



## **TORNADOES AND THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF GOD**

### **Job 1; Luke 13:1-5**

If you have a Bible—and I hope that you do—I want to invite you to open with me to Job 1 and Luke 13. We are going to be in both of those contexts this morning during our time together and we are going to be flipping back and forth so we will start in Job 1 and go immediately to Luke 13 so you might mark Luke 13 and have that ready.

About three years ago massive cyclone hit the country of Myanmar and hundred thousand plus people died. The next week a massive earthquake hit the country of China and tens of thousands of more people died. And so Sunday following that we set aside what we were doing to look in the Word and ask the question, how do you respond to natural disasters. And even since that time, obviously, we have seen other disasters in the world, even recently in Japan this year, but we can't in many senses, imagine the magnitude when we hear numbers like that, but the last week, when tornadoes came barreling through our neighborhoods and our friends' homes and our families' homes. That which seems far off is brought really close really quick and so as I was praying I thought it would be best to take some time this morning and revisit things that we have walked through as a church, so this is, this is reminders.

In these two texts Job and Luke—Luke is actually the text we looked at a few years ago—but reminders to, to encourage one another but not just one another, that we might be an encouragement with the Word for others to stand on as we serve alongside them in the days to come. You know, you know the gravity of what's happened this last week—Wednesday was the second deadliest day of tornadoes in the history of the United States—Weather Channel described Wednesday as "Awful, tragic and devastating. Destructive tornadoes some up to two miles wide raked the northern half of Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Georgia and Virginia, some tornadoes remained on the ground for hundreds of miles as swaths of Tuscaloosa, Alabama; Coleman, Alabama and Birmingham, Alabama were leveled."

The National Weather Service estimated approximately 211 tornadoes—and some of those may have been repeats they just don't define the numbers—but 200-plus tornadoes in one 24-hour period. Some of them, as you know F-4 potentially F-5—still researching on that—but leaving approximately at this point, I think the number was around 350 dead, 250 of those in Alabama and many, many others missing. There were still searching for people yesterday and in Pleasant Grove where I was and I know a lot of the different other contexts. And some of you have been serving in these different contexts whether it's Pleasant Grove or Pratt City some of you in Tuscaloosa and so you know, I mean these are scenes of just utter devastation where these tornadoes went through and you have heard, whether on the news or personally, story after story of families huddled together in basements as their houses were just ripped apart above them and people thrown in their houses, from their houses. Story in Pleasant Grove, we were talking to, basically a bathtub just flying and there's one other story yesterday of somebody who had been found alive a mile from their house. So you hear those things.

And so, they all, they all beg the question and that's why I wanted us to look today at these tornadoes and the trustworthiness of God and how, how do these tornadoes help us understand who God is and who we are. And particularly as we process responding to those and so what you have got in your notes are 5 reminders that I want to give us and then I want us to talk about how we as a faith-family can best respond.

And you know, it's, it's kind of tough—in a sense—because we are in a setting that is obviously, for the most part, spared the wrath of these tragedies over the last week. I know that some, many, many in our faith-family—on Wednesday morning especially—had a variety of problems with trees and some of you are still without power. We lost power this morning, not sure how that works, but we lost power this morning.

So there are certainly affects across our faith-family and we have got avenues that we want, that are set up, that if you need help from our faith-family to come alongside you, we want to help. But at the same time, for the most part, our community right around us was spared and it's one of the mysterious pictures—especially with these tornadoes that we've seen, these tornadoes that we've seen—to see even one house on one side of the street fine and another house right across the street completely obliterated. This is just a few miles away from us, but if you are driving around here right now, you can hardly tell it has rained last week, in some of our communities but I want to keep us from thinking that nothing has happened. Something close to us, something very, very close to us has happened. Something very, very difficult has happened. And we as a church—long-term—are going to be coming alongside brothers and sisters and people in these communities, and the best thing we have to give, yes we have chain saws and equipment and supplies and money, but that which will last is the Word. And so I want to make sure we are standing on the Word and helping others to stand on the Word.

