

There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2 And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? 3 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. 4 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? 5 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." 6 And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. 7 And he said to the vinedresser, 'Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?' 8 And he answered him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. 9 Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Why do bad things happen to good people? That was the question on the minds of those who came to Jesus and told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. It was a terrible tragedy. Imagine soldiers storming into a church during worship, harming innocent people, and desecrating the Lord's Supper. We would be shocked. We would be outraged. The people expected Jesus to be outraged too.

But Jesus never gets caught up with side issues. He goes straight to the heart of the matter. Instead of responding with anger, He asks a question: "Do you think these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?" Most people in Jesus' day would have thought, "Yes, of course." They believed suffering was a punishment for sin. If something bad happened to someone, it must be because they had done something wrong.

We still think this way today. When we hear about disasters—earthquakes, fires, wars, floods—we sometimes wonder, "Did they deserve it?" When a car crash happens, or a serious illness strikes, we might ask, "What did they do to

bring this on?" But then suffering comes to us or to someone we love, and suddenly, the question doesn't seem so simple anymore.

The death of these Galileans was a hot political topic for them. They had been fighting against Roman rule. Maybe some thought they got what they deserved. But then Jesus brings up another event: the tower of Siloam that fell and killed eighteen people. That wasn't political. It was an accident. Just a random tragedy. "Do you think they were worse sinners than everyone else in Jerusalem?" Jesus asks. That's a harder question.

We all ask, "Why do bad things happen?" But the deeper question is, "Where is God in all this?" Some wonder if God is merciful at all. Others think maybe He is powerful but doesn't care. But Jesus answers in a surprising way: "Unless you repent, you too will all perish."

At first, that may sound harsh. But Jesus is reminding us of something important. We all deserve death because we all sin. The Bible says, "There is no one righteous, not even one." If God only gave bad things to bad people and good things to good people, who among us could stand?

Jesus turns our focus from the tragedy of others to our own need for repentance. Death—whether through violence, accident, or disease—is a reminder that this world is broken. Sin has brought death into the world. And we all need to repent.

Repentance means turning away from sin and turning to God for mercy. It means admitting that we are no better than the Galileans killed in the temple or the people crushed by the tower. It means seeing ourselves as sinners in need of a Savior.

This is where Jesus tells the parable of the fig tree. A man had a fig tree in his vineyard, but for three years it bore no fruit. The owner, representing God's justice, said, "Cut it down. Why should it use up the soil?" That's how the Law works: If something isn't producing, get rid of it. But the gardener, representing God's mercy, said, "Leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit, great! If not, then cut it down."

Two ways to deal with the fig tree: Justice says, "Cut it down." Mercy says, "Give it more time." If you were that fruitless tree, which response would you want? Do you want God to give you what you deserve? Or do you want Him to be merciful?

Jesus leaves the parable open-ended. We don't know what happens to the tree. Why? Because it's a picture of God's patience. He doesn't want anyone to perish but wants all to come to repentance. He keeps working on us, forgiving us, feeding us, nurturing us with His Word and Sacraments.

Here's a story to illustrate. A farmer once had an old apple tree in his orchard. It hadn't produced apples in years. His neighbors told him to chop it down, but he couldn't bring himself to do it. One year, he pruned it carefully, enriched the soil, and watered it faithfully. The tree, to everyone's surprise, blossomed and bore fruit. In the same way, God does not give up on us. He continues to tend and nourish us, giving us every opportunity to grow in faith and bear fruit.

This is the Good News: God's justice and mercy met at the cross. Sin had to be paid for, but instead of us suffering, Jesus took our place. He was the innocent one who suffered, the truly good person to whom bad things happened—so that we, who are sinners, might be saved.

Think about Jesus on the cross. Was He a worse offender than the criminals beside Him? No. Yet He took the punishment they deserved—and the punishment we deserve. His blood was poured out, not as a sign of defeat, but as the greatest act of love. Through His suffering, death, resurrection, ascension, and eternal reign, He offers us forgiveness, new life, and the promise of eternity with Him.

When we ask, "Where is God in our suffering?" the answer is clear: He is on the cross. Jesus suffered for us, so that our suffering would not be the end of the story. His resurrection assures us that death is not the final word. His ascension declares that He reigns over all things for our good. And His eternal reign means that one day, He will wipe away every tear, and there will be no more suffering, pain, or death.

So, when you see tragedy on the news or face suffering in your own life, don't ask, "Why did this happen?" Instead, turn to God. Repent. Seek His mercy. Trust in Christ, who died, rose, and reigns for you. Because in Him, you have life—now and forever.

And when trouble comes, hold on to this truth: Our God is not distant. He is near. He is the patient gardener, still tending His trees, still calling us to repentance, still offering His mercy. And in His mercy, He has given us His Son, so that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

This is not just an abstract hope for the future—it is a reality for today. Christ's work of redemption is not only about what happens after we die, but about how we live now. In Him, we have the strength to endure suffering, the courage to face trials, and the peace that surpasses all understanding. His Spirit works in us, shaping our hearts, transforming our minds, and producing fruit in our lives—fruit that reflects His love, mercy, and righteousness.

God grant us the grace to live as people redeemed by Christ, bearing the fruit of faith, love, and repentance, and always until the end of time trusting in His unfailing promises. Amen.

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