

The Shaking of the World

By Bob Vincent

Bible Text: Hebrews 12:25-29

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If you have your Bibles I'd like to invite you to turn with me to Hebrews chapter 12 and we will begin reading at verse 14. If you are using the Bibles in the pews you will find this on page 1877.

“Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears.

“You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, because they could not bear what was commanded: ‘If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned.’ The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, ‘I am trembling with fear.’ But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, ‘Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.’ The words ‘once more’ indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our “God is a consuming fire.””

May we pray?

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. We thank you, Lord, that you have given authority to believers through faith in keeping with the Word of God according to your promises to speak that faith and even mountains are removed and cast into the sea.

Lord, as we come to you on this first Lord's Day of a new year, we pray, Lord, that we might walk in that humble faith that relies on the promises of God, that lives by the Word of God, that is obedient to you yet with that evangelical humility that trusts only in the finished work of Christ, his perfect life, his shed blood; and how all of the promises of God are sealed to us through the person and work of Jesus.

Lord, as we look at our world – frightened as it is shuddering in unbelief, cowering in disbelief – we pray, Lord, that we who know you may be able to give an answer for the reason of the hope that lies within us, but that we may be able to do that, Lord, with grace and humility, that we may be able to do it not pontificating, Lord, but entering into the suffering of others, full of compassion, pregnant with the sufferings of Christ himself.

Lord, we thank you that you suffer the pangs of this whole creation and that you were willing to come into this world to take unto yourself true human nature, you being God – without ceasing to be God in any sense – became a real and true human being, subject to all of the distresses and suffering, disappointment, pain and alienation of this life.

We thank you that at the right hand of God sits our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who truly understands us in our unbelief and in our suffering. Lord, grant to us, through the patience and the comfort of holy Scripture, applied under the anointing of your Holy Spirit truly, Lord, to sit at the feet of Jesus as little children who with quietness of heart still and quiet our souls.

Lord, there is no security, there is no peace, there are no answers except at the foot of the cross where we lose ourselves and find ourselves. May we do so again this day. Please, Lord, I am inept and unable to preach your Word apart from the Holy Spirit's anointing. So we pray in the ancient prayer of the Church, "Come, Holy Spirit," for Jesus' sake. Amen.

You may recall that last Lord's Day we looked at the 24th chapter of the gospel of Matthew. By the way, I intend – for a couple of weeks – to suspend my study on Basic Christian Doctrine on Sunday night and to look at Matthew 24 and 25, Mark 13 and Luke 21 – what's called the Olivet Discourse. I believe it's more conducive in a Sunday night context to study it rather than on Sunday morning because we can give more attention to certain details. So I'll begin to address that Olivet Discourse tonight at six.

But you may recall that part of last week's sermon we dealt with Jesus' words about the terrible things that happen in the world: wars and rumors of war, famines and plagues and earthquakes in various places. And then the week before – the Sunday before Christmas

– we looked at that passage in Haggai two. And I'd like you to look there with me for a moment – Haggai chapter two – and that prophecy that God gives of what would happen.

You remember that Haggai two's prophecy comes at a point of great discouragement to the people of God. They have returned from the Babylonian captivity. They have laid the foundation for the new temple. The year is 520 BC. The young people are all excited and shout for joy. The old people are deeply grieved because they realize that the new temple is going to be nothing like the temple that they had seen, the temple of Solomon. And God has this word for them there on page 1469 – Haggai chapter two and verse three.

“Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing? But now be strong, O Zerubbabel,’ declares the LORD. ‘Be strong, O Joshua son of Jehozadak.” By the way, that word is Jesus. And Jesus, by the way, is a common name for people among the Jews. Jesus and Joshua are absolutely indistinguishable in Hebrew and in Greek. “‘Be strong, O Jesus son of Jehozadak,” a specific historical figure alive back then, the high priest, “‘Be strong, all you people of the land,’ declares the LORD, ‘and work. For I am with you,’ declares the LORD Almighty. ‘This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.’ This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the LORD Almighty. ‘The silver is mine and the gold is mine,’ declares the LORD Almighty. ‘The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,’ says the LORD Almighty. ‘And in this place I will grant peace,’ declares the LORD Almighty.”

