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Suffering & the Savior

No doubt troubled by the previous remarks about impending accountability of their souls, some questioned Christ further to learn of any loop-holes that might afford them another option than reconciling their broken relationship with God other than through faith in Christ alone. Our 24 hours news agencies aren't the first to create a buzz about horrific tragedies and injustices in society. Even in ancient times, people were aware of incidents in the headlines where incredible tragedies occurred. Some even sought to put certain "spin" on stories to make the latest "scoop" more religiously and culturally controversial. Read here of their request of Jesus interpretation of these dramatic events:

¹There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

²And Jesus answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all *other* Galileans, because they suffered such things?

³I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.

⁴Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all *other* men who dwelt in Jerusalem?

⁵I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." *Luke 13:1-5 NKJV*

Pilate was instrumental in constructing an aqueduct system that would supply water from all the way from the Sea of Galilee to Jerusalem...even at the expense of Temple treasury. His pipeline plan was not only culturally costly, as it was at the expense of decreasing popularity with the Jews, but also politically costly as it created friction with Herod, who was jealous of local treasuries. There is very limited information on the two headlines that Christ sites, but some have attempted to helpfully piece together a storyline that can provide some insight into the line of questioning that is being presented in this narrative.

William Barclay, a helpful commentator notes: "At the very idea of spending temple monies like that [for construction of an aqueduct], the Jews were up in arms. When mobs gathered, Pilate instructed his soldiers to mingle with them, wearing cloaks over their battle dress for disguise. They were instructed to carry cudgels [clubs] rather than swords. At a given signal they were to fall on the mob and disperse them. This was done, but the soldiers dealt with the mob with a violence far beyond their instructions and a considerable number of people lost their lives." Barclay goes on to speculate that later when Pilate sends Jesus to Herod for trial it was perhaps an attempt to defer to the favor and win over some lost respect and camaraderie within the relationship that had been in disrepair due to this situation (Luke 23:6-12). William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 172-173.

Regarding the 18 who were killed in the fall of the tower (v. 4), it is likely that some of the workers for the aqueduct system were hired from among the Galileans. These Galileans would have been viewed with incredible disdain for their disloyalty to their Jewish village and to God. Apparently there was a failure during the construction process that was fatal. The lives that were lost were not so readily mourned over as those who had appeared in the protest mob against the Empire. These tower workers were viewed as greater sinners for their perceived betrayal.

Rather than taking a personal account of their own soul, these interrogators sought to neutralize the judgment of God on one hand by saying that the playing field of accountability is level, and on the other hand, sought to justify themselves on an artificial scale of God's favor based upon their own self-righteousness. They saw the Galileans who died in the protest as saints and viewed the tower workers as sinners based upon their loyalty / disloyalty to their country and their religion. **God's scale**

of justice doesn't' balance on the fulcrum of man-made morality. God's justice is fixed upon the unchanging nature of His holiness. Man cannot attain perfect morality by constructing his own system of balances. No nationality, no religion, no determination made by man can atone for his ultimate sin account before God. No good intention acted out in culture-changing movements, no matter how successful they may be, can level the scale of God's justice system. And no act of disloyalty, betrayal, divorce or corruption can disqualify some from being declared "pardoned" by faith in the judicial actions of God that were mediated on the cross at Calvary.

"The ground is level at the foot of the cross." Christ declares to them, "Unless you repent, you will likewise perish." Righteously indignant protestor to disloyal tower worker—neither is out of the reach of God's saving and irreplaceable grace. All human suffering may not be caused by a forensically linked and corresponding sin, but ultimately suffering has entered into this world because of the curse that sin has brought upon us. Suffering and death are ultimately the effect of sin. But the soul that places their faith in Christ alone for atonement and pardon for their sin will not perish (John 3:16). There is a death that is more deadly in its consequences than what only this world knows of in physical death. It is eternal death (Rev. 21:8) under the forever condemnation of God for that soul who in this lifetime rejects the saving work of Jesus Christ on the cross and in unbelief does not look to His resurrection as their hope for eternal life.

These people were unwilling to accept God's economy of grace. They aimed to attribute certain achievements as a debt settlement of a person's account of sin before God. In this man-made scheme, that one who places their faith in their own loyalties, performance, works, etc...is void of understanding the true nature of the grace which Christ delivered into this world.

LIFE APPLICATION:

1. What was the point of the ones who told Christ of the Galilean martyrs? What is the measurement of righteousness / good works that becomes evident by them?

2. Why is artificial measurement of righteousness *grace-less*?
3. Why did Christ use two opposing views of loyalty in the news headlines to deliver a message of good news? (v. 2, 5)

4. What is Christ pointing to when He used the word "likewise"? (v. 3, 5)

5. Read Job 4:7 and answer the following questions:
"Remember now, who *ever* perished being innocent? Or where were the upright *ever* cut off?"

The Jews (as many others do today) connected sin and suffering. Eliphaz, one of Job's "friends", said the above to Job. These were cruel and heartbreaking words to Job in his time of grief. Their implication was clear: the innocent do not suffer...therefore Job was suffering, allegedly, because of his sinfulness. As you can see, the Jews surrounding Jesus at this moment had bought into the thinking that the innocent (at least by their measurements_ would not suffer. They questioned Christ's teaching that all would suffer if they will not repent and turn to Him for salvation.

- a. What is wrong with a theology of suffering that supposes innocence is associated with a pain-free life?
- b. What is wrong with a theology of suffering that supposes suffering is associated with a sinful life?
- c. Christ does not down-play suffering in this world—*ever* (see his compassion on the blind, lame, afflicted...), however in all of the contexts of His concern for the sufferer His greatest interest is in the suffering of their soul both at the present and in the future. How is the "perish"ing of those who are unrepentant "like" the perishing of those who died in these two headlines?
- d. What is the "editorial" that Christ is declaring in this passage?