

Jeff Bush, age 37 goes to bed before 11:00 P.M. in his home in Seffner Florida. Suddenly the ground collapses beneath him. As he screams for help, he falls some 20 feet into a sinkhole. Earth covers his body. His brother, Jeremy jumps in to try and save him. But it is too late. A Sheriff's deputy manages to pull Jeremy out. Christ's Church, New Zealand. 49 people killed and 20 wounded in two mosques. 28 year old Brenton Tarrant has been charged with murder. The dead range from age 3 to 77. Charlene Jaeger, regular attender at Open Bible is walking near Sumter landing and is struck down from behind by an SUV while walking. She presently is recovering at the Villages Rehab on 466.

Tragedies. It seems like every day we listen to the news some new tragedy is occurring somewhere. Have you ever wondered why such things happen? Who hasn't? While Jesus doesn't explain why God allows such things he does tell us in our text that God uses calamity to grab our attention. Therefore let's spend some time today considering calamity's call; it's a call to repentance – for all of us, while there is still time.

One day while Jesus was teaching a large group, news came from Jerusalem that Pilate had just killed a number of Galileans while they were offering sacrifices in the temple. We don't know much about this incident but it doesn't surprise us to hear that Pilate would think nothing of sending his troops into the temple to carry out an execution. What was it these Galileans had done to meet such a violent end? Perhaps they were planning a rebellion, or had attempted one. Such groups were not uncommon. In fact the Pharisees would later charge Jesus with being the leader of such a group. Whatever these Galileans had done, those who brought the news seemed to be convinced that God had punished them through Pilate. Knowing what they were thinking Jesus said, "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 a person meets a violent end do we often suppose that they received what they had coming to them - like a drug dealer who gets gunned down while trying to expand his turf? While Jesus did say that all who live by the sword will die by the sword (Matt. 26:52), when someone meets a violent end the message that we are to take to heart is this, "Repent!" "You need to change the way you think. You have no right to say that this calamity was a commentary on the life of a person; instead, this calamity is a message for you. If you don't repent, then you'll perish like them." After the enormous and deadly Asian tsunami of late 2004, John Piper wrote, "Every deadly calamity is a merciful call from God for the living to repent" We ought not to consider tragic news in an impersonal, detached manner. We must not claim to know God's hidden purposes in calamities. Instead, we must repent or perish.

To make sure the crowd understood this point Jesus shared with them another example of an untimely end. He asked the crowd if the 18 Jews who died when the tower of Siloam fell on them were more sinful than anyone else? Again the answer was, "No, that's not the question to ask." Even if God did cause that tower to fall on those 18 Jews to punish them just as he caused fire to rain down on Sodom and Gomorrah, it's not our place to find out what they had done to deserve God's punishment. If that's our reaction then we are missing calamity's call to examine ourselves to see if we are ready to meet our Maker.

Repentance means to change your thinking about yourself. . Our opinion of ourselves can resemble that which the Pharisees had of themselves; they thought of themselves as righteous and very good. In fact one Pharisee in the days of Jesus spoke in this manner, “God, I thank you that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector over here. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess”. You and I can easily fall into the thinking of the Pharisee. I am not someone who has done something that has put me in jail, I come to church regularly, I do not take the Lord’s name in vain, thus I must be good.” Change Your Mind about yourself Christian. Say with the tax collector, “God be merciful to me a sinner. Or say with the inspired writer Paul, “I know that in me, that is in my flesh dwells no good thing.”

We need to change our thinking about sin too. God asks you to change your mind and think of sin as He thinks of it. God wants us to think of sin as a personal insult and rebellion against a Holy and loving God . God wants us to think of sin as every failure, regardless of how small, to follow the perfect pattern of living which God laid down for us in His Word. God wants us to think of sin as something that separates the sinner forever from the Lord God and that results in unhappiness in this world and in eternal damnation hereafter in hell. Change your mind about sin! Don’t put a rating scale on the sins out there. Every sin is a slap in the face against God.

The question should not be why a tragedy has happened to certain people, but why it hasn’t happened to us. Why didn’t our house wash away last night? Why didn’t the bridge collapse under our car this morning? Why haven’t we been killed in a terrorist attack? We are sinners and deserving of such judgment, but thank God for his mercy in sparing us to this point. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Our Lord purchased this gift at great cost, making His sinless Son to become sin for us that we could be right with Him. Our sin has earned us death, but God offers us life through faith in Jesus Christ.