So, let's read these two texts and then consider what we need to remember from these texts and these tornadoes. Job 1:1 says,

*There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. They were born to him seven sons and three daughters. He possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys, and very many servants, so this man was greatest of all the people of the east. His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, 'It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.' Thus Job did continually. Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. The Lord said to Satan, 'From where did you come?' Satan answered the Lord and said, 'From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.' And the Lord said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?' Then Satan answered the Lord and said, 'Does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? Have you blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.' And the Lord said to Satan, 'Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand.' So Satan went out from*

*the presence of the Lord. Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, and there came a messenger to Job and said, 'The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, and the Sabeans fell upon them and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you.' While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, 'The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you.' While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, 'The Chaldeans formed three groups and made a raid on the camels and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped them to tell you.' While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, 'Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, and behold, a great wind came across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead, and I alone have escaped to tell you.' Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. And he said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong (Job 1:1-22).*

That's Job 1—Old Testament—now Luke 13 in the New Testament. A conversation, unique to Luke's Gospel, between Jesus and these others.

*There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, 'Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them; do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish' (Luke 13:1-5).*

Two pictures: Job, pretty self-explanatory from the story; Luke chapter 13 needs a little context. And there are some things we don't know about this conversation, what it's referring to exactly, but these questioners come to Jesus asking about some Galileans who were offering sacrifices, who were worshiping, offering their sacrifices and when they were—under the direction of Pilate—Roman troops came and basically ambushed them and slaughtered them, their blood mingled with the blood of their sacrifices. So this group of worshipers ambushed and killed. And then, the second picture that Jesus brings up, this tower in Siloam that had fallen on 18 people and killed them. So here in Luke 13 you have a picture of moral evil, moral disaster and natural evil, natural disaster. Difference being one directly being tied to sin, murder, in this picture of worshipers ambushed and then one not directly tied to sin, more natural causes, the falling of a tower, 18 people died. And so in both of these passages we see, we see tragedy addressed. In Job 1, in Luke 13 and I think there are implications here for what God desires for us to remember in light of 200 tornadoes this last week in our midst. So what do 200 tornadoes have to teach us, what do 200 tornadoes remind us of in the Word?

## **What Do We Need To Remember? These Tornadoes Remind Us that This World Is Unpredictable**

One, these tornadoes remind us that this world is unpredictable. Job 1, Luke 13, 200 tornadoes on a Wednesday night, all reminds us that this world is unpredictable. No one, a week ago, knew that this Wednesday night was coming. You think about it in both these passages, Job 1, Job rises early in the morning as is his custom. This is a man who when his children are celebrating will offer sacrifice just in case they sin. So routine day, and a servant comes running up with one message, then another servant another message and you heard it in the language, it just builds, "while he was yet speaking another came and said...while he was yet speaking another came, while he was yet speaking another came..." leading to the climax at the end of the chapter when, when this last messenger comes and says, "your ten children who were celebrating, a wind came, blew down, took down the house, caved in upon them and all ten of your children are dead." So this is not just a fictional tale here in Job. Just imagine that progressive circumstance: you have lost this, this, this, kids – gone. Never could have expected that when he woke up in the morning. Never could have imagined that when he woke up that morning.

### **Suffering is usually surprising.**

Same thing, Luke 13, you got people who are, who are going to offer sacrifices, people who are standing next to a tower, unpredictable. When you put these stories together and think about circumstances this last week, you remember, the Bible teaches—experience in many way teaches—follow in your notes: suffering is usually surprising. Job never could have imagined, Galileans offering sacrifices could have never imagined, people standing under a tower, never could have imagined the suffering that would come crashing down on them. Suffering is usually surprising.

### **Life is never safe.**

Life is never safe. Life is never safe. You look at Job; everything seemed secure, as secure as it possibly could be. Secure personally, secure before God, secure with possessions—this is wealth and worship together as secure and safe as you could possibly imagine. Luke 13, you think about these two examples, both of them times and places where we would feel most safe and secure. In the context of worship, offering sacrifices what safer place could there be? Standing next to a tower, the tower of Siloam built as part of the defense of the city. In places where we would think, contexts where we would think you are most safe and secure, life is never safe.

### **Death is unavoidably sure.**

Suffering is usually surprising – life is never safe and death is unavoidably sure. I know this is depressing, you are going to have to hang with me through a couple of parts, we will get to good stuff, I promise. But this is at least in part what we need to take away from these texts and these tornadoes. These tornadoes remind us that you and I have no idea what will happen in our lives this next week. You and I have no idea what will happen in our lives the rest of today. And we can fill our lives with as much safety and security, stuff, but all that we build up around us can be gone like that.

