

Explaining Hurricanes and Other Natural Disasters from Jesus' Perspective

Katrina, Rita, earthquakes and killer diseases

Luke 13:1-5

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I just escaped the claws of two hurricanes or cyclones as they are called in India. Unfortunately many didn't.

The last report I read of the later one had more than 50 dead and well over a thousand people missing. It doesn't look good. The hurricane Katrina also has over 1,000 dead. Fortunately Rita was not as bad. How do you explain such horrible incidents? They are tragic.

Some people isolated from such tragedies question ask, "How can a loving God allow such terrible things to happen?" Jesus has actually discussed this topic. Luke 13:1-5 gives us the insight we need to begin properly understanding earthquakes, hurricanes killer diseases and other natural disasters. Let's look at this passage.

Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And He answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered this fate? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem?" I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. " Luke 13:1-5

'They are worse than us.'

This is the easiest argument to default to. Jesus was at this time speaking to a group who it seems had this perspective of life. When something bad happens to another person, it is easy to conclude that they are worse people than ourselves. Maybe we think, "They must be evil; they deserve it." Let's see how Jesus used two tragic current events to help them think these things through.



- ◆ "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered this fate?"
- ◆ Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem?"

We could make similar statements.

- ◆ "Do you suppose that these Indonesians were greater sinners than all other people, because they suffered this fate from the tsunami?"
- ◆ 'Or do you suppose that the more than 1,000 who died during the hurricane Katrina were worse culprits than all the men who live in America?

How would you respond?

People who believe in God tend to have two responses. We will not discuss those who do not believe in God, though admittedly, even the staunchest atheistic starts believing in God when facing some of these calamities.

The more popular response commonly found in the Western world cynically states that if God is loving, then He would not allow such things to happen. The other popular response believes that those who suffered by those calamities were worse than ourselves. They tend to think of themselves as an elitist group who are much better than the others. They even sometimes have the audacity to think that if they were more like them then they wouldn't have suffered. Both viewpoints come far short of God's perspective. How do we learn what God thinks? We need to take a serious look at Jesus' words.

Surprising answer #1: A Common Heritage

Some people have a problem with these natural disasters. They reckon that if there was a loving God and He permitted such 'judgments of God' then then they want nothing to do with this God. Their assumptions are critical. They believe that people do not deserve judgment. Jesus interestingly did not question whether the people in those two cases deserved judgment. They perished because they were sinners. They did do wrong. The Galileans that were killed or the 18 that were struck by the tower was not unjust. God told man that he would die because of his sin. The people deserved it. The disasters resulting from hurricanes in New Orleans or India were not mistakes by God or some other hidden force. They were fitting. They were terrible. But they were appropriate. What truth do we need to help us think about this properly?

We need to think rightly of the judgment of mankind. All of us deserve to die now, or even yesterday. No one deserves an extra day to live. The penalty of sin is death. Death is not only appropriate but demanded for sinners. Since we have all sinned, no one is an exception to this rule. It is horrible to see the homes and families that were destroyed, whether they be rich or poor; white or black. The point is that they all share one common element: they were all sinners and deserved to die.



Instead of thinking that no one deserves to die, we should think God's perspective: we all deserve to die. When Adam ate of the fruit, we all 'died.' God warned man but still man openly rebelled and disobeyed the Lord. Perhaps the execution is put off a time, but we still 'live' under the death sentence. The sentence is only delayed and this in and of itself is mercy.

Surprising answer #2: A Different Timing

Another problem, however, looms about. We compare ourselves with others. It is common to think that if they died, then we must be better than they. They were judged. Not us. This thinking is faulty and often blinds us of a proper response.

Just because God delays judgment in one case, this does not make them necessarily more evil. By assuming that one group of people, the victims, are wicked, it is easy though wrong to think of ourselves as 'good.' Jesus basically said that we are never to think that we are better than others for this defeats the purpose of staying alive any longer.

Our only hope rests in what God's Word says. The scriptures always point us to God's holy standard, not the standards of others. The only reason God has granted us more life is so that we can repent. "Behold, now is the "The Day of Salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). If we refuse to repent even after seeing



such a judgment consume the lives of others, does it not prove that perhaps we are worse than those that perished?

New Orleans had planned to host an annual homosexual party. It was due the weekend following its disaster. The city was imprudent to tolerate such evil. Any city that thinks they can grow economically through evil is totally deceived. They deserve judgment. But so do all the other cities, even 'the good ones.' (Actually there are no good ones!) Instead of condemning New Orleans, we need to start praying that God would have mercy on our cities and towns.

Our compromises might be of a different kind, but indeed like individuals cities and countries have transgressed God's law. If we really knew what was going on behind the scenes, we would see that it is only the mercy of God that holds back judgment upon all of us.

We are not to think that we are better than the others but to seriously consider how evil and wicked we are. We ourselves deserve judgment. Once we think of ourselves as better than others, then we are not looking rightly at ourselves. As sinners we deserve judgment. We deserve it yesterday.

Jesus' Explanation

Jesus explained both of these 'natural disasters' the same way. They are to be interpreted by the living. Judgment is final for those that are gone but for those that are living, it creates a special gap in time to repent and be restored to God. Judgment is soon coming to our own lives. We are guilty too and nothing will stop judgment from visiting our lives and taking all. "Unless you repent."

Calamities, whether they consist of a terrorist destroying a hotel, lightning striking a family under a tree, a tsunami washing away the beachcombers or a hurricane decimating a city, all should equally remind us of our own deserved soon-coming judgment. We do not deserve to live an extra day. Every day that we live is because of God's mercy. This is the reason Jesus twice repeated His warning to those knowing of the disasters in Jesus' day.

"I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3).

"I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:5).

We all are being warned because without repentance there is no hope. Without repentance we likewise will perish. The event through which we will be caught in God's judgment might differ, but the facts that bring forth death do not. Sin brings forth death. Death is the judgment for our sin.

Natural disasters make us think of running to a place that is safe. This is right. But we need not only to run from the calamity but what drove the calamity. Satan has power over a sinner's life and will grab it as soon as he can. Only God in His grace holds back His judgment.

Our Hope

What are these natural disasters anyway? How should we look at them? From Jesus' point of view, we should see them as warnings that help guide our life decisions. Like a sign that states 'Road ends ahead' we are to shape the decisions we make while driving.

We read in the scriptures that judgments increase in severity as long as the people do not repent. If this is the case, then we should see each calamity as one more opportunity to repent and turn from our ways. Each disaster should become an event that humbles us and should influence the way we live out our lives. We will have only so many close calls and then our end will come.

People tend to think that when pastors or evangelists preach about judgment and hell that they are using scare tactics. Are they? Warnings of great danger are not to be prohibited. They are the moral duty of the ones who are in the know. If a person by his knowledge can save life, then it is imperative that he warns. This of course does not just mean the pastor but everyone that knows.

It is a shame that any need to die. *"The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance"* (2 Peter 3:9). Disasters have a way of shaking people's lives so that they actually turn to the Lord. The death of some becomes a means other are saved. Repentance leads to life even though others are being judged. Despising these road signs only leads to further judgment, "He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS" (Hebrews 4:7).

Conclusion

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"He again fixes a certain day; "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS" (Hebrews 4:7).

Natural disasters are natural because sin always brings death. Repentance, however, is supernatural. Repentance can be described as the deliberate humbling of a soul and the turning away from sin. The repentant person is not simply remorseful. He changes. He or she begins to earnestly seek out God through Christ who brings hope and life. Jesus said He came to bring grace. And although this message of repentance might sound harsh, it is the only means we can find help and healing for not only this life but also beyond death's shores into eternity.