Turn with me, if you will, to Luke chapter 21. We see there in Haggai two that God was prophesying that the glory of the house that was being rebuilt after the Babylonian captivity was going to be of far greater glory than that of Solomon's temple. And yet as we look at it historically we wonder how that could be because the ark of the covenant was forever lost. It was never inside the restored temple, never there. When the temple was invaded in the second century before Christ by the Greeks, they discovered behind the veil no ark of the covenant. And the shekinah glory of God never came down on that second temple as we saw two weeks ago.

Why was that temple more glorious; that temple that was destroyed almost 2000 years ago in the year 70 AD? How could Haggai's prophecy be true that the glory of that second temple would be greater than the glory of the first temple? And the answer is that God himself in human form actually walked on the pavement of that temple; that God himself in human form actually came down; that God himself was anointed with the Holy Spirit on the Mount of Transfiguration – that was the shekinah glory of God coming on the Lord Jesus as the fulfillment of that second temple. And that's why the glory of that second temple was greater than the first temple.

But I want you to notice that God foretold that in the restoration of that temple and in the coming of the messenger of the covenant there would be a shaking. And that shaking, if we look at Luke chapter 21, we begin to understand something about it – page 1636. This takes us back a bit to last week.

And you may have questions which I'll try to answer tonight and the following Sunday nights – page 1636 – Luke 21:20.

This is about a specific historical event that occurred almost 2000 years ago. In the year 66 AD – as we saw last week – civil war broke out between the Jews and the Roman Empire. The head of the Roman armies, a man by the name of Cestius Gallus was able quickly to defeat the Jewish armies. And he was able quickly to move on the city of Jerusalem. And he had the city of Jerusalem surrounded with pagan armies. And those pagan armies carried an eagle. And the eagle was a symbol of pagan authority. In fact, the word eagle and the word buzzard are indistinguishable in Latin and Greek.

And so Jerusalem is surrounded by a pagan symbol, the symbol of the Roman Empire, the eagle, the buzzard. And that's why when Jesus says that, "Where the corpse is there the eagles will be gathered," because, again, the word is indistinguishable in Greek and in Latin. "Where the corpse is, there the buzzards will be gathered," as we would say.

So here it is surrounded by pagan armies with pagan symbols of worship. Remember, these pagan Roman soldiers worshipped their symbols of authority. They worshipped the eagle on top of their staff. They worshipped their platoon signs. These were divine things in their minds.

And so Jesus said in Matthew and in Mark, "When you see the abomination of desolation where it ought not to be," Luke, writing for a Gentile audience interprets that. And he says in verse 20: "When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near." And so the Christians who remembered this word from Jesus, how he had foretold that that generation would not pass away until all of his words about the destruction of the temple would be fulfilled, they remembered Jesus' words, they saw Jerusalem surrounded by the pagan armies – that abomination that makes desolate – and what did they do? They were told by Jesus to do what? If they were on a roof top not to go down and get anything but to jump from house to house; if they were out in a field not to return to the city but to get out.

And you know they did exactly that. And how was it possible, Jerusalem being surrounded by a pagan army? Because that pagan army mysteriously, under the orders of Cestius Gallus, sounded a retreat – even though the city was ready to give up. They sounded a retreat. They went away and came back over a year later. During that time, during that hiatus, that gap in the surrounding of the city, the Christian Jews left the city and they crossed the Jordan River and they went over to a place that we know as Petra today. And that's where they lived while the city was destroyed and the people, as a state, as a nation state, were destroyed.

So we see that, knowing its historical fulfillment. He says, verse 21, “Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written.”

You want to understand it, you read Deuteronomy chapter 28. You read Leviticus chapter 26. It foretells it in graphic detail right down to people cooking and eating their own children. It was an awful time, an awful time. And he goes on and he says in verse 23. “How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people.” Verse 24: “They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”

And what do we know? We know that that became historically, literally true and accurate. Jerusalem was trodden by the Gentiles beginning in 70 AD, when they took the city, when they destroyed the temple. It was trodden under the feet of the Gentiles and the Jewish people were sent into captivity. And from time to time the Jews tried to reestablish a Jewish state. Sometimes they were successful.

For example, in the second century of the Christian era, a group of Jews under the leadership of a man by the name of Simon the son of Kokhba – Simon bar Kokhba – had a revolt against the Romans and for a brief period of time reestablished a Jewish state in Jerusalem. They actually minted coins in the second century of the Christian era.

