

Lessons From The Haiti Earthquake

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Reading Job 9:1-8

"Then Job answered and said, I know it is so of a truth: but how should man be just with God? If he will contend with him, he cannot answer him one of a thousand. He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered? Which removeth the mountains, and they know not: which overturneth them in his anger. Which shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble. Which commandeth the sun, and it riseth not; and sealeth up the stars. Which alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea."

At 4:53 local time on Tuesday, January 12th, 2010 the nation of Haiti was plunged into a state of utter devastation. An earthquake measuring 7.0 rumbled through the most populated region of that nation, the capital Port au Prince. At least 35 after shocks have been recorded, 14 of which are between a magnitude of five and 5.9. And experts say these after shocks could go on for weeks and months.

Rescuers from around the world work round the clock and 10 days later they were still pulling the living from the rubble. Many notable government and religious personnel were killed and many of the nation's most prestigious buildings and landmarks were destroyed including the presidential palace and the cathedral in Port au Prince. The infrastructure of the nation crumbled with the buildings and the UN along with other nations converged on Haiti to enforce martial law.

While all of this echoes of chaos and destruction, it is nothing at all in comparison to the scale of human devastation and dismay. The death toll is estimated in advance of 200,000, hundreds of thousands more left bereft of parents, children, siblings and friends. Scenes from the streets of Haiti present horrific suffering. The look in the faces of those in the streets is a personification of utter despair. A million and a half have been left homeless.

Of course, we know that life must go on in Haiti. The street markets are beginning to reappear. Commerce continues in the midst of catastrophe. Human grief and perhaps in cases, to be gracious, human need brings the opportunistic to loot the shops and homes. And from this looting violence has ensued and the death toll rises unnecessarily.

We can sit in the serenity and security of our own homes and watch the utter devastation and unthinkable human pain and loss. We would be less than human if we were not moved in response. Humanness demands a response to human need.

The earthquake in Haiti is, therefore, our business. We cannot ignore it. The nation of Canada is immediately affected by it. As of Friday the 22nd of January 16 Canadians were confirmed dead and a further 306 unaccounted for. Thousands of Canadians were stranded in the capital's airport before they could be got home as refugees. But closer to home here in Victoria on Vancouver Island the earthquake

for us has a more poignant message. We are living right where the North American plate and the Pacific plate meet, the tectonic plate of Juan de Fuca. It is slightly smaller than the Caribbean tectonic plate that affected Haiti.

We are living, according to the government website, in the region under most threat of earthquakes in Canada. In 2009 three earthquakes were recorded in the Victoria area according to the government statistics. Vancouver Island's largest historic earthquake was a magnitude of 7.3 and was heard 10:15 AM on Sunday the 23rd of June, 1946. The epicentre was the Forbidden Plateau in the center of Vancouver Island just west of Courtenay and the Campbell River. There were two reported deaths as a result of that earthquake.

As we watched the news reports we must be aware that what happened in Haiti could also happen to us. We cannot live in ignorance. The camera crews of the world could be in this city. The rescue operation that is going on in Haiti could have been for our benefit. Such is the threat of earthquakes in the western Canada and on Vancouver Island. And so I address this issue today because there is a poignant message from the earthquake in Haiti that we as God's people must address. We, as God's people must look at and see in the earthquake in Haiti the hand of God to some extent and the mercy of God that has kept us from such a catastrophe.

1. The Geological Reason For Earthquakes

Earthquakes are not a new phenomenon. We are living on an earth where these things happen. History records a number of earthquakes and some very significant ones in Scripture.

In Amos 1:1 Amos refers to an earthquake that happened in his day. Josephus the Jewish historian in his *Antiquities* speaks of an earthquake in 31 BC in Palestine that claimed thousands of lives. An earthquake in 64 BC damaged the temple in Jerusalem and again in 33 AD the temple was again damaged by an earthquake that we as Christians know happened at the death of Christ when the earth shook in Matthew 27:51. *"And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent."*

In the book of Acts, it was a result of an earthquake that Paul and Silas escaped from prison in Acts chapter 16:26.

So there is a geological reason and there is a geological persistence of earthquakes that we find not only in secular history, but also in biblical history. In layman's terms, earthquakes are caused by a movement of the earth's crust. The lithosphere or the crust of the earth is broken up into numerous what are called tectonic plates. There are eight major Tectonic Plates and a number of minor ones such as the Caribbean Plate and the Juan de Fuca Plate on which we are on here in Vancouver Island.