Suffering: surprising. Life: not safe. And death is unavoidably sure. This is, this is Biblical. Hebrews 9:27, "And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment." And no matter what we have or hold on to, not one of us is guaranteed life through the end of this day. Now, again, I know this is depressing to think, you think about people in Tuscaloosa, Coleman, Pleasant Grove, Pratt City, none of them woke up on

Wednesday morning thinking “this could be it.” You think, well that would be such a depressing way to live to wake up in the morning saying, “This could be it.”

Well, maybe not so depressing. Jonathan Edwards in his “Resolutions” that he walked through on a daily basis, one of them was, “Resolve to think much,” Edwards said, “On all occasions of my own dying and of the common circumstances which attend death.” Resolve to think much on all occasions of my own dying and the common circumstances which attend death? You read David Brainerd who was close with Edwards, he spoke the same way, his biography is one of the more depressing reads there is—always talking about this—and he died tragically at the young age of 29. You think, “Well that is such a depressing way to live.” And in a sense, certainly taken too far would be a depressing way to live.

But brothers and sisters, we need to be reminded on a continual basis that our houses and our cars and our possessions and our bank accounts and our jobs guarantee us nothing in this world: guarantee you nothing in this world. That only exceptions being if Jesus would come back before you die: death is unavoidably sure.

And so the last thing we need to do this week is watch clips on the news and then flip the channel over to a ballgame and think that could never happen to me because the reality is, it could happen to anyone of us at any time. So these tornadoes remind us this world is unpredictable.

### **These Tornadoes Remind Us of the Penalty of Sin which Plagues All of Us**

Keep going on the depressing route. Second reminder: these tornadoes remind us of the penalty of sin which plagues all of us. These tornadoes remind us of the penalty of sin which plagues all of us. Now I want to be really, really careful here because the point in both these stories--Job and the two stories in Luke 13—is that what is happening here is not directly related to the sin of those who are suffering. So Job, author of Job, goes out of the way to make sure we don't equate his suffering with something he did specifically. That is what all of his friends are pointing to for chapter after chapter after this, we have to endure as we are reading through, but they are always trying to point to “what did you do Job to cause this?” And the whole point of the book is that Job didn't do anything specific to cause this to happen.

It is the same thing here in Luke 13: what you've got is a group of people who come to Jesus. These are the kind of people who would come to Jesus, in John 9, and say about a man who was born blind, “Why is he blind? Is it his sin or his parent's sin?” They thought somehow his blindness has to be attributed to somebody so is it his fault or his parents' fault that he is blind? What wasn't an option in there was that he was just blind. They are looking for sin to attach it to. And so that is the context: the friends in Job, of these people in Luke chapter 13. And so the whole point is, it is not directly—these people who are offering sacrifices, these people who are standing by the tower and Job—it's not because of something they were doing that the disaster befell them.

So now why do you say, “Well these tornadoes remind us of the penalty of sin which plagues all of us?” That is the whole point. You see this really clearly in Luke 13. Yes, these passages are showing us a picture of suffering and devastation, tragedy, even death that is not attributed to a specific persons' sin. So these passages definitely make clear these

tragedies are not due directly to personal sin in these people's lives. However, these tragedies do make clear that they are due to the presence of sin in this world. Do you see a difference there? Tragedy: not necessarily a result of specific sin in a specific person's life; but tragedy a result of the presence of sin in the world. That's why Jesus, in Luke 13, He doesn't say, "Well these worshipers, these people standing by the tower were totally innocent." Instead, He turns the tables and people are saying, "Well what sin in their lives caused them to die." And He looked at them and said, "You guys are going to die, because you've got sin too." We all, we all have sinned. This is the point.

### **Our sin is universal.**

Keep going in your notes there. Our sin is universal. Jesus is making clear that while, while what happened did not have to do specifically with sin in these specific people's lives, the reality is: no one is innocent of sin. We have all sinned and the penalty of sin is applicable for all people: death. That is part of the point in these passages, that is why it would be folly to in any one of these circumstances do what Job's friends were doing and these questioners were trying to do and compare the people who died, their sinfulness with our moral condition. To think well clearly some—and I hope, obviously we would not do that, we would not even begin to go there—in the context of this last week to think that well there is obviously sinfulness here in this person or that person or this community or that community that we don't have. That would miss obviously the whole point.

