

Why do bad things happen to good people? You know what I'm talking about. I am confident that every single one of you could give me examples of times when tragedy struck a person or family that faithfully attends church and serves God. Here's a relatively recent incident: one of the pastors in our church body who served a church in Minnesota, Paul Schmeling, was trimming trees in his backyard. His daughter was going to get married, and the reception would be in the backyard, so he wanted it looking its best. While up on a ladder, he lost his footing. He fell and struck his head hard on the ground. He died instantly. Don't we just want to ask God, "Why?! Why, Lord? Of all the people, why did you let this bad thing happen to such a good person?"

Here's another one. When I was in seminary, a student, Ernie Schultz, decided to take a year off before his final year at the seminary... not because he wasn't sure he wanted to be a pastor. But because his life-long dream had been to visit all of world mission fields of our church bodies. He elaborately planned a full year round-the-world trip to see and help all of our missions. What an ambition! His first stop was Australia where a friend was serving as a vicar in a mission there. While driving along the Australian coast, he asked if they could stop and take a quick dip in the ocean. While swimming, Ernie was grabbed by a riptide and pulled out to sea. His friend watched helplessly as he got farther and farther away. He went for help. But there was nothing that could be done. His body was found a couple days later. "Why, Lord? Why do you let bad things happen to good people?" Why does the hard working Christian man lose his job? Why does the faithful Christian wife get terminal brain cancer? Why are good people sometimes the victims in random acts of violence?

Friends, I'm not going to sugar coat anything in my message today. This is one of the toughest questions for the Christian to answer. To help us on our way, let's take a detailed look at a story from Jesus' life. It's the story of a good man who went to Jesus for help when his 12 year old daughter was dying. Jesus didn't make it in time and she did die. Why, Lord? Let's see if we can find some answers:

**Mark 5:21-24a, 35-43** When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. Then one of the synagogue rulers, named Jairus, came there. Seeing Jesus, he fell at his feet and pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." So Jesus went with him.

While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher any more?" Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, "Don't be afraid; just believe." He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. When they came to the home of the synagogue ruler, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep." But they laughed at him. After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha koum!" (which means, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). Immediately the girl stood up and walked around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. He gave strict orders not to let anyone know

**about this, and told them to give her something to eat.**

One of the hardest things to deal with is the death of a loved one. And studies have shown that most difficult is when a parent loses a child. This is a tragedy I know some of our own members have had to deal with. So we can certainly imagine what Jairus was going through. His little 12 year old daughter was very sick. In fact Jairus knew she was very near death. He must have been torn up inside. His daughter was dying and there wasn't anything he could do about it. Well, almost nothing. Jairus knew Jesus. We don't know how he knew him. Maybe he had heard him preach or seen some of his miracles. But somehow Jairus knew and trusted that Jesus could heal his daughter. So in faith, Jairus went to Jesus and threw himself at his feet. Jairus pleaded with the Savior. **"My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live."**

The Bible makes a point of mentioning who Jairus was: a synagogue ruler. You may recall that Jairus' peers were the ones who hated Jesus and eventually plotted to have him arrested, tried and put to death. Jairus had amazing courage and humility to approach Jesus and fall at his feet to beg him to help his daughter. Jairus showed his faith that he would call on Jesus in his time of trouble. And how did Jesus respond? He shows compassion and starts walking with Jairus toward his house.

By the way, isn't this a stark contrast to last week's lesson? Remember how the disciples reacted in a desperate situation as their boat was about to capsize in a violent storm. They lashed out at Jesus. They were angry at him and assumed he didn't care. They felt they deserved help they weren't getting. But Jairus is completely different. He is humble, knowing he deserves nothing. But he trusts. He believes Jesus could and would help.

