

THE SAN FRANCISCO EARTHQUAKE: DID GOD DO IT?  
Amos 3:6

Intro: At four minutes after five o'clock last Tuesday afternoon, an earthquake which registered 7.0 on the Richter Scale hit the San Francisco area. The cost to repair the damage is still being calculated, but it is sure to run into the billions. Bridges so vital to transportation in the Bay area were damaged, homes destroyed, the Nimitz Freeway collapsed, and many people died--the exact number is not known even yet. There is no question but that it will take years to rebuild and replace what has been destroyed.

The major television networks have had their news teams down there all week long, and it is apparent that the whole country has been shaken by what has happened. It is something that we will never forget. There has been much talk in our area about the possibility of an earthquake here, and I know that this has been true in other areas of our country. You have probably heard, as I have, a lot of discussion about the cause of earthquakes, and this is where I would like to begin this morning.

I. THE CAUSE OF EARTHQUAKES.

I have heard two explanations--one of them has been especially prominent.

The first is:

A. The scientific explanation.

Seismologists, geologists, and others involved in the study of the earth have been on television telling us what an earthquake is in terms of movements within the earth. They claim to be able to predict when and where there will be an earthquake--not to the day and the hour, but within the next 30 years or more. Undoubtedly man has been able to learn a great deal about the earth, but no one whom I have heard has claimed that they know exactly when an earthquake will come, nor does anyone claim that we can avoid them. They do talk about constructing buildings and freeways and bridges that will be able to stand a greater shock than we had this time. But no man in his right mind will claim that we can build so that we are safe from destruction and death in the event of another earthquake.

So it is probably looked upon by most people as a freak of nature which we have to live with. But probably you have noticed, as I have, that there has

been an almost total absence of any reference to God as far as this earthquake is concerned! It is looked upon as a natural event, tragic to be sure, but one we have to expect as a part of the world in which we live. We have heard survivors of the earthquake called "lucky"--not once, but over and over again. Those who have escaped, such as the man who was rescued yesterday, are termed heroes. But while he did thank God that he was alive, the media called him a hero, and one commentator said that he was "incredibly lucky."

Then there is another idea that I have heard mentioned--this coming from a Christian leader who is well-known in our day.

B. An earthquake is an aberration.

This is much the same as the scientific explanation, but it does recognize God.

An aberration is a departure from what is normal or typical of the operation of the universe.

The idea I heard expressed was this: God did not create a world that would have earthquakes. Earthquakes are a part of the curse brought upon us as a result of sin. So far I agree. But then this particular person did not attach any particular significance to an earthquake, it was just something that we have to expect living in a world like this.

That opinion comes very close to the philosophic system known as Deism--the belief that God created the world, but that He does not exert His influence on the world, either for good, or for calamity.

I doubt if the person who called the Bay Area earthquake an aberration would go that far, but he did not see any particular divine purpose or action of God in what has taken place. He probably would say that he believes in the sovereignty of God, but that in a lot of things God just "lets nature take its course." This would not only mean that there is no real significance to what has taken place, but it leaves us without any hope, and may mean that God Himself is unable to protect us.

There is a widespread belief among Christians that God has surrendered His sovereignty in some areas, and this apparently is one of those areas.

But there is a third explanation that we are given in the Scriptures.

C. The Scriptural explanation.

Please turn in your Bibles to Amos 3:6. There you will read these words:

Shall a trumpet be blown in the city,  
and the people not be afraid?  
**shall there be evil in a city,  
and the Lord hath not done it?**

The word "evil" here does not mean sin or moral evil, but it means a calamity. The Hebrew word actually indicates breaking something in pieces so that whatever it is that is broken becomes worthless. That is a fitting description of an earthquake.

Amos was a prophet of God, and he saw the hand of God in everything that takes place. His God did not sin, but his God was a God Who would bring judgment whenever He chose to do so.

Isaiah was quoting the Lord when he wrote the words which we find in Isa. 45:7. Listen to these words:

I form the light, and create darkness:  
I make peace, and create evil:  
**I the Lord do all these things.**

Yesterday one of our elders called my attention to Jer. 19:15. This is what it says:

Thus saith the Lord of hosts,  
the God of Israel:  
Behold, I will bring upon this city  
and upon all her towns  
all the evil that I have pronounced against it,  
because they have hardened their necks,  
that they might not hear my words.

Repeatedly we learn throughout the OT that the Lord brought judgment through famine, disease, war, floods, earthquakes--all of which resulted in death, often for thousands, people of all ages--the very old and the very young.

What about the plagues of Egypt? One solemn lesson that we learn from those days is that, if the people do not learn from the present judgment, the Lord will bring more judgments until they do see the hand of

the Lord in the things that are taking place.

What about God's judgments upon the Canaanite nations when the children of Israel invaded their lands under the leadership of Joshua?

What about the coming judgments mentioned in the Book of the Revelation? AND WHAT ABOUT THE ETERNAL JUDGMENT COUNTLESS NUMBERS WILL EXPERIENCE IN HELL?

People may scoff at this. They may say that it is wrong to say that a good God would ever bring such a calamity on anybody, but the Word of God is full of evidence to the contrary.

My subject this morning is a question: THE SAN FRANCISCO EARTHQUAKE: DID GOD DO IT? And my answer to that question is an unequivocal, YES! There is no doubt about it. It is absolutely clear in the light of the Word of God.

