God Turning Tragedy into Triumph

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Acts 11:19 – 30

It is such a joy to be here and such a privilege and such an honor.

As Paul wrote to the Romans, I long to see you, and I had that longing in my heart to see you, to see all of you, because I just wanted to meet those people that are so incredible, who’s handprints and footprints are all over Canaan from the beginning. I can even understand better what Simon said, now I’ve seen, I’ve seen your salvation, I can go in peace. I really was longing to see you, to see the faces of those people that have been supporting a work close to an ocean away, and having not met those people.

Now after spending almost 2 hours really talking to your pastor about Barre Evangelical Free Church, I have an even greater appreciation for you as a congregation and individually, knowing that you have served out of your own needs, that you have invested into God’s Kingdom and sometimes forgetting the personal or the needs that you have as a congregation. My heart is touched, I have learned a lot.

This morning was quite a blessing as I was just participating in the songs and I was singing all those songs and was taking notes rapidly, those beautiful songs. I love the style and love the music, so I will go home and share with my congregation, so by the time that we visit, because we will visit you again. We will force ourselves on you because we love you so much. We would like our young people to come here on a Sunday morning to worship with you and to enjoy the fellowship with you so that they would know some of those songs and praise God with you. I feel happy to be here and to share the word with you. The message of how God turns tragedies into triumph.

I will just read a few verses with you from Acts 11 from verse 19

19) Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed, traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. 20) Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to the Greeks as well, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. 21) The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

Now I will jump to verse 27

27) During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.

28) One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a great famine that would spread over the entire Roman world. It happened during the time of Claudius. 29) The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. 30) This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

Great persecution, great tragedy, death, great famine. When sin entered the world through the disobedience of Adam and Eve, tragedies entered with it, not your tragedies such as earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, famine, but since men has rebelled against God it’s in that nature as what has rebelled against men. When you reach a certain age when you are in your sixties and seventies, close to 70 like myself, you have been around for some time, you start noticing some
patterns, you don’t call them laws, but some of them tend to be consistent. When I was younger, I saw some young husbands disrespecting their wives consistently and horribly, and later on I see their sons growing up and disrespecting their mothers or vice versa their daughters disrespecting their fathers. It says that men has rebelled against God in nature and in turn has rebelled against men. And you find men being afraid of animals something that would not be heard of, man afraid of lions, tigers, bears, sharks and its body wide reached with diseases caused by bacteria, viruses, men was supposed to be immune to these things and his life span being cut short, from eternity to nine hundred years, five hundred, three hundred years and now to a mere one hundred years. We can better understand what Paul wrote in Romans 8:22 the whole creation is groaning awaiting its redemption, or we can better appreciate and even long for the illustrated picture in Isaiah 11, When the wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the goat, and the calf and the lion and the yearling together: and a little child will lead them. The infant will play near the cobra’s den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper’s nest.

What a picture of restoration there would be no harm in the Holy mountain of the Lord. Beside natural tragedies brought by the fall, sin was long man-made tragedies on an individual level and on an international skill as well. We find personal tragedies such as murder, we find international tragedies such as wars, persecution. The first murder, the death of Abel, what a tragic event, a life cut short from protentional nine hundred years to nothing. Sometimes I imagined the pain of the parents Adam and Eve, imagine a son killing another son; a brother killing another brother, what kind of pain that this can generate in parents and for many, many years remembering that. And since we are all related as creatures of God, it is really sad that we are still at it, brothers are killing other brothers.

The world creation is indeed a waiting redemption, restoration, but while we are all waiting this current generation, this future era when everything will be restored, God has been quietly intervening in history, and in the life of His church according to His sovereignty while we are all waiting for the great event to come the great regeneration, the great reconciliation. God has been turning according to His sovereignty tragedies into triumphs.