### **Our suffering is inevitable.**

It's folly to try to compare sinfulness but it is, it is wise to realize that death is the penalty for sin and suffering is the result of sin and our sin is universal and our suffering is inevitable. Job and Luke are both teaching us here that suffering and death are penalties of sin that plague all of us. Our suffering in the world is a result of sin in the world and as long as there is sin in the world, there will be suffering in the world. As long as there is sin in the world there will be death in the world. As long as there is sin in the world there will be disaster in the world. Suffering is a byproduct of sin. Which leads us then to the third reminder--keep going, this is extremely important—maybe the most important one.

## **These Tornadoes Remind Us to Repent and Be Reconciled to God**

These tornadoes then remind us to repent and be reconciled to God. These tornadoes—based on what we learned in these texts—are cause to repentance. Not for specific sin in specific people's lives who have experienced tragedy, but repentance of sin in all of our lives.

Let me show this to you. Well, Job, the whole point of the story, you get to the very end, last chapter of Job, after this whole journey, what does he conclude in chapter 42:5-6? He said, "*I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*" That is where the whole book leads: to Job 42:5-6 where he says, "repent." So the whole book leads to "repent."

Then you get to Luke 13 and you see these people asking and what does Jesus say to, in light of both of these circumstances, sacrifices and people who were killed by this tower of Siloam falling, He looks to these guys and says, "In light of these things: repent." It's like questioners coming up to Jesus, like people who might come up to Him today say, "Jesus, why? What is going on this last week? Why all of this stuff?" And Jesus' word back is clear. He says, he doesn't give—don't miss this, in Job, Luke 13, this is God's opportunity, Jesus' opportunity to give philosophical argument for how these bad things can happen to

seemingly innocent people—instead of a philosophical argument He gives a personal exhortation, He looks in the eyes of people and says, “Repent.” He says, “Turn from sin.”

### **Turn from sin.**

Turn from sin. Again, not because Job is a sinner that caused this or these worshipers were sinners that caused this directly or people in Tuscaloosa, Pleasant Grove or Pratt City sinned and that’s why the tornadoes happen. That’s not the point. The point is, in these tornadoes, see the effect of sin in the world, in a way that causes you to hate sin all the more. Part of the design, mysterious design of God in suffering, all throughout scripture, is to show us the disastrous effects of sin in the world and to bring us to hate sin with a deeper passion. And to long to be free from sin all the more, to long for the day when sin and suffering are no more.

So practically how does this play out? Say you are on the computer and you are looking at all these clips that you can see from tornadoes stuff this last week, so you are looking at different clips, just horrifying images. You are clicking through. If you look at all these horrifying images as you click through them and you see the disaster on the internet there and then you click over to pornography, you have missed the whole point because you have just seen the ruin in the world as a result of sin and yet you are running to that which ruins and destroys. So, look at the images and then let them drive you to never look at the pornography anymore because it destroys and ruins.

And you are sitting around in a group of people and you are having small talk and you are lamenting the picture that we’ve seen in northern Alabama and all these things that have happened and you are talking about that. If you shift that conversation from the lamenting what is going on over there and then shift it to gossip about someone else speaking negatively about someone else’s character, you have missed the point because you are giving yourself to that which destroys.

And so, so part of the point is for us here, for us in any context, us in Tuscaloosa or Pleasant Grove or Pratt City to see devastation and to hate sin all the more. And to look into our lives and to see any areas where you are toying with sin, where you are turning to sin, giving yourself to sin and realize that path always destroys. That path eternally destroys, that path doesn’t just destroy houses, it destroys relationships, it rips them apart. It destroys intimacy with God, it rips it apart. So part of the point is: repent and be reconciled to God. Let this be a sounding alarm in your life to look at sin and its destructive effects in your life and to hate it and run from it. So does that make sense? If we don’t go there in each of our lives we will miss part of the point. I am not saying this is why God brought this, I’m just, scripture teaches that sin, suffering is result of sin in the world and we need to hate sin and all of its effects. So, turn from sin.

### **Trust in Him.**

And trust in Him. Be reconciled to God. Are you right with God? That, that is the most important—we’ve got all kinds of questions about character of God, tornadoes, that kind of thing and we are about to talk about those in just a second--but the most important question in this room for you on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011 in Birmingham, Alabama, the most important question for you is: are you right with God? Are you right with God? If you are not right with God, be right with God, to receive His mercy and grace and be right with God. Have you grown apathetic with sin - run from that sin. If you have toyed with sin, run from sin. Trust in Him. You say, “Well how can I trust in God in light of all we have seen this last week?” I am glad you asked.

