

## A Theology of Mudslides – *Luke 13:1-5*

**Introduction** – Catastrophes abound worldwide, and now we are witnesses of one that is quite near, the Oso Mudslide. Whether earthquakes, tsunamis, the devastation of war, genocide, or the shattering loss of loved ones to car accidents, cancer, or any of innumerable tragedies, these shake our souls and test our faith. In God's plan, that is exactly what those tragedies are to do to us – and that shaking is to drive us to our God.

**When a Tower Fell** (Luke 13:1-5) – Jesus was informed that Pilate had brutally murdered some Galilean pilgrims, mingling their blood with their sacrifices. Turning to his disciples and other followers, many from Galilee, He asked if God had allowed this because they were worse sinners. Or, He asks, what about the terrible accident that just happened in Siloam? Were those eighteen who died worse sinners than the rest of Jerusalem? To both of those questions, He states clearly, “no” and we learn a lot about what not to surmise when tragedy strikes.

**Death is a Message** – In the immediate context, Jesus' warning (v3, 5) is to unbelieving Jerusalem. If they do not repent, that city, nation, and temple will likewise perish. But we can expand the application. First, when tragedy strikes “them” and not “us” it is not necessarily a sign that they were worse, or more importantly, that we are better. Death is a message, a wage, a consequence – telling us that something is wrong, terribly wrong in this world.

**Did God Do This?** – When bad things happen, is God behind it? Is He the God of hurricanes and mudslides, of murders and disease? Scripture teaches us that God is not up in heaven wringing His hands wondering how all of this has gotten out of His control.

**Over Groups of People** – “*If there is calamity in a city, will not the LORD have done it?*” (Amos 3:6)

**Over Nature** – “*I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these things.*” (Is 45:7)

**Over Individuals** – “*I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?*” (Ruth 1:21). When Job gave the same charge to God, we are told explicitly that Job was right (see Job 1:21-22). Even the crucifixion of Christ was determined, directed and governed by God the Father (Acts 2:22-24).

**Conclusion: God is Never Surprised** – God does whatever pleases Him (Psalm 135:6), and all that He is pleased to do He has planned and known from eternity (Acts 15:18). He is never reacting to events and activities in the way that humans react.

**Does That Mean We are Wrong to Mourn?** – To say that God is sovereignly in control of all of these events is not to say that it is unfaithful for us to mourn, to weep, and to cry out for things to be different. We learn from Jesus. He knew that His friend, Lazarus, had suffered from a sickness and had died (John 11:14) and He knew that He was going to bring him back from the dead.

Nevertheless, with compassion over the pain of death experienced, “*Jesus wept*” (John 11:35) at the tomb of Lazarus with his sisters. He “*groaned in the spirit*” and “*groaning in Himself*” (v33, 38), literally “*snorting with anger at, murmuring against*” death.

**Death is an Enemy** – ...and all that death is. Our physical deaths are a message and part of the curse. Our spiritual death is a result of the curse. Jesus came to put death to death – and in the end, the last enemy, death, will be destroyed (1 Cor 15:26). It is true that death has lost its sting for the Christian (1 Cor 15:55) but that is not to say that death is a natural experience. In that sense, God hates death.

**Then Why Did He Do This?** – Jesus does not tell His disciples why the Galileans were murdered, or why that particular tower fell on those particular eighteen individuals (with families and their hopes and dreams destroyed). Solomon declares in Eccles 3:16-22 that “*under the sun*” we can make no sense of this. There is no reason, no logic, and no defined purpose. Justice cannot be found (v16), except by faith (v17). God is testing us to see that “*under the sun*” we are no different than the road kill we passed by on the way to church – we all go to the dust (vv18-20). There is no scientific proof of what happens to the souls (v21), and nothing to hope for in what happens here after we've gone (v22).

**The Inscrutable Ways of God** – The questions are not answered. Not because God is weak (unable to stop evil), nor because He is a tyrant (giddy to bring forth evil), but because His reasons are beyond us. This is what God made clear to Job in the whirlwind (Job 38-41). God's power is beyond our reckoning; God's goodness is beyond our comprehension; and God's sovereign purposes in all He brings to pass in time and space as we experience it is completely inscrutable (Rom 11:33-36).

**Where Do We Find Consolation Without a Lie?** – Our hope cannot be in nice sounding “lies” (i.e. *God didn't do this, we know they are in a better place, we know we'll all be reincarnated*). Truth be told, outside of Christ, life is a crapshoot and the dice are loaded. There is no consolation in denying the existence of God because of the reality of evil; all that does is deny any condemnation of the evil as evil – anything goes and no one can judge. Death and tragedies like this drive us to the Truth, a Person Who is our Consolation – even in the midst of those tragedies, even after those tragedies (Rom 8:31-39).