A Biblical Response to Global Disasters – Answers to Five Questions People Ask

Speaking Truth, Removing Fear, Restoring Hope

A Biblical Response to Global Disasters

Unbelievable is the first word that comes to mind. Like me, I am sure most of you never expected to find ourselves in such a time as this—staying home more than we want, washing our hands and wiping down things we touch, and social distancing when we do venture out.

Also like many of you, I have been and continue praying for those affected by this disaster caused by global spreading of the COVID-19 virus. Praying God intervenes directly by stopping it supernaturally. Praying people pray rather than panic and do what the experts tell us to help mitigate the spread of so virulent an enemy. Then we will come out on the other side of this sooner rather than later.

I am also struck by the events of just the last seven or eight weeks leading up to this current crisis. The most publicized tragedy in recent memory occurred when the helicopter carrying nine people crashed and killed all on board, including one of the greatest basketball players of all time. There was a global outpouring of grief.

Subsequent to that tragic loss, I wrote a message and recorded a video and series of podcasts on dealing with tragedy focusing on how people respond. Many respond in anger or despair and immediately begin blaming God. And without fail, two questions surface:

(1) Where was God when this happened?

(2) Why would a good God allow bad things to happen to good people?

Rather than go deeper into that message here, following are links where you can find them. [The two-part video is still being edited.]

When Tragedy Strikes – How People Respond (Blaming God) (written message)

When Tragedy Strikes – How People Respond (Parts 1-5) (Podcasts)

Just three weeks ago here in Nashville and middle Tennessee, a deadly tornado claimed many lives, left hundreds homeless, and caused hundreds of millions of dollars in destruction. Many are still trying to dig out of the rubble and get a life again. (The local response has been great, but the need is also great and will be for some time to come. Keep praying and giving.)

Now this viral pandemic. COVID-19 is a disaster of global proportion that has infected much of the world we live in—claiming thousands of lives and infecting many more. Experts remain uncertain of the extent of the reach and impact it will have due to its unmatched virulence.

Disasters most frequently come in one of two forms: ***natural*** (earthquakes, hurricanes, tornados, floods) and ***man-made*** (the holocaust, nuclear accidents, financial). I guess we could consider this viral pandemic a combination of both, i.e., natural origin, spread by man.

Regardless of origin, disasters are hard to process. When our minds are finally able to do so, one of the most common reactions is ***fear***. Fear is a natural response and can be a

healthy one except when people let it become a stronghold over them.

One of the biggest fear drivers is *loss of control*. Most of us do not like to find ourselves in positions or places where we have no control over the situation or outcome. Disasters, or the threat of them, put many in such places.

Just as tragedy of great personal, unexpected loss raises questions people struggle to answer, so too does fear brought on by disasters like this one. But it brings a different set of questions for which people also struggle to find answers.

The rest of this message is given to that end. I add, as I always do, the "disclaimer" that as a Christian and teacher of the Word of God I do so from a biblical world view. That is welcomed by some and repulsed by many. So be it.

Following are five questions that can haunt people taken captive by fear and uncertainty from the thought and threat of disasters or the reality of this COVID-19 viral pandemic—questions that often are not verbalized, just internalized.

1. I wonder if I will contract this virus?
2. I wonder if I will die from it?
3. I wonder if this kind of disaster will happen again? (Some wonder, not if but when?)
4. I wonder if this is the end of the world?
5. I wonder how I can prepare for the worst?

Questions 1 & 2:

What does the Bible have to say about all of this, or does it even speak to any of it? To give a straight answer to the first two questions, you do not need the Bible. As I mentioned in the opening paragraph, following the guidance put forth by the experts is the best way to avoid contracting this virus and dying from it.

To date there are significantly fewer cases and deaths from COVID-19 than the annual run of flus we have experienced. HOWEVER, since this one is different (novel), there is much more concern and caution because it is so virulent in nature. So please err on the side of caution and prevention. We do not know what toll it will ultimately take on human life. We do know it is already devastating global economies.

Question 3:

Like many Christians, when disasters such as this occur—especially on such a global scale, our minds begin to think about the area known in "bible-speak" as ***eschatology***. It means "last study" or *the study of end times*. Recently, I did another study in Matthew 24 and Luke 21. In these chapters, Jesus answered questions from His disciples, "when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming and the end of the age?" I suggest you read them. Here are a few things Jesus pointed to.

"…you will hear of wars and rumors of wars…nation will rise against nation…and there will be great earthquakes, ***plagues****, famines, terrors from the heavens*.

