

What Do You Say In Times of Tragedy?

By Mark Mayberry
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Introduction

Life is filled with joy and heartache, blessing and calamity. What do you say in times of tragedy? What counsel can be offered in days of misfortune? The lips of the righteous bring forth what is acceptable (Prov. 10:32). Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances (Prov. 25:11). There is a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to be silent and a time to speak (Eccles. 3:1-10).

Proverbs 10:32 (NASB95) — 32 The lips of the righteous bring forth what is acceptable, But the mouth of the wicked what is perverted.

Proverbs 25:11 (NASB95) — 11 Like apples of gold in settings of silver Is a word spoken in right circumstances.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-10 (NASB95) — 1 There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven— 2 A time to give birth and a time to die; A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted. 3 A time to kill and a time to heal; A time to tear down and a time to build up. 4 A time to weep and a time to laugh; A time to mourn and a time to dance. 5 A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones; A time to embrace and a time to shun embracing. 6 A time to search and a time to give up as lost; A time to keep and a time to throw away. 7 A time to tear apart and a time to sew together; A time to be silent and a time to speak. 8 A time to love and a time to hate; A time for war and a time for peace. 9 What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils? 10 I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves.

Some Suffering Is Our Own Fault

Some suffering is our own fault. Many are the sorrows of the wicked (Psa. 32:10).

Psalms 32:10 (NASB95) — 10 Many are the sorrows of the wicked, But he who trusts in the Lord, lovingkindness shall surround him.

Adversity pursues sinners, and the companion of fools will suffer harm (Prov. 13:20-21).

Proverbs 13:20-21 (NASB95) — 20 He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will suffer harm. 21 Adversity pursues sinners, But the righteous will be rewarded with prosperity.

Israel stood condemned for their apostasy; having sown to the wind, they reaped the whirlwind (Hos. 8:1-7).

Hosea 8:1-7 (NASB95) — 1 Put the trumpet to your lips! Like an eagle the enemy comes against the house of the Lord, Because they have transgressed My covenant And rebelled against My law. 2 They cry out to Me, “My God, we of Israel know You!” 3 Israel has rejected the good; The enemy will pursue him. 4 They have set up kings, but not by Me; They have appointed princes, but I did not know it. With their silver and gold they have made idols for themselves, That they might be cut off. 5 He has rejected your calf, O Samaria, saying, “My anger burns against them!” How long will they be incapable of innocence? 6 For from Israel is even this! A craftsman made it, so it is not God; Surely the calf of Samaria will be broken to pieces. 7 For they sow the wind And they reap the whirlwind. The standing grain has no heads; It yields no grain. Should it yield, strangers would swallow it up.

Some Suffering Is The Fault Of Others

Some suffering is the fault of others. The nation of Israel experienced long and terrible oppression in Egypt (Exod. 3:7-9).

Exodus 3:7-9 (NASB95) — 7 The Lord said, “I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. 8 “So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. 9 “Now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them.

Evil and injustice are sad but common facts of life (Eccles. 4:1-3).

Ecclesiastes 4:1-3 (NASB95) — 1 Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done under the sun. And behold I saw the tears of the oppressed and that they had no one to comfort them; and on the side of their oppressors was power, but they had no one to comfort them. 2 So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living. 3 But better off than both of them is the one who has never existed, who has never seen the evil activity that is done under the sun.

Wicked men often abuse their power and position, depriving the needy of justice, robbing the poor of their rights (Isa. 10:1-4).

Isaiah 10:1-4 (NASB95) — 1 Woe to those who enact evil statutes And to those who constantly record unjust decisions, 2 So as to deprive the needy of justice And rob the

poor of My people of their rights, So that widows may be their spoil And that they may plunder the orphans. 3 Now what will you do in the day of punishment, And in the devastation which will come from afar? To whom will you flee for help? And where will you leave your wealth? 4 Nothing remains but to crouch among the captives Or fall among the slain. In spite of all this, His anger does not turn away And His hand is still stretched out.

Some Suffering Is Circumstantial

Some suffering is circumstantial. Swift and strength do not guarantee success, but time and chance overtake us all, thwarting our plans and purposes (Eccles. 9:11-12).

Ecclesiastes 9:11-12 (NASB95) — 11 I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise nor wealth to the discerning nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all. 12 Moreover, man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them.

Greater guilt is not the reason certain men suffer while others are spared (Luke 13:1-5).

Luke 13:1-5 (NASB95) — 1 Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. 2 And Jesus said to them, “Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? 3 “I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. 4 “Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? 5 “I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

Personal calamity is not always (or often) a sign of divine disfavor (John 9:1-5).

John 9:1-5 (NASB95) — 1 As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. 2 And His disciples asked Him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?” 3 Jesus answered, “It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him. 4 “We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work. 5 “While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world.”

Some Suffering Is From Satan

Some suffering is from Satan. Sickness, suffering and death are ultimately traceable to Adam’s transgression, a tragedy in which the serpent played a central role (Gen. 2:15-17; 3:1-7, 14-19, 24).

Genesis 2:15-17 (NASB95) — 15 Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. 16 The Lord God commanded the man, saying,

“From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; 17 but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”

Genesis 3:1-7 (NASB95) — 1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’” 2 The woman said to the serpent, “From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; 3 but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.’” 4 The serpent said to the woman, “You surely will not die! 5 “For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” 6 When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.

Genesis 3:14-19 (NASB95) — 14 The Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, Cursed are you more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you will go, And dust you will eat All the days of your life; 15 And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel.” 16 To the woman He said, “I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, In pain you will bring forth children; Yet your desire will be for your husband, And he will rule over you.” 17 Then to Adam He said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat from it’; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life. 18 “Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you will eat the plants of the field; 19 By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return.”

