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Why the Tsunami?

Everyone around the world who believes in God (or gods), whether Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist or something else, seems to be asking the same question—*Why?* Why did God decree or permit a tsunami (and it must be one or the other, as there are no other possibilities for those who believe in an all-powerful God) to take the lives of well over 150,000 people in eleven nations? I'd like to make an attempt to answer that question as a Christian.

First, if you are among the very small percentage of people who believe that God was not powerful enough to prevent or stop the tsunami, then I hope you believe that God is at least powerful enough to be able to warn people of a coming tsunami in order to prevent their deaths. It is a well-publicized fact that very few animals perished in the recent tsunami, even in large game parks full of wildlife that were flooded inland for miles. In light of this fact, the deaths of tens of thousands of humans speak volumes. God spared animals but allowed multitudes of people to die. Scientists are wondering at the animals' demonstration of their "sixth sense." Whatever it was that warned the animals of the coming waves, God gave it to them, just as He gave them so many other unexplainable instincts. God could have prevented any human deaths just as easily.

Now on to the question of *Why would God decree or permit a tsunami?* Some Christians are saying that it is just a mystery that we can't understand. That, however, is a means of avoiding what is obvious and is also a subtle insult against God. He has revealed His character *quite thoroughly* in the Bible. He has given us thousands of verses that reveal His motivations. He often does things, for example, motivated by love. He also does things motivated by anger and justice, which are outgrowths of His love. These motivations we understand without any difficulty.

Thus, to think that God has permitted or decreed the sudden tragic deaths of 120,000 people, one-third of whom were children, for a reason that is beyond our ability to understand, is to say that God is motivated at times by something other than love, justice, anger, and so on, something that He has not revealed about Himself during the thousands of years that He has been revealing Himself to humanity. That would seem rather odd. Are we really to believe that on December 26, 2004, God suddenly possessed a never-before-revealed motivation, and one that bears no resemblance to anything that has motivated Him for the past five thousand years?

Even in the case of a human killing another human, we rarely conclude that there was no motivation. The same is true for a person who does not prevent a death that he could easily prevent. In either case, if it is concluded that there was no motive, it is also concluded that the person is an insane madman. All of this is to say that if God had no motivation for decreeing or permitting that tsunami then He is no God at all. He is not worthy of worship or obedience. He is less than human. He's insane. He's a senseless madman.

Since God is not an insane madman, what might have been His motivation in decreeing or permitting the Indian Ocean tsunami?

I doubt anyone is thinking that God was motivated by love. When a human being is killed, we normally don't suspect that the killer was motivated by love for the person he killed. Similarly, when a person could easily prevent someone's death but doesn't, we don't think it is love that is motivating him.

How about *anger* for God's motivation? Christians profess to believe in a God who once flooded the entire earth because of His anger, killing everyone but eight people. There are scores of examples in Scripture of God wiping out pagan nations and even His own people (Israel) because of His anger. He often takes credit in the Bible for earthquakes that are a result of His judgment (see Num. 16:23-24; Isa. 29:6; Jer. 10:10; Ezek. 38:19; Ps. 18:7; 77:18; Hag. 2:6; Luke 21:11; Acts 16:26; Rev. 6:12; 8:5; 11:13; 16:18). He has foretold of natural disasters that are yet to come upon the earth that will make the recent tsunami seem like a ripple in a wading pool. Why could not the recent tsunami be a manifestation of God's anger? If it isn't, then what part of God's character does it manifest? What else might have been motivating Him?

But there are other questions: *If God is angry, why is He angry?*

God becomes angry because people don't do what He says, like love Him with all their hearts and love their neighbor as themselves. His anger stems from His perfect righteousness, which is rooted in His love. All truly loving people hate injustice, and God isn't any different, only His love is a perfect blend of justice and patience toward those who deserve His justice. If God does not ultimately react with justice against those who are selfish, He is not at all a loving God. What would you think of a parent who sits passively watching his older son assault his younger daughter? Love demands a reaction. Love demands that the guilty be punished. So the Bible tells us that God is angry every day (see Psalm 7:11). How could a loving and all-knowing God not be angry every day with what He sees on the earth?

But there are still other questions. For example, *Why would the people around the coastal areas of the Indian Ocean be targeted for wrath rather than some other part of the world?* Should we conclude that they were more deserving?

Jesus once commented about two tragedies of His day, and He told His audience that they would be wrong to draw such a conclusion regarding those who died violent, untimely deaths. He made it crystal clear that those who perished were no greater sinners than those who survived. They were equally deserving of perishing, and Jesus warned those survivors, “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (see Luke 13:1-9).

Thus we see that instead of wondering why so many people perished, we should be wondering why so many survived, including ourselves. Amazingly, 99.9981% of us are still breathing after the tsunami. Rather than pointing a finger of accusation at God and asking, “Why them?” we should be pointing our finger at ourselves and asking, “Why wasn’t it me?”

And there is, or course, only one head-spinning answer to that question: God’s mercy—unmerited, unearned and undeserved. While so many are amazed at the large numbers of deaths, we should be astonished that so many are still alive who are just as deserving as those who perished. Moreover, we should take heed to the warning that God has just sent to the whole world. Everyone should repent and give God His rightful place on the throne in their hearts.

