

Theater originated in ancient Greece. Broadly speaking, two types of plays emerged: comedy and tragedy. Comedy in ancient Greece didn't necessarily have to be funny, but it had to have a happy ending. On the other hand, a tragedy had a sad ending.

Now, who would choose a tragedy over a comedy? Why was that even a thing that took off? **TRAGEDY ENDS IN A CATASTROPHE WHICH CAUSES A CATHARSIS.**

Let me say that again, I. Tragic stories end in a catastrophe which causes a catharsis. Let me unpack this. A tragic story has the main character face one disaster and setback after another until he finally faces a catastrophe. In the ancient Greek play *Antigone*, King Creon's pride leads to the catastrophe of the death of his son Haemon and Haemon's fiancée, Antigone. In Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo and Juliet die by suicide. You don't need to be a history major to know how the 1997 film, *Titanic*, ends.

If you could make up any story, why tragedy? Why all the bloodshed? Why all the tears? Why all the death? It is for the sake of catharsis. Catharsis is the cleansing that happens from an outpouring of emotions. Have you ever had "a good cry"? *That* was a catharsis. There is a certain relief when the river of tears finally dries up, there is a renewed clarity after we have cried.

As you watch a production of *Antigone*, you weep at the death of Antigone because you reflect on the loss of loved ones and friends in your own life. As you watch the *Titanic* you reflect on disasters you've experienced, and pains from that feeling of injustice. As you watch *Romeo and Juliet*, you mourn the loss of love in your life, but you can also appreciate your spouse or boyfriend/girlfriend even more—star crossed lovers who didn't meet a tragic end.

Greeks before the time of Christ wrote many of these tragedies that survive to this day. And they didn't know the ten commandments. Yet even they knew we live in a world that isn't as it should be. Even they knew there was sin.

But this isn't a sermon about Greek tragedies. This is a sermon about Christ's tragedy. II. Christ's tragedy led to the worst catastrophe. Unlike a theatrical production, this is no mere fiction or work of a playwright's imagination. As we gather here on Good Friday, we gather to recall and observe the worst tragedy in human history, the death of the Holy, Righteous, Perfect Son of God.

See the catastrophe unfold: those who know the right thing to do, but don't do it. The disciples abandon Jesus as they fall asleep in the garden and then scatter when Judas comes with the mob. Pontius Pilate who had the military might to quell a riot but wanted to go along to get along with the Jews releasing Barabbas and sentencing Jesus to crucifixion.

On Good Friday, think about those who knew what they were doing was wrong, but did it anyway. Judas whose lust for wealth drove him to betray his

savior for thirty pieces of silver. Annas and Caiaphas, religious leaders who question Jesus in order to falsely condemn Him. The crowds of the Jews who shout, “Crucify Him!” Peter who denies Jesus three times. The soldiers who beat Jesus and nailed Him to the cross.

The sins of the good we fail to do and the wrong we fail to resist are the plot elements that lead up to our own tragedies and the tragedy all around us. Tonight, if every Russian man, woman, and child snapped out of their trance and saw the evils being committed in Ukraine, no prison or gulag would be big enough to hold them and Putin would be forced to end the war by Easter. If every U.S. Citizen opened their eyes to see that abortion kills a child, Roe v. Wade would be overturned this year, and we would be repenting in sackcloth and ashes. If we all took a stand to speak out against transgenderism, transgender medicine would be revealed for what it truly is: the mutilation of healthy bodies in service to the lie that a boy can become a girl and vice versa.

But tragedy doesn't start with these big issues. Failing to do what's right and succeeding in doing what's wrong happens every day in little ways in our lives. Words are just words, so what if I swear from time to time? Church services are an optional extra rather than the heartbeat that keeps me going from week to week. Nobody can tell me how I should live, especially not mom or dad. A good way to have me not call you idiot is for you not to act like one. So what if she's an old flame from high school, it's not illegal for us to get coffee, is it? I really deserve more breaks at work, so I'm really just getting what's mine when I take a little break to text friends in between customers. What's a little lie going to hurt? It's okay to want his car because I want it more; he doesn't even appreciate what he has! All of these examples are sins that inch us closer and closer to tragedy.

God hates sin not because He's holding out on us having fun. He hates sin because sin causes tragedy. He hates sin because it was sin that sent His Son Jesus to the cross. It was your sin that sent Him to the cross.

The crucifixion of Christ is the darkest catastrophe of human history. It is proven by the sun refusing to shine and the earth quaking at Jesus' death. Creation itself mourned at the death of the author of life.

And III. Christ's tragedy causes your catharsis. When you go to see a play, read a sad book, or watch a drama on Netflix, yes, you may have an emotional reaction. Yes, you may have a good cry. But part of the comfort is knowing that Antigone, Romeo and Juliet, and Jack Dawson—none of them actually existed.

But on this day, we mourn Christ who did actually exist. Who did actually suffer, die, and was buried. Jesus had real crowds mock Him. A real whip tore open his back. A real crown of thorns pierced His head. Real nails were hammered into him, and blood and water poured from His side after He died.

Today is a day to consider the tragedy of the cross, and weep. You're allowed to have "a good cry"—a catharsis—over the loss of the one true innocent man. Mourn that your sins took Him to the cross and that your sins contribute to the tragedies happening all around us and in your own lives.

Yet that itself isn't enough. Even after "a good cry" you still find yourself in your sorry state. The catharsis that the Greeks, Shakespeare, and modern artists are seeking to evoke does not ultimately fix things even if it seems to do so for a while. To be certain, it may shine a light on your own life and the sins and tragedies within that need fixing but mourning itself is not salvific.

Catharsis means cleansing or purification. Today, we came here seeking a catharsis, but perhaps not the kind found by watching a play or a movie. Christ's tragedy causes your catharsis. **“Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.”**

“What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.” Or to quote Paul Gerhardt in the hymn we just sung, “Lord, when Your glory I shall see And taste Your kingdom's pleasure, Your blood my royal robe shall be, My joy beyond all measure! When I appear before Your throne, Your righteousness shall be my crown; With these I need not hide me. And there in garments richly wrought, As Your own bride shall we be brought, To stand in joy beside You.”

This is the catharsis that a tragic world headed toward catastrophe needs—not a self-pity and mourning, but the catharsis—the cleansing—that comes from sins forgiven. The purification of the Lamb who faces tragedy so that we don't have to. The sacrifice of the perfect Son of God to make atonement for all the times when we sat idly by as evildoers create tragedy, and even those times when we joined the evildoers.

As Jesus proclaims, “It is finished,” and gives up His spirit we can know that the catharsis is complete. He's not saying I'm finished or I'm done for, but He's saying that your sins are completely forgiven. Your tragedies, your catastrophes, your pains, your sad endings—all finished, paid in full by this one perfect man who suffered for sinners. This is the catharsis, the cleansing, that we so desperately need.

Tragedy ends in a catastrophe, yet maybe we can salvage some good out of the death of Jesus Christ, true God and true Man. J.R.R. Tolkien, author of *the Lord of the Rings* coined a term eucatastrophe which literally means good catastrophe. A eucatastrophe is a catastrophe with an unexpected good or positive outcome for the main character. As the sanctuary continues to grow darker and darker, we gather here by the cross holding out hope that God can turn catastrophes into eucatastrophes and redeem tragedies with sad endings to comedies with happy endings.