

“Tsunami 2”
By: Doug Warren

Why does God allow such horrific tragedies as the tsunami in Asia?

We have all heard the various estimates of nearly 200,000 people killed in the earthquake and tsunami in the Indian Ocean and hundreds of thousands who have lost everything. We have also been shocked to see the images of devastation broadcast to us in the news. For me it came home most poignantly as I heard the report of our church’s missionary doctor who is leading a medical response team in Indonesia. The county of Lhoong, where they are providing aid, consisted of 28 villages prior to the tsunami, but has now been reduced to only four. The other 24 towns have been utterly wiped out.

We have so much health, safety, and blessings in Portland, Maine that we look at disasters as a shocking aberration to the norm; however, as we grieve for those with such loss, we are jarred from our own comfort. As we grapple with the questions of why God would allow such things, we are faced with different and conflicting answers. You may have heard some saying, “God sent this tsunami to judge the people in this region.” Others bemoan this “nonsense” as “horse feathers” and assure people that God would not do such a thing. He has set the tectonic plates in their places and is powerless to intervene.

The gospel of Jesus Christ offers an altogether different response. He has not wound up the universe like a clock and left it running. God is in control of every hair that falls from your head. But how can He be all-powerful and in control of such horrors and still be good and merciful?

We find the breath-taking answer in the cross of Jesus. It was necessary for Jesus to die in order to redeem His people. He didn’t just teach us about love and peace and lead a movement to change the world because it would not have worked. Sin had permeated all of creation too deeply for any human remedy. He had to die a horrible death full of such suffering and anguish because of the dreadful reality of our sin.

The Bible tells us that our sin has damaged more than ourselves individually; it has affected *all* of creation. God tells us that the *whole* of creation was broken by humanity’s insurrection. The ground itself was cursed. Thorns and thistles grow against the work of mankind. Wolves tear apart lambs. Rain no longer simply provides water for growth, but at times comes in torrents that cause mudslides, floods, and great destruction. We live on a fallen planet, one that is cursed by sin. The reason that “natural disasters” happen is not natural. This is not how life is meant to be. Nature can be a cruel and terrifying wasteland.

In the midst of this wasteland, we are blessed to see glimpses of God’s beauty and blessing. We have His promise in the rainbow and the seal of His fingerprints in the

tinest flower. Both terrors and beauty are reminders not just of the immensity of creation, but also of the awesome splendor of their Creator and Redeemer.

Jesus died to rescue us from the death and destruction of this cursed planet. He has borne the penalty of sin not just in an individualistic way, but to the depths of the earth and the heights of the stars. He not only died to restore this broken creation, but He has risen in victory over the very terrors we bewail. He has promised to return and bring new heavens and a new earth where the lion will lie down with the lamb—a restored creation where sin no longer infests the tectonic plates and the waves above them.

Why does God allow such horror now? He tells us in His Word that it is out of His merciful patience. He is giving us opportunity to see and repent that we might be saved not just from temporary ravages, but eternal ones. While God does intend such things to be shocking, He does not allow them to be meaningless. Death and destruction, pain and misery, loss and grief are all the horrific results of man's rebellion against God.

I am not saying that the tsunami happened as a result of the sin of those affected; I am saying that it and many other horrors happen because of *our* collective sin. God graciously allows us to see these effects of our own sinfulness so that we might turn from our rebellion.

Therefore, our first response to this tragedy should be grief over our sin and our own rebellion against God that has cursed our planet. It should be a grief that drives us to the cross of Jesus where God reconciles those who confess their sin to Him.

He also calls us in the midst of this disaster to care for one another. Therefore, our second response needs to be grief for others. Jesus called us to weep with those who weep. The loss of any human life is to be mourned. As we grieve with these people living on the other side of the globe whom we have never met, we are given a precious opportunity to see creation as it really is.

As we wrestle with these difficult questions, let us grieve, repent, and then act; act with true charity and kindness. We have all contributed to one another's suffering. Let us now in the knowledge of His mercy be His instruments of healing.