Where each section or each plate meets there is termed the fault line. And when these two plates rub together—to put it in layman's terms—there is the effect of an earthquake. The epicentre is where that lithosphere meets the surface and affects the surface of the earth as we see; the earth trembles and breaks up and the rocks are rent.

It is clear, then, that geologically the earth is in a continual state of flux. When the hymn writer wrote, *"Change and decay in all around I see,"* it was not only *life* on earth that was meant, but the *earth* itself. That is the first thing I want us to understand. Geologically the earth is in a continual state of flux. The earth, as we know it, is in a continual state of change.

There are physical features on the earth today that were not there when the earth was created. There are physical features on the earth today that were not there 100 years ago or 200 years ago because the earth is in a continual state of flux. I do not mean evolution. I mean flux. There is a change.

2. The Theological Reason for Earthquakes

Why is there this geological state of flux? Why is the earth continually changing? The answer is found in the theological consideration of earthquakes. All that happens in this earth and in all that happens to you as an individual and all that has happened in the past two weeks in Haiti, we must, as God's people Consider. And we must exhort the world to consider this event theologically, to consider this event as it relates to God because it does relate to God. God is related to the disaster in Haiti.

There is a relation between God and the catastrophe of human suffering in Haiti. And the question is: What is that relationship? As we look through Scripture, earthquakes are associated with a number of ways in which they relate to God. In Exodus 19:18 we have the Israelites at Sinai. There at Sinai the earth quaked. It is associated with the revelation of God. In 1 Kings 19:11 also we have the story of Elijah.

Elijah is waiting for the voice of the Lord and the earthquake and the wind that the Lord brings to Elijah are significant of the revelation of God, significant of the presence of God. But the Bible specifically says that the Lord was not in the earthquake. He was not in the wind. While the earthquake and the wind signified the power and presence of the Lord yet He was in that still small voice.

In Isaiah 6:4 we read the same that the earth trembled at the presence, at the revelation of God to Isaiah. *"In the year that king Uzziah died,"* Isaiah said, *"I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple."* And he goes on to speak of the revelation of God to him. And in Vs. 4 it says that the earth trembled and shook at the revelation of God.

Here in Job 9:6 we see that earthquakes are associated specifically with the power of God. Job here is arguing his case and he says in verse five; *"Which removeth the mountains, and they know not: which overturneth them in his anger. Which shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble. Which commandeth the sun, and it riseth not; and sealeth up the stars."*

Job is making the point that God is the God of creation. God is the God who oversees and who is in control of all that happens on this earth. He is a God of power. In Psalm 68:8 we see that the earthquake is associated with the presence of God. *"The earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God: even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel."*

So earthquakes in Scripture are associated with the presence of God. But more often than not throughout Scripture the reference to earthquakes is associated with the judgment of God and it is therefore ironic that very often those who either have no time for God or those who flat out deny his existence, it is in times like these when they look at Haiti, they are the first, very often, to blame God, to apportion blame to God for what happened upon the earth by way of catastrophe and human destruction.

While we do not read the providence of God—and I want it to be clear—while we *cannot* read the providence of God in what happened in Haiti and we cannot say that what happened in Haiti is a direct judgment of God upon the nation. I cannot get into the mind of God and say that. Yet the calamitous state that this earth finds itself in is in a state of judgment. It is in a state of judgment because as we read in Genesis chapter one, all that the Lord made was good. As the writer of Genesis, Moses, goes through the creation order and he identified everything that the Lord made, the Lord stepped back, as it were, and saw that it was good. It was created perfect. It was created without a blemish. It was created, beloved, without a fault line!

But man in his arrogance against God, in his sin in eating that forbidden fruit which is simply the personification of the disobedience of his heart. Man because of his disobedience against God has brought himself *and the earth* into a state of sin and calamity. In Genesis 3:17 the Lord said, "*Cursed is the ground for thy sake,*" to Adam. "*Cursed is the ground, Adam, because of you...In sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life.*"

Such is the state of this earth, this continual state of flux, geologically. It is in complete agreement with the curse of God upon man and the curse of God upon this earth. In sorrow shall we eat of the earth. In sorrow shall we live on the earth. "*Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble,*" Job says. The earth was cursed because of Adam, all the earth was cursed, and all his posterity. And so looking at the earth as it relates to God we see that the earth as we know it today and we see that what happens upon earth as far as natural effects are caused by the original curse of God upon the earth, because of Adam's sin.

