

The Tower of Siloam Falls

By Dr. Dave Neale

This morning and up until Easter I'll be preaching from our Luke passages in the lectionary, a book that I am somewhat already familiar with. This makes me happy for several reasons. First it means I won't have to work very hard. The second reason is that I consider the message of Luke to hold the key for the salvation of our world today.

I'm going to talk about the first 5 verses this morning, which are an interesting reference by Jesus to two unfortunate events of that time. (It is a story found only in Luke).

Verses 6-9 are this fascinating story of the man who returns to find the fig tree in his garden without fruit for three years, is besought by the gardener to give it one more year. This is a classic Lukan theme that I will be dealing with next week in the story of the Prodigal Son, chapter 15.

So I will stay with the two disaster stories and see how Jesus' words about them call us to a fresh encounter with God today.

Behind the Text

Pilate, was the Roman governor of Judea and Jerusalem, under whose authority Jesus was crucified. There was a visceral hatred for the man among the Jewish population because it was believed that he expropriated temple funds to his building projects. People were outraged at his corruption of their religion.

In the Text

Jesus first comments on an event in the temple:

...the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

The comment on the Galileans reflects the comment of Josephus (*Jewish Wars* 2.9.4 et al) that Jews were killed by Pilate for protesting that the monies he spent on an aqueduct project connected to the ***Pool of Siloam*** were siphoned from the temple treasury.

Some Jews gathered in the temple for their normal sacrifices were protesting this, and they were set upon by Roman soldiers who had hidden themselves in the crowd, and they beat the protesters so savagely that some died.

People were looking for a political statement from Jesus and he turns from the political question to the question of our lives before God: ***Were these protesters greater sinners than you all because they suffered thus? Of course not.***

You can't determine that there is sin in someone's life because they experience calamity. He turns the question from politics to the question of the state of our own souls.

Are the Ukrainians who are being killed in their homeland sinners. Of course not.

Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them...

There are no extra-biblical references to its building, nor is its purpose known. There is, in fact, a ruin located about 150 meters from the ***Pool of Siloam*** that is possibly where it stood. It fell over and 18

people were killed who were working on it, and the self-righteous probably thought they were sinners for working on another of Pilate's projects, built by misappropriated funds.

Again... ***'Do you think that because they suffered thus that they greater sinners than you are?'***

Each of the calamitous events are capped by this saying:

No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.

From the Text

Why do I think that the message of Luke is so important for our lives today? ***Theirs*** was a time of tremendous social unrest. And ***ours*** is a time of tremendous social unrest. You would be forgiven for thinking that the world has gone mad. Not only are we in recovery from the covid years. We are all grieving daily at the scenes that we see Ukraine.

And the most troubling aspect is where it all might lead in terms of a global conflict.

Angus Reid/CBC conducted a poll about what two years of living through the COVID-19 pandemic was like for people. A majority of those polled say "the ordeal has significantly disrupted their lives" and 4 out of 5 surveyed said the pandemic had "pulled Canadian further apart" and "brought out the worst in people" (CBC, Mar 11, 2022). Almost half surveyed said that bad news had predominated in the last two years

I tell you; unless you repent, you will all perish likewise, Jesus said.

The gospel uses the traditional language of Scripture: sin, disease and impurity. We have a terrible war, the curse of nationalism run amok, not just in Russia, but everywhere narratives of hate are being expressed. We have the shameless bombing of civilian targets, and 2 million refugees. If you still think we don't have sin and impurity in our world I don't know what moral framework you adhere to. But wrong is *still* wrong.

And yet, we come to a book that has tremendous optimism about the human condition. And that is why I believe the message of the gospel is so relevant for today. The gospel is our light in the darkness, our path to salvation.

The gospel teaches that it doesn't matter who you are. Be it the tax collectors and sinners and of which the Bible speaks, or the modern equivalent – and here you insert the people you think are in the wrong of it on any variety of moral questions or lifestyle decision. "Sinners" is usually a name we apply to those who make different choices that we do.

Everyone... everyone is within the reach of this absolute optimism of salvation by Jesus Christ.

But there is a caveat: ***I tell you; unless you repent, you will all perish likewise.***

This is His solution to it all. To all social unrest. To the presence of evil among us. It isn't at all complicated. It's this... we need to turn to God in humility. This will bring a restoration of the Spirit to our hearts; the restoration of a moral structure in our homes, communities and nations; a restoration of our rightness with God.

The underlying premise in all of this is a wonderfully optimistic one: it is that the human freedom to chose one's destiny is ours. As such, the gospel is this story of immense optimism about the human condition. Everyone gets to choose the path of life.¹

And today... we need a fresh encounter with God. Pray with me.

Benediction: And now, let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let us return to the Lord, that He may have mercy upon us, and to our God who will abundantly pardon. God bless you this morning. In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit... Amen

And now Pastor Jimmy will come and read a letter for you.

¹ Here you will recognize the emphasis of Wesley's theology on the importance of our choice to choose salvation.