

## “A Mighty Fortress is Our God”

Luke 13:1-9

As Jesus continued His journey toward Jerusalem, some people in the crowd wanted to know His view of what happened to the Galileans who were cut down by the Roman soldiers as they were sacrificing their lambs for the Passover Feast.

The Judeans from southern Israel who asked Him this probably thought that the Galileans from northern Israel deserved this suffering, and God punished them justly. (Those from southern Israel, especially those from the immediate region of Jerusalem, thought of the Galileans as second-class citizens. They were the “down-staters” to Jerusalem’s Chicago.)

Or possibly, some in the crowd wanted to “elicit a strong rebuke against Pilate and the Roman occupation of Israel.”<sup>1</sup> There was a great deal of thought in the crowds about wanting the Messiah to re-establish the nation of Israel and restore the land to the glorious peace and prosperity of the days of David and Solomon.

But Jesus speaks not of Pilate’s sin, but of the sin of the Galileans -- not just the ones who were killed, but of all Galileans. These people who were cut down by the Romans were deserving of

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<sup>1</sup>Just, *Luke*, 533.

death, but no more than any of you, he says. He tells the crowd that these people were not worse sinners than the others. They were no worse than you. The unbelievers in Haiti and Chile are not more under God's wrath and judgment than the unbelievers of Quincy. The repentant believers in Haiti and Chile are not more under God's wrath and judgment than the repentant believers of Quincy. All sinners deserve death and hell. If you do not repent and believe, you will perish. God does bring judgment.

Now, Jesus is not suggesting that God sits on high and randomly punishes us for our sin, or has a list of specific sins for which we will suffer in this life.

We see that, at times, God does punish people in specific cases that serve now as a warning concerning the seriousness with which God views sin and the finality of God's judgment upon the wicked who despise God's will and grumble against the Lord. The Old Testament is full of such examples. And even in the New Testament, we see this with the likes of Ananias and Sapphira who fell down dead for trying to lie to the Lord.

But when we view suffering or hardship in this life as a random punishment from God, we are generally viewing reality completely backwards. God is the One who rescues us from harm and danger, sin, and every evil. Luther had such a wonderful understanding of this. He once said in a sermon (I think I have shared this with you before – at least in Bible class), Luther said: “even though God does

not want to assault and torment us, the devil does, and he cannot abide the Word. He is by nature so malicious and venomous that he cannot endure anything which is good. It irks him that an apple should be growing on a tree; it pains and vexes him that you have a sound finger, and if he were able he would tear everything apart and put it out of joint.

...Therefore he too does not rest...And if our dear God were not guarding us through his angels and we were able to see the devil's cunning, conspiring, and lying, we should die of the sight of it alone, so many are the cannon and guns he has ranged against us. But God prevents them from striking us."<sup>2</sup>

Although hardship and even tragedy do occur, we must remember that only through God's patience and long-suffering have we been allowed to live this long. Only because the Lord is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, as Scripture repeatedly says, are we able to face the difficulties of this life with the sure hope and confidence of the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting.

That is the promise of the New Covenant which Christ made with us and sealed with His own blood. He has placed Himself between us and the torments Satan desires for us.

Like those Galileans killed by Pilate or the men who died when the tower fell at Siloam, or those who lost their lives in the earthquakes, we deserve to die. Because of our sin, if God were only

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<sup>2</sup>LW 51:206

a God of justice, He would have struck us down and cast us into the pit of hell for being steeped in sin from our birth, because that is what we deserve.

Instead, God rescues us through the waters of Baptism and calls us His dear children -- even as He rescued the children of Israel through the waters of the Red Sea and called them His own.

God is a God of justice, but He is most rightly defined as a God of mercy and grace. Those are His dominant attributes. And He has most clearly shown this by sending His Son to stand between us and the torment and death we deserve. Christ experienced it for us. As we Lutherans love to sing, "A Mighty Fortress is our God." (We just sang it two weeks ago.)

He continues to protect us and rescue us, so that when the time comes that God does call us out of this life, we will feel, not the wrath and judgment upon our sin (although that is what death is – the wages of sin), but we will experience the fullness of the promises made at our Baptism. The Church on Earth grows through the new life found in Holy Baptism. So also the Church in Heaven grows with the new life found in eternity.

Whether we live or whether we die, we do so to the Lord, and we are forever under His protection. Amen.