

“Why do bad things happen to good people?” That is a question often posed to Christians. Here’s a few more: “If God is all good and if God is all powerful, then why is their evil in the world?” “Why do tragic things happen?” “Why is there pain and suffering?” “Why is there calamity and disaster?” “Is God really in control?” And if He is, “Is God sending us a message when disaster strikes?”

As I am sure you are all well aware, there have been quite a number of natural disasters that have struck our nation and surrounding countries. America has been recently hit by two severe hurricanes Harvey and Irma in the southeast, mostly in the states of Texas, Louisiana, and Florida, as well as in the Carribean. And Puerto Rico was recently hit hard by hurricane Maria. Mexico also, has been devastated by a number of earthquakes. These high category hurricanes and seismic earthquakes have brought massive destruction, injury, and death to the lives of many.

In light of these recent natural disasters, it is good for us to be reminded from God’s Word about His almighty and sovereign purposes in bringing natural disasters, for He does indeed bring them. He commands the wind and the rain, He wields the storm and the tornado, the hurricane and the earthquake to accomplish His purposes.

The Lord spoke concerning Himself in this regard through the prophet Isaiah 45:7, “I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I the Lord do all these things.” The prophet Amos likewise announced in 3:6, “If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people be afraid? If there is calamity in a city, will not the Lord have done

it?” And the psalmist sang in Psalm 29:3, “The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders; the Lord is over many waters.”

Now ultimately, we don't have a comprehensive knowledge of God's ways. We don't know all of the particular reasons why He does the things He does. Why he brings calamity and tragedy on some and not others, why He brings affliction and pain into one persons life and ease and affluence in another. The secret things belong to God, Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 29:29, and only those things that have been revealed in His Word are for us and for our children. But we do know that God does have a purpose and a reason for it all, and that He is accomplishing His plan according to His manifold wisdom. The apostle Paul reminds us of the mystery as well as the splendor of God's secret counsel in Romans 11:33-34, “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?”

However, we do know that God has sent disaster and calamity in the past as a judgment on sin. We know that God destroyed the world with a Flood for the great wickedness that was in the earth and that He sent down fire and brimstone on the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah for their immorality. We know that God brought His own people into captivity for their unfaithfulness and their unrepentant sin. The passage we have before us today in Daniel 9 is a reminder of that event.

But God does not always send calamity because of a persons or because of a peoples particular sins. If the story of Job teaches us anything, it teaches us that God sends calamity and affliction even upon the righteous. Job lost everything, you will remember; his servants, his livestock, his children, and his health, all in a single day. And yet, God said of Job, “there is none like him on earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil.”

Job was certainly more righteous than his unfriendly false accusers, who thought there must have certainly been some great unconfessed sin in Job’s life for such tragedies to have overtaken him. Eliphaz pointed his false little finger at Job and had the audacity to declare, “Is not your wickedness great, and your iniquity without end?” No, the story of Job and the tragic events that befell him are a clear indication of the fact that we cannot discern the mind or the intentions or the motives of the Almighty when He brings calamity.

That being said however, while it is true that we may not know all the reasons why God sends calamity, I think there is at least one reason we can be sure of. And that is to remind the people that they are not God, that life is fleeting and short, that they cannot take their present possessions with them out of this world, to remind them that everyone is going to die, it’s only a matter of time. C. S. Lewis put it this way in his book, *The Problem of Pain*, “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it [pain] is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”

Thus, I believe we can say that God does use natural disasters, like the ones we've just recently witnessed, as a merciful wake up call to all who experience or observe such tragic events. It's a wake up call, not merely to those who suffered most from the tragedy, but to all in the village, to all in the city, to all in the country, to all in the nation, all who are privy to the tragic events, to look away from themselves and unto God. And it is especially a call unto the church, to those who are most acquainted with God's ways, to those who know and can see that this is the hand of God, to those who understand God's warnings, . . . It is especially a call to the church to turn to God as well.

In our passage before us today, we find Daniel to be a model example of the proper response that anyone, especially any Christian, should have, toward calamity and disaster. And although Daniel's situation here was unique, unrepeatable in the history of redemption, yet the model that Daniel sets before us is equally applicable to any and all calamitous events that affect the church and the nation on a large scale. And one of the first things we notice about Daniel from verse 13 is that he turned unto God in prayer on behalf of the people who had experienced and witnessed the calamity. *Daniel turned unto God in prayer on behalf of the people.*

Even a brief glance at this passage will reveal that the majority of Daniel 9 is taken up with Daniel's prayer unto the Lord. All the way back up in verse 3, he says that he set his face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications. The period of captivity had come to an end, and it was time to pray that the tragic events which took place

would now produce the proper result, the proper outcome, and the proper attitude in the lives of the people.

