

**Supernatural Lessons from a Natural Disaster**

Scripture: Luke 13:1-5

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We come to the time of study in the Word of God at this point, and Luke 13 is our text. We now leave chapter 12 behind, that long chapter of 59 verses, and enter in to chapter 13. And this morning we're going to look at the opening five verses. For you that are visiting with us, we go through the scriptures one verse at a time, passage by passage, paragraph by paragraph, and we are currently going through this amazing history of the Lord Jesus Christ called the gospel of Luke. And we find ourselves in the thirteenth chapter verse 1 and I'll read verses 1 through 5.

"Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And He answered and said to them, 'Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? I tell you no. But unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the Tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you no. But unless you repent you will all likewise perish.'"

We live in a society unlike any in the past, a world of electronic media, a world of mass communication, a world of overexposure to relentless visual images and enhancements. We see everything and we see it constantly. In fact, we're not isolated from anything that happens anywhere in the world. Every catastrophe, every calamity, every cataclysm, every disaster, every tragedy everywhere eventually comes to us through the media and we vicariously experience all the pain and sorrow and suffering and death, whether it's earthquakes in Mexico, or Japan, or Indonesia, or whether it's famine in Africa or volcanic eruptions on various islands of the sea, or whether it's horrific hurricanes in Asia or in Florida, whether it's plagues in India, avalanches in Europe, wars in Iraq, whether it's genocide, whether it's suicidal terrorists in Israel or New York City or Washington D.C. or in a Russian school, whether it's a plane crash, a train disaster, the sinking of ferry boat in a choppy sea in the English Channel, whatever it is, we are not isolated from these disasters, natural disasters, massacres, terrible crimes, calamitous events, despotic rulers who slaughter their people, images of war, gruesome killings with body parts lying all around, the killing of unborn children by abortion, gang murders of innocent children walking along the street or playing in their yard is a way the gang member gains credibility in his organization, whatever it is, we get it all. We cannot escape the information about catastrophic car wrecks that kill people. We see them replay it again and again on the nightly news, or house fires that burn up entire families.

And the truth is, if we weren't living in this particular era of human history, we would not experience all of this. We would live in a little world somewhere and that little world would have its share of disasters and sometimes pretty devastating ones. But we at least wouldn't have to bear the weight of all the disasters of all the world all the time. There is no little world for us anymore, not in western society. The weight of the tragedies of the world finds its way on our emotional backs. The tragedies of the globe becomes ours to process in our beleaguered minds. And if it's not enough to have to deal with all the real disasters, our society is very adept at creating artificial ones and putting them on the screen so we can be emotionally hammered by things that don't really happen to go along with the things that do. We wind up, to some degree, being initially outraged, but we end up numb. We bear the knowledge of every disaster. We bear the disaster of every catastrophe and every calamity at a level that never has been experienced by generations in the past. And the media that we're exposed to are filled with images of chilling deaths endlessly. The level of this all, I suppose, may make us think that there are more calamities in the world than ever in any other era of history. And certainly it is true we have more technological killing power than we have ever had, but we seem to be holding it off. We do have greater killing power than the world has ever known in the past. But the truth is, the calamities aren't any worse or any more frequent. In fact, there have always been natural disasters and for the most part they...they do more damage in more primitive societies as we see in Third World countries and would have done more damage, of course, than in past history when we didn't have the safeguards we have today in construction and protection. And certainly diseases did more damage in the past. Plagues would wipe out whole countries. There's always been calamity in the world, cataclysm, disaster, always catapulting unexpected people into eternity.

You know, this is a dangerous place to live, this earth. Not like we really had an option. But it's a very dangerous place to live. We do a lot of things in modern society in technology to try to protect ourselves and minimize the danger. And some of it we do pretty well. We have organizations to make sure that the airplanes meet certain standards and that the food meets certain standards and that the medication meets certain standards and that conduct and behavior in societies controlled to a certain degree. And we do everything to make buildings meet a certain standard. And all of these things are an attempt to try to protect from calamity. But it's still everywhere. And when calamity comes, the question always surfaces, it always does, what does it mean? And if there's a God, why does it happen? And certainly the calamity of all calamities that hit us was 9-11 and we were all thrown into the dialogue on what is this all about, what does it mean, is there a message here, is God trying to say something, is there some purpose in this, is there some meaning? What is the message of calamity?

