

Accepting Adversity and Tragedy

Lesson 6 Large Scale Tragedies Further Answers in a Fallen World

Introduction

Look again at the last thought of the previous lesson: large-scale tragedies highlight the fact that something is wrong with the world; not only that the world is flawed, but that it is outside the power of man to fix whatever is wrong. In this lesson we will examine this paradoxical benefit at length and conclude with some final thoughts on large-scale tragedies and disasters.

A Scriptural Lesson

In keeping with the emphasis on using inspired revelation, rather than mere emotions as the source of our understanding, consider the following passages:

1. Read Ecclesiastes 7:14.
 - a) What are we told to do in the day of prosperity? Would this be hard?
 - b) In the day of adversity we are told to consider, i.e. to think and learn a lesson. Why does adversity provide a better opportunity to learn than prosperity?
2. Read Luke 13:1-5.
 - a) We have looked at this passage in lesson 4 to know that it is appropriate to learn from tragedies.
 - b) Does Jesus explain whether God specifically caused the tower to fall or if He allowed Pilate to kill the Galileans in order to teach the Galileans a lesson?
 - c) Who was to learn a lesson from these tragedies?
 - d) What was the lesson?

Jesus made it clear that every person could learn an important lesson from these two tragedies. The key is avoid getting tangled up in series of why? questions and failing to see what God is teaching. Even when the adversity is not our own, we can still consider it and learn the lesson that we need God, that we must repent and draw ourselves near to God.

God's Megaphone

C.S. Lewis was quite pointed about the need for man to pay attention to this lesson. Using the word pain in reference to trials, adversity and tragedies, he said:

"We can rest contentedly in our sins and in our stupidities; and anyone who has watched gluttons shovelling down the most exquisite foods as if they did not know

what they were eating, will admit that we can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world. A bad man, happy, is a man without the least inkling that his actions do not 'answer', that they are not in accord with the laws of the universe".

From The Problem of Pain

Look at this quote and answer the following:

1. Why is it easier to ignore pleasure than pain?
2. How can God wake up a bad person who is happy? Do we see this happening?

Consider how many times in the Old Testament that God brought a tragedy or great trial on an entire nation in order to teach them the lesson of dependence upon Him.

Ten Plagues
Israel on the way to the Promised Land
Cycle of punishment in the book of Judges

Can you think of others?

A Twentieth Century Example

Few centuries could match the twentieth in terms of human destruction and cruelty, the chief example, of course, being the actions of Adolf Hitler and the Nazis. The Pianist is the harrowing first person account of Wladyslaw Szpilman, a Jew in Warsaw during World War II. Having survived unspeakable horrors at the hands of the Germans from 1939 to 1945, Szpilman is hiding in the last moments of the war when he is discovered by a German officer named Wilm Hosenfeld. Expecting at last to lose his life, Szpilman is surprised when Hosenfeld not only allows him to continue to hide, but even helps him. After the war, while Szpilman tried unsuccessfully to track down Hosenfeld, he did obtain a copy of his war time diary; excerpts of which are included at the end of The Pianist.

I believe Hosenfeld rightly understood the principle of a flawed world made worse when it turns away from God. In his diary entry for September 1, 1942, Hosenfeld explained the war:

"Why did this war have to happen at all? Because humanity had to be shown where its godlessness was taking it. First of all Bolshevism killed millions, saying it was done to introduce a new world order. But the Bolsheviks could act as they did only because they had turned away from God and Christian teaching. Now National Socialism is doing the same in Germany. It forbids people to practice their religion, the young are brought up godless, the Church is opposed and its property appropriated, anyone who thinks differently is terrorized, the free human nature of the German people is debased and they turn into terrified slaves. The truth is kept from them. They can play no part in the fate of the nation.

There are no commandments now against stealing, killing, or lying, not if they go against people's personal interest. This denial of God's commandments leads to all the

other immoral manifestations of greed – unjust self-enrichment, hatred, deceit, sexual license resulting in infertility and the downfall of the German people. God allows this to happen, lets these forces have power and allows so many innocent people to perish to show mankind that without him we are only animals in conflict, who believe we have to destroy each other. We will not listen to the divine commandment: ‘Love one another’. Very well, then, says God, try the Devil’s commandment, the opposite: ‘Hate one another’. We know the story of the Deluge from Holy Scriptures. Why did the first race of men come to a tragic end? Because they had abandoned God and must die, guilty and innocent alike. They had only themselves to blame for their punishment. And it is the same today.”

Final Thoughts and Observations

We cannot always know that God has a specific purpose behind a disaster. Who is to say for certain that God is or is not punishing a group of people by a disaster or tragedy? Did a natural disaster simply happen or did God send it for a specific purpose. Man-made disasters, as we have seen, cannot be blamed on God, but He could stop them, so did He have a lesson for someone or not? We should be careful in answering such questions as we remember the misguided views of Job’s friends who believed they knew God’s purpose in Job’s suffering.

Nevertheless while in the specifics we must confess that we don’t know for sure the lesson to be gained, in a general sense we can always hear God’s megaphone. We can conclude that something is wrong and we can’t control it! We need God.

Today, we are so aware of large-scale tragedies through 24 hours of news that a danger may be they fail to wake us up. They fail to teach us as God intends. We don’t always appreciate the human scale in a large tragedy. Our sympathy may be blurred because of the numbers involved. Warren W. Wiersbe commented, *“I may be wrong, but I have a feeling that people react to so-called disasters in a shallow and temporary manner. No sooner is the news flash (of a plane crash) completed than the television viewers go right back to their baseball, perhaps saying, ‘That’s too bad! Think of the people waiting in that Los Angeles airport!’ Few of us will be so upset that we’ll miss a meal or lose any sleep; and at coffee break the next day, we’ll discuss the plane crash and the baseball game in the same breath.”*

Christians should not allow this to happen. In addition to our compassion and concern, we must also constantly have reinforced the idea that there is something wrong in the world that only Godly obedience can overcome.

One last benefit can result from large-scale tragedies. What an opportunity it affords us to explain our faith in God and His Son. It is our chance to speak up for God when He is called to task for some tragedy. In I Peter 3:15, we are commanded to make a defense to everyone who asks us for an account of the hope that is within us. Interestingly, the context of the verse is our personal suffering for Christ.