

THE TOWER COULD FALL ON YOU

(Luke 13: 1-9)

- Intro: The headlines never seem to change.
- Bush Tours Tornado-Hit Towns.
 - #20 people killed.
 - Bus Riders Recall Plummet, Crash.
 - #Four teammates dead.
 - #Plus the bus driver and his wife.
 - 9 Dead in NYC House Fire.
 - Tulsa Killed in Industrial Laundry Facility Accident.
 - Galileans Killed in Jerusalem Temple.
 - 18 Die in Siloam Tower Collapse.

It doesn't seem to matter.

- If the newspaper is:
 - #Jerusalem Times.
 - #Tulsa World.
- If the date is:
 - #27.
 - #2007.

There are always:

- Disasters.
- Calamities.
 - #Natural.
 - #Man-made.

The headlines never change.

I. The Questions Never Seem To Change.

A. Why?

1. Why did Pilate order his soldiers to invade the Jerusalem Temple?
 - a. Why were those Galileans killed?
 - While they were in the Temple.
 - While they were offering sacrifices.
 - #So that their blood.
 - *Was mingled with the blood of the sacrifices.
 - b. What brought that on?
 - c. Why?

2. Why did that tower collapse?
 - a. Poor design?
 - b. Shoddy workmanship?
 - c. Sabotage?
 - d. Why?
3. On a more personal level:
 - a. Why those Galileans?
 - As opposed to other Galileans.
 - What did they do to deserve such a fate?
 - b. Why those 18 at Siloam?
 - Why not 17 or 19?
 - Why 18?
 - Why those 18?
 - #What did those 18 do to deserve such a fate?
4. The questions are as old as the headlines.

B. Behind The Questions Are A Couple Of Assumptions.

1. Things Don't Happen For No Reason.
 - a. We like to believe that we live in an orderly world.
 - World of cause and effect.
 - #Even if we don't know the cause.
 - *We still believe it exists.
 - If we can just figure out the cause-effect relationship.
 - #We can:
 - *Explain it.
 - *Predict it.
 - *Prevent it.
 - *Control it.
 - b. To believe otherwise.
 - Open ourselves to:
 - #Chaos.
 - #Confusion.
 - #Chance.
 - You mean someone could come into this church?
 - #While we're gathered here for worship.
 - #"Go postal."
 - *For no reason?
 - +That's scary.
 - You mean the roof of this building could come crashing down?
 - #While we're sitting here.
 - *For no reason?
 - +That leaves me feeling awfully vulnerable.
 - c. I don't want to believe.
 - Things happen for no reason.

2. You Get What You Deserve.
 - a. We like to believe:
 - Good things happen to good people.
 - Bad things happen to bad people.
 - #Do good.
 - *You'll be rewarded.
 - #Do bad.
 - *You'll get zapped.
 - b. That's not a new idea.
 - Story of Job.
 - #When Job lost virtually everything.
 - *His possessions.
 - *His children.
 - *His health.
 - #His three friends came.
 - *Eliphaz.
 - *Bildad.
 - *Zophar.
 - #For the first week.
 - *They gave Job some of the best pastoral care.
 - +They could possibly have given.
 - *They didn't say a word.
 - +They just sat with him.
 - +They shared in his:
 - =Hurt.
 - =Loss.
 - =Grief.
 - #But then they had to open their mouths.
 - *"Job, what did you do?"
 - +They ask.
 - *Job says:
 - + "What do mean, what did I do?"
 - + "I didn't do anything.
 - *His friends say:
 - + "Oh, come on, Job."
 - + "These things don't happen for no reason."
 - + "You must have done something to bring this on."
 - *Back and forth they go.
 - +For 30+ chapters.
 - *Job's friends are convinced:
 - +Bad things only happen to bad people.

-John 9.

#Jesus' disciples come across a man.

*Who has been blind from birth.

#They want to know:

*"Who sinned?"

*"Whose fault is it?"

+Him?

+His parents.

c. Why all of these questions?

-Because:

#Job's friends.

#Jesus' disciples.

#We.

*All feel vulnerable.

-We don't want to believe.

#These things could happen to us.

-So we try to blame the victims.

#Looking for some:

*Flaw.

*Defect.

*Sin.

+In them.

-So that we can convince ourselves.

#They are only getting what they deserve.

#This could never happen to us.

II. Jesus Blows That Notion Out Of The Water.

A. Our Gospel Lesson For Today.

1. "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?"

a. Luke 13:2.

b. "Not so!"

-Jesus says.

c. "Not so!"

2. "Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem?"

a. Luke 13:4.

b. "Not so!"

-Jesus says.

c. "Not so!"

3. "Don't try to point the finger at them."