But the Romans eventually put down their revolt. We find in our own day, 1948, a modern Israeli state is established. And in the '67 War, the Jews began to have some measure of control of the city of Jerusalem, but the Jews do not yet control the city of Jerusalem, nor do the Jews control the temple mount yet. The temple mount is under the control of Muslims, as I found out in a very poignant way when I went on a pilgrimage there in the year 2000, and we were warned before we entered the temple mount that it was under the control of the Muslims and that we were not allowed, by Islamic law that controlled and controls right now that piece of real estate – we were not allowed to gather in any way and exhibit any form of worship whatsoever. If we wanted to pray, we prayed by ourselves. We were not allowed to gather together and have a singing or to have a praying or to have any kind of preaching. That was absolutely proscribed under Islamic law. The city in terms of its core of its existence, the temple mount, is still under the control of the Muslims.

But Jesus says, he implies, that that is going to come to an end at a point. He says in verse 24 again, “They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” When the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled Jesus’ words imply a restoration of a Jewish existence there in control of Jerusalem and its core piece of real estate.

But then he goes on and he says, “There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars.” Interestingly enough, if we read the eyewitness accounts from the first century, that

happened. There were all kinds of portents in the skies, and they were misinterpreted by the zealots holed up inside of the city after the Christian Jews left the city and the unbelieving Jews were left in it. They interpreted these signs as indicating divine favor, but they misunderstood the signs because God did not deliver the Jewish people at that point and God allowed them to be plundered and destroyed and their city taken, their temple destroyed. That all happened even though there were these portents in the skies.

“On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”

Then, at some point in the future, Jesus foretold this would happen, verse 27: “At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.” And that, we know, is yet future. That hasn’t occurred yet. Jesus is going to come back to this earth. It hasn’t occurred yet. That’s still future for us.

Now, as we think about these things, I want you to understand that the New Testament envisions the coming of Christ accompanied by a great shaking. Listen to how he describes it here in Luke chapter 21. “Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.” That’s exactly what Haggai foretold. Haggai foretold that in the midst of a shaking of the powers of the world, the Lord himself would come to his temple. And so we have to understand that when does this shaking occur? This shaking began with the first coming of Christ, if we read Scripture in light of Scripture and not by our own imagination. The shaking began.

Turn with me, if you will, back to where we were last Sunday – Matthew chapter 24. And, again, you may have questions arise. I’ll try to answer those in the next couple of Sunday nights. Matthew chapter 24. Jesus describes these events that have occurred throughout human history. Matthew 24 – page 1538. Listen to what he says; verse four, Matthew 24, verse four. “Jesus answered: ‘Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, “I am the Christ,” and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.’”

I’m going to enter into just a tad of speculation, but that tad of speculation is rooted in something that I believe is here implicitly rather than explicitly, and what it is when Jesus refers to these things as birth pangs. As I said last Sunday, birth pangs begin not very intensely, and they are not frequent. We know that the birth is about to take place when those contractions come extremely regularly, extremely close together and with great intensity. And anyone who has been around someone who was getting ready to give birth to a baby knows that’s true. I can remember being with my wife as I was present at the birth of four of our five children; and I missed the one because while I was getting her registered in the hospital, the baby was born upstairs. That was a rather frightening moment. But that’s what happens: greater intensity and closer and closer together.

I believe that implicit in our Lord's words is the idea that while these things have occurred from time immemorial: wars and rumors of war, earthquakes and so on, as we draw nearer to the end of the age, as we draw nearer to the time of the Second Coming of Christ that there's an analogy with childbirth. There's great intensity, and they come with greater regularity. I pointed out last Sunday morning that in the week before there was an earthquake off the coast of Antarctica that was eight on the Richter Scale, but because it was not in a populated area, it was with very little damage.

But then, just two days later, on Sunday morning, last Sunday morning, came an earthquake only slightly larger. But because of its proximity to a highly populated part of the world, that earthquake caused a tsunami that had absolutely devastating results. Perhaps it's going to go down as the greatest calamity of the past hundred years. We don't know. You know, the estimates are growing daily. Hundreds of thousands of people probably will die – or already have died – as a result of that earthquake that occurred there near Indonesia.

