

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF NATURAL CATASTROPHES

By Alan J. Dunn

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In recent years the headlines have reported catastrophic events from all over the world. Earthquakes in particular have brought devastation to Sumatra, Pakistan, China and Haiti. We wonder, "Where will the next earthquake hit?" Those who have been exposed to the teachings of the Bible understand that these events have significance. But what do they mean? Are earthquakes "signs" from God? Is God angry with men? Is God punishing people because of their sin?

In order to interpret catastrophes (indeed to interpret all life and experience), we must view the event from the vantage point of a Biblical worldview. A Biblical worldview rests upon the four pillars of Biblical reality: Creation, the Fall, Redemption and Restoration. Earthquakes must be interpreted in terms of these four foundational truths

NATURAL CATASTROPHES MUST BE VIEWED IN THE LIGHT OF CREATION

The world which God created was created *very good* (Genesis 1:31). It was a world without sin, without sorrow, without death. God made man, male and female, in His image and gave him responsibility for creation. Man was placed on the earth *to cultivate and to keep it* (Genesis 2:15). Man would determinatively influence his environment by his labor as he lived in obedience to God. God gave the man provisions for life and commanded him to obey His Law. God warned the man that disobedience would bring death into the world. The wellbeing of the entire creation depended upon the man's obedience to God.

A world in which earthquakes and catastrophes occur is not the world that God originally made. We live in a world filled with natural disasters and death, but that is not the original order of things. Originally God created a *very good* world. Originally, man lived in perfect communion with God. Originally all creation was unified with its components functioning in symbiotic balance. Each component was designed to fit into the whole. Each individual thread of life's fabric had an inherent attraction to align alongside of its designated complement both to receive nourishment and contribute nourishment. All was unified in a vibrant, throbbing, living tapestry that displayed the glory of God which culminated in His image: man. There was no death, no violent natural upheavals by a world out of balance, a world convulsing harmfully against itself. No, originally *God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.* (Genesis 1:31)

NATURAL CATASTROPHES MUST BE VIEWED IN THE LIGHT OF THE FALL

At the center of the Fall is the disobedience of man. Enticed by a fallen angel named Satan, our first parents rebelled against God, disobeyed His command and came under His judgment which brought death into the world. *Through one man (Adam) sin entered into the world and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned* (Romans 5:12). Adam's original sin brought death to all his children (mankind) are born in a state of legal and actual death. His sin also unleashed death upon creation for which he was responsible to God. Death, according to Scripture, is a separation, a severing, a dividing of those things that God originally made to exist as a unified whole. Death is especially the state of being separated from God. At birth, all men are now spiritually dead: estranged from God. All men legally inherit Adam's guilt and legal condemnation. All men are also born broken in every aspect of their humanity with a natural disinclination to God, a natural orientation to disobedience to God and idolatry. Rather than living in loving knowledge of God, fallen men are now ignorant of God. Rather than worshipping the true God, men are deceived by the *god of this world* (2 Corinthians 4:4) Satan, who, because of Adam's rebellion, has usurped the place of God in the world.

The earth itself was also affected as a consequence of Adam's sin. Death enveloped the entire creation. The components of the perfectly balanced creation became separated, disjointed, and imbalanced. The earth itself was *cursed*. It would no longer freely respond to man's labor. Now man would be rewarded for his work with thorns and thistles and diminished fruitfulness. Now man's body, formed by God from the dust of the earth, would return to the dust in physical death (Genesis 3:17-19). The world that previously sustained life would continue to do so, but as a cursed earth. Fallen man is now consigned to live on a cursed planet in which both he and his environment are visited by death. The state of the earth continues to be integrally bound up with the state of man's relationship to God.

However, creation has not been abandoned by God to death. God immediately came to this fallen world and rescued it in grace. But before we consider God's grace, we need to give full weight to these first two foundational aspects of a Biblical worldview. We need to understand the full integrity of Creation and the Fall. This is a good world that has been brought by man's sin, into a bad state. When we experience death and the tragedies of things like earthquakes, we are experiencing the repercussions of the Fall. We are experiencing life in a world enveloped by death, a world tragically separated from God, a world in need of deliverance – for we are a people in need of deliverance.

