God intended to happen." **Don't be stupid!** A famous radio political personality following Antonin Scalia's recent death said in a Facebook post. "... perhaps God allowed (Supreme Court Justice) Scalia to die at this time to wake America up to how close we are to the loss of our freedom... The event is in the hand of God. No matter how the press wants to twist my words or meaning, I stand by we need to be awakened." **Don't be stupid!** At the visitation for Michelle's mom in 1987, with Whitney being due a few months later, a well-intentioned woman from our church said, "The Lord showed me why Elaine died, "God needed her more in heaven." **Don't be stupid!**

Dr. Leonard Sweet, "Excuse Me? If something happens, then God intends it to happen? God willed these things to happen? Where do these professed Christians get this stuff? Where do they learn their bad theology? What Christians say after a disaster is disastrous and downright embarrassing." Here are some of the worst:

They didn't deserve this.

- Does anyone ever deserve suffering, pain, evil, rape, murder, cancer, etc.?
- Job was one of the most righteous men living on the earth at the time of his suffering.

Its part of God's plan.

- "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." - **John 10:10**
- Madness, mayhem, failure, pain are NEVER God's plan for you.

They're in a better place.

- Undoubtedly! Paul suggested such: "For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better." - **Philippians 1:23** Selfishly we may want to be in a better place. But, God needs me here and other people need me here, until my race is finished: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." - **2 Timothy 4:7**
- Death, unless Jesus returns first, is unavoidable. Yet, death is an enemy.
- "The last enemy that will be destroyed is death." - **1 Corinthians 15:26**
- God values this life and we should also. This life is a gift from God. While we have breath we are to glorify and to enjoy God on the earth.

It's punishment for the sins of our nation.

- Natural disasters are not God's judgment on a nation or we would have all been annihilated long ago.
- God does not take "someone home" to wake us up.
- "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"), that the blessing of

Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." - **Galatians 3:13-14**

- The wrath of God for sin was poured out on Jesus Christ on the cross.
- "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" - **Romans 2:4**

God is teaching a lesson.

- I have needed to teach Lindy a lesson just a few times in her life, but never orchestrated events that caused her injury or illness.
- I would go to prison for the things God is accused of doing to his children.
- God corrects us by his Word.
- Actions and attitudes bear their own judgments sometimes.
- But again, not every tragedy, failure or trouble results from cause and effect.
- Sometimes bad things happen for no reason at all other than by living in a sin-cursed world.

What Jesus taught about tragedy:

- All human being are trapped in the same leaking boat. All are doomed for disaster.
 - The death of those Galileans did not single them out as ones who were specifically evil.
 - Their death only served as an example of the need for all people to repent of their sins and to realign their lives in a right relationship with God.
 - Jesus did not absolve those who perished, but neither did he find them any different than the whole population.
 - All people stand on the same broken ground, in a broken relationship with God.
- All need the merciful touch from God.
- In this season of Lent (slowing down to reflect upon the coming of Spring) it is time for soul searching.
- It is time to consider new possibilities.
- It is time for repentance.
 - Repentance is a gift from God. Repentance is wholly dependent upon God's invitation to take action.
 - Repentance is a grace and mercy that God extends towards all of us.
- God loves us and desires us to be in a safe, saving relationship with Himself.
- The greatest current event is God's love.
- In the words of Rev. Emily Heath, whose Vermont church was destroyed by Hurricane Irene, "I know God will be there tomorrow, because I know that wherever there is hope, there is God. While the flood was, God is and God will be.

What Jesus taught about the fig tree:

- In Matthew and Mark's gospels Jesus cursed the fig tree (another parable with other lessons).
- Here the puny producer earns a reprieve. The frustrated owner decides the time has come to cut his losses and cut down the tree.
- But the servant tending the garden offered an alternative solution.
- The gardener suggested he extend special care and one more year's chance for the tree to produce.
- God is not ready to cut you off today and throw you in the burn pile.
- He is giving you a chance to repent of your barrenness.

- It is now time for you to fulfill you *God-given* purpose and destiny to be his fruitful, life-giving creation.
- Today is your second-chance!