So maybe the first thing we need to remember in answer the question, "Why do bad things happen to good people" is this: there are no truly good people! Every last one of us is sinners. David, whom God himself declares was a man after his own heart, was an adulterer and a murderer. He finally confessed his sin to God. The apostle Paul called himself the chief of sinners. Jesus called the upright Pharisees white washed tombs that looked good on the outside, but were full of stinking death inside. No one is righteous, not even one. So our question strictly speaking is wrong: There are no good people. Not in and of themselves, anyway. The **tax collector** in the back of temple who beat his breast and said, "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner!" understood this. Isaiah, standing before the Lord in heaven understood it when he said, "Woe to me! For I am a man of unclean lips!" And Jairus understood it when he fell before the Lord in all humility... because he knew he was not worthy. And we're not either. Let's first repent of our attitude that God owes us because we're so good, and recognize we deserve nothing. With humble hearts, let's continue the story.

So Jesus sets off to Jairus' house. Because of the crowd, it was slow going. Jesus stopped to heal a sick woman. While they were still making there way toward Jairus' house, they received some very sad news. Some men came from Jairus' house and told him that his daughter had died. Imagine how this news crushed Jairus. Jesus had been on his way. He still had hope that his daughter might live. Then these men tell him the awful news that his daughter was dead. I'm sure he was devastated. He was disheartened. What's more, the men tell him to give up all hope. **"Why bother the teacher any more?"** the men say. This man may be a healer, they say. But he certainly can't do anything for a dead girl. Leave the man alone. These men limit Jesus'

power. They assume there are some things Jesus couldn't do.

But how wrong they were! How little they knew about Jesus, the Lord of Life. Jesus heard their words, but he chose to ignore them. Instead he turns to Jairus and says, "***Don't be afraid; just believe.***" What the men said was getting to Jairus. He was afraid and probably deeply saddened. Jesus says, "Don't listen to what these men are saying. You listen to me. Stop being afraid. Just believe, because things aren't hopeless." Jesus the caring Savior comforted Jairus with these words. He built him up in his time of weakness. He encourages Jairus to believe in him -- to trust entirely in Jesus because he would take care of things.

Friends, in this sinful world, bad things sometimes happen. Why? We live in a sinful, fallen world. We live in a world that is out of spec and knocked out of alignment. So it's wobbling along and we're often going to get bumped around with it. We are sometimes thrown violently by life's unexpected turns. Especially in the face of death do we hurt and fear... whether it's our own, or a loved one's.

Jesus also comforts us in our time of need. It may look like things are going badly. Maybe we have troubles that start to overwhelm us, frighten us, and cause us to become disheartened and lose hope. But Jesus comes to us with those comforting words, "***Don't be afraid, just believe.***" Whether you see it or not, and whether you understand where things are heading or not, God has things in control. And he encourages us to lean on him and trust entirely in him.

And here we already begin to see a reason and a blessing that comes from the bad things that happen in our lives. *Troubles actually increase our trust and reliance on Jesus.* There was a Christian man who had a great deal of troubles and hardships in his life. His friend approached him once and said, "You know, with all things you've had to go through I'm surprised it hasn't made you lose your faith." The Christian man replied, "My friend, these troubles haven't made me lose my faith, they've made me USE my faith."

Imagine a man on a tiny deserted island with one palm tree. On the warm sunny days, the man leans against the palm tree for rest, support and shade. Maybe he even starts to take that palm tree for granted. But the man will rely on that palm tree even more when a hurricane blows through, won't he? He will have to rely on that palm tree and its strong roots to keep him from being blown into the stormy ocean. That tree that he once relied upon mainly for comfort, he now relies upon for his very life. Suddenly he's not taking that tree for granted anymore. The same is true in the Christian's life. When things go well and life is easy, sometimes our trust in God becomes a comfort and convenience that we take for granted more than a necessity for life. But when the storms of life get rough, we learn to rely on God and his strength and power and love more and more.

Our text didn't end there with Jesus' words of encouragement. You see, God doesn't ask us to believe in him so we look at things more optimistically. Jesus didn't ask Jairus to "just believe" so he wouldn't be so down. Jesus told him to believe because Jesus was going to *do something* about the situation. Jesus doesn't just offer him or us empty word of encouragement, but he follows through with action.

