

Jesus on Disaster

Luke 12, 13, 17

Turn to Luke 13 please. Luke 13. Today we'll look at what Jesus said about disasters, tragedies, random deaths, random to us at least. The question is, how should the survivors think? How should survivors understand disasters that they have escaped? It has happened to others and not them. Why? We're interested because of covid-19, but there are many such tragedies.

Who is to blame? Who stands to gain from this? If we just looked at the Bible, we would say that in some way these come from God himself, and that God himself hopes to gain something from these. They are wakeup calls to the watching world. What God hopes to gain is that we will leave our self-centered lives, and become rich toward God.

Here's a summary of Christian conversion that Paul uses in 1 Thess 1. He's talking about you and me: *you turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son Jesus, who saves us from the coming wrath.* We turned to the living and true God to do two things: *to serve God, and to wait for Jesus, who saves us from the coming wrath.*

To make sense of what Jesus says about disaster, we must absorb a nasty piece of information. Human history as we know it will end with an explosion of God's anger on the human race, for its long refusal to serve and worship him. Life on earth as we know it will end in a judgement similar to the flood in Noah's day, or fire and sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah.

The OT prophets said this, they called it the day of the LORD, Jesus spoke of this final judgment, and Peter, and Hebrews, and certainly Revelation, and Paul does briefly here: the coming wrath. Those who serve God and wait for Jesus will be rescued from this.

Don't press me for details, I don't know, but this much is clear. Human history as we know it will end with an explosion of God's anger on the human race, for its long refusal to serve and worship him. Jesus will rescue from this all who wait for him and serve God.

Tragedy in Jerusalem Luke 13:1-5

Since the beginning of Luke 12, the theme of Jesus' teaching has been judgment, and Jesus continues that in the beginning of Luke 13. That's the context – teaching about judgment.

In Luke 12, Jesus told parable of the rich fool, who died but was not rich toward God. Still in Luke 12, Jesus told stories of servants whose master gave them a job to do, and then the master left, and then he suddenly came back. Some servants were doing their jobs, and got promotions, and some were not, and got punishment. The Son of Man will return suddenly.

All of these in some way warn about coming judgement, and this continues in Luke 13.

Luke 13:1 *Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”*

So Pilate slaughtered some Galileans who were in Jerusalem for a temple festival. Pilate was cruel and corrupt, and had done enough things like this. We don't know any more than this says. Galileans offended Pilate in some way, but did not deserve death. But he had them killed.

Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. When Jesus hears the story, he decides to correct wrong thinking by those who told him the story. Apparently, those who told Jesus DID think these Galileans were worse sinners than surviving Galileans.

These people make two assumptions. One, they assume these Galileans died as God's judgment on their sins. Two, they also assume that since these people died, and not others, they were worse sinners than other Galileans who survived.

Jesus accepts their first assumption, but not the second. Were their deaths the result of their sins? Yes, Jesus agrees with them on that. Their deaths were in fact because of their sins, which means that somehow God was in this. But, were the people who died *worse* sinners than the survivors?

No, absolutely not, and Jesus has energy about this. The rest are just as guilty as the dead. Is that not unfair on God's part? No, Jesus would say, not unfair, because the same disaster is coming on everyone who does not repent. If God was being fair, in Jesus' mind, then all Galileans who had not repented would have died at that time; survivors are getting extra time.

Then Jesus bring up a different disaster, a tower in Jerusalem fell and killed 18 people. Another senseless and random tragedy. And same explanation: were they guilty sinners? Yes.

Folks, we want to blame somebody. Who would we blame for a vicious ruler like Pilate? Who would we blame for a collapsing building that killed people? We would be all over that. My brothers and sisters, could we not do that? Blaming is not worthy of our calling. Even if we were right. We were called to inherit a blessing, so let's steer our mouths away from such things.

The people with Jesus blamed the victims. Jesus would not have it, and he would not have most of our blaming either. Were the victims any worse than those who lived? No. All of those will die the same way, if they do not repent.

“Those eighteen who died when the tower fell -- do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”

What's the purpose of these tragedies? It's a warning to the survivors, a wake up call. Life will not always go on like it is. Listen to these lines from Revelation, and think about our plague:

The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols. Nor did they repent of their murders, their sexual immorality, or their thefts. Rev 9:20

[The survivors] cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.... They cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done. Rev 16:9,11

In Revelation, disasters urge God's enemies to repent, and turn to God, to serve him, and wait for Jesus. What does God stand to gain by these disasters? That people will wake up, repent, we will realize we are not in control, life is vulnerable, so trust in God! That's what God hopes to gain.

Jesus used these two disasters, Pilate's slaughter and the tower collapse, to warn those listening to him that the same disaster would happen to them if they did not repent. Jesus is doing the same with these disasters as Revelation does with plagues and random deaths.

Final Disaster: Noah and Lot, the Flood and the Fire - Luke 17:24-30

Turn to Luke 17 please. In our story at the beginning of Luke 13, Jesus twice told those people, *unless you repent, you also will all perish*. Let's look at what Jesus had in mind, that would come on Galilee and Jerusalem, when all perished. This is Jesus describing the final disaster.

For the Son of Man, in his day, will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other. But first he must suffer many things, and be rejected by this generation. Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven, and destroyed them all. It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed.

Knowing what God has done in the past is the core of prophecy. How will final judgement look? Well, how did judgement look at the Flood? How did it look at Sodom and Gomorrah? Jesus prophesied that it would be much like those past judgments.