And we can see at the beginning of verse 13, that Daniel prayed for the people, specifically for those people who didn't react to the disaster in the way they should have. Those who didn't see the spiritual message that God was bringing through the calamity. Those who didn't see the need to turn to God themselves in prayer: "all this disaster has come upon us; yet we have not made our prayer before the Lord our God." Thus, Daniel interceded on behalf of the people, he prayed that the people would wake up to the meaning of the disaster they had witnessed.

Sadly, this was the typical response of the Jewish people throughout much of the Old Testament era. What finally terminated in the Babylonian Captivity was not the first instance in which God had brought calamity upon the nations of Israel and Judah. Notice that in verse 14, Daniel says, "Therefore the Lord has *kept* the disaster in mind and brought it upon us (i.e. the disaster of the Babylonian Captivity)." Now, what does Daniel mean by saying that the Lord *kept* the disaster in mind? Well, it means, at least in part, that because the people did not heed the warnings that were sent to them, God did not relent of the destruction He was determined to bring upon them.

God warned the people primarily through the prophets, but he also used other means to warn them as well, such as natural calamity and disaster. And we saw an example of such warnings in the passage we read earlier from Amos 4:6-13. In verse 6 of that

passage, we learned that God sent some of the people famine, in verses 7-8, drought, in verse 9, locusts to devour their crops, in verse 10, pestilence and disease, in verse 11, some kind of fiery judgment similar to the one Sodom and Gomorrah experienced, which may be a reference to a volcanic eruption. And after each one of these reminders God said, “Yet you have not returned to me says the Lord.”

These natural disasters were warning signs to the people of the far greater disaster that would come upon them if they did not turn back to God. They were really merciful wake up calls to the people. And God is pleased to continue to bring such wake up calls to people today. Listen to this quote from the puritan John Owen, “I am persuaded that, such is the goodness and tenderness of God to mankind, so little is he delighted in bringing sore judgments upon them, to their ruin and destruction, he scarce ever destroyed the most wicked and idolatrous nation, . . . but he gave them some providential warnings of it.”

These two hurricanes we have just recently witnessed, Harvey and Irma, are God’s providential warnings, a wake up call to the people, not merely to those who felt the wind and the waves and the blast of the storm, but a wake up call to the entire nation. And no doubt, most will not see it as such. As the prophet Isaiah said in Isaiah 26:11: “Lord, when your hand is lifted up, they will not see.” Therefore, my dear congregation, it is the obligation of the church to pray like Daniel did here, “Lord help the people to see this event for what it really is, help the people to heed the warnings you give them, cause the people to turn to you O God in prayer.”

Now, as you know, merely to turn to God in prayer is not enough. Undoubtedly, many in our nation have prayed about these tragic events. In fact, president Trump called for a day of prayer. He made a proclamation in response to Hurricane Harvey to make September 3, 2017, a national day of prayer, and that is commendable. The president encouraged the entire nation to pray for good things, important things, necessary things: prayer for those harmed by the hurricane, prayer for those who lost loved ones, prayer for those who lost their homes and other property, prayer for the first responders, for the law enforcement officers, for the military personnel, and for the medical professionals. These are all things that we should pray for.

But whom may I ask, has stood in the gap and prayed for our nation the way that Daniel prayed for his, who has prayed like Daniel did here, “all this disaster has come upon us; yet we have not made our prayer before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities.” Which leads us to the second thing we notice about Daniel from our passage, and that is that he turned unto God, not only in prayer on behalf of the people, but he also prayed that the people would turn unto God from their sins. *Daniel prayed that the people would turn unto God from their sins.*

Now, some may ask, “Is every disaster and calamity that befalls us a call to self-examination and repentance.” After all, it was crystal clear in Daniel’s situation that what the Jewish people underwent was as a result of the sinful rebellion of that nation, foretold

in the law of Moses. It even says at the beginning of verse 13, “As it is written in the law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us.”

Now, while it is true that the disaster which befell the Hebrew people in Daniel’s day was clearly the judgment of God, which is something we cannot say of natural disasters and calamitous events in our day, yet I think it can still be demonstrated from Scripture that such events are indeed always a call to self-examination and repentance.

