

A Bible Study after a Disaster

Introduction

When times of disaster strike a community, the Christian looks to the Word of God for comfort and to help make some sense of the suffering and tragedy. The same questions invariably occur to us: How could a loving God permit such suffering? Why did it befall those that it did? Aren't such things in God's control? Doesn't He care?

The Word of God never once attempts to solve the problem of suffering. But it does provide us with some important promises by which we can battle the darkness and despair that threaten to engulf our faith. Today we'll look at only a few of these passages.

From the Word

Read Rom. 5:12 and answer the following:

1. According to the Bible, how does death make its entrance into the world?

Read Rom. 8:18–39 and answer the following:

2. What two realities does Paul put into the balance, and which does he find to be the weightier?
3. How does the apostle describe creation as we now experience it?
4. What exactly is it that creation is waiting “to give birth” to? [Cf. 2 Peter 3:13]
5. What is the adoption of sons that we're waiting for? [Cf. 1 John 3:1–3]
6. Who helps us as we wait for this hope to become visible?
7. What does He do within us?
8. What promise does God give us as we wait amid the sufferings?
9. Martin Chemnitz, the great second-generation reformer and principal author of the Formula of Concord, wrote these comforting words based on Paul's words in Romans 8:

Paul teaches this in a very consoling way. He explains that God in His purpose has ordained before the time of the world by what crosses and sufferings He would conform every one of His elect to the image of His Son. His cross shall and must work together for good for everyone, because they are called according to God's purpose. Therefore, Paul has concluded that it is certain and beyond doubt that neither “tribulation, or distress,” neither “death nor life,” or other such things “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”¹

Read 1 Cor. 7:31 and answer the following:

10. What is “the present form” of this world that is passing away? [Cf. Rev. 21:1–6]
11. How does Scripture describe the world (or age) that we are waiting for at our Lord's return?

Read James 4:13–16 and answer the following:

12. It's “normal” for humans to speak casually about their plans. What strong warning does St. James give us to help us speak with humility?

Read Heb. 13:14 and answer the following:

13. What are the implications of this verse?
14. Think about how “homes” always vanish away in this world. How does knowing about the permanent and abiding city and home [cf. John 14:1–7] give us hope?

Read 1 John 3:16–18 and answer the following:

¹ *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, second edition; edited by Paul McCain, et al., copyright © 2006 Concordia Publishing House, p. 609.

15. Though we know that this world is passing away and we long for the new heaven and new earth, we are definitely sent by God to help our brothers in their needs. How does this passage suggest we can help?
16. Visit www.lcms.org to find ways you can concretely help in the wake of this latest disaster.

Conclusion

As Christians, we live with the certain and joyful hope of the new age that is coming at Christ's return. We *know* already that love will triumph over every hate, peace will triumph over every violence, joy will triumph over every sorrow, and this is all because LIFE has already triumphed over death — our Lord is risen! But equipped with this hope, Scripture urges us toward a “spiritual action plan” — that is, always be prepared to die, since no one has any guarantee of a tomorrow in *this* age; always be ready to help the sufferers, to pray for them, to witness to them about the hope that is given in Christ and to meet their concrete physical needs with joy.

Hymn: “Who Knows when Death May Overtake Me”

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| <p>1. Who knows when death may overtake me!
 Time passes on, my end draws near.
 How swiftly can my breath forsake me!
 How soon can life's last hour appear!
 My God, for Jesus' sake I pray
 Thy peace may bless my dying day.</p> | <p>Nor life nor death shall us divide.
 My God, for Jesus' sake I pray
 Thy peace may bless my dying day.</p> |
| <p>2. The world that smiled when morn was breaking
 May change for me ere close of day
 For while on earth my home I'm making,
 Death's threat is never far away.
 My God, for Jesus' sake I pray
 Thy peace may bless my dying day.</p> | <p>8. Once in the blest baptismal waters
 I put on Christ and made Him mine;
 Now numbered with God's sons and daughters,
 I share His peace and love divine.
 My God, for Jesus' sake I pray
 Thy peace may bless my dying day.</p> |
| <p>3. My end to ponder teach me ever
 And, ere the hour of death appears,
 To cast my soul on Christ, my Savior,
 Nor spare repentant sighs and tears.
 My God, for Jesus' sake I pray
 Thy peace may bless my dying day.</p> | <p>9. His body and His blood I've taken
 In His blest Supper, feast divine;
 Now I shall never be forsaken,
 For I am His, and He is mine.
 My God, for Jesus' sake I pray
 Thy peace may bless my dying day.</p> |
| <p>4. Help me now set my house in order
 That always ready I may be
 To say in meekness on death's border:
 Lord, as Thou wilt, deal Thou with me.
 My God, for Jesus' sake I pray
 Thy peace may bless my dying day.</p> | <p>10. Then may death come today, tomorrow,
 I know in Christ I perish not;
 He grants the peace that stills all sorrow,
 Gives me a robe without a spot.
 My God, for Jesus' sake I pray
 Thy peace may bless my dying day.</p> |
| <p>5. Reveal the sweetness of Thy heaven,
 Earth's galling bitterness unfold;
 May I, amid this turmoil riven,
 Thy blest eternity behold.
 My God, for Jesus' sake I pray
 Thy peace may bless my dying day.</p> | <p>11. And thus I live in God contented
 And die without a thought of fear;
 My soul has to God's plans consented,
 For through His Son my faith is clear.
 My God, for Jesus' sake I pray
 Thy peace may bless my dying day.</p> |
| <p>6. My many sins blot out forever
 Since Jesus has my pardon won;
 In mercy robed, I then shall never
 Fear death, but trust in Thee alone.
 My God, for Jesus' sake I pray
 Thy peace may bless my dying day.</p> | |
| <p>7. Naught shall my soul from Jesus sever;
 In faith I touch His wounded side
 And hail Him as my Lord forever.</p> | |

The Lutheran Hymnal #598 (Hymn translation ©
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