

The earth just opened up and swallowed him. That's what happened late Thursday night in Florida when a man just getting to sleep in his bedroom suddenly called out for help. His brother, sleeping just down the hall, rushed in but he was gone. The giant sinkhole under the bedroom was even too dangerous for rescuers to go into.

This isn't the first instance of the ground opening and swallowing someone. This morning we have a more miraculous instance. In the Florida case we don't know why it happened to this man and not someone else. In this morning's case we know what happened and why. The first lesson records the miraculous judgment of God.

Whether it is sinkholes, drive by shootings, or weather events, unexplained tragedies happen all the time. Yet people live their lives thinking that nothing bad could ever happen to them. Then suddenly everything changes drastically or it's over completely. Everything may have been going fine appearing like nothing was wrong. But warnings come at us all the time. The call this morning is to...

**Listen to the judgments of God
They call you to repent
They showcase God's grace**

To understand the story some background is required. Moses and Aaron are the spiritual leaders for the Israelites, God's chosen nation. One specific family from among the Israelites was chosen by God to help Aaron with priestly duties. That family was the Levites. For the previous 450 years the Israelites had been slaves in Egypt. God got them out by a miracle, promising them a land of their own. But they ended up in the desert, not really going anywhere. So it seemed. Things were hard in the desert. Many started complaining. One Levite had even started a rebellion against Moses. That Levite's position dragged a bunch of other people in as followers in the rebellion.

Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were all disgusted with Moses for his apparent lack of leadership. Moses called them out on their rebellion but they responded, **"We will not come! Isn't it enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the desert? And now you also want to lord it over us? Moreover, you haven't brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey or given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards."** They were angry, but they were wrong. They didn't remember the reality of Egypt. Egypt wasn't flowing with milk and honey; that was God's promise for the Promised Land he was giving them. And had they forgotten the 450 years of slavery, the harsh treatment by the Egyptians, and the escape God led them on? They were openly rebelling against the Lord's chosen leader. Bad move.

God made his decision. This rebellion against Moses, really against God, had to be stopped. First a warning was given. **"Say to the assembly, move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram."** God's judgment on the rebels was happening soon. This was warning from Moses, really from God, so no one innocent of rebellion would get caught up in the immediate destruction. One more warning came through Moses. **"This is how you will know that the Lord has sent me to do all these things and that it was not my idea: If these men die a natural death and experience only what usually happens to men, then the Lord has not sent me. But if the Lord brings about something totally new, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them, with everything that belongs to them, and they go down alive to the grave, then you will know that these men have treated the Lord with contempt."** The leaders of the rebellion were defiant. They wouldn't repent of their unfaithfulness or change their ways. They disappeared off the face of the earth without a trace.

These days God seems to move a lot slower with his judgments. So slow we might think they won't happen at all. Those that sin might not even realize it right away. God doesn't open the earth to swallow sinners anymore that we know of. But it's time to recognize every sin is still open rebellion against God. From the littlest lie to the worst murder every sin says to God, "You don't matter to me. I don't need you." And when you sin others see you. So if you curse maybe someone else thinks its okay for Christians to curse. If someone reads on Facebook gossip you write they might think its okay to do that. When your kids see you disrespect your spouse they might think its okay. And because God moves slowly in judgment, and the earth doesn't swallow us up right away when we sin, we may not realize it right away that our actions are sinful.

When we see sinkholes, building collapses, or any other number of terrible things that happen we might mistake them for what they are. While we can't say what things that happen are acts of God's judgment for specific sins, we can take them as warnings. Whatever is happening could happen to you. So now is the time to repent. Now is the time to change your ways. If we avoid, ignore, or downplay disasters we might miss warning signs from God.

God is calling you to repentance. God sends reminders your life is ending, he's serious about sin, and if you die in sin you go to hell. Still God is always loving when he calls us to repent. The warning might seem stern, but the call to repent is loving. Only God brings about true repentance. He alone leads us to recognize our sins and be sorry for them. He alone sends Jesus his Son for those sins. And he alone takes those sins away. He gets credit for our repentance and change of attitude. So when we see acts of judgment we see and we hear a call to repent from God. Stop your sinful actions. Be truly sorry for your sins. Commit to changing your sinful behavior. Rest in the comfort of total forgiveness that comes from Christ.

One of the hardest things for children to realize is that discipline is a loving thing. How could it be loving when it hurts so much? How could it be helpful when all it brought was pain? Children don't naturally get that. It's something they hopefully learn. It relies on parents being clear when bringing discipline why they're doing it and for what reason. It means leading the child to repent through judgment, but showing love for them too. God's acts of judgment do the same things and we should listen to them. They call us to repent, but they also showcase his grace.

God's grace is all over this story. The fair warning that the people should move away from the rebels' tents is God's grace. The earth did open up but it did only swallow those who were involved in the rebellion. Sinkholes can't be controlled, but God did to only effect those in the rebellion. That was God's grace acting towards all those there that day. The holy censers, what the rebels were using to burn incense against God's command, they were picked up and the metal was used to cover the altar as a reminder of the call to repent and God's grace which had saved them. Aaron and the Levites continued the high priesthood. The fact that the high priesthood continued was God's constant sign that his grace was still greater. A greater high priest was still on his way, the promised Savior.

Our sins cause us to take our eyes off God's grace and look at ourselves. We take our eyes off what God has done for us. We start bringing complaints against God that he isn't loving us enough when we suffer. We claim that he isn't in control because the suffering seems so haphazard and uncontrollable. We miss the reminders that God brings into our lives, sometimes on purpose. We may even refuse to listen to someone who tells us plainly when we have sinned.

Still God continues to showcase his grace to us every time we open our Bibles. We always get to see God's son there. We have a reminder that even in the midst of tragedy and pain God is still in control and that he is working these things out for our eternal good. We get to see God's love to us in Christ Jesus, the great high priest who was promised and came for us. He is the showcase of God's grace and love for us.

See the judgments and hear the warnings from everyday life. Don't be fooled into thinking that God won't allow these things to happen to you. Hear the call to repent in the sudden loss of life. Don't get mad at God for his acts of judgment but see them as an opportunity to communicate something to you and warn you from straying too far from him. He calls you back to him with calls of repentance through acts of judgment. He showcases his grace through those same acts of judgment. In love God always calls you back to Christ. Return to Christ.