

We have people in our church who have lost loved ones—swept away in the deluge
We have families in our church who have lost everything they own
So many in our community are suffering—we have been hit really hard (fires; floods)

I think the first thing we wonder in times like these is: “Where is God in the fire and the flood?”

- In moments like these He can feel distant
- And so many prayers seem to go unanswered (when everything is going wrong)
- But from everything we know about God from Scripture, we have to believe that He is with those who suffer
 - **The Lord is near to the brokenhearted** (Psalm 34:18)
 - **Psalm 46:1-3** and **5**, ESV
- Times like this do not often feel that way—but we must by faith lean into those promises for ourselves and for others that need our help (and ultimately God's help) (pray that for people)
- He is the God of all comfort, and His nearness is our good—so we have come to seek Him today

Sharper questions linger in our collective mind as a community while we've endured the fire and flood together

1. How could God allow such a thing to happen?
2. Is this series of events the judgment of God on our community?

Let's tackle that latter question first: Is this the judgment of God on our community?

- The nearness of the events seem uncanny (even non-believers are wondering aloud)
 - Several people mentioned to me yesterday (some in slight jest) that the Lord would be coming back any minute (as evidenced by these events)
 - We associate extreme weather events and natural disaster with the return of Christ because some of the Bible's apocalyptic passages mention things like fire, smoke, hail, earthquakes, plagues, etc¹
 - Living here especially we get concerned when things are not like 72° & sunny
- Additionally: God's track record is what allows us the paradigm to even ask the question (cf. **Flood; Egypt**)
 - And eschatological passages in Scripture reveal that God will use natural phenomena in future
- But God does not usually do such things (or we would see much more of it)
 - **Psalm 130:3-4**, NASB
 - If God practiced one for one retribution, we'd all be destroyed
- Because He offers forgiveness, He is patient with people
 - **2 Peter 3:9**, NLT
- In this age of grace, God's general approach in light of the cross is that: His judgment and wrath have been poured out on Jesus so that we might be forgiven, and He is currently actively working to bring people to Himself, that they might be saved from His wrath
 - **1 Thessalonians 1:10**, NLT
 - Cf. **John 3:17**
- God is seeking to bring people to Jesus that their sins might be forgiven and they would escape judgment
 - And His approach, in light of the Cross, is grace & mercy (kindness of God leads us to repentance)
 - **Romans 2:4**, NLT
 - But, for those who refuse grace, there is a day of judgment coming
 - **Romans 2:5**, NLT
 - But that day is not now

So, we cannot, with any real authority, declare that we know events such as we've witnessed lately to be the direct judgment of God—we can say, with all the authority of Scripture, that God prefers mercy to judgment, and has delayed judgment for the final day

As Bible-believing Christians, we need to be very reserved in declaring this to be God's judgment

¹ See for example Luke 21:11 and Revelation 8:7
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To stand on solid Biblical, New Testament ground is to declare the merciful and gracious Presence of God, and to display His kindness to those suffering

- To see and pursue God's redemptive purposes in these events

And, to acknowledge the sharper edge here, to call people to repentance—not because God is currently judging them, but because He will judge the whole world

- This feels sharp at such a time (and timing is everything), but this is actually also how Jesus leads us

Jesus had this very conversation with some around Him one day when they had tragedy strike close to home

- **Luke 13:1-5, NLT**
 - Galileans murdered (cf. the disciples, and Jesus) (close to home)
 - The tower of Siloam in Jerusalem (again, close to home)
 - Evident from Jesus' comments is that what lingered in His audiences collective mind was the very question we are wrestling with: **"Is this some sort of judgment from God?"**
 - The assumption in their wondering was that those people deserved judgment
 - Jesus, **corrects their assumptions by saying that we all deserve judgment**
 - There lies the problem with trying to say that something like these floods are God's judgment on a particular place or group of people—because then why not us—or, everyone?
 - He says that those events were not a direct act of judgment, but what people ought to do in response to such things is know that one day God will act directly in judgment
 - So, people ought to repent now
 - God is leaving room for repentance now (does not want to judge people)

Then, Jesus, consistent with what we have said previously today, reveals something about how God is working in the world since His coming (in parable/story form)