The death of Stephen in Acts 7 was a tragic event, culturally tragic, accused by Christian Jews, Hellenistic Jews, Immigrant Jews, or son of immigrant Jews, and probably he was an immigrant Jew himself. He was brought on first charges before the Sanhedrin’s and all Palestinians and Jews, he was stoned to death. Future tragic because he was a pillar of the church in Jerusalem, men full of grace and power filled with the Holy Spirit according to Acts 6. He was publically executed. The Romans they would crucify people, the Greeks would banish people, the Jews as execution would stone someone. The church of Jerusalem lost a great leader and a great persecution broke out as we read in Acts 11. The church scattered north, a tragic event and God quietly started to turn that immense tragedy into a triumph. Squeezing out a blessing out of that terrible event. The bible says those were scattered by the percussion in connection with Stephen travelled north as far as Phoenicia, Cypress, Antioch sharing God’s word only with Jews first of all for whatever reasons, some Jew shared only with Jews perhaps it was cultural difficulties, perhaps language barriers, perhaps it was their comfort zone or perhaps not fully understanding this call of the gospel fully, it doesn’t matter, but there are some other Jews that started to share the gospel with the Jews as they said Jew from Cypress, from Cyrene, there were Christian Jews, Hellenistic Jews, African Jews, Immigrant Jews, sons of immigrant Jews, bilingual Jews, Jews with an accent as yourselves, because I don’t have one😊

They started to share the gospel with the Greeks, they felt comfortable enough they had the language skill to do that, and people started to respond. Antioch was a coastal city, a cosmopolitan city an international city. People from every culture from every language group would do business there.
Beside Rome in and Alexandria, Antioch was the third largest city of the Roman empire. Everyone knows from Antioch [unknown ] spread out all over the world by land or by sea. It was in Antioch that those who were full of Christ were called for the first time, Christians. It was in Antioch that the great commission was fully implemented that tragedy was turned to triumph, those that were scattered, they went all over and started to implement the great commission. According to Acts 10, Antioch was being add to an international city and it gave birth to as far as we know the first multicultural church outside of Jerusalem, because it says in Acts 1 There were all types of leaders, leaders from Cyrene, from Africa there were some raised in noble families,[unknown] from great rich and powerful, friends of Heron, others from Tarsus, others from Cypress, people that were really learned in the [unknown] law, teachers with teachers, multi-talented church. The first church was in Antioch and Antioch was going to be the place where the great missionary journeys would start and later on when Jerusalem would be destroyed, Antioch would become the anchor of Christianity. Just sending people in and out, a great tragedy has been turned by God into a triumph of the propagation of the gospel.

Tragedy and tragic events will take place whether natural or manmade and sometimes God judgement it will happen because we are living on this earth. It will happen because there is a curse in nature. It will happen because nature has rebelled against men. It will happen because men are sinful creatures. It will happen, men will hate each other, men will find reason to have wars with each other, but what should be our response to tragedy?

I find that our first response should be praising God, relying on His love, trusting on His sovereignty, Sovereignty that He can turn whatever tragedy into triumph. That He will squeeze something great out of what we perceive as evil and sometimes is evil, I was just thinking sometime if I look at the great skill of thing when we think about the great Napoleonic wars, terrible in Europe hundreds of thousand of people in Europe lost their lives, what good could come out of that? How could God turn something that is so evil, so painful to so many, is there any good that can come out of that? Can God squeeze something good out of that? It was during those wars as France was fighting against England and Spain that they could not really care for their colonies, it was in that time that Hatti became independent, because Hatti could fight against the French soldiers, because they could not be reinforced, Napoleon was fighting all over the world it was in that time that all the countries of Latin American became independent, now it is Hatti who was the first black probably in the world after America. It was the first country independent in the new world what we do with independence is something else, for the first time a country that was in slavery became really free. Sometimes we think about things that happen, can something good or great come out of something as terrible as war. God can turn really tragedies into triumph and when you keep thinking about it what is our response to tragedies, sometimes it is personal it is an individual tragedy when I look at the parable of the good Samaritan the way that the parable is structured, a couple of people pass by, perhaps there was indifference perhaps not understanding, but the first two or three people did nothing. The good Samaritan came, there is a problem, someone came across cultural line and he come and was [unknown] that person. That was someone who had been, that was victim [unknown] of a tragedy.

