

WHEN NATURAL DISASTERS HIT

The earthquake and tsunami in Japan has sparked numerous articles and programmes alternately blaming God for the disasters, or claiming that these disasters prove that God does not exist. Similarly with the AIDS plague. *“A man’s own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the Lord.”* Psalm 19:3

One newspaper article claimed that all the heads of the major religions and denominations which they had interviewed agreed that the earthquake and tsunami could not have been a judgment from God.

Are People Basically Good?

It would seem that these theologians and religious authorities share a basic assumption: that man is basically good. Because we are all, at heart, such good people, we could never be judged by a loving and merciful God who would seem to be just too soft and gentle to judge anybody anyway.

After all, none of us would ever be selfish, greedy, deceitful, vengeful, dishonest, lustful or murderous. We are all basically good!

God’s Word on Natural Disasters

In the book of Amos 4:7-8 the Lord declares: *“I also withheld rain from you when My harvest was still three months away. I sent rain on one town, but withheld it from another... **yet you have not returned to Me, declares the Lord.**”*

The Depravity of Man

Far from people being basically good, the Scriptures teach the innate depravity of man: *“There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one. Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit; the poison of vipers is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known. **There is no fear of God before their eyes.**”* Romans 3:10-18

“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power.” 2 Timothy 3:1-5

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the Kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

“But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the Second Death.” Revelation 21:8

Learning from Calamities

In the light of these passages and the blessings of obedience and the curses of disobedience outlined in Deuteronomy 28, it would appear that the message of these natural disasters is being rejected by most journalists and theologians. It is a double grief when lives are lost and lessons are not learned. **Every deadly calamity is a merciful call from our Holy God for us to repent.** That was how the Lord Jesus responded to those who brought news to Him of the Galileans who had been massacred by Pontius Pilate in the Temple.

Jesus on Disasters

Jesus answered: *“Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”* Luke 13:2,3

Then the Lord referred to the disastrous fall of the tower in Siloam when eighteen died. **“But unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”** Luke 13:5

There is a time to weep (Ecclesiastes 3:4), and we should grieve with those who grieve. But we should also repent: *“Now, therefore,” says the LORD, **turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm.**”* Joel 2:12-13

This is the lesson we should learn from every deadly disaster: **Repent!**

Recognising Reality

Grieve that God is cursed for every catastrophe, but seldom praised for His wonderful Creation.

Lament that God makes the news headlines only when man mocks His power or questions His goodness, but tens-of-thousands of God's acts of mercy, grace, protection, provision and patience receive no headlines.

Grieve that the Name of the only righteous Man who ever walked the earth is used as a swear word on T.V. screens and in cinemas across the world.

Grieve that God is blasphemed by the very same people who question why God does not restrain the consequences of their own rebellious actions.

What Could God Be Saying To Japan?

Could God be speaking to Japan?

Over 70% of Japanese claim no personal religion, but the majority follow the demands of idolatrous and ancestor venerating Buddhism and rituals of polytheistic Shintoism. Many also follow some of the hundreds of newer religious movements that are offshoots or interpretations of these. The polytheistic and syncretistic multiple religious loyalties of the Japanese can be seen by the official statistics of 85% adherents to Buddhism and 90% to Shintoism! Less than 3% of Japanese identify themselves as Christian. Less than half a percent would identify themselves as Protestant or Evangelical.

Economic Crisis

Public debt before the recent earthquake and tsunami disaster was 200% of the Gross Domestic Product! Japan has the world's third largest industrial economy. However, this is built upon imported metals and energy sources. Almost all of its oil comes from the Middle East and the upheavals there are disrupting Japan's supplies. Japan is facing the scenario that along with

higher prices they could face an interruption in oil supplies, such as occurred in 1973 when the Arab world imposed an oil embargo for 5 months that shut down much of Japan's economy. To mitigate against its oil dependency Japan has employed two alternative fuels. It is the world's largest importer of seaborne coal and it has become the third largest producer of electricity from nuclear reactors. With a string of its nuclear reactors knocked out by the earthquake and tsunami, and its oil supplies from the Middle East threatened, Japan is facing an energy crisis with disastrous implications for its economy.

Without a Moral Compass

Japan's own leaders have called their nation a "superpower without a moral compass." Japan is a culture with no apparent direction. The nation has been described as having "a suicide epidemic" with over 30,000 suicides a year. Immorality is rife with rampant teenage prostitution.

Japan has one of the world's lowest birthrates and highest life expectancies. The percentage of the aged in Japan's population is increasing rapidly. Japan is one of the most extremely materialistic cultures on earth and materialism is very much on the rise, dominating the ambitions of most of the younger people. Only 10% of Japanese believe in the existence of a personal God. Cults and sects have grown far faster in Japan than Evangelical churches.

The Need for Revival

The church in Japan tends to have an insular, bunker mentality and generally fails to engage with society. Church attendance is low with less than half of church members regularly attending services. There is a great lack of men in the churches. On average, women attendees outnumber men 7 to 1. There is a tremendous need for Spiritual Revival and Biblical Reformation in the churches in Japan and for dynamic widespread evangelism to fulfill the Great Commission in this strategic nation.

The Judgments of God

In the wake of the catastrophic earthquake and tsunami in Japan, we need to study afresh the Holiness and Justice of God and God's Word to a nation.

"The Lion has roared – who will not fear? The Sovereign Lord has spoken – who can but prophesy?" Amos 3:8

"I sent plagues among you... I killed your young men with the sword... yet you have not returned to Me, declares the Lord." Amos 4:10

"You are Just in these Judgments, You who are and who were the Holy One, because You have so judged; for they have shed the blood of Your saints and prophets... yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are Your Judgments... they cursed the Name of God, but they refused to repent and glorify Him... they refused to repent of what they had done... and there were noises and thunderings and lightening, and there was a great earthquake, such a might and great earthquake... and they cursed God."

Revelation 16:1-21

When Catastrophes Occur

Can God be speaking to a lost and careless world through these deadly disasters? Can these catastrophic calamities be a merciful call from a just God for us to repent?

In 2 Chronicles 7:12-14 the Lord declares: ***"When I shut up the Heavens so that there is no rain, if My people were called by My Name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from Heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."***

Throughout the Bible natural disasters are seen as a judgment of God and a clear warning to people to humble themselves and to pray and seek God's face and turn from their wicked ways.

Repentance

It is time for us to take a fresh look at God's Law and to structure our Repentance according to the Ten Commandments. Biblical repentance is not merely "feeling sorry" for our "failings and weaknesses". What God calls wicked we should not try to redefine as some kind of "mistake". Biblical Repentance involves: conviction, contrition and conversion requiring a change of mind, a change of heart and a change of life and demanding change of lifestyle and a change of behaviour.

"Seek the Lord while He may be found; call on Him while He is near. Let the wicked man forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him, and to our God for He will freely pardon." Isaiah 55:6-7

The fact is that people are not basically good. We are naturally selfish, innately depraved and very wicked. Every deadly disaster is a merciful call from our Holy God for us to Repent. ***"Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. Why should you die?"*** Ezekiel 18:31

"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." Acts 3:19

"The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit" Psalm 34:18

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise." Psalm 51:17

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