Like most, I am amazed one small viral organism can pass into one man in China eating something odd and within weeks contaminate much of the world creating havoc, even panic, in some parts. (Assuming that is how this began.) All this despite our great advances in medicine and technology over the last century.

So the answer to this question is *yes.* There will continue to be plagues, pestilences, and more of the things Jesus said. They are cause for great concern, but not giving in to the stronghold of fear, and not necessarily concern for the reasons most think. I will explain why shortly.

Question 4:

Jesus said a lot in this time with His disciples because He wanted them to be ***informed and prepared***. As we continue reading both texts, He spoke of many false Christs and prophets who would come and deceive people with a ***version of the truth*** that they want to hear (tickle their ears) just as in the days of Isaiah and today. People want the truth as they define it.

Jesus told them they would witness the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem (which occurred about forty years later in 70AD). He spoke of the tribulation to come and the persecution. He said lawlessness would increase, and even some who said they believe would grow cold and turn away. But even then, He added, *"that is not yet the end."*

Most people want to know when the end of the world will come.

Jesus plainly told us when the end of the world will come.

In Matthew 24: 14, He said,

"This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come."

There are learned expositors who say this use of "end" applies only to Jerusalem's pending destruction described in subsequent verses. However, the Great Commission language Jesus used means we are to take His Gospel to all known people groups throughout the world we live in today—not just His world. This, we are safe believing, as did many former expositors (including my favorite, Spurgeon), that once accomplished, then the end will come. That end is the sign of Jesus' return (the Second Coming) for His people. That will not be the end of the world as we know it yet. That comes at the end of the great and horrible Tribulation period.

Question 5:

For those struggling through times like these, my heart goes out to you. If we are honest, all of us have, at some point, wrestled with fear, even anxiety, during times not even as serious as this. We filled our mind and thoughts with that question about "preparing for the worst."

Friend, I have a suggestion for you straight from the heart of God Himself.

Why not ask this question instead? How can prepare I for the <u>best</u> that is to come?

Too often fear and its allies become strongholds because we have been overtaken by the deadliest virus man ever created. It came out of the perfection of God's paradise through the willful disobedience of His first creatures—Adam and Eve.

That virus is sin. Some will come down hard on me for using this analogy during such a time as this in our world. But truthfully, there is no better analogy because this sin virus is worse than any natural or other man-made one that will ever infect mankind. There is no cure for this virus. It cannot run its course as most viruses do. No vaccine can ever be created. It is to be grieved over and feared more than any other.

Yet most consider it a minor affliction if at all. Believe me when I repeat what God told His chosen people, the prophets repeated, and Jesus made His mission statement:

Sin kills.

I know this is hard reading and may make you feel worse before you feel better. But I have Good News that will bring you comfort, assuage your fears, and dry your tears.

Man can never discover or create a cure for the sin virus. But God loves you more than you can imagine—no matter where you are in life or what you have done in the past. Sin is the

only thing keeping you from Him **and** all that He has for you that is greater than anything you can imagine. Because of His love, God made the Cure available to all who will hear Him out and respond to His word. Jesus is the Cure. And He laid it out for us.

As Jesus began His ministry, His message was clear and concise,

***"Repent** for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."* Matthew 4: 16

Repent simply means we confess our sins and turn from them. It literally means to turn around and go the other way. Leave that lifestyle behind. God has better plans ahead.

Jesus told the important Jewish leader, Nicodemus, that we must be ***born-again***. He did not understand that either, so Jesus explained it this way.

*""For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever **believes** in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life*.

Believe. We must believe that Jesus is Who He said He is and about whom John the Baptist testified, *"Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world."*

The blood of Jesus is the only cure for the lethal sin virus. So His blood wipes away all past, present, and future sins for those who believe in Him.

Receive. Who would understand the need to repent of his sins and believe Christ came to die for us – His blood cleansing us – and not receive Him as our Savior and Lord? The Apostle John (who was the closest disciple to Jesus) wrote these words in his gospel account.

*"But as many as **received Him**, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who **believe in His name,**"* John 1:12 (NASB)

Now ask yourself how you can prepare yourself for the BEST that is yet to come because for all who are in Christ, that is life from this point forward. Whether or not our lives get easier, or we become infected with this or future viruses, we know with certainty life is eternal, and we will spend it with our Lord no matter what happens this side of Heaven! Clearly the best is yet to come.

That is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God!



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