I remember immediately being put on international television and asked this question: what does this mean? How are we to understand these kinds of things? Is God saying something? And if so, what is He saying? And how is it that such bad things can happen to good people?

We are very familiar with these kinds of questions. Now we all know that everybody dies. We're not talking about that. Everybody dies. We're talking about calamity, that unexpected, inexplicable, almost serendipitous death. You get in your car and you drive somewhere and there's an accident, wipes out your whole family. Or you get in an airplane and it hits a mountain. Or something falls on you and crushes you. Or you get some kind of illness that you couldn't have expected that takes your life instantly. We all know we're going to die, it's the unexpected element of death. And particularly when it happens to large numbers of people. What is it saying when this happens?

Well the Jews had a theology about it. They did. Their theology was, of course, that they were superior to everyone. They were the people of the Covenant and they had a very highly developed theology that they were the favorites of God. And that God blessed them and protected them and kept calamity from them. And, in fact, if calamity did fall, it was a good indication that God was judging you in particular because although you may have been a part of a people that were generally under the blessing of God, you must be very evil and very bad at heart because God is going to bring calamity to fall upon those people who are evil. That was sort of the prevailing conventional wisdom theology of Israel. This goes way back. This goes way back to the patriarchal period. We're talking the time of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob period. We're talking about the time of Job who lived in the patriarchal period. Job, you remember, had calamity, right? All of his children were killed. Horrible, they were all killed and they were killed while they were worshiping God. They were massacred, his whole family. And then he lost all his crops. And then he lost all his animals. And then he lost his health. And his friends came around to explain what the reason was for this. They were going to give him the theology of his own 9-11. "Eliphaz says, 'Remember now, whoever perished being innocent?'" When were the upright ever destroyed, Job? You must be a really wicked person. You're hiding it. That's what he said. And he was relentless, you know. Four chapters later he's still at it. And many chapters later he's still at it. You come in to chapter 22, he's still at it. He says in verse 4, "Is it because of your reverence that He reproves you?" mocking him. "Is it because of your reverence that He enters into judgment against you? No, is not your wickedness great and your iniquities without end." That was the conventional theology.

If you have calamitous events in your life this is the judgment of God on you because you are a bad person. That...that was their theology in the New Testament. John chapter 9, there's a man born blind and the Jews said, "Okay, who sinned, this man or his parents that he would be blind?" The human calamity, and human disaster, human illness was related to sin. And if you were alive and you were well, you must be good. In 1861 in the great day of Charles Spurgeon, there were a couple of severe calamities that occurred in London. One of them was a train wreck in which, if I remember right, 23 people were killed. And the other was a tunnel disaster which killed quite a number of people. This became such an issue among Christian people that Spurgeon preached a sermon on those two accidents from this text. It was September 8, 1861 and he preached a sermon to dispel the absurd idea that God killed those people because they were traveling on a Sunday. We wouldn't have a

congregation if that was the way God operated. But there was this crazy idea that, you know, if you breach the Sabbath, God may kill you in a tunnel disaster or crash your train.

What do these events mean? Well what does it mean when a tower collapses and kills indiscriminately Christians, non-Christians, adults, children, evil people and moral people? What does it mean when a plane goes down and everybody dies without regard for their relative morality, or spirituality or knowledge of God? What's the point? Is God picking on certain people by assembling them together in the right place to just kill them all?

Now we know better than that. We know a lot of very wretched, evil, wicked people who are doing very well. They're healthy and prosperous and living long lives and doing everything they can to corrupt our culture. And we know some very good people who died in terrible calamities...car wrecks, train wrecks, illnesses, even hurricanes. What does it mean?

Well Jesus answers that question in this text. And I remember when I was first interviewed on the 9-11 thing with Larry King, this is the text that I went to because I knew this text very well. And Jesus here gives us the answer when that question is asked.