What does the Bible say about those kinds of things? It says that those kinds of things have happened throughout history. But there is implicit in Jesus' words that there is an intensification near the time of the end. They come with greater force. They come with greater regularity. They come with greater devastation.

In other words, what Jesus is talking about in Matthew 24 is that what we have to look forward to in this world, as we look forward to the Second Coming of Christ, is more and more of these kinds of things. They've occurred throughout history – especially at significant moments in the plan of God. For example, when God gave the law on Mount Sinai, in the passage we read in Hebrews 12, it reminds us of that event. There was a terrible earthquake, and Mount Sinai shook, and there was lightning, and there was fire on the mountain and fiery smoke. And Moses went up on that mountain to receive the law from God's hands in the midst of that very fearful sight. Yet Moses was terrified even in his obedience to God because of the shaking of the mountain and the fire and the smoke and the whirlwinds that surrounded all of these bizarre phenomena that occurred when God gave the law on Mount Sinai.

You know, again, there was another mountain and there was another earthquake. And that other mountain was Mount Zion. And that other event was when the Son of God on a cross, on a hill, there by the great mountain of God, by the city of God; when the Son of God was lifted up on the cross, when the old covenant passed away and the new covenant was inaugurated, and the Son of God was tortured to death, nailed to a cross, and his human life slowly ebbed away as he died as the victim of your sins and my sins. When that happened, there was an earthquake. And that earthquake was so severe that the very powers of the Heavens were shaken in that earthquake event that occurred in the year 30 AD. In that great earthquake something happened as a result of it. What happened is that that barrier between the holy God and sinful man was ripped from the top to the bottom.

God had always had that barrier between himself and sinners. That barrier said, “Thus far and no further, lest you die;” that barrier that said, “You cannot come into the presence of God;” that barrier that said, “No woman may apply;” that barrier that said, “Unless your race is right you cannot come;” that barrier that said, “Unless you were a descendant not only of Levi, but of Aaron, you couldn’t come;” that barrier that said, “You cannot come 364 days out of the year, you can only come on one day, the Day of Atonement.”

God destroyed that barrier by means of an earthquake. And by means of that earthquake dead people were vomited out of the ground. But something bizarre happened at that. Because the powers of Heaven were shaken, those dead people actually came back to life. Did you know there was a resurrection, a bodily resurrection, that occurred at the time of the death and resurrection of Christ? Did you know that in the earthquake that hit the city of Jerusalem so forcefully that the temple itself was damaged and the barrier between a holy God and sinful man was broken; that in that earthquake, supernatural phenomena occurred, that as the graves belched forth the dead, they came not as corpses, but they came back to life and walked around the city and were seen alive? Did you know that? That’s what the Bible tells us.

This earthquake that occurred in 30 AD was no mere natural phenomenon, any more than the earthquake that occurred on Mount Sinai back in the year 1445 BC was a mere natural phenomenon. Both of these phenomena were supernatural phenomena, accompanied by supernatural phenomena caused by the very hand of God.

But what Haggai tells us is that this shaking is not exhausted in Mount Sinai. Indeed, he wasn’t even thinking of that. And it’s not exhausted in the earthquake that gives birth to the new world order – the new world order being the new covenant under which you and I live in Jesus Christ that occurred in 30 AD. That shaking continues on. That Haggai prophesied shaking, that Haggai prophesied earthquake, that Haggai prophesied shaking not only of earth but of Heaven itself, continues on throughout our history. And that’s what Jesus is saying.

Verse six, he says in the second sentence there: “Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.” And then in the second sentence of verse seven: “There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.”