So what does it mean when someone comes to an untimely end or suffers through tragedy? We don’t know and if we try to figure it out we’re going to come up with the wrong answer just like Job and his three amigos Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar did. Do you remember how Eliphaz and company were convinced that Job had lost his children, possessions, and health because God was punishing him for some secret sin? Job on the other hand felt that the calamities were all a mistake and he demanded an explanation. In the end God assured Eliphaz that he wasn’t punishing Job for any specific sin, and he chastised Job for demanding an explanation. God never did tell Job why he allowed him to suffer the way he did. It was simply enough for Job to know that God was wise, powerful, and everything he does is correct. Therefore there was and is no need for God to explain himself to us.

Although God doesn’t owe us any explanations for the way he runs the world he does give us a few important insights into suffering. Through Job’s example God shows us that nothing happens to us that he does not allow to happen. Paul assures us that when God does allow us to face difficulty he always gives us the strength to cope with it (1 Cor. 10:13). We also know from the Apostle Paul that God does not send tragedies into a Christian’s life to punish. While we may have to suffer the uncomfortable consequences of our own sins, Paul tells us that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. That’s because Jesus has taken the punishment we deserve for our sins (Romans

8:1). Why then does God allow us to suffer? Because he disciplines us as his children and uses calamity to bring us closer to him (Hebrews 12:7-11). Think of how God used Paul's sickness to keep him focused on Jesus for his strength and not on himself (2 Cor. 12:9). Do you see why we Christians can always rejoice, even in the face of suffering? We have the promise that everything, even calamity works for our benefit (Romans 8:28).

Calamity not only reminds us to repent of our sins but that our time to do so is short. To drive that point home Jesus shared a parable with his listeners. He spoke about a certain fig tree that bore no fruit for three years after it had been planted. Understandably the master was upset and directed the gardener to cut the tree down. The gardener however pleaded for more time and promised to give the tree the very best care. He said that if in another year the tree didn't produce fruit then he would cut it down. The meaning of the parable is pretty simple. God the Father is the vineyard owner, the Son is the gardener, and the fig tree represents you and me. The kind of fruit that we, the tree are expected to produce are fruits of repentance, and our time to produce such fruit is limited.

To produce fruits of repentance doesn't just mean to acknowledge that you've done a few bad things in your life; it means to be truly sorry for every sin you commit and to turn away from it trusting that Jesus has forgiven you. Just how good are we at being sorry for our sins? For example when we fall into the sin of impatience do we excuse ourselves saying that we we're under a lot of pressure, or that we wouldn't be so impatient if it wouldn't be for the kind of teachers, or co-workers we have? That's not repentance; it's passing the buck.

To produce fruits of repentance means that you not only refuse to make excuses for your sins but that you will seek to undo any harm your sins have caused. For instance if I have offended brother Byron then I better go and make things right with him and not just think to myself that I was wrong but God will forgive me anyway. Jesus once said, "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift" (Matt. 5:23, 24).

Every tree that does not produce fruit will be cut down and when it is it only has itself to blame. Through the parable we see how God is patient in looking for fruits of repentance going to extremes to find that fruit but that patience won't last forever. Think of how God waited an extra 120 years for the people of Noah's time to repent and when they didn't he destroyed them. Peter says that God is patient with us as well but that patience won't last forever. "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

The people sitting in the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and the planes used in the terrorist attacks of September 11, probably did not think about dying when they woke up that morning. Neither do most people think of it today, yet we all have an appointment more certain than any visit to the doctor. "It is appointed unto man once to die, and after this, the judgment. Therefore don't put off repenting of your sins and believing in Jesus. The time is short! Every Calamity is a Wake-up call to Repent and that Judgment Day is coming soon!

Lord, every day we turn on the television for the evening news or pick up a paper, we see or read about another devastating tragedy that has happened in our world. These tragedies should grab our attention, but many times we just shake them off, don't pay real attention to them, since they happen so frequently. Forgive us for this apathy and indifference to tragedy. Give us a greater resolve to pay closer attention to world tragedies and instill in us the message you are trying to get the world to hear: That we repent for our sins, turn from them, and look to your Son Jesus Christ for healing.

Then again, when a tragedy hits close to home, affects someone we know or love, we get downright angry at you and curse your Name, since we feel this should never happen to someone who is your child. We question your wisdom and knowledge in allowing this to happen. But why shouldn't it happen to us. We are sinners and sinners deserve punishment and death from You. And yet, you have been extremely merciful to us. You have spared us of tragedy to this point, and given us many physical blessings. Plus, you have sent your son to die for us, so that all these bad things that happen to us, are not punishments, but rather disciplines from you.

Please give us a greater trust in you in times of tragedy, that indeed you do know what you are doing, that You will indeed work it all out for our long range good. May the comfort we receive from your promises be the same comfort we give to others who undergo similar tragedies. May these tragedies be a reminder that death could come to us at any time, and that we need to be alert and ready, Should today be our last day on this planet earth. Keep us alert to Calamity's Call!