There, my friend, is where we begin. That is why I say we cannot and we ought not make any judgments upon the nation of Haiti as though God was directly punishing Haiti by this sin, by this calamity. I am well aware of the sin of Haiti. I am well aware of the Catholicism and the Voodoo and all of the sin that is associated and pinned upon Haiti. But are we to say that God judged Christians in Haiti because of all of that? Are we to say that we know the mind of God and we can read the providence of God in such a manner that we can say dogmatically, "*There is the judgment of God upon Haiti*"? Are the same sins not in America? Are the same sins not in Canada? Are the same sins, my friend, not in Victoria, in this most ungodly city? We above all cities are ripe for the judgment of God and God has withheld his judgment. "*It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed.*"

3. The Humanitarian Consequences of the Earthquake.

I want us to deal very practically here with the humanitarian consequences. We cannot watch the television screens. We cannot see the harrowing experiences of those people in Haiti without being moved. Haiti is in a state of despair. And it is clear, then, that as we look on those harrowing experiences that there is a cause behind it all. Earthquakes are affected by the sin of mankind. And it is equally clear that God is behind it all. The earth is suffering, as we said, because of human sin. And because the earth is suffering humans, in turn, suffer because of the suffering of the earth.

We have a responsibility as we look upon human need. We would be less than human were we not moved to do something. So how are we to act in a humanitarian manner? How are we to act as mere human beings? How are we to respond to such need and to such disaster?

In Psalm 41:1. We read the words, "*Blessed is he that considereth the poor. Blessed is he that considereth the poor.*"

C. H. Spurgeon commenting on this verse says that many give to the poor in a hurry without thought and many give nothing at all. So you have the two extremes. There are those who rush out and millions and millions of dollars have been raised in response to Haiti. But many people give without consideration as to who and what they are giving and where their money will be going and how their money will be spent. And this is particularly associated with Christians who are particularly obligated as stewards of the money that the Lord gives them. How are we to respond? The psalmist says, "*Blessed is he that considereth the poor.*"

C. H. Spurgeon identifies two areas in which the Christian can participate on behalf of the poor. And the first area is that the poor ought always to lie heavy on his heart. It is not enough simply to give. It is not

enough simply to empty your bank account. It is not enough simply to scribble a cheque and give. That, my friend, by itself, and isolated from feeling is an abomination. The Christian, first of all, is to consider the poor. The poor, in other words, are to lie heavy on his heart. We are to think of the poor. We are to pray for the poor. We are to feel for the poor. We are to agonize for the poor. And until we have done that, Christian, we have not done our duty.

Now as we watch these things in Haiti and as we watch other natural disasters, my heart, my first reaction instinctively is a desire to be there and to do something practical. And I look at people lifting blocks with their hands, cutting at them and one just wants to be there to pull and to labour. But we can't be there. But my friend, you can pray. You can feel for them and you can lift them up before the throne of grace in prayer that the Lord will sustain, that the Lord will give spiritual life, that the Lord will bring back from the brinks of death those who are hanging between life and death. You can plead that the Lord will have mercy on the living. You can plead that the Lord, moreover, will reveal himself to those who have survived such a harrowing experience. You can feel and experience that compassion for them and enter into their grief. This is what the psalmist means.

There is benefit from this. To say this is not simply to isolate yourself from them. To plead for them and to burden yourself for them is not simply to do something without benefit to them. It is benefiting them to pray and to feel for them. This is what the psalmist said in Psalm 5:1; *"Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my meditation."* As we meditate on them. As we consider them, as we pray for them, as we keep them before the Lord in prayer we do our duty. That is our first duty.

Our second duty, as Spurgeon identified is a Christian ought to *consider* the poor. He ought to look into their case and devise plans for their benefit. That is the next step. And this deals, then, with the practical, so-to-speak. I am not here to make an appeal for monetary gain on their behalf. You know as a Christian what you can and cannot give. You know as a Christian what you need to do.

But in all situations whether in Haiti or simply the poor in general, those who are beyond the means of helping themselves and I classify that because there is poor in this city, for example who can help themselves and don't help themselves. The poor then are those who are beyond the means of helping themselves. I think that is what Spurgeon meant when he said people give without considering; they just throw money out to all without discrimination. We are to consider the poor. We are to look into their case and to devise plans for the benefit of them. That is the humanitarian consequences of Haiti and how we are to relate to it.