Genesis 3:24 (NASB95) — 24 So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.

As a test of Job’s faith, Satan was allowed to personally afflict the faithful patriarch (Job 2:1-8).

Job 2:1-8 (NASB95) — 1 Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the Lord. 2 The Lord said to Satan, “Where have you come from?” Then Satan answered the Lord and said, “From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it.” 3 The Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause.” 4 Satan answered the Lord and said, “Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. 5 “However, put forth Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse You to Your face.” 6 So the Lord said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life.” 7 Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and

smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. 8 And he took a potsherd to scrape himself while he was sitting among the ashes.

During Christ's earthly ministry, Satan was allowed greater impact in the affairs of men, causing sickness and suffering (Luke 13:10-17).

Luke 13:10-17 (NASB95) — 10 And He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. 11 And there was a woman who for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was bent double, and could not straighten up at all. 12 When Jesus saw her, He called her over and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your sickness." 13 And He laid His hands on her; and immediately she was made erect again and began glorifying God. 14 But the synagogue official, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, began saying to the crowd in response, "There are six days in which work should be done; so come during them and get healed, and not on the Sabbath day." 15 But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall and lead him away to water him? 16 "And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?" 17 As He said this, all His opponents were being humiliated; and the entire crowd was rejoicing over all the glorious things being done by Him.

Paul's thorn in the flesh was a tormenting messenger of Satan, allowed by God, employed by God, but not caused by God (2 Cor. 12:7-10).

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (NASB95) — 7 Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! 8 Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. 9 And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

Some Suffering Is From God

Some suffering is from God. Jehovah punishes the nations (Psa. 59:5).

Psalms 59:5 (NASB95) — 5 You, O Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel, Awake to punish all the nations; Do not be gracious to any who are treacherous in iniquity. Selah.

He brought Assyria and Babylon against His wayward people, and then afterward punished both superpowers for their sin (Isa. 10:12; Jer. 50:17-20).

Isaiah 10:12 (NASB95) — 12 So it will be that when the Lord has completed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, He will say, "I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the pomp of his haughtiness."

Jeremiah 50:17-20 (NASB95) — 17 “Israel is a scattered flock, the lions have driven them away. The first one who devoured him was the king of Assyria, and this last one who has broken his bones is Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. 18 “Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘Behold, I am going to punish the king of Babylon and his land, just as I punished the king of Assyria. 19 ‘And I will bring Israel back to his pasture and he will graze on Carmel and Bashan, and his desire will be satisfied in the hill country of Ephraim and Gilead. 20 ‘In those days and at that time,’ declares the Lord, ‘search will be made for the iniquity of Israel, but there will be none; and for the sins of Judah, but they will not be found; for I will pardon those whom I leave as a remnant.’

On a personal level, God brought both comfort and discomfort to Jonah the reluctant prophet (Jonah 4:1-11).

Jonah 4:1-11 (NASB95) — 1 But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. 2 He prayed to the Lord and said, “Please Lord, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity. 3 “Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life.” 4 The Lord said, “Do you have good reason to be angry?” 5 Then Jonah went out from the city and sat east of it. There he made a shelter for himself and sat under it in the shade until he could see what would happen in the city. 6 So the Lord God appointed a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant. 7 But God appointed a worm when dawn came the next day and it attacked the plant and it withered. 8 When the sun came up God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah’s head so that he became faint and begged with all his soul to die, saying, “Death is better to me than life.” 9 Then God said to Jonah, “Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?” And he said, “I have good reason to be angry, even to death.” 10 Then the Lord said, “You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. 11 “Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?”

Conclusion

Some suffering is our fault; some suffering is the fault of others; some suffering is circumstantial; some suffering is from Satan; some suffering is from God. However, we cannot always discern the difference.

Job’s friends were better help when they remained silent (Job 2:1-13). Remember, there is a time to be silent and a time to speak (Eccles. 3:7).

Job 2:1-13 (NASB95) — 1 Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the Lord. 2 The Lord said to Satan, “Where have you come from?” Then Satan answered

the Lord and said, "From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it." 3 The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause." 4 Satan answered the Lord and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. 5 "However, put forth Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse You to Your face." 6 So the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life." 7 Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. 8 And he took a potsherd to scrape himself while he was sitting among the ashes. 9 Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!" 10 But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips. 11 Now when Job's three friends heard of all this adversity that had come upon him, they came each one from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite; and they made an appointment together to come to sympathize with him and comfort him. 12 When they lifted up their eyes at a distance and did not recognize him, they raised their voices and wept. And each of them tore his robe and they threw dust over their heads toward the sky. 13 Then they sat down on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights with no one speaking a word to him, for they saw that his pain was very great.

Writing to Philemon regarding Onesimus, the inspired apostle was cautious regarding his assessment of providence, qualifying his statement with "perhaps" (Phile. 15-16).

Philemon 15-16 (NASB95) — 15 For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever, 16 no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

We should demonstrate similar restraint in offering counsel during times of calamity (Prov. 15:28).

Proverbs 15:28 (NASB95) — 28 The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, But the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.

Evidencing caution, let us speak words of sober truth, offering encouragement and guidance reflecting the inspired message of truth (Eph. 4:29; Col. 4:6; 1 Pet. 3:14-17).

Proverbs 15:28 (NASB95) — 28 The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, But the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.

Ephesians 4:29 (NASB95) — 29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

Colossians 4:6 (NASB95) — 6 Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.

1 Peter 3:14-17 (NASB95) — 14 But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, 15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; 16 and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. 17 For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.