Now the way to break the text down is to break it into three parts. First is the temple calamity, we're talking about calamity here, okay? First is the temple calamity, let's pick it up in verse 1. "Now on the same occasion," that is the same occasion as this long discourse that started in chapter 12 verse 1, this long evangelistic invitation in which He's calling on people to come to Him and be saved. "On that same occasion there were some present." They are unidentified, no sense in speculating, some people. "Who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices."

This is the third interruption. This is a long discourse. He was interrupted by someone who had a question in verse 13. He was interrupted by Peter in verse 41 who had another question. And here He is interrupted a third time by some people who have a question. This is a wonderful thing. I mean, Jesus was open to being interrupted when He was in these long open discourses with people and they would sometimes interrupt Him to express their curiosities and He would respond. Well some of these people who are present reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

Now remember the subject here is judgment now. End of chapter 12, Jesus closed out that portion of the message by talking about the fact that a person who is going to go to court who is guilty of something better settle with his accuser before he gets to the judge or the judge is going to expose his guilt, turn him over to the constable, or the jailer and put him in prison until he pays every last cent. And what Jesus was saying is, "Look, you better settle your case with God before you ever get to the judgment. You better settle your case with God before you ever get to the judgment because

when you get before God at the judgment, it's too late, you're going to be turned over to eternal punishment." That was the point. So judgment is the theme. And that peaks the interest of these people. Speaking in the category of judgment, they say, "What about those Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices? How does that fit in to God's judgment? Is that the judgment of God?" That's the question in their mind. It doesn't say what they actually said. They're not quoted. They just brought up the issue about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

Now this was something that had just happened, a fresh event. This would have been headlines in the Jerusalem Gazette, if there was one. Everybody would have heard about it. It would have gone through Jerusalem like a wildfire. Everyone would have known this. First of all, Pilate, Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, we met him, first of all, back in chapter 3. He ruled in behalf of Rome in Israel from 26 to 36, that span right through the time of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was the fifth Roman prefect or the fifth Roman procurator assigned to represent Rome and Rome's authority in the occupied land of Israel. He had a deserved reputation of being very inflexible, very implacable, very wicked, very self-willed. His rule was marked by briberies and robberies and insults to the Jews, abuse, frequent executions without trials, savage ferocity marked the man relentlessly. It was largely Pilate's treatment of the Jews that precipitated the Jews' rebellion that led to the Roman invasion and the destruction of the city and of the nation in 70 A.D. Pilate lit the fuse because of how he treated the Jews. And so this is consistent with Pilate's behavior. And apparently Pilate sends his soldiers to find some Galileans and slaughters them while they are offering sacrifices, Galilean Jews who had come down to offer sacrifices. Only one place in Israel where you could offer sacrifice, that's the temple. Very likely this is the Passover, this is a Passover. And these Galilean Jews had come down to offer their sacrifices. There were so many tens of thousands, in fact some estimates, a quarter of a million animals were slaughtered in the Passover week. It was so massive a slaughter, the priests couldn't do it themselves, and so the actual worshiper would participate it. So we could assume that this would have been very likely at a Passover.

Furthermore, Pilate would have been in Jerusalem at the Passover because that's when the city was bulging with all the pilgrims and trouble could come. And so he would have left Caesarea to come there to be in Jerusalem. And the Galileans were notoriously rebellious so apparently there were some Galileans who maybe had done something of a rebellious nature against Rome and they were tracked down into Jerusalem and tracked by whoever investigates those kinds of things found at the temple, found there offering sacrifices. We don't know any of the details. But there they were, offering their sacrifices.

And Pilate comes, not personally, but his soldiers. Finds them there and slices them up so that in a very gruesome way, a gory way, it describes their blood as being mingled with the blood of the sacrifices. Now you have to understand, offering sacrifices at Passover would be like being in a slaughter house. That would be the only thing comparable. In fact, to kill a quarter of a million animals

in a week, you can imagine what kind of a slaughter house the temple was, blood everywhere. And now the blood of these Galileans flows with the blood dripping off that altar. Maybe...maybe they had known Pilate's men were after them, maybe they sought sanctuary at the altar. You remember in the Old Testament there was a man named Adonijah, according to 1 Kings, who...who ran into the altar and grabbed on the horns of the altar as if it was a place of safety. And if they were holding on to the horns of the altar of sacrifice, Pilate didn't spare them. He slaughtered them there.