- B. The Tower Could Fall On You.
1. Jesus doesn't get hung up on finding the cause.
 - a. He doesn't criticize Pilate for killing those Galileans.
 - Although Pilate could easily have been criticized.
 - #For that.
 - #For more.
 - b. He doesn't criticize the:
 - Architect.
 - Engineers.
 - Construction workers.
 - #For the collapse of that tower.
 - *Although there may have been plenty of blame to go around.
 2. Jesus calls us to look at ourselves.
 - a. "Unless you repent, you will all perish as they did."
 - Luke 13: 3,5.
 - b. Unless you:
 - Look in your own heart.
 - See your own sin.
 - #Own it.
 - #Confess it.
 - #Repent of it.
 - #Receive the grace of God's forgiveness.
 - *This, or worse, could happen to you.
 - *The tower could fall on you.
 3. Tim Veldstra and his colleagues from Thrivent are with us this morning.
 - a. When I invited them several weeks ago.
 - I hadn't looked ahead at the lessons for today.
 - But when I read this Gospel lesson.
 - #Tim came to mind.
 - b. Tim was in the south tower of the World Trade Center.
 - On 9/11.
 - On the 61st floor.
 - c. I "Googled" him.
 - I found Tara Lynn Thompson's article.
 - #"Witness to Infamy."
 - #Community Spirit Magazine.
 - *September 2006.
 - He tells his story.
 - #First plane hit the north tower.
 - #As he was evacuating his building.
 - *Down 61 flights of stairs.
 - *Second plane hit the south tower.

- d. I also "Googled" some statistics.
 - Over 2600 people were killed in the World Trade Center.
 - #That day.
 - Around 16,000 escaped from the Twin Towers.
 - #Before the buildings collapsed.
 - e. We could ask our "why" questions.
 - Why did Tim get out and not others?
 - Why did some hesitate to evacuate and not others?
 - Why did some find the way out and not others?
 - Why did some turn back and not others?
 - f. Jesus doesn't ask those questions.
 - He shifts the focus from them to us.
 - "Unless you repent, you will all perish as they did."
 - The tower could fall on you.
4. In January 1989.
- a. Missouri held its first execution in almost 20 years.
 - Several of us drove:
 - #From St. Louis.
 - #To "The Walls" in Jefferson City.
 - *For a prayer vigil.
 - By the time the execution was carried out.
 - #Shortly after midnight.
 - #Pea soup fog had settled in.
 - *I offered to drive home.
 - +120 miles through the fog.
 - +Barely able to see:
 - =White dotted lines.
 - In the middle of the road.
 - =Solid white line.
 - On the side of the road.
 - +But we made it safely.
 - b. Next day I talked with a pastor friend of mine.
 - Pastor Ron.
 - #Lived in St. Louis.
 - #But he served a congregation in Belleville, Illinois.
 - I told him where I had been the night before.
 - He told me what had happened to him that night.
 - #He had left the church.
 - #He was driving down the highway.
 - *On his way home.
 - #He saw tail lights ahead of him.
 - *On a car that didn't seem to be moving.
 - +He slowed down.

- *As he got closer.
 - +He saw that the car wasn't moving at all.
 - =He pulled over and stopped.
- *As he got out of the car.
 - +He saw:
 - =Not only the car's tail lights.
 - =But a tractor-trailer truck.
 - Sideways across the road.
 - *Apparently this truck had been trying to:
 - +Turn around.
 - +Cross the median.
 - =It had gotten hung up.
 - Running lights on the side of the truck.
 - #Dirty.
 - #Covered with grime.
 - +This car had wedged itself under the trailer.
- #Pastor Ron ran up to the car.
 - *To see if he could offer assistance.
 - *He saw two people inside.
 - +Decapitated.
 - +Killed instantly.
 - =Probably never knew what they hit.
- c. When I shared this incident.
 - With a sister.
 - #Roman Catholic nun.
 - *Who had been to the execution vigil that night.
 - She said:
 - #"Your friend was spared because he was doing the Lord's work.
 - *That sounds nice.
 - *Maybe we'd like to believe that.
 - Do we then assume?
 - #Those who were killed.
 - *Were somehow worse sinners.
- d. I think Pastor Ron had a better understanding of that experience.
 - He said:
 - #"That could have been me."
 - #"If I had left the church a few minutes earlier,"
 - #"If I had been ahead of that other car,"
 - *"That could have been me."
- 5. Our Gospel lesson for today tells us several things.
 - a. It could happen to us.
 - Tower could fall on you.
 - Tower could fall on me.

- b. We're not so different.
 - From the people killed on 9/11.
 - From the people in the way of those tornadoes.
 - From the people in that fire.
 - From the people on that bus.
 - From the people in that car.
 - From the man who was executed that foggy night in 1989.
 - #Tiny Mercer.
 - We are:
 - #Sinners one.
 - #Sinners all.
- c. We live by God's grace.
 - Why weren't other Galileans killed in Pilate's rampage?
 - #God's grace.
 - Why were only 18 killed when the Tower of Siloam fell?
 - #God's grace.
 - Why did Tim Veldstra make it out of the Twin Towers alive?
 - #God's grace.
 - Why did Pastor Ron avoid running underneath that truck?
 - #God's grace.
 - Why hasn't God chopped down our trees?
 - #When we have been unfruitful.
 - *God's grace.
- d. God's grace.
 - Put Jesus on the tree of the cross.
 - #Chopped him down.
 - *Instead of us.
 - #Uses that cross.
 - *To dig up the soil around our hearts.
 - #Uses the blood of our crucified Lord.
 - *To fertilize our spirits.
 - Raised Jesus up on the third day.
 - #So that we might have:
 - *Another year.
 - *Another day.
 - *Another chance.
 - +To grow in God's love.
 - +To bear fruit.
 - =In a world filled with:
 - Calamities.
 - Disasters.

Concl: Remember: The tower could fall on you.
But so does God's grace.

