

1. The world we live in is incredibly fragile and we who live in it are even more so. We need an eternal and indestructible God who has made himself available as a friend and protective father to all who come to him on his terms asking for mercy and salvation.
2. We are incredibly fragile so we need the love of one another and that demands that we care for our neighbour and allow ourselves to be cared for by our neighbour.
3. Now is the time to give generously to those who suffer because if you are a Christian and an Australian in 2005 you are among the most generously dealt with people in the whole of human history. We can afford to be generous! The cards you hold are only of value while the game is still in play—once the hand is finished they count against you.
4. We are incredibly valuable to God—we must learn to live in harmony with one another and stop getting into petty squabbles over things that cannot last. Nothing we have to hand over at death is worth fighting for when there is so much at stake of an eternal nature.
5. Our lives are incredibly short. God is patient but he is not indifferent to our sin and rebellion. We were created to produce fruit for God. He may wait a little but he will not wait forever. The axe is at the foot of the tree so get on with it while you still have a chance.
6. Remember God is never wrong and you are not more compassionate than He. Every grain of suffering in this world is necessary to achieve his ultimate purpose of saving for eternity every single human being who is the slightest bit savable. It is right to be horrified and grieve for those who suffer whether it be for the loss of a brother or the loss of a whole village, because life is precious. However it is foolish to suggest that God has done wrong or made a mistake. He only has to do that once and he forfeits his right to be God. Then where do you turn?
7. Be thankful for what you have and stop complaining about the inconveniences and minor agonies of this life—they are not even worth comparing with the glory that awaits us in eternity.
8. Offer God's out of court settlement to every person you can so that more and more people will come to Jesus and find salvation while the offer still stands.



Some answers from Luke 12:49-13:9 to consider as we try to come to grips with the giant tsunami.

This week we have been visiting Julie's brother who is very sick with cancer and unlikely to get better. I am amazed and delighted that our government goes to any length through our hospitals and their wonderful staff to keep him alive and to reduce his suffering as much as possible. Yet at our last visit I found myself drawn to the television in the adjacent bed where details of the horrors of the recent tsunami are revealed in graphic detail. It all seems so surreal. We are so incredibly concerned about the life of one person when just a few thousand miles away we are faced with the possibility of 250,000 people dying in Asia. It may end up being the worst natural disaster in recorded history. How does one get one's head around all this? .

Most have called it a 'natural disaster' and that it is—at least in the sense that there are clear scientific explanations to indicate how it happened. But that is not enough for us, we need to know why it happened. Why did God let this happen?

The ultimate answer is always the same; all suffering is rooted in human sin which not only distorts humans it also distorts the universe God created for us humans to live in. The unstable tectonic plates that cause earthquakes

are just one example of this. The bigger question is; "why those people and why now?"

The first thing to avoid is the unfiltered transference of Old Testament answers to the problem. God no longer identifies himself with a particular nation in a specific geographical area that needs to be protected or punished. His concerns are now for his church which is spread all over the world.



This explains Jesus' approach found in Luke 12:49-13:9.

He warns his listeners that he has come to bring fire upon the earth (12:49) indicating that his mission is not only to save but also to allow the final judgment to go ahead once the salvation of the elect is complete. He then seeks to point his listeners towards some of signs which speak of the inevitability that judgment.

He warns them in no uncertain terms that they are guilty of culpable ignorance. They pride themselves in being able to forecast things like the weather but are not interested in applying their considerable skills to reading the more important signs—those that point to the end of this world order and the inevitable judgment that follows—in this they show a total lack of judgment (57). Sadly 2,000 years later we are no wiser. The few comments of a spiritual nature one's hears in regard to our re-

cent disaster are full of foolish sentimentality or direct abuse towards God.

Seek an out of court settlement

If they really understood what was happening they would take their lives seriously, stop arguing with God and seek to make an out-of-court-settlement while they can (58-59). This is the appropriate response and Jesus has made it possible. His death means that God is now able to settle your account by offering you the most favourable terms imaginable. You will be forgiven totally and rewarded incredibly with eternal life in a place worth living forever in.

Repent and nothing will be held against you, refuse and nothing will be overlooked. God, being a just judge, will have no choice but to throw the book at you. You will loose everything and that means your life, forever. Some may think that Hell is here on earth. Wrong! —it is just a foretaste of it. You may be able to euthanise yourself out of the pain of this world but there is no euthanasia in Hell.

Down to specific cases 13:1-9

Jesus then uses two typical events to drive home the points he has just made. The first was caused by human brutality —Pilate had killed a number of

Galileans and mixed their blood with their sacrifices. The second was the death of 18 killed by a falling tower. It may have been an earthquake. What Jesus says here is very relevant to our present case.

Firstly, we should not accuse the victims. True they were sinners and being sinners had forfeited their right to remain on earth. But none of us have the right to point the finger because we are in the very same boat. So there is no

“Repent and nothing will be held against you, refuse and nothing will be overlooked”

profit in suggesting the victims were any more deserving of death than we are. We all deserve the same fate—no one on this planet is entitled to a long life. Secondly Jesus reinforces what he had previously said—repent or you will too perish and that means forever!

Finally he presents us with a picture of a vineyard-keeper given the task of looking after a fig tree which is three years old and has failed to produce fruit. It ought to have but it hasn't, so he is told by his master to cut it down. The vine-keeper pleads for mercy and gets a one year extension for the tree but that's it! No fruit at the end of that year and the axe must do its work! God is patient but he is not a fool.

So the lessons we should learn from all disasters are these: