

Many people who suffer tragedy find comfort in the saying, "Things happen for a reason." If a family member meets an untimely death, if a strange sickness afflicts an otherwise healthy person, or if another calamity befalls an innocent victim, people often take comfort in those few words, "Things happen for a reason." We may not be able to figure out why certain things happen, but we trust that God has something good in mind.

The crowds listening to Jesus also assumed that tragedies happen for a reason. However, the reason was not some future good, but rather some past sin. To Jesus' listeners, "Things happen for a reason" meant bad things happen to people because they have sinned. Pontius Pilate tortured a group of Galileans by draining some of their own blood and mixing it with the blood of the sacrifices they were offering. Why would he do that? Why were eighteen particular people standing under a tower in Siloam when it fell and killed them all? Why was it those eighteen people? The crowds thought the reason was that those people had committed sins greater than anyone else's in Jerusalem. What Pilate did and what the tower did was to execute God's punishment. It's the same argument you sometimes hear today about AIDS; that it's God's punishment. Or when people's misfortunes increase, you sometimes hear them wonder, "What did I do? Why is God punishing me?" Jesus says wrong. That's not how things work; there is no relationship between behavior and fate. If you're a victim, it's not because you're a sinner. If someone sexually harrasses you or rapes you, it's not because you were asking for it or because you deserved it. Things may happen for a reason, but the reason isn't sin. The reason is, simply, some bad things happen. And that's it. We say that's not fair. The only part that's fair is that bad things can and do happen to everybody. God's complete plan promises a better life than this. In the meantime, if we have sinned, we should repent. Repentance won't guarantee that we'll never have an accident, but it will guarantee forgiveness. Then if an accident happens, we'll be set.

When bad things happen to us, a favorite saying may help us through, but Jesus basically tells us not to worry about the things we have no control over. If we repent of the sin we can control, happiness will be ours.

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woman at well

God knew her better than she knew God

God knows our sins, and our desires, longs to fulfill them

she seeks living water, draws from a well that has no end

pray for those who seek that water, they may confess their sins and enjoy mercy