

Luke 13:1-5 – This is How to View Disasters

Some have said that the earthquake in Haiti is a sign of God's direct and observable judgment. It was the same with the Tsunami of 2004, Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and the events of 9-11-01. People try and draw a direct line and attribute disasters with God's immediate judgment.

It is certainly true that God is not a bystander in world events. The Bible clearly claims the sovereign rule of God over all His creation, all of the time. God was not surprised by the earthquake in Haiti, and we have no right to claim that God could not have prevented it from happening. The earthquake reveals His reign, but so does the waves of relief and assistance. If God hated Haiti, there would be no missionaries there; there would be no aid going to the nation; there would be no rescue efforts – there would be no hope.

God's rule over creation involves both direct and indirect acts, but we have no right to claim that we know why a disaster like the earthquake in Haiti happened at just that place and at just that moment for just this certain reason. We cannot directly trace the effects of voodoo to an earthquake. Jesus himself warned his disciples against this kind of presumption. Think about it: why didn't an earthquake come to stop Hitler? A proper understanding of theology avoids the extreme of attributing actions of God directly to certain events, even while recognizing that suffering and death are the results of sin and that it is God who brings calamities on nations.

How do we process tragedies like this? Experience, Emotion, Elemental, Environmental, Escape. We all will experience tragedy at times, we all will have to deal with intense emotions, we all will have to figure out what to do and make plans as best we can, and we will all have to face the ultimate disaster if we do not turn to Jesus. How are we as Christians to view disasters? When calamity, catastrophe, chaos and confusion happen, where is God and what does He want us to know and to do? What is God saying through these disasters? What is the big picture?

Instead of speaking in speculative terms we can let God speak clearly to the matter, through the words of Jesus we have in the pages of scripture. This text is not everything about the subject, or the last word on the subject, but it is foundational to the subject. This message does not include all the issues that this particular text addresses, but this is biblically based instruction on this subject from this text of scripture.

Jesus cites two instances of disaster that were well known in His day. One was an evil done by the hand of man, and the other was a natural disaster. He did not want his hearers to think that these tragedies were necessarily a judgment on these people because they were worse sinners. He wasn't saying that they were innocent, but that all are guilty before God. Jesus turns the question from "why did this happen?" into "what does this mean to me?"

- Reality
 - We live in a fallen world where these things will happen
 - these were men who were worshipping; how horrible
 - Genesis 3 / Romans 8:19-23 / 2 Peter 3:10-15a / Revelation 21:5
 - Judgment is coming
- Revelation
 - Reveals His reign
 - He is the Creator and is in control of His creation
 - Reveals His righteousness
 - All deserve judgment, He is the righteous One
- Repentance
 - Verse 3 speaks of ongoing repentance, verse 5 speaks of once for all repentance

- Redemption
 - If we do repent we will not suffer eternal death, but receive eternal life

Vs.6-9 – God is looking for the fruit of repentance. Jesus’ warning that they must repent or perish had a nearly immediate, terrible fulfillment. Within a generation, those who had not repented and turned to Jesus perished in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. This serves as a warning to people, to the church (vs.6-9 spoke of the Jews, now to us, Romans 11:22), to you.

God hates sin, and will punish both individual sinners and nations. But that means that every individual and every nation will be found guilty when measured by the standard of God’s perfect righteousness. Hebrews 9:26-28 – Jesus came to put away the eternal consequences of sin, temporal consequences remind us of final judgment, the question is whether or not we will have the judgment of our sins placed on Him, or will we have to suffer them ourselves? These natural disasters come like a thief in the night, sudden, unexpected, and terrible. So too will be the coming of our Lord to those who are not watching, not ready. Jesus tells us to repent otherwise we might die suddenly and in a state of unbelief, unrepentant, unregenerate, bound for damnation. He makes His majesty and His terror known. Disasters are a type of the terror that for all eternity will be with those who will not flee His wrath by fleeing to the Cross of Christ. No one escapes death, who can escape His judgment? We all may die at any time, so repentance must be our priority. Those who died in both of these instances did not think they would die soon, but they did, and we can suppose that most of them were not ready. Are you ready?

We do not need to try to figure out the reason for the earthquake, or decide that we can know for sure that it is judgment, but we should take the opportunity to look at this event and remember that Judgment Day is coming for all of us. Amidst all the calamity, catastrophe, chaos, and confusion, that is the larger point. We do not need to judge Haiti, we need to pray for them and to show mercy, and part of that mercy is bringing the true eternal message of hope.

The meaning of the disaster is that I am a sinner and should repent 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 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. We should mourn, but we should also hope as those who have a living hope, and we should be moved, not to despair, but to action; civil action, social action, and most importantly, gospel action. Disasters remind us that God is in control, and if we do not repent and trust in Christ, we will die in our sins. We might think this doesn’t matter to us because we have repented already, but this speaks of both initial and ongoing repentance. Are you still in a repentant state? Also, what about telling others about it?

People think that they are owed an answer, but Jesus changes the question. The world justifies rejection of God on the grounds that there is evil in the world. They demand an answer, but these things keep happening and will always happen, and the true focus remains the same. There is sin in the world, and God is going to judge it. The fact that God doesn’t seem to punish sins and sinners immediately doesn’t mean that He approves of the sin, or that He will always allow it to go on without consequence, it is that He is merciful and allowing time to repent. All sin will eventually and eternally be punished, unless it has been covered by the blood of Christ. What is your alternative? How are we doing without Him (Romans 1)? The greatest evil in the world was the murder of Jesus (Act 2:22) and it was predetermined by God (Acts 2:23). In His mercy He is presenting you with grace through belief in Jesus Christ. Don’t suffer the ultimate disaster.