NATURAL CATASTROPHES MUST BE VIEWED IN THE LIGHT OF REDEMPTION

We must appreciate that legally, as our Creator-Judge, God would have been completely righteous had He visited the disobedient couple with Final Judgment. No wrong would have been done had the Lord come into the Garden, lined the three culprits up (Adam, Eve, and the Serpent) and then and there pronounced the sentence of eternal separation from God; then and there transformed the earth into hell – a place of unmitigated punishment and wrath. Had God done that, none of us could utter a protest. No injustice would have been committed. Ponder that for a moment.

Amazingly God came to the fallen couple and this death-enveloped world in grace. Death indeed had come due to man's disobedience. Death saturated every aspect of man's experience. He experienced separation in his relation to God, to himself, to others, and to the created world. And into this sad situation, the Holy God came in grace. In Genesis 3 we read of how He salvaged the then disintegrating cosmos. He put enmity between humanity and Satan. He secured both the woman and the man in their respective original functions so as to sustain the original order of life on earth. In grace He rescued His creation so that it will eventually be delivered from death and share in the final eternal restoration. God's plan to deliver man from death and restore creation was announced to Satan in the hearing of the couple. He would send One who would defeat Satan and in so doing, rescue fallen man and creation itself from death, from eternal separation from God.

As God's purposes of grace are worked out through history, God continues graciously to sustain this fallen world. This is the world in which we live. It is a fallen world in which God's grace is demonstrated. Jesus tells us that the Father *causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous* (Matthew 5:45b) and that the Father *Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men* (Luke 6:35b). Paul tells us that *God did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.* (Acts 14:17). What would this fallen world be were it not for the grace of God? It would be hell.

We are shocked and dismayed at the upheavals of natural disasters that disrupt our sense of well-being and visit destruction upon us. But in a fallen world, the amazing thing is that sinful men are given rain and sunshine and know satisfaction of heart! I know that sounds jarring, but that is because we rarely see ourselves from God's viewpoint. We do not realize just how sinful we actually are and how gracious He truly is. When we have sunshine and rain and fruitful seasons, we are not getting what we deserve from God. We are receiving His undeserved kindness. *We live and move and have our being in Him* (Acts 17:28) and He, astonishingly, is kind to us *ungrateful and evil men*.

Sadly, most men do not understand that this world was created as *very good* but fell through man's sin into death. Nor do most realize that this fallen world is now being sustained by God's grace. In many people's thinking, their view of origins (Creation) merges with their view of sin and evil (the Fall). By not distinguishing these two foundational truths, they view the world as being inherently defective. They assume that death (evil) is simply the "natural order" of things. Most men do not understand that death is foreign to God's original creation. By mixing their view of origins with their view of evil, many wrongly blame God for evil. An earthquake hits and men question God's goodness and blame Him for evil. "If God is good and powerful, why is there suffering and death?" The question assumes this common mistaken confluence of Creation and the Fall. The questioner posits the goodness of God, but fails to factor in the Fall. The good God created a good world, but it was sinful man who brought death into the world and it is now a fallen world in need of deliverance. The good Creator did not stand idly by. He stepped into this fallen death-cursed world to be our Deliverer! Satan does not triumph. Death is not victorious. Man is not lost. Creation is not destroyed. God's purposes for redemption are being accomplished. There is good news for us sinners and for our fallen planet. In grace God still sustains this created order. In grace He sent His Son Jesus Christ *that the world through Him might be saved* (John 3:17). Jesus is the promised One of Genesis 3:15. Jesus Christ has *appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil* (1 John 3:8).

The good news for a death-cursed world is the cross of Jesus Christ where He

NATURAL CATASTROPHES MUST BE VIEWED IN THE LIGHT OF FINAL RESTORATION

Once we view suffering and death in the context of Creation and the Fall, we are then able to perceive how it is that God is at work redemptively to ultimately restore the world. Suffering, for the Christian, is not meaningless, but is experienced in the context of God's redemptive purpose to restore this fallen world. The apostle Paul writes: *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body* (Rom 8:18-23). Paul is referring to the Fall when he explains that this present world has *been subjected to futility and corruption* and now *groans* like a woman about to give birth: *the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth*. The fallen world awaits its deliverance, when it will be *set free from its slavery to corruption*. Until that time the world, like a woman in labor, experiences protracted periods of discomfort with episodes of intense explosions of pain. Earthquakes are explosions of pain. The best biblical metaphor by which to understand life in this present fallen but grace-sustained world is the metaphor of a woman experiencing the contractions of giving birth. The contractions, although painful, are part of a process that issues into the joy of a new life. This world writhes and groans in a birthing process that will issue into a new cosmos and the revelation of the sons of God in the Resurrection. We who are in Christ, although we also groan, we yet live in hope.

