

Disasters

THESE is a very common way of thinking with regards to disasters, accidents, and losses. We tend to think that if someone does “good,” they will be rewarded, and contrariwise, if they do “wrong” they will be punished. This is supported in part by our experience, where we find that if we live in accord with the laws of nature, and the laws of the land, we can generally be assured of the rewards of health and peace.

This way of thinking is also supported by almost all religious teaching, and even the teaching of fables and traditions. Think of Christmas as an example: Santa Claus comes to reward the “good” boys and girls with gifts. “He knows when you’ve been bad or good, so be good for goodness sake,” as the song goes.

However, there are some fundamental problems with this way of thinking. History teaches us that sometimes, or perhaps often, the “good” are cut down, or trodden under foot by those who will use military might, or monetary might, to obtain what they want. Disasters and diseases often spread without regard to whom they afflict. Sometimes accidents occur to even seemingly innocent babies, who have hardly lived long enough to establish “good” or “bad” habits.

Furthermore, there is another problem with this way, and that is that it leads us to look upon those who suffer some evil circumstances with suspicion.

“What have they done wrong that this evil has come upon them?”

we ask ourselves. The more materialistic people think that the sufferers just need to work harder, or be wiser; or perhaps just “aren’t lucky”. The more superstitious, or religious minded think,

“God must be punishing them, He is angry with them.”

This leads to a lack of sympathy for the suffering, for...

“...if God is afflicting them, who are we to interfere? Are we better than God?”

This is exactly the attitude that the Pharisees of Christ’s day would take towards those suffering disease or misfortune. So, even Christ himself was often looked upon as “smitten of God, and afflicted” because he did not match up to their ideas as someone who was favored and honored by God.

There is an interesting passage in the Bible that addresses this problem:

Luke 13

¹ There were present at that season some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

² And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose you that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things?

³ I tell you, No: but, except you repent, you shall all likewise perish.

⁴ Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, and slew them, think you that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?

⁵ I tell you, No: but, except you repent, you shall all likewise perish.

Now consider what is being said. If God himself was the one who administered the punishment for evil, then, since He is a God of unbending justice, He would punish the most wicked first, and they would receive the worst punishment. Therefore, we could assume that anyone who suffered a disaster, such as the people mentioned above, must be the greatest sinners. This Christ flatly denied.

Instead, He proposed the idea that the ones who suffered these disasters just happened to be in a more vulnerable position at the time. It was not a personal God who administered the punishment, but rather the fallen state of the world that has, in part,

separated it from His protection and control. The powers in nature and in men, out of control, are the destroyers in this case.

We see this principle illustrated almost daily. When a tornado or typhoon hits part of the world, does it strike the most sinful part of the world? No, it usually strikes in a tropical area, or some other area susceptible to these phenomenon. If it was a judgment from God (that is, if God was an administer of destruction), then these disasters would strike perhaps Los Angeles, or some other city renowned for its wickedness.

But then, if disasters may strike us whether we serve God or not, what is the benefit of serving him? Simply this: education. It makes all the difference as to what we learn from our trials.

When God led the children of Israel out of Egypt, he “suffered them to hunger.” Why? So they might learn that man does not live by bread alone. Many have suffered hunger since then, but not many have learned the lesson. And what is the lesson? That in times of trial we learn to look to God as our helper, sympathizer, and deliverer from the evil results that sin has caused in our world.

We need to know in our own experience the results of right and wrong ways. This does not mean we need to enter into the wrong ways, but we may certainly observe them around us, and their results upon us. By seeing these principles in contrast, we can be drawn to cling to the right, and shun the wrong. By my experience of what it’s like to be robbed, I learn to hate this thing more, and become more sealed against ever doing it to anyone else.

But we can see that the view we hold on God’s character and position in the controversy to a large extent determines whether we learn anything or not. If we believe God to be the administer of destruction, then the only thing we will learn from trials and disasters is to hate God more, and despise his rulership. This is precisely what happens all too often. The book of Revelation points forward to a time when disasters will devastate this world. What is the reaction of most people during that time?

Revelation 16

⁹ And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God...

¹¹ And [they] blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores...

They learn nothing from these trials because they hold erroneous views of His character. They look upon God as the one who controls and sends these plagues. Therefore, they curse him for his supposed cruelty to them.

But we may learn to see things another way. Take our very own bodies for example. The moment the body sustains an injury, a healing process at once begins. The body attempts to repair the damage. This working is to us an evidence of life. And this life was created by God. Therefore it is revealing to us something of the character of the Creator, since He is known by His works. And what is the character here revealed? That God is the Restorer, not the destroyer. He is only concerned with restoration. This is the lesson written by an unseen hand directly into our physical bodies.

This lesson, as it applies to the disasters that strike our physical bodies, should teach us what to do when we face other disasters that are around us. The body starts its restoring, healing process automatically. But in the case of our mind, and outward circumstances, the will plays a part, and God will never violate our free choice. So there is a necessity of calling upon Him in those trials, so that He can stand towards us as the Restorer of these things as well. He will not automatically do this, since He must have the consent of our will.

Psalm 50

¹⁵ Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.

Psalm 91

¹⁴ Because he has set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he has known my name.

¹⁵ He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honor him.

So, once the will consents, and looks to God, He can at once begin a restorative process. Whether this results in immediate restoration of outward possessions and properties (or health in the case of disease) will largely depend on what lessons we need to learn. The important thing is that we do learn, since this is our fitness for the future life.