

# *The Tsunami – Whom should We Blame?*

a little piece of theodicy by

*Ken Chant*

## text

*"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why do you stay so far away? How long, O Lord, will you listen to my desperate cry, and not rush to help me?" (Psalm 22:1)*

Great tragedies in human life always stir up the bitter question: *"If God is truly all-powerful and all-loving, how can he allow such things to happen? Why does he not intervene to stop them?"*

Let me say at the outset that no answer can fully satisfy our demands, or remove the pain of a terrible and awful disaster. But some defence is possible, which maintains the wisdom and goodness of God.

## *(A) God knows all about it*

No earthquake, flood, or famine ever takes God by surprise. So, why doesn't he prevent them, or at least give adequate warning? Even our own law requires this of a good citizen.

We don't know, for many things are hidden from our eyes. But remember that Jesus predicted such things, and was able to accept them without condemning the Father: *"You will hear of wars and rumours of wars. Don't be alarmed! These things must happen, but they don't mean that the end has come. Nation will fight against nation and*

*kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places* (Matthew 24:6-7, GW)

There has never been a greater moral philosopher or ethicist than Jesus of Nazareth. If we could live with the problem of horrendous and undeserved catastrophes, then we too must accept their inevitability.

The fact is, we live on a violent and savage planet, with a raging inferno at its core, and a turbulent surface. Its vast energies are released without respect of person or place. It is a fact of life that we must simply endure.

The same is true of the universe as a whole. The seemingly serene sky above us is in fact a vast holocaust of surging nuclear activity. Old stars are dying, new stars are endlessly being created. Some dying stars come to their end in an awesome explosion of unimaginable power that astronomers call a *supernova*. The destruction is terrible, yet such events also spread across the universe the heavy metals and essential elements upon which life itself depends. That is, if the skies above us and the earth beneath us were less violent than they are we would simply not exist. We have to accept the good with the bad.

## ***(B) Man is Born to Trouble***

*"As surely as sparks fly upward, so all who live in this world will know trouble!"* (Job 5:7)

Ever since the Fall, suffering has been an inescapable part of the human condition. Thus the earth produces thorns and is subject to decay and death. Likewise, beginning with the Flood, the earth has known many disasters worse than any current event. To give just one example, in China, in 1556, an earthquake caused by the same kind of tectonic plate movement that created the recent tsunami killed no less than 820,000 people. That tragedy, and others like it, did not impugn the integrity of the Almighty any more than a contemporary crisis can.

Note here two other important ideas –

1. *Much loss of life is caused by our own folly.* If we insist upon building our cities around volcanoes that must one day explode (Auckland), or upon earthquake fault lines (Los Angeles, San Francisco), or near sea coasts subject to violent storms and other upheavals (Pacific Islands, and even Sydney, whose coastline in the distant past has been ravaged by tsunamis even more terrible than the recent one), it is hardly God's fault when we reap the consequences of our lack of prudence. Or, if people insist on locating their homes in bushland (Ferntree Gully in Melbourne, or the Blue Mountains in Sydney), is it fair to blame God when the inevitable bushfire sooner or later wreaks terrible destruction?
2. *We have never been promised immunity from trouble.* We are part of human society, and must accept ill fortune along with good. Note Jeremiah 45:1-5: *"This is what the Lord says to Baruch, 'I am tearing down what I have built, and I am uprooting what I have planted throughout the earth. Why then do you look for some great thing for yourself? No! You can't expect any special favours, for I intend to bring disaster everywhere, says the Lord!"*

The idea is that if we are happy to enjoy the benefits of a prosperous society (which after all is built by mostly godless people), then we must also expect to share the pain of that society's collapse. We cannot expect immunity from trouble, nor some kind of special treatment by God. Thus Jesus himself gave several warnings about locating your treasure on earth instead of in heaven (e.g. *Matthew 16:19-20*).

### ***(C) The Mystery of Joy***

There are three special things we can say about the mystery of human suffering

1. *Like Job*, we will lose our questions when we finally see the glory of God (Job 40:1-42:1-6).
2. *The mystery of joy* is even greater than the mystery of pain.