NATURAL CATASTROPHES MUST BE VIEWED IN THE LIGHT OF FINAL JUDGMENT

History, according to the Bible, is linear: it has a beginning and an end and moves forward on a straight line. History is not a revolving circle, an endless repetition whose beginning and ultimate purpose is unknown. History began at Creation and is moving to Final Judgment. As the line of

history progresses, the world will experience more frequent and more intense "eschatological¹ contractions." These birth pangs are painful precursors to the final contraction that will occur at the Second Coming of Christ, "The Day of the Lord", or Final Judgment.

The final contraction is described by Peter in 2 Peter 3:3-13. *Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.* This created order will be destroyed in a global cataclysm similar to Noah's Flood, except that the element of destruction will not be water, but fire. This final contraction will issue into the formation of *new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.* The final contraction will involve a convulsion of the entire globe. In Revelation, we learn that this present order of things will end in an earthquake of global proportions. Preliminary contractions leading up to the end will be similar in kind but less intense and will be regional rather than global. The world will increasingly convulse in eschatological contractions, "signs of the times," indicators that history is moving toward Final Judgment.

Jesus informed us of eschatological signs in "The Olivet Discourse" recorded in Matthew 24 and 25 as well as Luke 21. One such sign is the global expansion of His Kingdom through the preaching of the gospel and the building of His church. Today virtually every people group on earth has received testimony of the gospel. Another sign is the opposition and persecution that His people encounter as the Kingdom of light invades Satan's kingdom of darkness. The twentieth century has witnessed more persecution of Christians than all the previous centuries combined. Another sign is the increase of apostasy accompanied by the rise of false religions. Today many so-called "Christian" churches have abandoned the gospel and compromise Scriptural doctrine, practice, and morals. A fourth sign concerns our present interest: the sign evidencing the birth pangs of this created order. Wars, earthquakes, famines, pestilence - these catastrophes are signs, eschatological contractions leading up to the birth of a new world which will be revealed in conjunction with the Final Judgment of mankind.

In teaching about the end of the world, Jesus employs the metaphor of a woman in childbirth. *And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs* (Matthew 24:6-8). These eschatological *birth pangs* are referred to in Luke. *And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these things begin to*

¹ The theological term "eschatology" concerns the study of the "last things" that will occur at the end of this present age: the second coming of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the dead, Final Judgment, eternal heaven and hell.

take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near (Luke 21:25-28). Certainly a 9.0 earthquake in Sumatra in 2004 qualified as *a great earthquake*. Scientists told us that the December 26th earthquake actually shifted the earth's axis - *for the powers of the heavens will be shaken*. Certainly the tsunami that surged onto nine nations around and beyond the Indian Ocean qualifies as *a roaring of the sea and the waves*. Since then we've witnessed several more earthquakes and men all over the world are in *perplexity, fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world*. In light of Jesus' teachings, I submit to you that we should view the 2004 tsunami and the earthquakes since then in Pakistan, China and Haiti as birth pangs, as eschatological contractions, as preliminary divine judgments pointing us to the coming Final Judgment.

Let me immediately qualify how these catastrophes signify divine judgment. Note that Jesus says *that is not yet the end, all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs*. As when a woman in labor has a contraction, we know that the birth will occur, but a contraction is just preparatory. As contractions, natural catastrophes point to the certain coming of Jesus and Final Judgment. Similar signs have been given throughout history. The world has seen other horrific catastrophes and will continue to do so until the end of history. According to Scripture, we should expect that catastrophes will increase in frequency and intensity as the time draws near, just like a woman giving birth.

There is another qualification that needs to be made. Those who are suffering in this present catastrophe are not worse sinners than other men. They are not being visited by a specific judgment of God because of specific sin. In Jesus' day, violence and tragedy were headline news too. *There were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And He answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered this fate? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish* (Luke 13:1-5). The unexpected, violent and tragic death of men was an occasion for Jesus to inform those yet living that they who died did not die because they were greater sinners than the living, but that we all face the same prospect of death and therefore, we need to prepare to die. How? Repent and believe in Jesus Christ.