4. The Prophetic Significance of the Earthquake

The language that the Scripture uses to speak of the present destruction and groaning of the world is the language of child birth. Christ said these words in Mark 13:7-8 *"And when ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, be ye not troubled: for such things must needs be; but the end shall not be yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles: these are the beginnings of sorrows."*

The earthquakes, the destruction and the famine and the wars and rumors of wars, the Bible says in Mark 13:8 are the beginnings of sorrows. The phrase that is used here in verse eight could be literally translated, *"It is the beginning of the travail of child birth."* In Romans 8:22 Paul speaks of the earth *"groaning"* and *"travailing."* In 1 Thessalonians 5:3 Paul, again, speaks of the end of the age in the same figure and he says, *"As travail upon a woman with child."*

Now, I want us to understand what the Scriptures are teaching us here. The earthquake that happened in Haiti and the groaning of the earth that Paul speaks of in Romans 8:22 are the beginning of the birth pangs. That groaning in Haiti is the beginning of something *positive* that is going to happen; something, in other words, that is going to bring life. It is not the groaning of death for the earth. The groaning and

travailing is the waiting for the redemption of the earth. And here we see the smiling face of God behind the frowning providence.

As we look upon Haiti, as we look upon natural disasters and we wonder why, we wonder how and we cringe in fear for those who have struggled and who are perhaps still alive under the rubble in Haiti, when the ground opens up and the concrete crumbles down around their heads, this sudden destruction, my friend, it is simply the earth groaning and travailing in the beginning of child birth.

But what I want you to notice today is that this groaning and this pain that the earth is enduring and that we are enduring as a result of it, is not a pain unto death. For the Christian it is a pain unto life. That is the smile of God behind the frowning providence. While the earth is cursed by God because of man, God has set in motion a plan to redeem the earth.

I will be redeemed ultimately on that day. I will be changed into his image. You also, if you are trusting Christ and believing in the blood of Christ for your soul, you will be redeemed on that day. You will be changed from this vile body into the incorruptible body. But the earth also will be changed because, my friend, there is going to be a new heaven and a new earth. And God has set in motion this plan of redemption through which he will bring not only his people, but he will bring his created earth to a place of perfection again as it was in the Garden of Eden when God looked at it and he saw that it was good.

There, my friends, is a Christian's perspective on the earthquake in Haiti. These are the beginnings of sorrows for this earth. These are the beginnings of pains for this earth. But there is coming a brighter day for this earth and there is coming a brighter day for the Christian. There is coming a brighter day for those who have trusted Christ.

And what of those who have not? When God, in the person of Christ breaks through the clouds on that great day when sudden destruction shall come as pain upon a woman with child and sudden destruction comes then they will be in the very presence of God. There will be earthquakes and the ungodly then in the immediate presence of God will be crying on the rocks and the hills to cover them.

Now you connect that with what we said earlier regarding earthquakes in the Scriptures. God, by his presence at Sinai, caused the earth to quake. God, by his presence with Isaiah in Isaiah 6:4 caused the earth to quake. Christ, when he died on the cross, caused the earth to quake by the power of his presence in order that we might know that it was God, in order that he might reveal himself to us. My friend, God has revealed himself in this world this past two weeks. God has shown himself mighty. God has shown himself strong in all that happens. And God has shown himself merciful to you in Victoria. *"It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed."*

People look at the catastrophe in Haiti and looking at it in all different perspectives and they wonder how such a God of love could do such a thing upon Haiti. My friend, the Christian who knows God, who knows the nature of God and the Christian who knows the heinousness of sin looks at Haiti and thinks of the mercy of God in preserving us from such a calamity. *"It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed."* It is by the Lord's mercy that this earth in its entirety is not burned up and all its sinful humanity. God has been merciful to you. And as you look on the plight of others then think, my friend, on the mercy that God has shown to you. First thank God for the mercy that he has shown to you here in preserving your life. Call upon him in repentance of sin.

Secondly, think in connection with the mercy that God has shown you to the mercy that you must show others.

That brings us, then, to how we can act, what we can do on behalf of others in Haiti. Show them mercy. Pray for them. Plead with God for them that the Lord would reveal himself in salvation, that the Lord would bless especially his Church there, that the Lord would bless his people there, that he would sustain

them, that he would comfort them, that he would build them up again in the most holy faith because, my friend, we have brothers and sisters in Haiti who love the Lord like we do. And they have passions and feelings like we have and we must remember them.

Amen