And that raises the question of, these...these people aren't pagan, they're not Romans, it should be the Romans being slaughtered, they're the pagans, they're the ungodly. And not only that, they're not just sort of neutral, they're worshiping, they're doing what the Old Testament says. They're worshiping God, they're confessing their sins, they're bringing their offering. How...the question is...how can such a bad thing happen to good people?

And so in verse 2 Jesus responds to the intention of their bringing this up. "He answered and said to them, 'Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate?'" And He calls their conventional theology into question. Now do you think that the reason this happened to them was because they are the greatest sinners in Galilee? Is that what you think? Do you suppose that?

This, by the way, says He answered and said to them, "He answered a question they had only implied." And their question was, how could this happen? Our theology says bad things only happen to bad people. How can this be? Are they worse than everybody else in Galilee? That's what they're thinking. Do you suppose, dokeo, are you imagining? Ah, sometimes there are judgments by God on individuals for sin. We certainly would say that God in the past has brought judgment on the heads of certain sinners, immediate and instant judgment. I think of Herod, you remember, holding Herod Day in the book of Acts and all of a sudden God struck him and he died. There are times when God does judge individuals. But when you're talking about a collective catastrophe, the question comes up...why did this happen? What kind of a judgment is this? And there are built-in judgments, by the way, to sinful behavior. If you want to be an alcoholic, there's a built-in judgment, it's called sclerosis of the liver, you'll die. And if you want to live in the most gross, immoral way, there's some built-in problems there, you're going to get a venereal disease, etc., etc., that could well kill you. If you want to live a life of crime, you might get killed in a shoot out.

I mean there are some factors built in to sinful behavior that bring about death. We're not talking about individual issues, we're talking about calamity. We're not talking about the gradual or natural effect of sin but these catastrophic events, these accidents, these calamities that fall on people somewhat indiscriminately. What is this about?

A few weeks ago we were in Pompeii just outside of Naples in Italy, which is one of the most fascinating set of ruins in the world because it was preserved by being buried under ash since just

after the destruction of Jerusalem in that same decade, only discovered in the modern era. And you go through that city and you see pornographic images everywhere, preserved through all these centuries, horrific. And you see a whole street given to brothels and prostitutes and somebody would say, "Well this is the judgment of God that fell here." Well there were also little tiny babies that were there, there were also little children there. There were also people there who didn't engage in that and there were also towns all around that had the same kind of life style exactly as that. Why did that happen to them? Were they the worst people in Italy? That's the question. And there may well have been some believers there. Some believers in Jesus Christ may have been there. Planes crash with believers and nonbelievers in them. Christians die in Africa, slaughtered by enemy tribes. And very many places in the world, Christians are purposely killed because they're Christian. Sometimes the righteous die and the wicked live.

What's the message then of calamity? Of war? We have our young men over in Iraq, there are young men who love Christ that are being blown up just like young men who hate Christ being blown up. There are Muslims being blown up. Muslims who want to kill Americans being blown up with Americans who want to evangelize Muslims. Crushed at the bottom of the towers in New York City was a spectrum of humanity from little children to older people and all points on a relative moral scale, believers and nonbelievers. Spurgeon said in that sermon in 1861, "As I look for a moment on the poor mangled bodies of those who had been so suddenly slain, my eyes find tears but my heart does not boast. Far from me be a boastful cry, 'God, I thank Thee that I'm not as these men are.' No, no, no, it's not the Spirit of Christ nor the spirit of Christianity. While we can thank God that we are preserved, yet we can say it is of Your mercy that we are not consumed." That's the only issue. You don't live because you deserve to live. You live because though you deserve to die, God is merciful. Sometimes people read the Old Testament, I've had this debate many times, and say, "What kind of a God is this? The Old Testament God is unacceptable. What kind of a God kills whole cities of people with plagues? What kind of God tells the Israelites to destroy the Canaanites? What kind of God opens up the ground and swallows people whole? What kind of a God sends a bear out of the woods to rip up 42 young men for yelling, 'Old bald head,' at a prophet? What kind of a God does these things?"

