

The Tower of Siloam and COVID 19

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Those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them -- do you think that they were worse sinners than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did. -- Luke 13

The Tower of Siloam is unknown to history outside of this one sentence attributed to Jesus in Luke. It's logical to assume it was some kind of structure or Roman aqueduct associated with the Pool of Siloam where Jesus reportedly healed man who had been lame from birth. That pool has now been rediscovered and can be seen in Jerusalem today.

What's interesting to me is that Jesus attached no providential significance to this tragedy. "Do you think that they were worse sinners than all the others living in Jerusalem?" he asked. And his answer was "No." Elsewhere, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: "He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." This theology runs counter to how many of us think about God and against what it says elsewhere in the Bible For example. Psalm 5 says:

'Let all those rejoice who put their trust in You;
Let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them;
Let those also who love Your name be joyful in You.
For You, O Lord, will bless the righteous with favor
You will surround him as with a shield.'

So it may have been disconcerting to Jesus' disciples to hear that God blesses both the good and the evil with his sun, and that those on whom the tower fell were not any more wicked than those who were spared.

Today we are in the midst of a national and world health crisis due the Novel Corona Virus Covid-19. A few weeks ago we heard a sermon here in New Hope Family Church that suggested this virus was a punishment against China for acting against God's providence. Today we are beginning to wonder if it might be a punishment against us. There are even those who suggest it was brought by God to America to put an end to the immoral Trump presidency, and conversely as a warning that the un-Biblical policies of the Obama Administration must be rolled back.

In that context, I think we might want to consider the story of the Tower of Siloam. For Jesus, the Tower tragedy wasn't a punishment from God. Jesus used the event to warn people to repent, because everyone is liable to judgment in the Last Day. Perhaps that's how we should be thinking today. We should repent, but not because of the Corona Virus. It may have nothing more to do with God's providence than the Tower of Siloam did. But with more time on our hands and few sports events on television, it provides us with an opportunity to reflect on our relationship with God and align ourselves with His will.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus' disciples asked him about a man who had been blind from birth: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" they asked. Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him." (John 9)

The disciples' question was based on a false premise. They assumed that birth defects are the product of ancestral sin. But Jesus rejected this idea, at least in this case. "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," Jesus said. So then, did God cause this man to suffer blindness all his life so that Jesus could heal him? I have my doubts about that as well. But just as in the case of the Tower of Siloam, Jesus used the event to reveal something about God. In the case of the Tower, he taught us the need to repent. In the case of the blind man, he showed that God's love is a healing power. And for me, that is the lesson we need to concentrate on today.