## These Tornadoes Remind Us of the Sovereignty of Our God

Fourth reminder: these tornadoes remind us of the sovereignty of our God. The sovereignty of our God. This is most clear in Job: the sovereignty of our God. Job hears the news, this possession, this possession, this possession, oxen, sheep, cattle, servants—gone, and then ten children gone. And Job, in that poignant verse, verse 20 and 21, he hears this, he rises—and as you are reading, if you don't know what's coming you think how is he going to respond—he rises and he falls on the ground and he worships. The words that come from his mouth, "The Lord has given and the Lord has taken away." Not, "The Lord has given and Satan has taken away." Okay? "The Lord has given and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." And that, that confession of worship summarizes the whole chapter, the whole book. Job 1 makes clear that Satan is sovereign over nothing. God is sovereign over everything. Satan can do nothing outside of the divine purgative - nothing. God is sovereign over nature, not Satan. God is sovereign over nations, Sabeans, Chaldeans not Satan. God is sovereign over comfort and God is sovereign over calamity. That's what later on in Job 2:10, Job says to his wife, "*...shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?*" God is sovereign over it all. He is sovereign over the whole picture.

Now the danger is in circumstances like this last week, there is a lot to wrestle with here and some start to say, "Well maybe God was not in control of that, certainly God wasn't in control of that." But I want to encourage us; it is not a comforting word to think that Satan was in control of something that God had no power over. That is not a comforting word. I want you to see a picture here of the sovereignty of God, of God's sovereignty over good and evil, of God's sovereignty over comfort and calamity, God's sovereignty over life and death.

### **The sovereignty of God is the only foundation for worship in the midst of tragedy.**

And I want you to see, follow in your notes here, that the sovereignty of God is the only foundation for worship in the midst of tragedy. Okay? Now follow with me here: only foundation for worship in the midst of tragedy. And that just begs the question, "How is that possible?" What I want you to see—yes, Job 1 is clear, these tragedies are directly a work of Satan, but ultimately under the sovereignty of God and that is the only foundation for worship in the middle of tragedy—to realize that yes, this is sin, Satan at work, but ultimately all of that is under the sovereignty of God. Follow with me why that is the only foundation for worship in the midst of tragedy.

See the implications: God's sovereignty assures us that He is in control. Some say, "Well God couldn't be in control of that." Many theologies today—Open Theism, Process Theism, some practical out workings of various theologies—that say basically, and people are writing this, advocating this, that God is doing the best He can under the circumstances, but He cannot control everything that is happening. So ultimately, is not sovereign over suffering. They are wrong when they say that. I don't know how to square all of this, but it is clear in Job 1 that He is absolutely in control of the whole picture. The whole earth is the Lord's and everything in it - Psalms 24 - *everything* in it. And He makes this clear in the picture of God, the portrait of God, we see at the very end of Job—which we will talk about in a second—but I want you to hear why it is good news that He is in control of everything. Because the God who is in control of everything, first of all, He is with us.

The one who holds the universe in His hands, the one who holds the wind and the storms, the seas in His hands, He is with us. This is so key, don't gloss over it. This is so key, just let this hit a home in your heart. This, Job, after Job 2, what you get is conversation after conversation after conversation with all kinds of questions are being asked and the big

question is, "Why, why, how can this happen, why did this happen?" And you think, and I mentioned this earlier this was God's chance to give us the answer to the problem of evil and suffering – right? Like just spell it out here, we won't have to have philosophical debates about it for thousands of years. You get to the end of all the questioning and you get to chapter 38, and God finally speaks after all of these other guys have talked and talked and talked and talked, God speaks in verse 38. You have got these questions hanging out there like—yes, God is speaking—and what does God do starting in chapter 38? After all these questions what does God do? God asks Job—get this—He asks Job 64 questions. Sixty-four questions—all of them designed to say to Job, "Job, you have no idea who I am and My greatness over all things and My control over all things and My wisdom above all things."

And you know, the picture is and Job gets to that conclusion, he says, "I've heard of you, now I see you." And you realize, maybe our greatest need, all of our questions, all of the wrestling of our hearts, maybe our greatest need is not an explanation, maybe our greatest need is revelation. Maybe our greatest need is not a philosophical argument from God, what if our greatest need is the assurance of the presence of God with us?