Let’s turn back to Hebrews chapter 12. Hebrews chapter 12 has a word for you and me today as we think of these earthquakes of the past – page 1878 – and verse 26. As we think of these shakings of the past, these earthquakes of the past, we are warned about our future. He says in verse 26: “At that time his voice shook the earth.” What’s he thinking about? He’s thinking of the earthquake at Mount Sinai when God gave the law. And he said that people that disregarded God’s Word that came at Mount Sinai suffered severe punishment and death. And he says to us, “If they suffered severe punishment and death under the old covenant in the earthquake that brought in that covenant, how much greater do you think is the risk we take, if we ignore that covenant that was inaugurated with yet a greater earthquake, the new covenant, and that great earthquake that occurred at

Jerusalem in 30 AD?” He says there in verse 26: “At that time,” referring to Mount Sinai at the giving of the law, “his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, ‘Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.’ The words ‘once more’ indicate the removing of what can be shaken— that is, created things— so that what cannot be shaken may remain.” What’s he saying? He’s saying that the earthquake of Mount Sinai was the omen, was the portent, of a new world order that occurred in 1445 BC. God brought in a new world order almost 2000 years before Christ – a millennium and a half before Christ – when he inaugurated the old covenant with the Israelites on Mount Sinai. And the portent of that birth pang of that new world order was this great earthquake that shook Mount Sinai. But God foretold the coming of a greater earthquake. And it was functioning as the portent of a greater new world order, the new covenant, that Jesus has inaugurated by his shed blood as he died on the cross for our sins. That, too, is accompanied by the omen, the by the portent, by the signpost of the coming of a new world order. And that new world order is the New Testament under which we live.

And yet Scripture indicates there’s coming a greater shaking yet. There’s coming a fulfillment of that which Jesus began at 30 AD, that will be consummated when he comes again, and that’s what Scripture’s talking about here. He says in verse 26: “At that time,” that is, 3500 years ago at Mount Sinai, “his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, ‘Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.’”

I want to think about the earthquake that occurred a week ago today. Was God involved in that earthquake? Absolutely.

Turn with me, if you will – we’ll come back to Hebrews 12 in a moment – but turn with me, if you will, to Amos chapter three. A couple of passages of Scripture we’re going to look at. Amos chapter three. Listen to what he says there. Page 1422 – Amos chapter three, verse six: “When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble? When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it?”

Who caused that earthquake? Well, we can say that natural forces did. We can say that the tectonic plates underneath the surface of the earth have been under enormous pressure for an incredibly long time and as that pressure has built and built – particularly in the southern hemisphere – as these two massive tectonic plates come together, that a result is what? Sooner or later there is going to be a massive earthquake, a massive earthquake that’s going to bring great destruction. And we had a little foreshadowing of that. I say, a little foreshadowing of that last Sunday morning. Natural causes, natural causes are involved in that earthquake. Absolutely. A knowledge of geology underscores that. It was a natural phenomenon.

But it’s more than a natural phenomenon. The Bible indicates that nothing happens in this world that’s outside of the scope of a great war that’s being waged between Christ and Satan. And in that war Satan is powerful. Satan is effective. And Satan loves to bring human misery and human suffering. And in that cosmic war, we can say that Satan is behind it, even though there were physical causes that give an answer to the question.

It was a natural phenomenon; yet it was also a supernatural phenomenon because of the war between Christ and Satan.

Yet the Bible also indicates a third answer; a third answer that is absolutely true, just as the second answer is absolutely true and the first answer is absolutely true. And that is: that earthquake occurred as part of a divine plan laid out in eternity, a divine plan laid out in eternity that includes what we call evil and includes what we call good. But what God does is not evil. What God does is not evil, even though God's plan includes things that we see as evil. Amos 3:6: "When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it?"

Or turn with me, if you will, to Isaiah chapter 45 – page 1131 – verse five. To a pagan ruler whom God foreknew would arise on the scene of history well over a century after these words were given, a man by the name of Cyrus, a follower of the religion of Zoroaster, a man who believed that the world was governed by two supreme beings, not one, a man who believed that there was a good God named Ahura Mazda and an evil god by the name of Angra Mainyu, who held to a profound dualism of co-equal, co-eternal gods, one absolutely good and one absolutely evil. God gives him an answer long before he was every born.

This is what he says in verse 5; Isaiah 45:5 – page 1131: "I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me, so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting men may know there is none besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things."

"I create prosperity." שְׁלוֹם, Shalom it is in the Hebrew, meaning not only peace but financial prosperity, physical prosperity, the freedom from sickness and calamity. I bring prosperity – שְׁלוֹם Shalom – and create disaster. The Hebrew word is רָע Rah. I create disaster – רָע Rah – that is evil, trouble, calamity, heartache, misery. Do you see what the Bible says? As we look at these natural phenomena, we have to say something. What is it that we say? Where was God when maybe 100, maybe 200 maybe 300 maybe 400 maybe 500,000 maybe 600,000 people died within a few minutes time, without any real warning? Where was God when that happened? Where is God when these same people, now that of these people groups that are left are starving to death, that in spite of the heroic efforts of the world around them to rescue them, they're dying from disease and from famine and from lack of clean water. And perhaps the death toll will reach over a million or two million people? Where is God? The Bible gives an answer.

