


THE CHALLENGE OF THE END TIMES

Our Attitude Towards Natural Disasters

As early as the 1960s Mother Basilea had drawn our attention to the growing frequency of natural disasters. She saw them as preliminary events. Even greater judgments were coming in the end times, and we needed to be ready. Over the years she sounded the call to repentance.¹⁾ Above all, she prayed, encouraging believers to do the same and to prepare their hearts in the light of impending judgment.

When in 1995 a flood hit one of our foreign branches, swamping part of their property, she helped us to find the right perspective. This proved to be a key experience for us in view of catastrophes that have since affected various parts of the world – or are yet to come. At that time she shared with us:



Many natural disasters are coming upon our world. Any moment they may strike. So it is very much on my heart that we should be inwardly prepared. Regardless of whether we are personally affected or not, we need to know where we stand. We may be asked by friends or even strangers for our opinion. What would we say then?

What we are seeing at this time is God reaching out to us through judgments that warn us of the beginning of the apocalyptic age. Having the right perspective will help us to have the right reactions – both now and later. Holy Scripture says, ‘Does evil befall a city, unless the LORD has done it?’ (Amos 3:6). But we also read, ‘He does not willingly afflict or grieve the sons of men’ (Lamentations 3:33). This speaks of the Lord’s grief even in judging.

The Bible clearly sees a direct connection between sin and all kinds of calamities. Consider, for example, Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple:

WHEN THE HEAVENS ARE SHUT UP AND THERE IS NO RAIN BECAUSE YOUR PEOPLE HAVE SINNED AGAINST YOU, AND WHEN THEY PRAY . . . AND TURN FROM THEIR SIN BECAUSE YOU HAVE AFFLICTED THEM, THEN HEAR FROM HEAVEN . . . WHEN FAMINE OR PLAGUE COMES TO THE LAND, OR BLIGHT OR MILDEW, LOCUSTS OR GRASSHOPPERS, OR WHEN AN ENEMY BESIEGES THEM IN ANY OF THEIR CITIES, WHATEVER DISASTER OR DISEASE MAY COME, AND WHEN A PRAYER OR PLEA IS MADE BY ANY OF YOUR PEOPLE ISRAEL . . . THEN HEAR FROM HEAVEN, YOUR DWELLING PLACE. FORGIVE AND ACT . . .

1 KINGS 8:35-39 NIV

We should be cautious about how we interpret disaster. This can really only be done by someone who has heard from God concerning a specific occurrence, as the prophets did from time to time. Unless God has given a prophetic insight, we should not presume to say: 'This is God's judgment for such and such a reason.'

What, then, should our attitude be when calamity descends upon us



as a people and we don't understand why? In the face of disaster we are to humble ourselves under the sins of our age, in which our own are included. Daniel 9 gives us guidelines.

Daniel was not personally to blame for the destruction of Jerusalem. But he does not sit in judgment over others. One with his people, he shares the blame for sin, confessing, 'We have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws ... O LORD, we and our kings, our princes and our fathers are covered with shame because we have sinned against you' (Daniel 9:5,8 NIV). He humbly acknowledges the rightness of God's dealings.

We are the ones who have sinned! This is the confession Jesus is waiting to hear from us, as we can see from His reaction to specific calamities in His day, such as the Roman massacre of Galileans and the collapse of the tower in Siloam: 'Unless you repent you will all likewise perish' (Luke 13:5). Jesus does not condemn the victims. Rather, He challenges the rest of the population, who were not personally affected, to repent, humbly confessing personal and national guilt.

On another occasion Jesus is asked by His disciples about a man born blind, 'Who sinned, this man or his parents...?' (John 9:2). One German commentary²⁾ on this passage notes that often there is a spiritual link between sin and disease or natural disaster. Specific sins may have painful consequences. However, as the commentary went on to observe:

It is wrong to assume automatically that a specific suffering is a punishment for specific sins. God primarily has the eternal well-being of the victims in mind.

I realized that such an event as the flood at our branch is a testing from God, bringing to light what is in our hearts. When we are asked to comment, it is our attitude of heart that counts, not whether we are articulate.

Recently I came across something the Lord had shown me nearly forty years ago. At the beginning of the end times God would raise up souls to lament with Him and bring Him comfort.³⁾

This group of mourner-comforters would have all the qualities we need today. Before the anguish of God reaches its peak, we need to pray that these qualities will become ours. These souls do not just respond to God's judgment – with their whole being they are a response. Years later I was to write:

In days to come many people, unable to flee the wrath of God, will lash out against Him and curse His name, refusing to repent of sin (Revelation 16:9,11). At that time God will be waiting for those who will share His anguish and grieve with Him, those who will bring Him comfort by confessing their sins and humbly submitting to His wrath. Unwittingly, they are living proof of His love, because they never lose confidence in the love of God.

They will share God's anguish (Genesis 6:6) for a morally and physically polluted world, for a world of contaminated soil and water, of depraved minds, stifled consciences and blaspheming tongues. But they will also grieve over their own sins as no

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previous generation. Because they empathize *with* God, they can genuinely mourn over what they have done *to* God.

These mourner-comforters will lament for the multitudes on the road to hell. But when they grieve for the lost or for those hit by disaster, they weep with a priestly heart, just as Jesus wept over Jerusalem when His city did not recognize the hour of its visitation (Luke 19:41-44). Even while suffering themselves from the effects of divine judgment, they will join in the song raised by the heavenly hosts at the throne of God:



YES, LORD
GOD ALMIGHTY,
TRUE AND JUST
ARE YOUR
JUDGMENTS.

Revelation 16:7 NIV

Excerpt from SOWN IN WEAKNESS, RAISED IN GLORY
From the Spiritual Legacy of Mother Basilea Schlink
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If on - ly I could weep, Lord, La - ment - ing
 That so few of Your chil - dren Have time for
 night and day Who cares or heeds the suff' - ring
 You to - day.
 That fills Your heart with grief? You are a - lone,
 for - sa - ken In Your deep ag - o - ny.

If only I could weep, Lord,
 Lament unceasingly
 That You, O Love eternal,
 So little love receive.
 You yearn to have us with You
 Wherever You may lead,
 But we choose our own pathways,
 Shunning the pain and grief.

If only I could weep, Lord,
 And never cease to grieve
 Till ev'rywhere souls hasten
 To comfort You in love,
 So that at last in splendour
 The Marriage Feast can be.
 Then shall Your heart be radiant
 With joy eternally.

I WANT TO CONSOLE YOU
 NOVEMBER 15, 1954