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“Lest You Be Consumed” — The Tragedy in Minneapolis

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The scenes from Minneapolis are frightening, tragic, and sobering. In this age of technological marvels and engineering achievements we expect buildings to stay on the ground, airplanes to stay in the air, and bridges to stay in place. The sudden and catastrophic collapse of the I-35W bridge in Minneapolis — just as rush hour was coming to a close — challenges some of our most comforting assumptions.

We drive across bridges, enter tall skyscrapers, board commercial aircraft, and perform any number of daily tasks as if there was no danger involved in the equation. We have come to trust architects and engineers to do their jobs and we place a great deal of confidence in inspectors, standards, and testing. Those driving across that bridge on Wednesday evening had every reason to give the bridge itself little thought . . . until it fell.

The extent of the human tragedy is not yet fully known. *The Minneapolis Star Tribune* is reporting 9 persons dead, 60 injured, and 20 missing at present. Given the circumstances, the twenty missing persons are unlikely to be alive. Approximately fifty cars went down with the bridge, along with construction workers working on the structure.

Christians will be praying for the citizens of the Twin Cities, and especially for those with loved ones directly involved in this tragedy. We should pray for the churches of Minneapolis and pray that God will use faithful churches to minister grace and truth amidst this tragedy and turmoil.

The people who drove onto that bridge had no advance warning of its collapse. They made no conscious decision to embrace danger or to put their lives on the line. Experience and reason have trained us all to trust what looks solid and stable — and that bridge looked solid and stable up until it fell.

This is a metaphor for our lives and spiritual peril, as Jonathan Edwards so clearly understood. In his famous sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” Edwards made this point with clarity and power:

It is no security to a natural man, that he is now in health, and that he does not see which way he should now immediately go out of the world by any accident, and that there is no visible danger in any respect in his circumstances. The manifold and continual experience of the world in all ages, shows this is no evidence, that a man is not on the very brink of eternity, and that the next step will not be into another world. The unseen, unthought-of ways and means of persons going suddenly out of the world are innumerable and inconceivable. Unconverted men walk over the pit of hell on a rotten covering, and there are innumerable places in this covering so weak that they will not bear their weight, and these places are not seen. The arrows of death fly unseen at noon-day; the sharpest sight cannot discern them.

The ways and means of persons suddenly passing out of this world are indeed “innumerable and inconceivable,” and the tragedy in Minneapolis is yet another reminder of this sobering truth.

As Edwards reminded his hearers:

And let every one that is yet out of Christ, and hanging over the pit of hell, whether they be old men and women, or

middle aged, or young people, or little children, now hearken to the loud calls of God's word and providence. This acceptable year of the Lord, a day of such great favour to some, will doubtless be a day of as remarkable vengeance to others. Men's hearts harden, and their guilt increases apace at such a day as this, if they neglect their souls; and never was there so great danger of such persons being given up to hardness of heart and blindness of mind. God seems now to be hastily gathering in his elect in all parts of the land; and probably the greater part of adult persons that ever shall be saved, will be brought in now in a little time, and that it will be as it was on the great out-pouring of the Spirit upon the Jews in the apostles' days; the election will obtain, and the rest will be blinded. If this should be the case with you, you will eternally curse this day, and will curse the day that ever you was born, to see such a season of the pouring out of God's Spirit, and will wish that you had died and gone to hell before you had seen it. Now undoubtedly it is, as it was in the days of John the Baptist, the axe is in an extraordinary manner laid at the root of the trees, that every tree which brings not forth good fruit, may be hewn down and cast into the fire.

Therefore, let every one that is out of Christ, now awake and fly from the wrath to come. The wrath of Almighty God is now undoubtedly hanging over a great part of this congregation. Let every one fly out of Sodom: "Haste and escape for your lives, look not behind you, escape to the mountain, lest you be consumed."

UPDATE: [Dr. John Piper](#), pastor of [Bethlehem Baptist Church](#) in Minneapolis, wrote [this meditation](#) just hours after the bridge collapse. As he explains, the text for their family devotion that night was Luke 13:1-9. Dr. Piper writes:

All of us have sinned against God, not just against man. This is an outrage ten thousand times worse than the collapse of the 35W bridge. That any human is breathing at this minute on this planet is sheer mercy from God. God makes the sun rise and the rain fall on those who do not treasure him above all else. He causes the heart to beat and the lungs to work for millions of people who deserve his wrath. This is a view of reality that desperately needs to be taught in our churches, so that we are prepared for the calamities of the world.

The meaning of the collapse of this bridge is that John Piper is a sinner and should repent or forfeit his life forever. That means I should turn from the silly preoccupations of my life and focus my mind's attention and my heart's affection on God and embrace Jesus Christ as my only hope for the forgiveness of my sins and for the hope of eternal life. That is God's message in the collapse of this bridge. That is his most merciful message: there is still time to turn from sin and unbelief and destruction for those of us who live. If we could see the eternal calamity from which he is offering escape we would hear this as the most precious message in the world.

The video team at Bethlehem Baptist Church put together [this video](#) of the bridge collapse, along with voice-over by Dr. Piper.