That's really not the question. The question is what kind of a God lets anybody live? We know God is holy and righteous and we know the wages of sin is death, and we deserve to die. The soul that sins, it shall die. The fact that we take another breath is because God is merciful. It's the patience and forbearance of God leading us to repentance. You see, history works this way, we all deserve to die. But instead, God lets us live and really live, you know, we live, we love, we laugh, we enjoy all the blessings of life in all its richness. What's that about? It's showing you the patience and forbearance of God, the kindness of God, the compassion of God with the intent of leading you to repentance. It's time to repent. It's giving you opportunity.

But all through human history, God punctuates His patience with events that remind us death is around the corner and we don't know when. That's the message. And that's what I said to Larry King that night. The message is, you don't know when you're going to die, but you are going to die and you can't predict it and you can't plan it. You need to be ready. The question in the Old Testament is why did God let all those sinners live? Why does God let a world of sinners live today? Because He's compassionate and He's merciful and He's patient. And He's waiting for sinners to repent. And Spurgeon went on to say, "It is only because He has mercy, not willing that we should perish but that we should come to repentance." That's why He has preserved us from going down to the grave and kept us alive from death.

So it isn't that I must be better than the people who died because I didn't die. No. God has been merciful to you and given you an opportunity to repent. And that's why Jesus said in response, look at verse 3, "I tell you no, no. The Galileans who were slaughtered by Pilate were not greater sinners than all other Christians because they...all other Galileans, I mean, because they suffered this fate. They are not greater sinners than everybody else in Galilee. I tell you no."

Let's go to the second issue before we come back to the second half of that verse. The first was the temple calamity. The second is the tower calamity. Since we're in that kind of discussion, Jesus brings up another issue from the front page. "Or do you suppose," tapping again into their sort of theology, "do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits or debtors," that is debtors to God for violating His law, "then all the men who live in Jerusalem?"

The Jews down in Jerusalem tended to think of the Galileans as inferior. So maybe implied in that question was, you know, sort of the idea that Galileans are bad and maybe those were the worse of them. But now Jesus takes it down to their own city and their own area. And He says, "There was a tower in Siloam as you well know that fell over and killed eighteen people." I mean, there's no indication of sin here. There's no indication of sin on the part of the Galileans. They weren't doing something wrong, they were doing what was right. These people aren't doing anything with moral consequences. They're just there when it falls. These aren't issues of sin. We don't have any other details on this, by the way, except to say Siloam is a section of Jerusalem, the lower city, where the southern and the eastern wall meet. And there was a spring in the area outside the wall called Gihon and the Gihon spring had an abundance of water and that water was brought into the city of Jerusalem through a tunnel that Hezekiah built, well known Hezekiah's tunnel to anybody who visits Israel. And the water came through Hezekiah's tunnel and filled up a pool called the Pool of Siloam which is where Jesus sent the blind man in John 9 to wash. Remember that story. So it was a water supply. The city had to have water supply. The water springs on the outside, the water was then funneled into the city through that tunnel.



Well in order to spread the water, Pilate had built an aqueduct. The Romans were great at building aqueducts. The ruins of one is still available to be seen in amazing repair at this point in the city of Caesarea by the coast there. But the Romans loved to build aqueducts by which they moved the water around. And Pilate had done that. Put on a big building program to produce an aqueduct which was connected to Siloam and to the water source. Apparently either in the building a scaffolding fell over, or they had constructed a tower on the aqueduct, which the Romans often did in order to observe the flow of the water, and to protect the flow of the water from enemies cutting it off, whether the tower itself that had been built there for that reason fell or whether some kind of scaffolding tower fell, we don't know. But either workers or people watching or walking by were crushed and died. It's nothing about sin there. They were just there. They just, you know, we would say today they were in the wrong place and the wrong time. And so He says, "Do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem?" Was that the scum of Jerusalem, were they the worse people here?