- **Luke 13:6-9, NLT**
 - Grace and mercy—a second and third and fourth chance for bad trees
 - The Spirit's work in the world as **"the gardener"**
 - **"Special attention and plenty of fertilizer"** (drawing us with kindness)
 - We must not be tone deaf to the words of Christ here
 - His call for people to repent is a loving warning of unending, merciful love
 - **Ezekiel 33:11, NASB**
 - Jesus used those two tragedies and His audiences assumptions about them to call people's attention to their need to repent in light of coming judgment (that is loving to do so)
 - And about how God is working by grace in the world to bring people to forgiveness
 - It all reminds us that God is Good (merciful and kind)

But, we ask, if God is Good (merciful and kind), and is giving bad trees **"special attention and plenty of fertilizer"** and trying to lead people to repentance with kindness—**Why does He allow horrific events such as the fires and the floods to happen?** (first question)

To answer that question we acknowledge one of the most basic assertions of Scripture: **That God is Sovereign**

- So, we must confess that God does indeed allow such things (though not forever... there is a day)
- But we do not need to say that God directly instigates such things, nor is God to blame
- How does that work? Who, if anyone, is to blame?

We live in a world that is in chaos

- Cf. A broken operating system
 - Where people in power commit atrocities (Cf. Pilate) and towers fall on people—fires burn cities and floods wash them away
- Why is the system broken?
 - God's creation was good
 - God blessed humanity in the Garden and invited us to live under His rule
 - Gave us freewill that we might truly know love
 - Lovingly warned us that if we rejected His rule, our own choices would lead to death
 - And, as always, God kept His word (and He was right and good in what He did)

- We, as usual, rejected His loving rule and rebelled and are reaping the consequences
- In the form of a world that now contains death and all that reeks of death
 - And **lives under a curse** because of our rebellion
 - **Romans 8:20a** and **22**, NLT
 - Things and systems and natural laws that God created as good and for blessing have not escaped the corruption
 - **In His sovereignty God has ordained that natural laws and systems work the way they do... though He is always present and working within (holds all things together), He does not always intervene (to do so = a miracle)**
- **Because of this, bad things happen (to everyone)**
 - Things that God never intended
 - Weather systems out of control, drought, famine, disease, corrupted power
 - Unstoppable fires, floods, tsunamis, earthquakes
 - In a broken world these things just happen (which ought to make us hate sin even more)
 - **And, yes, God allows it—because humanity chose it—**but with tears
 - Jesus wept with Mary and Martha for Lazarus; over the plight of Jerusalem; etc
 - God also, in His sovereignty and goodness used those things (cf. past and future)

But, God will not always allow it!

- God has already begun to undo the chaos
- Jesus came demonstrating what new life in the Kingdom would look like (w/o the curse)
- **Jesus became a curse for us on the Cross (Galatians 3:13)**
- And defeated sin and death
- And paid the price in full for judgment
- That we might be free from the curse and have peace w/God and creation

The Scriptures declare that Christ is coming again and will stop the chaos once and for all

- This is what He was demonstrating in the Gospels when He healed the sick, raised people from the dead, calmed the storms and confronted evil
- **Romans 8:18-21**, NLT
 - There is coming a day of **glorious freedom from death and decay** (and all that reeks of it)
 - We have an **eager hope** in Christ (time like this in intensify it—we long for **glorious freedom**)
 - And, **“what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later”** (Rom 8:18)
- When: **Revelation 21:4-6**, NLT
- We live in the tension of the “already/not yet” (we witness both sides)

Much of comfort is based on knowing what will happen (Cf. Rev 21)

- But, it is also God present with us in what is happening (Cf. **Psalm 46:1-3** and **5**, ESV)
- We, the church, also bring the presence of God to people
 - Love and service
 - Gospel (evangelize)
 - Prayer (Tuesday night)

Humility and Gratitude

- That we are here and okay (cf. my friend struggling with that)
- Choosing to move away from sin and toward righteousness

Hope and Trust

- That God will once again bring us into a place of abundance
- Psalm 66:12b-13
We went through fire and through flood; yet You have brought us out to a place of abundance. I will come into Your house with burnt offerings; I will perform my vows to You.
- So we worship God—He is still worthy

Leaders are available to you; come pray Tuesday; we will keep you up to date with what we can do as a church