I have a lot yet to learn in marriage – a lot yet to learn. But this I have learned: when my wife is going through difficulty and struggle, the last thing she needs is explanations from me. What she needs most is presence with me. And the whole picture we have in the Book of Job is the God who amidst the deepest hurts in our hearts looks at us and He says, "You are not alone, I am with you and I hold all things in my hands and I am with you." Job knows that and that's why he falls on his face and he worship because he knows he is not alone. God is with us and to make it better, not only is He with us, but God is for us.

The beautiful language in Job 1:21, "The Lord,"—not just God, not just His power, Almighty, God, Elohim, but the Lord, Yahweh, gave, the Lord, Yahweh— "has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." The name of God that represents His love and His faithfulness to His people; the God who is with you is also for you. Again, I am not saying this is easy to grapple with when we walk through tragedy like this last week or other tragedy in our lives. But know this: the God of the universe—people of God—the God of the universe is with you in the midst of your tragedy and He is for you.

He has promised to use it all, all of it, He is going to use it for good. He is going to use it for your good, Romans 8:28. He is going to use it for His glory and that is why Romans 8 ends the way it does, why it says (Romans 8:31), "*If God is for us, who can be against us?*" (Romans 8:35) "*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?*" Shall tornadoes separate us from the love of Christ? "*No, in all these things we are more than...*" What? "*...conquerors through him who loved us*" (Romans 8:37). I am convinced that "*neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, not powers, nor heights nor depth, nor anything else in all creation... [no tornadoes]..., will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Romans 8:38, 39). That is a rock to stand on when you don't understand when the world is spinning around you—to know that in the middle of it that God is with you and He is for you.

And His sovereignty assures us that He is in control. That the one who is with you and for you is not just doing the best He can under the circumstances, but it is out of control, He is in control.

The one who is with you and for you is in control leading to; second, God's sovereignty reminds us that Satan has been conquered. Part of the purpose of Job is to flat out

humiliate Satan, isn't it? Showcase his lack of power. After chapter 2 he is silenced throughout the rest of the book. In fact, we don't see him in the rest of the Old Testament in this kind of picture, speaking, tempting like this, until he reappears in Matthew chapter 4. Three times he tempts the Son of God and he gets shot down all three times. You get to the end of that chapter and his head is crushed in the resurrection of Christ. It is good to know that, that he has been defeated.

And therefore, all the affects of sin, suffering, tragedy, they are all temporary. They are temporary because the enemy has been conquered. This is why Luther loved Psalm 46 that Jim quoted earlier, wrote that hymn "A Mighty Fortress is our God" based on Psalm 46, great hymn. I wish I could sing it, but I'm going to read it instead. It is better, it will be more, better, this way. Luther wrote,

A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing; Our helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing: For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe; His craft and power are great, and, armed with cruel hate, On earth is not his equal. Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing; Were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own choosing: Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He; Lord Sabaoth, His name, from age to age the same, And He must win the battle. And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us, We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us: The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him; His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure, one little word shall fell him.

Yes! God is in control and because He is in control, we know that Satan has been conquered. Satan has been conquered and God's sovereignty guarantees us that one day as a result, our suffering will conclude. This is good news for everyone who trusts in God to know that one day, one day very soon, your suffering will conclude. It may not be tomorrow, it may not be ten years from now. It may not end in this life, but one day there will be no more sorrow or sickness or struggle or pain because God Himself will, will wipe every tear from your eyes. And, and that's not just a wish: "I hope it works out that way in the end," like, "I hope that a team wins a game," like, "Hopefully odds are it's going to happen." That's rock solid because God is in control, we know it's going to happen and therefore, tornadoes are temporary and destruction and devastation in this world are temporary because there is a new heaven and a new earth that is coming where we will be with Him and there will be no more pain and suffering. We know that because God is sovereign.

You see why sovereignty of God is the only foundation for worship in the midst of tragedy? You throw out the sovereignty of God away; you throw out all that out. You don't have a rock to stand on; you have sinking sand that's pulling you in. This is a rock to stand on—His sovereignty—the only foundation for worship in the midst of tragedy.