And I think we can clearly see that from an incident in the life of Christ recorded for us in the gospel of Luke 13:1-5. Christ, in that passage, was in the midst of a discourse about the final day of judgment, when he was interrupted by some in the audience, who implied that the recent slaughter of some Galileans at the temple by the hands of Pilate was a result of God’s judgment. In response to this, Christ corrected their misconceived notions when he said, “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.”

Then Christ continued His argument with the example of another recent tragic event which had taken place not far from the Jerusalem temple. “Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”

You see, Christ showed the people that these calamities were to be viewed as a warning to them all. They were to serve as merciful reminders of the fact that a day of reckoning was coming to them as well. That if they did not repent of their sins, then they would perish too, not by being slaughtered, not by being crushed under a fallen tower, but by being crushed under the outpoured wrath of Almighty God in eternal flames.

In like manner, these recent hurricanes are not opportunities given to us in order that we might point the finger at others. To try and figure out who it was down there in Florida, or what group of people was there in Texas that was so wicked that they deserved to be punished. Rather, these high powered hurricanes were an opportunity to point the finger back at ourselves, an opportunity to repent, and an opportunity to pray that the people in this nation would repent as well.

Notice that Daniel did not simply pray that all the other people would turn away from their iniquities. Rather he prayed, “that *we* might turn from *our* iniquities.” Daniel was one of the most godly individuals that Israel ever produced. He was probably taken captive to Babylon as a young god-fearing teenager. If anyone was not at fault for the disaster that had come upon God’s people, it was he. But that is not the attitude Daniel had toward the situation. He took ownership of the guilt of the nation before God in prayer, and so should we. For we have all contributed to the sins and the guilt of our nation as well.

The church in this nation, of which we are a part, has lost much of her light and her salt has lost much of its savor. There are ways in which each of us have capitulated to the

pressures of our society and have been partakers of the sins so rampant in our land. We have all been prone to love the things of this world and we have all succumbed to the unbridled idolatry that pervades our churches and our nation; the love of sports, the love of cinema, the love of social status, the love of sensuality, the love of security, the love of stuff, and the love of self.

Like the prophet Isaiah, we live in the midst of a people of unclean lips, and we ought to bring that corporate guilt before the Lord with humble repentant hearts and cry out with Daniel, “Lord forgive us, have mercy upon us, wake us up, and turn us from our iniquities.” We ought to pray that our nation would respond the way that Job did after his calamity was over in Job 42:5-6, “I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore, I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.”

The church in America is much like the church in Sardis whom Christ reproved in Revelation 3 with these words, “I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. Remember then what you [have] received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you.”

It is because of the current condition of our church in America today that most will not see these disastrous events as warnings from God, as a call to self-examination, as a call to repentance. For nothing in nature, not even calamity, can in and of itself really call

people to repent. That is the job of the church. As the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 1:20, the creation clearly reveals God's invisible attributes, even His eternal power and deity, so that mankind is without excuse, but it doesn't reveal Christ. Which leads us to the third thing we notice about Daniel's prayer from our text. And that is that Daniel not only prayed on behalf of the people that they might turn unto God from their sins, but also that they might understand His truth. *Daniel prayed that the people would turn unto God in order that they might understand His truth.*

Isn't truth the message we all need to hear when it comes to calamity and disaster? Isn't it interesting how severe trials and afflictions have a way of arresting us, of awakening us, of alerting us to that which is most important in life. And of causing us to ask the question that Pilate did of Christ, "What is truth?"

One has to wonder what kinds of views people have of the hurricanes that just hit our country? Or what kind of hope that they can hold onto in the midst of calamity and disaster? Not only is God's Word the only source of truth when it comes to understanding such events, but His Word is also the only shelter from the storm, for His Word is truth incarnate. His truth is Christ Himself.

Therefore, dear congregation, pray that these tragic events and others like them, would wake up the church as well as our nation. Pray that they would provoke the people in our land to search for the truth, to read the dusty Bible that is still sitting on their shelf, to ask their Christian friends and neighbors about the meaning of their woe, to

search for the only hope of real peace and everlasting life, which is found in Christ alone.

Pray that they might find Christ, before the real tragedy finds them.

For there is coming a day when God will shake not only the earth, but the heavens also. And on that day there will be calamity and disaster the likes of which no person has ever seen. And the only refuge in that storm will be the sinless lamb of God, the one who bore the calamity of the crucifixion on the cross, that those who trust in Him might know the comfort that only He can bring. Therefore, pray on behalf of the people, that they might turn from their sin, and look to the truth; that indeed they might look to Christ.