Well they knew better than that but that's what their theology told them. You know, if I'm alive and it doesn't hit me, I'm good and they're bad. He says no, no. The fact that you're alive doesn't mean you're any better than they are. No. Calamity is not God's way to single out the especially evil people.

Now let's come to the third point, the temple calamity, the tower calamity, the true calamity. The true calamity, go back to verse 3. "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." Verse 5, "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." That's the true calamity. The real calamity is not that you were killed in the temple or that the tower fell on you or that you died by any other means. The real calamity is that if you don't repent, when death comes you will perish. And He's talking there about eternal judgment. Just because you're alive doesn't mean you've escaped judgment. "It's appointed unto men once to die and after that...what?...the judgment." True calamity is that you die and experience the judgment of God because you haven't settled your case before you got to court, back to verse 58 of chapter 12. The true calamity is that you feel the judgment of God eternally because you will not repent. The issue is not how people die or when they die or by what cause they die. The issue is that they die without repenting. That's what I kept saying in interview after interview. "Look, the lesson is you're going to die, you don't know when you're going to die, you need to repent before that happens." And certainly our Lord knew that a lot of the people who were in Jerusalem at this very time were going to die in 70 A.D. about 35 years from now if they were still alive. Those who still lived would very likely perish when tens of thousands of Jews were massacred by the Romans.

But it's really not physical death He's talking about. We have to assume that the Galileans there offering sacrifices were probably not believers in Jesus. We have to assume the eighteen people crushed by the towers were not believers in Jesus and they perished. And Jesus says, "Look, don't assume anything. You're going to likewise perish," likewise not by the same means but with the same certainty. Everybody's headed for death. And the point is, you better repent before you get there. You better settle your case before you get to court. Just because Pilate's soldiers ran by you to get to

those Galileans, says nothing about your righteousness. Just because the tower fell and you had just left with your water doesn't mean you're more righteous than the ones who were crushed. Just because your plane landed and somebody's crashed doesn't mean you're any better than anybody else. What it does mean is God is showing you more mercy, more patience, giving you more opportunity to repent.

This was...this was such a bitter pill the Jews wouldn't swallow it. Repent? We're the righteous. We're the godly. We're the spiritual. We're the chosen. We're the blessed. What are You talking about repent? They hated His talk of repentance. They hated it with John the Baptist. They hated it with Jesus. And it was because He called them to repentance that they plotted to murder Him and eventually did. They refused to see themselves as sinners. They refused to see themselves as headed for judgment. It infuriated them to be diagnosed that way. Most of all the leaders and then the leaders passed on that infuriated attitude to the people. And our Lord doesn't try to prove they were sinners. He doesn't give some long litany trying to prove they were sinners. They all knew the Law of God. And they all knew that the Law was summed up in the great commandment, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, your neighbor as yourself." They knew they didn't do that. They knew they were full of hate and animosity and bitterness and wretchedness. They knew. So He didn't bother to prove that they were sinners. They had the Law of God, well acquainted with it. He just said to them, "You better repent. Are you prepared when a tower falls on you?"

Now what do you mean repent? Two things. With this we'll draw a conclusion. Two things in repentance. One, change your mind about your sinfulness. Change your mind about your sinfulness. Most people think they're pretty good. Most people would say, "Well, when I get to the judgment seat and I face God, yeah, I think my good outweighs my bad." Boy, that is a damning attitude. You better change your mind. You better acknowledge the absolute holiness of the Law of God, its binding obligation. You better acknowledge that if you've ever broken one of God's Laws one time, you're headed for hell. You are a violator of the Law of God. You are a debtor to God. The word culprit is the word debtor. You are a debtor in the deepest sense, not only is your conduct bad, your...your words bad, your thoughts bad, but your heart is corrupt. You must accept personal guilt and the expectation of judgment by God as a just judgment on you as a guilty sinner. You deserve punishment. That's the thing we're talking about when you say change your attitude about your sinfulness. Repentance is the sinner agreeing with the righteous condemnation of the Law. It's the sinner agreeing that not only his conduct but his heart is evil and rebellious and contrary to God and His Law. And inherent in that admission is the confession that the sinner has no power to change it, no power within himself to rescue himself by moral duties, by ceremony, or by some kind of conduct. So repentance is simply agreeing with God's diagnosis of your wretchedness and understanding that you can do absolutely nothing about it.