As fallen sinners, we all stand under the sentence of God's judgment and are all liable to death. Was the Haitian earthquake in January 2010 divine judgment for sin? Yes, but as an expression of the judgment under which the entire world exists as a result of the Fall. That earthquake was no more a judgment than similar devastations occurring elsewhere in this fallen world. During August and September 2004, the state of Florida was struck with three successive devastating hurricanes. Louisiana and Mississippi were hit by hurricane Katrina that struck us in August of 2005. In the summer of 2004, unprecedented heat caused extensive death in France. In recent years, thousands have died in China, Europe, Haiti and the Dominican Republic due to devastating floods. In the spring of 2007 Typhoon Nargis hit Myanmar on May 3rd and claimed 22,000 lives. The earthquake that struck central China on May 12th that same year claimed almost 10,000 lives. Eschatological contractions abound: tornadoes in America's mid-west in 2008 and record cold in Europe during the winter of 2009. Unusual death-causing weather is a sign of coming judgment and that sign is being given to men in every country on earth. Mankind the world over stands under the sentence of death because of sin. Our world is as it was in the days of Noah when *the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually* (Genesis 6:5). So Jesus teaches us - *For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand*

until the flood came and took them all away; so shall the coming of the Son of Man be (Matthew 24:37-39).

We must not fail to understand what catastrophic events mean. *Behold, the Judge is standing right at the door (James 5:9).* These signs communicate a message from God: this world (you and I) will be about to be judged. We are heading toward Final Judgment.

LEARN ABOUT FINAL JUDGMENT FROM NATURAL CATASTROPHES

As Abraham was compelled to view Sodom after it was overcome in its destruction, we too must gaze upon the horror of natural disasters and learn wisdom. Let me speak, at this point, especially to you who are yet outside of Christ, who have yet to trust in Him, you who are not yet Christians.

Learn that Final Judgment will come upon men unexpectedly, like an earthquake. Suddenly, surprisingly, men will be engulfed and overwhelmed. Final Judgment, like a tsunami, will come upon men unexpectedly and will engulf them. *While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape (1 Thessalonians 5:3).* The final destruction at the end of the age will be global, like Noah's Flood. There will be no safe location on earth - for anyone: *for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth (Luke 21:35).* Understand that you will not escape the sudden eruption of God's Day of Judgment when He comes to purge the world of sin and death. It will be a Day only hinted at by the preliminary contractions of earthquakes and tsunamis. It will be a Day of unspeakable wrath. *Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, cruel, with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation; and He will exterminate its sinners from it (Isaiah 13:9).* All who are then still under the sentence of death will be swept away in the eternal fire of judgment. The most fearful thing conceivable is to come to the Day of Final Judgment still in your sins and then to enter an eternal death apart from Christ. *And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28).*

Learn from natural catastrophes and flee from the coming wrath of God. John the Baptist preached as a prophet standing under the impending Day of the Lord and challenged his generation: *You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? (Luke 3:7)* He preached in anticipation of *the wrath to come*. The Word of God comes to you under the looming shadow of the coming Day of the Lord, the Day of Judgment. During this present time, God, through His church, is calling the world to repent and be saved by faith in Christ. He is also giving the world signs, signaling that the Day will soon be here. Natural catastrophes are signs. Do not live in denial of what these events signify! When a woman starts labor pains, it is foolish to deny what is transpiring with her body. Understand that this world has begun its eschatological labor pains. The Day of Judgment is soon upon us. What would Jesus have you to do? *Unless you repent, you too will perish.* In repentance from sin and by faith in Jesus Christ, you can flee from the wrath to come. By faith in Jesus Christ, you can find forgiveness for sin and not stand before God under the sentence of death, but stand before Him in the righteousness of Jesus. By faith in Jesus Christ, you can find safety in Him who alone has satisfied the wrath of God on the cross and conquered death by His resurrection. You can call upon Him today – now. He is ready to save all who seek Him in repentance and faith. God does not want you to perish in your sin. *"For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," declares the Lord God. "Therefore, repent and live." (Ezekiel 18:32)* He wants you to believe in Christ and to be saved!

LIVE LIKE YOU ARE HEADING TO FINAL JUDGMENT

You, who profess faith in Christ, listen to what your Lord tells you and live in hope. *But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near (Luke 21:28).* You, dear Christian, have *turned to God from idols to serve a living and*

true God, and (now you) wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come (1 Thessalonians 1:9,10). Your Lord is about to appear! You only, of all the people on the planet, can live with hope! Adam through his disobedience plunged this world into death. But Jesus, the last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45), through His obedience has conquered death. In the Resurrection at the end of the age, Jesus will transform us and this fallen world (see Philippians 3:20,21). Jesus, by His victorious resurrection, has recovered what fallen Adam had lost. As we groan waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body (Romans 8:23), we understand that natural catastrophes are birth pangs signaling the coming of a new heavens and new earth in which He shall wipe away every tear from (our) eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away (Revelation 21:4). We lift up our heads! The return of our Savior will certainly come! Our redemption is drawing near!