**Ultimately, tragedy on earth can be understood rightly from the perspective of heaven.**

And ultimately, tragedy on earth can only be understood rightly from the perspective of heaven. Only be understood rightly from the perspective of heaven. I'll hit this quick but, in this book—stay here in Job for a second with me in your mind—that is all about the mysteries of God in the middle of suffering. Notice the way that the story is told. We know things in this story that Job doesn't know. We know about a conversation in heaven surrounded by a heavenly throne between God and Satan. And we know of what God has said to Satan and what Satan has said to God, "if you take away his stuff he will curse you to your face." Satan has spoken against God and the result, this picture that happens at the

end of Job chapter 1, this disasters coming on, now Job, knows none of that. In fact, we never get a clue anywhere in the rest of the book that Job knows about this conversation.

And so here we are, cheering for Job, to trust in God when all this happens, and when he does, oh to think of it from the perspective of heaven. So here's Job, he is hearing the news; one person after another person after another servant come and here is all these people are dying, his children are dead and heaven peering over in silent expectation, waiting to see what is going to happen. You have a hundred thousand angels around the throne of God who witness this, who know what's going on, waiting to see what is going to happen. They see Job rise up and silent expectation, they see him fall to the ground and worship; cry out "blessed be the name of the Lord." Unbeknownst to Job, at that moment, two hundred thousand arms go flying into the air and cry out, "Worthy is the God of Job." And Satan goes running as fast as he can, away.

That was victory at the end of Job chapter 1. Did it feel like victory for Job? Absolutely not. The thought that this could even be perceived as victory is the farthest thing from his mind. Now I am not saying that when you or I walk through suffering, tragedy, that this last week, that any of that is a result of a conversation that happened in heaven. That is not at all what I am saying, we certainly do not know that, but I am saying this; the Bible is saying that when we walk through suffering and tragedy like this last week or in other things in our lives, there is another perspective at work. There is another perspective. The perspective of a good, wise, loving, great God and He knows the whole picture and yes, there are mysteries in each of our lives and each of our families and in this community right now but they are all connected somehow and the picture of a grand scheme where God is working all things together for His people's good, and for His own glory. Tragedy on earth can only be understood rightly from that perspective.

## **These Tornadoes Remind Us of the Urgency of Our Mission**

### **Life is fleeting.**

All that leads to the last reminder that I want to give us. These tornadoes remind us of the urgency of our mission, of the urgency of our mission. We do not have time to dive in depth here. You can read the end of Luke 12:35-48 and you see that Jesus is telling His followers to be watchful, to be ready when the King comes back. And there is a whole tone of urgency even leading into Luke 13. This is where we are reminded, brothers and sisters, this whole picture and this really sums it up: life is fleeting. Life is fleeting. James 4:14, "*...for you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.*" Vapor, mist: here for an instant, gone the next. So, again can I just remind us in this room; some of us are not going to live through this next year. Some of us in this church are not going to be here a year from now. Some of us in this room may live for 70 more years. But in the end, the difference between the two is miniscule. It is tiny. It is a mist. Your life, my life, we are a mist; we are a vapor, here really quick – gone.

### **People are perishing.**

Eternity ahead, life is fleeting, people are perishing. There is an eternity ahead—see this, okay? There is... I don't know how to best describe this, I certainly don't want to in any way misuse some of the images that we've seen this last week or underestimate the effect of those images but the reality is there are people at this moment, that you work with, live among, that surround us here in Birmingham and among the nations, and because they are without Christ, eternal destruction headed their way. People - perishing without the gospel, heading to an eternity without Christ. Do we believe this? If we believe that, you have news

that a torrent is coming, then you tell people: take cover, run to the cross of Christ and take cover. He is provided a way for you to be safe, eternally safe from all your sin and all suffering and all pain so trust in Him. There is an urgency that comes with that – right? It takes precedence over the things in this world that we think are so important, there are more important things, peoples souls for eternity at stake.

**Eternity is coming.**

So there is urgency here. Life is fleeting, people are perishing and eternity is coming. So let's give our lives, let's give our families, let's give this church in the context of Birmingham and to the ends of the earth; making the gospel of Christ known to everyone. So we don't play games when tornadoes come, we don't play games when eternal wrath due sin is coming. We give ourselves and everything we have, all of our resources, we give ourselves to how can we make the good news of salvation of grace and mercy, we make it known. Safety, eternal security, we make Christ know.

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