And sometimes it happens in real life and the Lord will expect us to respond as individually whenever it is necessary, as we can. It is an opportunity of service. I was thinking about in John 5 (this is not a parable, this is a real event) that Christ would go through so many people that were sick, he would go to someone that was really sick, paralyzed for like 38 years, and personally touching that one person who would like to be healed, the lesson that I got from that is sometimes we are not touching the whole world and God is not asking us to rescue the whole world because we cannot, but he will but into our hearts an individual, one person to reach out, maybe one person across the pew, across the city, maybe across cultural lines, maybe cross racial, way, way, way beyond the sea that the Lord will
allow you to hear the cry and to do something. I’m quite touched when the disciples were on the other side of the lake and they heard [unknown] lets go to the other side and reach to that person.

The third thing would be an opportunity to rally people and to respond collectively to most of these people as we read in that passage when the great famine occurred, people from all over, Christians, Grecian Christians, Christians from Asia Minor, with Paul and Barnabas would go around and ask for help for the Christians in Jerusalem.

II Corinthians chapters 8 & 9

“We see the great collection as he would go asking churches to contribute as Saul would say, asking churches to contribute, giving beyond their means. It’s an opportunity for God’s people to join together.

During the great earthquake in Hatti in 2010, yesterday was the anniversary of that earthquake, January 12th, I lost my mother, I lost friends, some churches were totally decapitated from leadership, pastors, deacons, leaders. What can come out of such a tragedy. We have learned to appreciate and know that there is goodness in people, faith has been restored into people, and in America. Sometimes we hear America is all bad, bad things America is doing all over the world, believe me there is no other country, and I praise God for that, that responds to tragedies all over the world there is no other county that responds as well as America. Within Eleven to twenty four hours people from Israel, I don’t know how, such a small country, responded so rapidly some are used to tragedy, they go underground helping. Twenty four hours the National Guards were there, they set up the hospitals in no time they were treating people [unknown] and the ship was there all of a sudden hospital ship were there, army hospital ships were there, They were treating people, taking them to the US, to all the states, some even to Germany. That is why there are fifty thousand people now, on CPS temporary status that have been there for 9 years, working, helping people back home, still asking for compassion, because their country still is not going well. [unknown]

Something great came out, we are just appreciative of the goodness of God working, not only with Christians but even working in people, faith has been restored, even in us sinful people, but the image of God that compassion of God is not totally erased, God can really trigger [unknown] that He is still on the throne. Through tragedy no city like Canaan has, people that never had anything have something, as the whole world was turning to Hatti and as pastors vocational pastors reflecting, we do that every year when there is a tragedy. Every year I’ve been going to Hatti after that there is perhaps more people that have been saved from hunger and illness than any other time perhaps two hundred and twenty thousand people would die in about ten years out of illness from hunger, or whatever, but its in that time there are so may more people who can to know the Lord. So many other people came to know the Lord through that tragedy

God has called me to work in Canaan. When I went and visited Canaan, first my heart went out to that place, there was no church, no school, no water, but the first thing that came to my mind was to run away, with a small church less than 40, an immigrant church you cannot have such a vision how can you have such a vision to help such a group of people because the Lord vision should be given to big churches with big budget, with great leaders, how can a small church respond to what seems that you are calling us to do, I didn’t call them they called me because some of them knew me because they were in other churches that I used to visit [unknown] and I couldn’t sleep after that, this thing was on my mind, and the Lord put into my heart lets share it with brothers and sisters and Barre, you responded so magnificently. Your hands have been at every single thing that was done. The church, the school, the system, the wedding the goal, every single thing.
I wanted to see those wonderful, super good people that the Lord has been using, and I see that He does it out of your own needs. You responded well to the tragedy. I'm praying you will keep on responding to tragedy both on a personal level and as a church, and as you are motivating others.

I heard some beautiful wonderful stories from your pastor to share with my church. Inspirational stories, How the Lord’s grace and power of God can be moved from you to touch the world. [unknown]

My God bless you abundantly and use you as you respond to tragedies as you are explaining tragedy to all people, and I’m certain that is what is the truth. As Paul said May the Lord will richly keep on blessing you.

May God Bless You.