As your heart fills with this hope, you will be motivated to live in holiness. Everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure (1 John 3:3). The evidence that we are truly joined to Jesus and that we are not destined for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:9) is holiness of life. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless (2 Peter 3:11-14).

We must live oriented to the coming Day. The birth pangs have begun! Let us not get distracted by the empty vanities of this passing age, but in everything we do, let us seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33). In every legitimate endeavor of life - in our families, our labors, our use of time and money - in all things, let us live as those who are serving Christ and awaiting His return. Again listen to Jesus: Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. Be on guard, that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day come on you suddenly like a trap; for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. But keep on the alert at all times, praying in order that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man (Luke 21:33-36). We cannot live carelessly, with dissipation, wasting our time and resources without focus or purpose. We cannot live in the pursuit of sensuality and drunkenness. For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer (1 Peter 4:3,7). We cannot allow our hearts to become dull, cold and loveless (see Matthew 24:12,13), ensnared by the worries of life. A life full of the weeds of worry will prove to be thorny and unfruitful in the Day of final harvest (Luke 8:14). We cannot allow ourselves to be distracted from the Day that is pressing upon us. We are called to keep on the alert. How? Praying. This act of devotion to Christ epitomizes and represents all "the means of grace" to which the Christian gives himself so as to nurture and strengthen his faith and express his discipleship to Christ. We must be firmly connected to Christ and His people and give ourselves to those things that foster our spiritual health. The strength to escape will be given to those who follow Christ by faith and live wisely, building their lives in obedience to His words - as the wise man who built his house upon the rock (Matthew 7:24-27). Live with this anticipation: soon you will stand before the Son of Man. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10). Let us come to that Day to stand before Him having exercised a fruitful faith, having lived a life in which His grace was evident by our devotion, our obedience, our holiness, and our love.

Let us therefore live that life which abides: the life of faith, hope, and love (1 Corinthians 13:13). *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near* (Hebrews 10:23-25). Let us have hearts filled with compassion, like Jesus, *for the distressed and downcast* (Mt 9:36). Let us *be zealous for good works* (Titus 2:7,14; 3:8,14) and *adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect* (Titus 2:10). Let us minister, self-sacrificially, to the needs of others, to those suffering and disoriented by these horrible events. *Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven* (Matthew 5:16). *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds* (Titus 2:11-14). Let us live by faith in Christ, in hope of His coming, and extend His love and His gospel to as many people as we can.

As we live in these sober times, men all around us will be gripped with a foreboding sense of fear that something overwhelmingly terrifying is about to happen: *men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world* (Luke 21:26). Sadly, many will fail to recognize the "signs of the times" and will not respond to the gospel. Revelation 9:20,21 says *the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts*. But remember, during this time the Lord will build His church (Matthew 16:18) and will gather all His people to Himself at His return (Matthew 24:31). In the meantime, *today is the day of salvation* (2 Corinthians 6:2). Today is the day of grace. The gospel is being proclaimed and sinners are repenting and coming to Christ! This is an eschatological sign of hope! Let us minister Christ's gospel of hope to our frightened family and friends. *Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you* (1 Peter 3:15). Share your hope. Let others know that Jesus has risen. He is the first fruit of the final resurrection harvest which has already begun. Tell them that there is a new world coming. Warn them to flee from the wrath to come. Urge them to repent and trust in Jesus - now! *We must work the works of Him who sent Me, as long as it is day; night is coming, when no man can work* (John 9:4). There is urgency to our appeal. The time is short and the Day is near. People all around us are dying and face the coming Day of Judgment and eternal death. Let us warn them. Let us plead with them. Let us beg them for Christ's sake, to *be reconciled to God* (2 Corinthians 5:20). Let us do the work of our Master for He will soon return. We do not know when, but we know that He will. *And this do, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we first believed* (Romans 13:11). The last recorded words of Jesus in the Scripture are found in Revelation 22: 20. *Yes, I am coming quickly*. I believe Jesus. Do you? I believe that He is coming quickly. Do you? I see the signs of His coming. Do you? *Yes, I am coming quickly*. I believe Him. Amen. *Come Lord Jesus* (Revelation 22: 20).