The world looks at phenomena like that and says in the words of Archibald MacLeish in his play that reflects the book of Job, *JB*. MacLeish asks the question, or rather MacLeish makes the statement: "If God is good, he is not God. If God is God, he is not good."

And that's the response of many people. They respond either by saying there can't be a God, or if there is a God, he must be evil and not the God of love that we've heard about.

And the answer of the Bible is: God is God. He is in absolute and total control of everything.

You know, the Lord Jesus was out on the Sea of Galilee, and Satan tried to kill Jesus with a storm. Jesus is asleep in the bow of the boat, and his disciples are terrified as the winds howl and as the waves come crashing over the bow of the boat. “Carest thou not that we perish?” They shake the Lord Jesus. And in that shaking he stirs himself. He simply stands up, and he utters a word: “Peace. Be still.”

And in a moment of time the howling wind is muzzled and ceases to blow and to sound. And the raging of the sea immediately goes into a great calm. One word from the master, “Peace. Be Still,” all is still.

Where was Jesus last Sunday morning? Jesus in the days of his earthly humiliation could have spoken that word and said, “In spite of that earthquake under the ocean floor: Peace. Be still.” And there would have been no tsunami. God is in absolute control of the world. Yet the Bible says that God chooses not always to exercise that divine restraint in terms of natural phenomena. And he allows such things to happen. He allows the evil one to bring such things on the sons of men. Indeed, the Bible indicates that it is part of a divine plan that is ultimate beyond my ability to fathom.

“I am Yahweh,” he says, “the God of the covenant, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” And he says, “There is no other.” He says, “Contrary to the teachings of Zoroaster with its two coequal, co-powerful, co-eternal gods Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu, I am the Lord. There is no other. I form the light and create darkness. I bring prosperity and create disaster. I, the Lord, do all these things.”

What do you do with a God like that? Turn with me, if you will to the book of Acts; Acts chapter 17. What do we do with a God like that? What do you do with a God who chose not to stop the demonic plan that occurred last Sunday morning? What do you do with a God like that? Acts chapter 17 – page 1724. We’ll begin at verse 24 in a moment. What do you do with a God like that; God who is absolutely capable of stopping the movement of tectonic plates, a God who is able – by some other means – to relieve the pressure of the plates of the earth as they push inextricably, unchangeably, again and again, massively but slowly and undiscernibly together to create these convulsions that give birth to mountains and tsunamis that wipe things away? What do we do with the God who could stop that and who chooses not to and, indeed, a God who has ordained that what happens is according to a divine plan? Let’s see something of the nature of that God because it gives us insight into this.

Verse 24, Acts 17 – page 1724: “The God who made the world...” Paul is speaking to the Greek philosophers on the Areopagus, Mars’ Hill in Athens. “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man,” or from one blood, “he made every nation of men.” We’re all brothers. We’re all united: Asians and

Africans and North Americans and South Americans – we're all one. "From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live."

"He determined the time set for them." Have you ever wondered how these set times change; these set times that have been ordained of God and ordained to change; how he changes the affairs of nations? Sometimes it's by means of a war. Sometimes it's by means of a plague. Sometimes it's by means of a famine. And sometimes it's by means of an earthquake that destroys a nation overnight.

Are you aware that were we to discover to our chagrin that the mantle of this earth under New York City, Washington, D.C., along with the San Andreas fault is highly unstable? What would happen in an earthquake that were, say, approaching a 10 on the Richter Scale, took place simultaneously on the eastern coast of the United States and the west coast of the United States? What would happen to our nation, to our civilization?

I think the *Mad Max* movies give us a picture of what would happen to America if you lost virtually the entire east coast and the entire west coast of America, if law and order were dissolved over night. What would happen? What would happen?

