

Luke 13:1-9

Why do bad things happen to good people? And why do good things happen to bad people? Now I'm not saying that certain Georgia trucker is bad, but a number of people are upset that he won the mega-million dollar jackpot last week because they buy tickets every week and he doesn't. He just got lucky. But while good things happen to some who may not really deserve it, bad things happen to people who really don't deserve it either. Why do non-smokers die from lung cancer? Why do careful drivers die at the hands of those who drive drunk? Why do children become abducted? Why do innocent bystanders get picked off by terrorists?

Bad things happen. That may not be how Forrest Gump would put it, but if you watch the news or read the paper, you know that there is no rhyme or reason to it—bad things happen to people no matter how decent, loving, or careful they may be.

And that's true of us also. One of our favorite questions is, "What did I do to deserve this?" Sometimes we say it in fun. Other times we really mean it. "Why did God let me get cancer?" "Why am I having so many troubles lately?" "Why are all my friends picking on me?" We're good people...aren't we? Why, then, does God allow bad things to happen to us?

Eighteen people died in Jerusalem. It happened about 2,000 years ago because a tower fell on them. It was big news at the time, and it got people thinking...What did they do to deserve that? Were they being punished? Was God 'getting them' for being such wicked sinners?

Jesus said, "No!" They weren't killed by the tower because they had it coming. They weren't any worse than anybody else in town. And there were some other people—some Galileans who were killed, too. But this was no accident. Pilate slaughtered them. When they were worshiping at the Temple he killed them. These were God-fearing people, killed during church. What did they do to deserve that? Again Jesus said, "Nothing."

You could be the strongest Christian on the face of the earth; living each and every day for Christ; giving what you are and have to help others; devoting yourself to good works—but that will not prevent bad things from happening to you. A tower could fall on you. A disease could strike you. A burglar could steal your car. Your faith in Christ is not a lucky charm. It does not keep bad things from happening to you. You know why? Your Christian faith does not make you and me any less a sinner than anybody else. What it does is give us the comfort of knowing that God does not impute our sins to us. He does not hold your sins against you. But you and I are still sinners living in a sinful world, and bad things will happen. Period. Whether we deserve it or not.

Now Jesus didn't say all this so that we will not get our hopes up; so that we learn to expect troubles to come in life. No, Jesus wants us to exchange our question for another. Instead of asking, "What did I do to deserve this?" We should ask, "What didn't I do to deserve this?" Rather than being surprised when troubles come, we should be surprised when they don't come.

As God's people we regularly confess that we are "poor, miserable sinners who deserve nothing but punishment now and forever." The problem is not that we confess these words but that we don't really believe them. If we did, you and I would not be surprised when bad things happen because, after all, this is what we deserve.

But somewhere along the line we've reached the point in our thinking that we deserve to have good days, and when we have a bad day we get all upset and wonder what we did to deserve it. We think that we deserve good weather, and we complain when it's too cold or too hot. We think we deserve to have good health, and we complain when we have aches and pains and when we have to constantly take medicine. We think we deserve to have cars that run well, appliances that work well, and we complain when our power goes out because of a lightning storm.

We think we're good people who have bad things happen to us, but we're not as good as we think we are. For us the question is not, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" The question for us really is, "Why do good things happen to bad people?" "There is no one good, not even one," the Bible says. So when bad things happen to us—no surprise—it's what we deserve. But it ought to make us wonder "why?" when anything good happens to us because that we don't deserve.

Okay, so maybe we don't really have the right kind of thinking. Maybe we think a little too much of ourselves. But is that such a big deal? Everyone does it. Here's what Jesus says, "Unless you repent, you will all perish!" Our thinking is leading us down the wrong path. If I think I deserve what is good from God because I'm good, then I'm not repentant and I will perish. If I say, "Why me? I didn't deserve that!" then I'm not repentant. To repent means to mean what we say when we confess, "I, a poor, miserable sinner have sinned against you, Lord, and I deserve your punishment." Anything else comes, not from a heart full of faith, but from a heart full of ourselves.

Friend, God does not want you to perish, and so He wants you to look at Jesus. Here is Someone, the only One who had the right to say, "Why Me? What did I do to deserve this? What did I do to deserve the mocking, and the beatings, and the whippings, and the thorns, and the nails? What did I do to deserve the suffering and pain of hell?" But He didn't! He said not a word. Jesus did not point His finger at you as He hung on the cross and say, "You deserve this, not Me!" Instead, He said: Father, forgive them. Do not hold their sins against them. Give Me whatever they deserve, and give them your grace and blessing.

And that is the reason, friend, why you and I have good things—because God, for Jesus' sake, is merciful to you. The fact that you have good things happen to you is because of God's mercy alone. The fact that God cares for you and sees you through your troubles is because His heart is merciful toward you. Your faith in Christ is due to the mercy of God. Your place in heaven is because God, out of mercy, has brought you to Christ in your baptism and kept you in Christ through His Word and Sacrament. Why do good things happen to sinners like us? Because of what Jesus did for you; because you have a merciful God.

And something else to consider is that because of God's mercy to you, those bad things that happen really aren't bad things at all. We see troubles as obstacles and hindrances that

prevent us from enjoying life. But God sees them as things which build character; which teach us to persevere, to trust in Him, and to hold, not so tightly to this world because our true home is in heaven. Even death is really not a bad thing for us, for Jesus has made it the gate of heaven for those who love and trust in Him.

Why did God let bad things happen to Jesus? So that good things would come to you. And one of those good things—the best of them all—is that God, right now, declares you forgiven. He doesn't check your attitude first before He forgives you—He forgives you because Jesus took the bad, the punishment that you and I deserve. God has nothing bad left to give because Jesus suffered everything bad for you. God, therefore, gives you only what is good.

This means that when things go right for you and me it's not because we deserved a good day—it's because God is merciful. And even when we think we're having a bad day, God is merciful. He doesn't ever stop loving you and forgiving you. He cares for you through both the good and the bad. And He wants you to be comforted in believing that there is no punishment, no anger for you at all. All God has for you is His mercy, love, and good blessings. These are all He has to give you—and it's all because of Jesus. Amen.