Jesus said twice in our text in Luke 13, *unless you repent, you too will all perish*. This is what Jesus had in mind in Luke 13 about all perishing: the final day of the Son of Man, which will be like these past judgements, where the flood destroyed everyone, and the fire and sulfur destroyed everyone in those cities.

But, Noah and his household were saved from the flood, and Lot and his daughters were saved from the fire. Those who trust in God will be saved. We turned to God from idols, to serve God, and to wait for his Son Jesus, who saves us from the coming wrath.

God's people are included in enough of the warning disasters. This is not all bad, we need wake up calls as well. And remember that those who do not serve God suffer disasters and plagues we do not taste. And remember also that we will entirely escape the wrath of God still to come.

How Not to Prepare for Disaster – Luke 12:13-23

How do we live in a world that has random disasters, things that badly frighten the survivors? It can be a frightening world, make no mistake. What kind of insurance do we take out? How do we respond? God does tell us how to respond to this. What does it mean to repent, and escape the coming judgement? God tells us. First, how not to prepare for disaster.

Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." ¹⁴ Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" ¹⁵ Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."

¹⁶ *And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. ¹⁷ He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'*
¹⁸ *"Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. ¹⁹ And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." ²⁰ "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' ²¹ "This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God."*

This parable in Luke 12 is in the same series of Jesus on judgement. The disaster here is ordinary death, a person's unexpected death. We are the survivors. We see other people's unexpected deaths. All these things bring a crisis to us, too. When we survive someone else's disaster, we are relieved, but we also feel vulnerable. It could have been me! How can I be safe?

Jesus: don't store up for yourself, be rich toward God. How do I prepare for disaster? Don't store up for yourself. Be rich toward God.

People, what is your project? What are you trying to get done? This parable is very blunt. Jesus says, if disaster can end my project, God calls me a fool. If unexpected death can end my project, I am a fool. If any tragedy can end what I'm trying to get done, I am a fool.

Our projects are vulnerable. We try to protect against that, but they still are. They can be destroyed by things we did not see coming, or things we did see coming, but were helpless to stop. But if our goal was to be rich toward God, we would not suffer loss.

Disasters are always unpleasant, we are right to fear them. But what will we do? God hopes all people will respond by waking up, by correcting how we live. We will repent, and become rich toward God. We turned to God from idols, to serve the living God, and to wait for his Son Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath. That is the life of a person rich toward God.

You see, the one disaster we must at all costs avoid is the final disaster, the final wrath. This world is headed for final wrath. There is no doubt in the Bible about that. It's coming, and God wants to rescue people, so he sent Jesus to save us, and he sends little disasters to wake us up. Living safely means being rich toward God.

How to Prepare for Disaster – 1 Timothy 6:17-19

The rich fool showed how *not* to prepare for disaster. In first century churches, there were believers who were far too much like the rich fool. And our churches too, for sure. Timothy was in Ephesus, there were such believers in that church, and Paul wrote instructions to Timothy, about what Timothy should tell those believers who were too much like the rich fool.

Jesus in many places spelled out what being rich toward God meant, but these lines in 1 Timothy are specifically addressed to believers, which makes them good for us. We all need to live like this, whether or not we think we are wealthy. This is how to be rich toward God, this is how to live safely in a world with random disasters.

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way, they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

How to prepare for disaster? Let's break this down into ten short lines:

1. Be rich toward God.
2. Don't hope in anything here.
3. Put your hope in God.
4. God generously gives everyone things to enjoy. Enjoy them.
5. Be rich in good deeds. (Use chances to be good to someone.)
6. Live generously. (Let's live as if God is generous with us.)
7. Be ready to share. (Be prepared, so you don't have to think when you have a chance.)
8. In this way, we lay a firm foundation for the coming age.
9. In this way, we grab hold of the True Life.
10. In this way, we become rich toward God.

I will read these again. God tells us how to prepare for disaster.

1. Be rich toward God.
2. Don't hope in anything here.
3. Put your hope in God.
4. God generously gives everyone things to enjoy. Enjoy them.
5. Be rich in good deeds. (Let's use our chances to be good to someone.)
6. Live generously.
7. Be ready to share.
8. In this way let's lay a firm foundation for the coming age.
9. In this way let's grab hold of the True Life.
10. In this way let's be rich toward God.

This is what our life looks like, because we have repented. This is God's way for us to protect ourselves from disaster. And Paul wrote to Timothy, *Command them*. These are not just options for us. If we've decided to serve God and wait for Jesus, these are commands.

When we were baptized, we said yes to this. "Yes, God, I want to serve you, and be rich toward you. Yes, Jesus, I will wait for you to come rescue me." Lots of this happens regularly among us, and that's so good to see. It is God's mercy to us. Let's not get weary, let's carry on. Amen.

PRAYER: O God, help us to understand the world we live in, and where it is heading. Help us to understand how this all looks to you. You've explained it clearly enough, and for that we thank you, for telling us the truth. We ask that along with all these preliminary disasters, you will send your Holy Spirit, to guide us and teach us. Lead us to the right response, lead us to turn to you again. Guide us in the right path, for your name's sake.

And our Father, you are also calling the world by these events. We want your Spirit to succeed, and that in all of these, some will repent and turn you, some will choose to become rich toward you. Open the hearts of unbelievers, so they can receive your good news.

Father, we thank you for the gospel, for planning this great rescue. Thank you for opening our hearts to receive your call. Thank you for baptism, the Spirit, and for bringing us into Christ's body. Thank you for Jesus, our hero and champion, our friend and our priest, our shepherd and teacher. O God, we watch and long for his appearing. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the Lord make our love increase and overflow, for each other, and for everyone else. May he strengthen our hearts, so that we will be steady and holy, in the presence of our God and Father, when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.