All I'm saying is this. We think we're secure. We feel secure with our investments, as our dollar plummets for the past two years against the Euro, against gold. We think we're secure with social security and other things and the 401k and retirement plans, government funded or not. We feel secure. Don't you know that the lesson of last Sunday is that God is in the business of shaking the world? And he's going to shake it again. That wasn't the last of the tremors that's going to occur. Indeed, those tremors will come with greater intensity and greater regularity as we move towards the end of the age, if we read what's implicit in Jesus' words in Matthew 24.

What would happen to our great nation, the most powerful nation on the face of the earth, were there to be at one time two gigantic earthquakes, one on the east coast and one on the west coast? Our civilization would collapse. It would collapse. It would implode on itself. Chaos would ensue.

What does this earthquake tell us? It tells us several things. First of all, it happened according to a divine plan. Secondly, that it happened according to a plan that God has foretold is going to happen. Thirdly, it happens because of a divine purpose that is saving. And that's what Acts tells us, as we'll look there again in a moment.

First of all it happens by the hand of God. "If God is not good, he is not God. If God is God, he is not good," says MacLeish in his play, *JB*.

I tell you this: If you reserve to yourself the right to sit in judgment of God then you have to say: "God isn't good."

Will you – mere man in your autonomy, in your quest for self authority and self-realization and self-assertion, in your rebellion – will you sit in judgment of God? The God who is, is beyond your judgment. Whatever God does is right for one reason only. Not because it conforms to our scheme of right and wrong, but because God does it. And there is no authority beyond God, above God. There is no authority but God. And whatever he ordains is right.

Do I like this God? Not always. Were I to entertain the error and hubris that whispers up in my soul at times and vomits itself into my conscious mind and says, “Well, if I were God, I wouldn’t do that.” Do you know that I have to do with all that? I have to say this: “You know, what happened last Sunday is nothing compared to people burning in Hell forever.” Lives were snuffed out in a moment last week. They were crushed and mangled and broken and drowned, and most people died within a matter of seconds. A few survived a few minutes, and very few more than an hour. But I want you to understand that the Bible teaches – and the one who teaches it is the Lord Jesus – there really is a place called Hell. It’s called the lake of fire. It’s where people continue to exist in eternal torment and woe and conscious agony, dying in flames and yet never completely dying. That’s what the Bible teaches.

And I tell you: If I want to sit in judgment of God in terms of a tsunami that wipes out hundreds of thousands of people. It’s nothing compared to what God is going to do, is doing now, with the bulk of the human race.

Untold millions of people are burning in Hell right now. What do you think of a God like that? I don’t like him very much. Being honest, but you know what? He’s the only God I’ve got. He’s the only God that is. He’s the only God that’s spoken of in the Bible. “He is the Lord, and there is no other.” And he’s the only God who is consistent with what we see in history. This namby-pamby God who winks at sin and never judges sin and never brings calamity on the world, that God doesn’t exist. He’s a figment of the imagination of people. Why do people believe in such a God? Because they want to believe in such a God. A man’s a damned fool who can look at the universe and conclude there’s no order behind it, no supreme intelligence, no reason, no Creator. A man’s a damned fool who can look at that and say there’s no God. Everybody that’s honest concludes there’s a God.

So where does Atheism come from? You know where it comes from? People hate the God of the Bible. People hate the God who is. They don’t like him. So they say in their minds, “I choose not to believe in him.” But it’s not a matter of intellect. It’s a matter of the will, rooted in deep seated antipathy to such a sovereign because we live in the days of the final outworking of the bastardization of the democratic ideal, and we believe that everybody is equal, including God. And so we have a right to sit in judgment of this God and call him to account. But the God who is, is the God of the Bible. And the God of the Bible, according to Psalm 47 is terrible. “He is a great king over all the earth.” And our response to him is one of fear and trembling.

So as I hear of these disasters like last Sunday and more disasters that will occur this year – as they will – for disaster is decreed. As I look at the portents that are around us already and portents of things that are coming and terrible times to come on nations and the shaking of the very powers of the air as well as the earth; I've got one of two responses I can give: I can join with the whole corrupt cacophony of the crowd of this world and I can say, "I hate you, God." And understand that. That's atheism. Atheism is not intellectual.

I want to say it again. Atheism is emotional, and it's an act of the will. "I choose to reject God because I hate such a God." That's the heart of man. That is what you have to deal with today because things are not going to get better. Things are going to get worse.