I realize that these are strong words, but our generation needs some strong words. We need to wake up. We think that God is not paying any attention to what we are doing in these United States, that His eyes are closed to all of our wickedness. My Bible tells me, and your Bible says the same, that

The eyes of the Lord are in every place,  
beholding the evil and the good (Prov. 15:3).

WHAT HAPPENED THIS PAST WEEK IN THE BAY AREA, AND WHAT HAPPENED IN CHARLESTON A FEW WEEKS AGO, ARE JUDGMENTS FROM GOD, MESSAGES FROM GOD, TO ALL OF US. THEY ARE NOT BECAUSE THE PEOPLE OF CHARLESTON, OR SAN FRANCISCO, OR OAKLAND, OR SANTA CRUZ, OR ANY OF THE OTHERS CITIES THAT WERE HIT BY THIS EARTHQUAKE ARE WORSE THAN THE REST OF US. WE LIVE IN A WICKED CITY, TOO.

I remind you again this morning of those words of our Lord Jesus Christ in Luke 13:3 and 4 when he was referring to two tragedies that took place in that day. When some of them thought that those who had felt the brunt of those tragedies, our Lord said,

Nay: but except ye repent,  
ye shall all likewise perish.

It is true that the city of San Francisco has been a spawning ground for many of the worst sins of our country, a city which on November 7 will vote on a

referendum to extend "family" status to homosexuals and unmarried couples, but the sins of our country are everywhere. And so that which is a judgment upon the Bay Area should be a warning to all of us, and we had better be listening.

Let me ask another question, and I have already suggested the answer. It is this:

II. DO WE DESERVE IT? <sup>Seek the cause? Why is God angry with us? The Word of God has the answers.</sup>

Just stop for a moment to think of the sins that are going on in our country, and some getting governmental support: the homosexuality, the abortions, the murders, the drugs, the dishonesty in government and in business, sexual promiscuity, unfaithfulness in marriages, divorces, wife abuse, child abuse. God has given us over to do things that are contrary to His will. He judges sin with more sin, but He upsets the natural order of things from time to time to wake us up, and to get our attention. One of the greatest judgments against us that is now affecting many children is the disease of AIDS.

When you stop to think of what God could have done last Tuesday, you and I can praise Him that He was so merciful. Every person in Candlestick Park could have been killed. All of the freeways and bridges could have collapsed. High rise buildings could have come crashing down. Millions could have died. The death of even one person is a tragedy, but we can all thank God for His mercy.

Yes, we deserve God's judgment. It is amazing to me that we have not seen something far worse than this before now.

III. WHAT SHOULD BE OUR RESPONSE?

First, let me speak to those of us who know the Lord.

A. We need to thank the Lord for what He has done for us.

Having seen that there has been practically no praise given to God for His mercy has made me want to spend more time than I ever have in just praising the Lord. O how good God is, and how badly we have treated Him.

B. We need to repent of our sins, and forsake them.

We all need to be more holy than we are. We all need to obey the Lord more than we do. And this means

staying away from those things that displease the Lord, but also doing that which does please and glorify Him.

B. We need to be more faithful in prayer.

God the One Who has changed our hearts. He is the One Who has opened our eyes, and drawn us to Christ. And He is the only One Who can change the hearts of sinners today. We may be able to do more than pray after we have prayed, but until we pray, nothing else is more important! Live lives of obedience to the Word of God, and be praying as you walk with the Lord.

C. We need to show greater boldness in our witness of Christ.

We witness in a twofold way:

- 1) By godly lives.
- 2) By word of mouth.

Who are you praying for who is not a Christian? And what are you doing to make sure that they know about the Gospel of the grace of God?

Talk about tragedies, the greatest tragedy of our day is that the spiritual life of the Lord's people and, consequently, the spiritual life of our churches, is so low that the world is not really paying any attention to the message we have to give. When we get more concerned about personal holiness, we will begin to see greater blessing as we seek to win others to Christ.

But let me close with just a word to any who do not know the Lord.

IV. TO THOSE WHO ARE NOT BELIEVERS IN CHRIST.

Do you know what the purpose of God's judgments is? It is not that He delights in seeing people suffer. But sometimes God has to use severe measures to wake us up. Most people are living for the here-and-now. They just want to have a good time, live the good life, but they are not thinking about death and eternity.

I have been on that Bay Bridge many times, and you probably have, too. I have been on that Nimitz freeway many times going from Portland to southern California over the past 35 years to see relatives down there. Any one of us could have been where people were killed last Tuesday. Any of us could meet death today right here in

Portland. God wants us to know that He is God. He wants us to know that we are not ready to meet Him. He wants us to know that He hates our sin, and that He judges sin, and that those who do not humble themselves before Him, turning to Christ, and turning from their sins, will spend eternity in hell.

Christ died for our sins. Only those who are trusting in Christ when death comes, or when the Lord Himself comes, will be saved from the eternal judgment of God.

Concl: An earthquake is a terrible thing. So is a hurricane. So is a famine. So is war. So is a plague--whatever it may be! God never relinquishes His sovereignty to anyone. Just because He does not judge immediately, does not mean that He will not eventually judge. So it behooves us to heed the warning, to get our own lives straightened out by turning to Him, doing His will, and thus making sure that we are ready for eternity. There are no second chances after death. That is why the Lord uses earthquakes (and other tragedies) to awaken people NOW.