And so, when you're talking about repentance, you're talking about having to cast yourself on somebody who can do something for you in your helpless condition, somebody who can rescue you

from the guilt that you bear, somebody who can rescue you from the judgment that awaits you, somebody who can take you out of the power of sin 'cause you can't do it for yourself. And there is only one such person, you need mercy, you need grace, you need forgiveness, you need deliverance. And there's only one Savior and that's the Lord Jesus Christ.

That leads to the second element in repentance. To acknowledge Jesus Christ as the only Savior...to acknowledge Jesus Christ as the only Savior. Repentance in the New Testament always includes faith in Jesus Christ as the only Savior. You could talk about repentance in its narrow sense, the sense that it is turning from sin. But...and that would be a way that it could be used. But in its New Testament gospel usage, it always embraces faith in Christ. It is a turning 180 degrees, so it's turning from sin to something and the something or someone is always Christ.

When I go to Russia, always refreshed, but the fact that the believers never say I was born again, I was saved, I was redeemed, I was converted. They always say, "I repented, I repented, I repented." That's what they always say. And they understand in that repentance is the full embracing of the only one who can deliver them from sin's power, sin's penalty, and sin's presence, namely Jesus Christ. In fact, at the end of Luke when the Lord gives the great commission in verse 46, He said to them, "It is written that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and...here's the great commission...that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all generations." So it is a repentance in His name. It is a repentance connected with faith in Christ. It's not just repentance. A lot of people are sorry for their sin, that's not enough. It's repentance in His name. And in the book of Acts when the early church went out to preach, the eleventh chapter, eighteenth verse, they said, "God has granted to the Gentiles...listen...the repentance that leads to life." There is a repentance that doesn't lead to life, just being sorry for your sin. The repentance that leads to life is that repentance which embraces Christ. Romans 2:4, "God's patience to lead you to repentance, not just repentance alone but repentance that leads to faith in Christ." "God is not willing that any should perish but all should come to repentance," 2 Peter 3:9, "embracing full faith in the Lord Jesus Christ."

And back to our text. The Lord says, "Look, if you don't repent, a kind of repentance that embraces full trust in Jesus Christ as the only one who can rescue you from your sin, you will all likewise perish," *apollumi*, be destroyed, lost. He's not just talking about physical death here. He's saying you will end up at God's court sentenced to eternal judgment. Jesus says, "How do you understand calamities? Is it just the bad people that get killed?" No. No. It could be anybody. It could be you. And the lesson is, you better repent or when it does come, you're going to perish. And it will come, maybe in a calamity. Let's bow in prayer.

We're reminded of the words of the Apostle Paul borrowing from the Old Testament, "Today is the day of salvation." Lord, we have time now. We have opportunity now. We don't know what the future has. We don't know what calamity awaits. But we know we are experiencing Your patience and

forbearance now. We know it's not because You're slack with Your promise. It's not because You're impotent, or powerless. It's not because You're indifferent. You could take us at any moment. You could snuff our lives out and You would be just in doing that. But You have given us life and time and gospel opportunity to repent. And we have to see that opportunity for what it really is and we have to hear what our Lord said, "Repent or perish." Death comes suddenly, unexpectedly and if we have not repented with a repentance of not just turning...as turning from sin but turning to Christ, then eternal judgment awaits and forever we pay the penalty. What a horrific thought. While there is time, while there is opportunity, while there is the knowledge of the truth, I pray, O God, that hearts would turn to You even now. Father, now we ask that You would do Your work. We're so grateful for the fact that You have been gracious to us, those of us who know You. We were given time and space and opportunity to repent. We were given the truth to hear and to believe and, O Lord, we pray that You would so move in the hearts of those who have heard now and have not yet repented, may they be warned and shaken to the seriousness of the jeopardy in which they exist. And we ask that many would repent before they perish. And, Lord, use us to spread this word of warning and of mercy to sinners everywhere. May they know that judgment comes but that mercy waits. And now send us out to be used to Your glory, we pray in Your Son's name.

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