This is a year of disaster. Disaster is coming. Are you ready to meet God? Jesus is coming again. When Jesus comes again, are you ready to meet him? If you're ready to meet him you'll be spared the worst of the disasters because the trumpet will sound, and the archangel will shout, and those who have come to the Lord Jesus will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and they'll be spared these terrible, terrible things that are yet to come. For far worse evil is yet to come.

Are you going to take your stand with the atheists – those who, not because of logic, not because of science, not because of reason, but because of a deep seated antipathy to the God who is, the God revealed in creation, the God revealed in Scripture – say there is no God. They know there is such a God because the Bible says in Romans chapter one verse 18: "The wrath of God is being revealed...against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness."

That tsunami reminds us that the God who is, is not only a God of love, but a God of wrath. Will you come to that God? Will you come with all of your doubts? Will you come to him with all your fears? Will you come to him with all your uncertainties? Will you come to him with all of your questions that may not ever get answered in this world? Will you come to him just the way you are? Will you humble yourself, or will you take your stand with the billions of this planet that defy that God and tell him, "We will not have this one to rule over us"? Or will you, in spite of not liking all about this God, not understanding all about this God, not fathoming all of his ways but willing to defer to his judgment and to say that he is altogether just and altogether good, will you bow your knees to this God and come to him?

Only two choices, only two choices, to bow your knees to God.

Do you know? I've got to tell you something. As a preacher, a long time ago I came to understand that the God who is, is terrifying. And that forever altered how I preach because I'm going to be faithful to that God no matter what the results. I'm going to faithfully declare his words no matter what that does to people. But, you know, I've got to tell you my heart. My heart for you is this: I don't want one of you to leave this place, to join that corrupt crowd in their cacophony of defiance against God. What I want for every one of you is to bow your knees to this dread sovereign, to know that the God who

is, is the only God there is and to come to him just the way you are, in humility, with all your doubts, with all your questions, with all your fears and come before it's too late because God is in the business of shaking the earth. And I want to tell you: God's going to shake your life this year.

2005 is going to be a year of disaster for you. 2005 is going to be a disastrous year for you in one sense according to Hebrews chapter 12. Look at it. Hebrews chapter 12. What does he say? He says, verse 27: "The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken — that is, created things — so that what cannot be shaken may remain."

What are the things in your life that hinder God's work in your life? Is it a relationship with somebody? God's going to shake it this year. Is it something you possess or something you're involved in that keeps your eyes off Jesus? God's going to shake it this year. Why is he going to shake it according to Hebrews? So that what is permanent and what remains in spite of the shaking may be unshakable in your life.

See, that's what Paul was saying in Acts 17 to the Athenians. God engineers all these things and creation so that people would seek his face.

Turn back there with me, if you will, as we close. So clear there, Acts 17, God's purpose in history. God's purpose in history is that people would know him. He says there in verse 27 – page 1724: "God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.'" That's what God wants in your life. That's what God wants in Indonesia. That's what God wants in India.

God wants the people of India to turn from their damnable religion of Hinduism with its myriads of false gods. God wants the people of Indonesia to turn from their false god Allah to the God of the Bible and come to him, not in the arrogance of law, but in the humility of grace and faith in Jesus Christ. That's what God wants. And God wants you and me, not only to come to him, but to be part of his plan to save the world. "For God so loved," what? "The world that he gave his only begotten son." There is this profound tension within God, the God of love, the God who reaches out to all men and invites them to come. He is the God also of wrath who is going to shake your life.

Some of you will know suffering in 2005 you've never know before. Some of you will know loss in 2005 you've never know before. But let me tell you this: If you willingly come to God and lay it all on the altar, you will find such a delight, such a security, such a blessing, such a place of peace and security, it's indescribable.

The choice is yours through the work of the Holy Spirit, whom I pray will come and touch you with his grace. God wants you, whomever you are, to come to him, to bow your knees to him and to receive him as he offers himself to you in the gospel.

And this God, who inflicts so much suffering on our world through the activity of Satan, is a God who himself has suffered in your place. That's the great resolution of this whole thing. This God of love, who is also a God of wrath, demonstrates his love for us and his wrath in the cross.

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