Thus Sir Thomas Browne (1605-1682), in his *Religio Medici*, showed 400 years ago

*"While many are obsessed with the problem of evil, and of pain, we should rather explore the equally complex problem of the existence of goodness, and of joy."*

The fact is, both pain and pleasure are equally inexplicable and equally undeserved.

3. *God himself has shared this valley of tears* through the sufferings and terrible death of Christ, so he is not indifferent to human need, but has himself known the worst anguish of pain and death.

### ***(D) NIMBY***

Everybody wants God to do something, but only if his interference is confined to some small place! It is the typical n.i.m.b.y. syndrome! How loudly they would shriek and complain if the Lord decided to take control over *their* lives! Imagine the Lord asserting mastery over our homes, businesses, government!

Do you really think that the politicians in our houses of parliament would welcome direct control by God over their deliberations and enactments?

Do you doubt that people would furiously oppose him? Then look at how they treated Jesus when he tried to introduce the government of God! The *Jews* hated him, the *Romans* crucified him, and the *Greeks* laughed at him! Do you really suppose that divine intervention would be any more welcome now than then?

How about if the Lord decided to curtail their pleasures because of their sin? No! They want God to stave off disaster, pain, or loss, but they resist any accounting of their misdeeds!

### ***(E) We trash our own planet***

When we ourselves are busily wrecking the environment and killing each other with zeal, it behoves us to blame God for nature's fury! By self-inflicted wars, pestilence, famine, global warming, and the like, we slaughter millions of people. Why then should the Lord suppress a natural cause and effect whenever it threatens our contentment? We are, after all, hap

receive the *benefits* of natural law, so we cannot honestly complain when that same law happens to work to our disadvantage.

Yet having said that, we must also observe that a measure of war, pain, struggle, disaster seems to be an inescapable part of God's plan at this time. There are several reasons for this, among them the following

- The restless energy of fallen humanity, especially while we are confined to this planet, needs some kind of release.
- Crisis forces people to search for and find creative solutions (consider the wonderful inventions that were wrought last century out of the two World Wars).
- Suffering stirs up compassion and benevolence.
- Tragedy compels people toward a dependence upon God.
- One disaster may well prevent an even worse horror – for example, by stopping a war, forcing preventive action against disease, the ravages of natural forces, and the like.

The idea is this: *unbroken peace and prosperity, health and happiness, would lead the human race enervated, dull, empty of dynamic vitality. By contrast, the present condition drives us ever onward to higher achievement.*

There is an undoubted mystery here, but, as Paul says, we are at best like people "looking through a piece of smoky glass". Yet we can be sure of two wonderful things

1. God knows what he is doing!
2. The most awful *disaster* of all, and the most glorious *triumph* ever, still lie ahead  
see 2 Peter 3:8-18 . . .

### *The Warning*

"My dear friends, here is something that you should never forget in the sight of God. One day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day! So the Lord is not in fulfilling his promise, as some have said. Rather, he is patient with you, because he does not want anyone to be destroyed. Instead, he is giving time for everyone to abandon their sins. . . .

### *The Disaster*

". . . Nonetheless, the Day of the Lord, like a thief, will come without warning. On that day the very galaxies will vanish with an awful clamour, and the earth and everything on it will be destroyed. Yes, the heavens will be aflame, they will burn with fire, and the stars above will melt away in the heat. . . .

### *The Lesson*

". . . Since we know that all these things are destined for destruction, what kind of people should we be? Surely, as we wait for the Day of God, and do all that we can to hasten

coming, we should strive to be holy and we should dedicate ourselves to the service of . . . In the meantime, we are waiting for what God has promised: new heavens and a earth, where only righteousness can flourish. . . .

### *The Triumph*

". . . Therefore, my friends, as you wait for that Day, do your best to be pure and faultless in God's sight and to be at peace with him. . . . Be on your guard, so that lawless people not be able to entice you to folly, and cause you to lose your security in Christ. Rather, continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory, now and forever! Amen."

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