Jesus goes to the house of Jairus, and what does he find? "***When they came to the home of the synagogue ruler, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly.***" What Jesus saw here was more than people grieving. You see, when someone died, the custom at that time was to pay people to mourn. Total strangers would come into the house and put on a show of grief. It would appear Jairus was getting his money's worth, because there was quite an uproar

at this house.

So Jesus goes in and says, "**Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.**" Now, Jesus isn't upset at them for mourning. He himself cried at the death of his friend Lazarus. What Jesus saw was an unwholesome grieving. Some were making noise even though they hardly knew the child, others making noise and crying so loudly because they thought all was hopeless. The child was dead. So Jesus reminds them, "**The child is not dead, but sleeping.**"

The people responded by laughing at Jesus. This wasn't a laugh because the words he said made them happy. They were laughing in unbelief. They knew perfectly well that the cold, breathless body of the child was not just napping. She was dead, and they were convinced she would stay that way.

Jesus ignores them. He clears out the house. He makes everyone leave except the parents of the child and Peter, James and John. Why? Jesus didn't do miracles to convert unbelievers. The miracle he was about to perform was to be a sign and benefit for those who knew him and trusted him. He wanted them to know even better that he was indeed the promised Savior who had come into this world to overcome sin and death. Those who laughed would not get to witness the miracle as it happened.

So after the house was cleared, Jesus returns the girl's life to her simply by grasping her cold hand and saying, "Little girl, get up." Note that Jesus didn't need any lengthy incantation or chanting. He doesn't do any crazy dances, animal sacrifices, candle burning, drum beating, or hocus pocus. With just two simple words in the common language of those present he says, "Talitha, koum." Little girl, get up. And she did. Friends, that's how much power Jesus our Savior has over things which we have no power over.

And when that girl was raised, she was not only made alive again, but she was also healed. So she wasn't waking up from a deep coma with a long recovery ahead. She was raised from death and healed of her terrible sickness. Whenever someone is sick or dies, we are reminded of the effects of sin. Sin is why there is death and sickness in this world. This story reminds us that the God of all grace can easily remove the effects of sin. Know also that our God just as easily takes care of sin itself.

So you see, faith in Jesus isn't about wishful thinking, positive feeling and a vague hope for something better. Jesus follows up his words with concrete action. He not only comforts us, he also delivers us. Trust him!

Why do bad things happened to good people? As we already said, we're all sinners. There are no good people. The real question to ask is this: *Why do good things happen to bad people?* Why did a sinner like Jairus get to have his daughter back from death? Why do we get to have eternal life in heaven? Why do we get to have our sins forgiven? Why do we get a meaningful, full life here on earth now? Or even the earthly blessings: Why do we have enough food to eat. A house to live in? Why do these good things happen to bad people? The answer: because of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because of his perfect life for us, and his death on the cross for our sins, God shows us love and goodness now, and once since is completely gone after Judgment day... in eternity! God's grace... his undeserved love are why we enjoy his goodness and blessings.

Friends, when troubles come into your life, whatever they may be – and especially when death comes knocking on the door -- call on Jesus. Rely on him. He will comfort you. He will deliver you. He will never let you down.

Why did Ernie Schultz and Pastor Schmeling die? Why did tragedy fall on their families? Why this bad? Why do we sometimes suffer? I don't know the specific answer... God often doesn't reveal it. But I do know God's promises: He is working it for eternal good. Those who die in the Lord are in heaven with him. That is *good*, not bad! When tragedy strikes we focus on things eternal instead of temporal, and that's good. And finally, God is pointing us to the cross where he promises he has removed our "bad" forever through his Son Jesus Christ. And that is most certainly good. When you get right down to it, bad never happens to God's people, for he promises everything will work for good.

When bad times come, don't focus on what God hasn't revealed, and instead focus on his love and promises that he has revealed. Turn to him and trust his grace and mercy. Meditate on these words from Psalm 91. Speaking of the believer, God says: "**Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation."** Jairus trusted these promises, and he experienced how true they are. May we trust too, for we will not be disappointed. Amen.