But what about the children who perished? many wonder. Most of us who believe in a God who is fair consequently also believe that He does not hold children accountable until they approach adulthood, reaching an “age of accountability.” Thus Jesus told us that the kingdom of heaven belongs to children (see Matt. 19:10). Every child who perished in the tsunami is now beholding the face of God. And although it is certainly impossible to judge all parents, is it not actually better for children to die and go to heaven rather than grow up under the influence of wicked parents who will lead them to hell? Moreover, every parent who is grieving over the loss of a child can have the hope of being reunited forever with that child *if* he or she will repent. What would be better as a parent—to spend your life with your child and then both go to hell, or lose a child and spend eternity together in God’s kingdom? God’s *temporal* judgments are often designed to warn people so they might avoid His *eternal* judgments. That is a motivation of love.

But why were people targeted who live in a region of the world that has had so little exposure to the Christian gospel? some Christians ask. They never had a chance to hear.

The apostle Paul would disagree, I’m afraid. He declares that no person has an excuse before God, because God is evangelizing every person every moment of his or her life. He is shouting at everyone through His amazing creation, revealing his divine nature and attributes (see Rom. 1:18-20). God has been preaching to the coastal people of the Indian Ocean through bananas, starfish, seagulls, and a million other daily miracles. According to Paul, everyone has heard God’s messages (see Rom. 10:18). God is not only shouting at people outwardly, but also inwardly, through their conscience (see Rom. 2:14-16). His message is the same every moment: “Repent!” People certainly become more adept at

ignoring God's voice within them as they grow older, but God never stops shouting. Scripture says He has written His laws in our hearts (see Rom. 2:14-16), and so everyone knows right from wrong, as proven by how often they condemn other people who do wrong. If you've ever found fault with anyone else, that proves you know right from wrong. We all thus stand self-condemned before God, condemning others for what we also do.

Don't think for a moment that people all over the world haven't heard God's message. God has already revealed to everyone 95% of what He wants everyone to know. The gospel is just the final 5%, and God generally sends that message to people who are listening, at least to some degree, to the first 95% of His revelation. In fact, if they completely ignore that 95% because they've allowed their hearts to become so hard, He often makes attempts to soften their hearts before it is too late. Tsunamis are one way of softening hearts and restoring the fear of God. For those of us among the 99.9981% of the earth's population who are still breathing after the tsunami, we currently have good reason to soften our hearts and fear the Lord. Has your heart been softened?

But what about Christians who perished in the tsunami?

First, please know that the recent tsunami hit areas that are populated by very few Christians.

Second, just because someone claims to be a Christian doesn't mean he is a Christian by God's appraisal. In the Jewish Bible, there is record of God killing lots of Jews who weren't Jews by God's definition, that is, they weren't people who loved and obeyed Him. The same thing is true among professing Christians. Jesus asked, "Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46). True Christians are those who have repented, who deny themselves, and who prove their love for God by obeying Him and loving their neighbor as themselves. False Christians are just as deserving of God's wrath as anyone else, if not more. I've noticed that the so-called "Christian" nation of the United States has lately been experiencing a fairly sizeable dose of God's wrath. We have given Muslims around the world good reason to call us "infidels." Just visit your local movie theater to find out what we're exporting to the world. And is it possible that God is not pleased with professing European and American Christians who indulge themselves at luxurious exotic resorts while they ignore the plight of the poor people who live in shacks and dress in rags just over the fences of those resorts? Are we really to think that a loving God can look at that passively? Didn't Jesus speak often about these things?

That being said, only God knows the true spiritual state of every professing Christian around the Indian Ocean. Those who died among the professing Christians who were indeed holy followers of Christ are now happier than we could imagine, and they wouldn't return to the earth if they were given the chance. *They aren't angry with God because of the tsunami.* Their friends and family who remain on earth who are also true followers of Christ are surely having their faith tested like Job of old. Their reward will be just. Our prayers are with them.

Every day on the earth about 150,000 people die. It's like a new Indian Ocean tsunami every day, but because it happens every day and is spread out all over the earth, it doesn't

make the news. God, however, is *always* trying to get our attention. Even as we look at our aging faces in the mirror each day, God is again trying to mercifully warn us that our *final* day is coming. There is nothing that is more important than being ready for that final day.

Please allow me one more minute. I know I haven't even tried to answer every question. I don't have all the answers. But let me write for a moment to readers who are sincere Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists.

Jesus is undeniably an historical person. His contemporaries recorded His amazing life in the Bible. He claimed to be God, the one who created the universe, and He proved it by His miracles. He raised the dead, opened the eyes of the blind, and walked on water. They killed Him and three days later He came back to life, after having predicted all of it in advance. He also forgave the sins of repentant people.

Now you must decide in your own heart, *Was Jesus who He claimed to be? Was and is He the Lord God?* He promised everyone who would repent and believe in Him that He would forgive them and come to live in them by His Holy Spirit, enabling them to obey His commands. You can strive with all your ability to be a good person, but you will fail miserably. You can never be good enough to please God in your own strength. You must humble yourself, admit that you have been disobeying God's voice in your heart, and call on Jesus to forgive you. He died for your sins, and He now lives to be your Lord (see Rom. 14:9). So repent. Make Jesus your Lord and Master. He will forgive you. He will come to live inside you. You will become a new person!

So thankful for His mercy,

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding (Proverbs 9:10).

Jesus said: "There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Luke 21:25-26).