



## **HOW DO WE RESPOND TO NATURAL DISASTERS? Luke 13:1-5**

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, I'm going to invite you to open with me to Luke 13. The plan this morning was to continue our series looking at the gospel and our families, and the focus today was on the gospel and singleness. There is a singles event going on this evening for all singles, 22-years old and up, who might want to be connected into a small group. That event is still going on tonight after our evening worship gathering. There's information on that in the front portion of your Worship Guide, but our talking about the gospel and singleness is going to be postponed for just a few weeks.

The reason is because of what has been going on in the world over the last two weeks. Many of you remember a few years ago, when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans and affected many, many lives including my own in a very personal way and claimed the lives of just over 1,000 people. This church responded, went into high gear immediately to respond and say, "How can we help those who've been affected by this disaster?" That was a very good thing for this church to do.

But here's where I've been convicted this week in my own life. Two weekends ago, a cyclone ravaged the country of Myanmar, formerly Burma. This is a predominantly Buddhist nation with a military regime that has sought to marginalize, if not eliminate, the church altogether. The predominant people group in Myanmar is the Burmese people group and they are .07 percent Evangelical Christian, making them one of the most unreached people groups on the planet today. Estimates now range at 78,000, if not 100,000 or more people, who have lost their lives in Myanmar over the last two weeks.

One week later, this last Monday, a 7.9 magnitude earthquake rocks central China. China, as you know, is a communist, atheistic nation. Sichuan Province, the province most directly affected by this particular earthquake, has 33 different people groups in that province alone; 33 different people groups who have no Christians, no missionaries, no gospel, no Jesus whatsoever. Over 20,000 have been confirmed dead there, with numbers that may rise to approximately 50,000 according to some estimates.

In the meantime, civil war has again erupted in Beirut, Lebanon, where we had the opportunity to be just a few months ago. Our brothers and sisters there now find themselves again in the middle of turmoil and fighting that has caused hundreds of people to be either wounded or killed.

The question I want to ask this morning is, if this church responded the way it did to a thousand-plus people who lost their lives on the Gulf Coast a few years ago, then how much more so should this church respond when between 100,000 and 200,000 people lose their lives in a matter of two weeks where the gospel is least known?

So, this morning, I want us to change directions, and I want us to ask the question, "How do we respond to natural disasters? How do we respond to news like this?" I'll go ahead and

let you know from the start that there is not a lot of levity to our time together this morning; not a lot of lightheartedness and nor should there be. This is a heavy word, and our hearts should be very heavy. If they are not heavy, then there is a problem with our hearts.

When it comes to evil and suffering in the world, we basically see evil and suffering through two lenses: A lens of moral evil and natural evil. Moral evil are things like wars. Natural evil are things like cyclones and earthquakes. Both of them are addressed in Luke 13. I want you to follow along with me in the first five verses.

Verse 1,

*Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood pilot had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worst sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Salome fell on them - do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish" (Lk. 13:1-5).*

Now, there are some things when we come to this passage that we are not completely sure about. This is a teaching from Jesus that is unique to Luke's Gospel. We're not sure exactly what had happened to precipitate this. We know this much: There were two events that are being addressed here. In one event, Pilate is the governor over an area that included Jerusalem, had a precarious relationship with the Jewish people and apparently some Galileans were worshipping there at the temple in Jerusalem, offering their sacrifices, and these Galileans were ambushed by Roman troops and sacrificed themselves. They were killed by these Roman troops. Their blood was mixed with the blood of their sacrifices. That is an example of moral evil.

Then, Jesus refers to this tower in Salome that apparently had fallen and killed 18 bystanders who were standing there. This is the topic of conversation as the crowds come to Jesus. They're asking, "Have you heard about this and this? What are we to think about these things?" It would be like going and seeing Jesus today and saying, "You know about what has happened in China and Myanmar. What do you think about these things?"

## **Four Reminders ...**

What I want to show you in Luke 13:1-5 is four reminders that Jesus gives to them that I believe He would give to us today. There are four reminders that I think we need to remember when we hear news like we've heard over the last couple of weeks. What you'll see spread throughout your notes are some quotes from a guy named Jonathan Edwards, a pastor, leader of the church in the middle of the Great Awakening.

I've been re-reading David Brainerd's biography, which Jonathan Edwards edited. David Brainerd was a missionary up in the Northeast with Native Americans. In the beginning of the biography, it has Jonathan Edward's resolutions listed. What he had written were 70 resolutions. He resolved 70 different times, "This is how I'm going to live my life." What I've done is I've included some of these. I couldn't help but think about some of those

resolutions that would illustrate the truths that Jesus is putting in front of us in Luke 13. So that's what those are there for.

### **Natural disasters remind us that death is unpredictable.**

How do we respond to natural disasters? Reminder number one: Natural disasters remind us that death is unpredictable; death is unpredictable. In both of these circumstances, Jesus is underscoring the unpredictability of death. People are coming to Him and really comparing themselves to those who had died, saying, "Obviously, they died for a reason. There was a reason they were under that tower instead of me. There was a reason these folks were killed when they were sacrificing instead of those who were around them." We're going to get to that deeper in just a moment.

But what Jesus does is twice, He repeats a phrase to keep them from comparing themselves to those people who had died. Twice He says, "*I tell you, no! Unless you repent, you too will also perish.*" (Luke 13:3, 5) Some of your translations say, "*Likewise, you also will perish.*" In other words, Jesus looks them in the eye, and He says, "The same thing could happen to you; the same thing could happen to you." In both of these circumstances, people died in a similar way: Quickly, unexpectedly and tragically. Both of them, if you'll notice, at a place and a time when you would think they would be the safest.

Is there any safer place to be, better place to be than offering sacrifices at the temple worshipping God? That could be the safest place you could be or standing next to a tower. A tower that was undoubtedly erected, built as a picture of defense against attacks from the outside. These are the safest places you can imagine.

Jesus uses these two instances to look at the crowd following Him, and He says, "The same thing could happen to you." What He is doing is He's reiterating some truths here. First of all, He's reiterating that death is often sudden; it's often sudden. Death often comes instantly, seemingly out of nowhere. Natural disasters bring sudden death. One minute you're standing there, and the next minute, a tower is falling on you. Instantly.

Not only is death often sudden, but death is often surprising. Don't miss the picture here. The people referred to in Luke 13, people in China one week ago and people in Myanmar two weeks ago did not wake up in the morning thinking, "This is going to be my last day on this earth." They were shocked to find the horrible end to which their lives were given over to.

Death is often sudden, death is often surprising, and even if it's not sudden or surprising, third, death is always sure; it's always sure. Death will be sudden for some of us, possibly many of us in this room. Death will be surprising for some or many of us in this room, but death will definitely be sure for all of us in this room. This is the sobering reality of Luke 13. Jesus is saying, "When you hear about natural disasters, you need to remember this: Death is unpredictable." The earthquake in China and the cyclone in Myanmar remind every single one of us in this room that you are not guaranteed tomorrow.

Ladies and gentlemen, you are not guaranteed today. Not one of us in this room is guaranteed today. This is what a natural disaster reminds us of. Very few of us got up this morning and thought, "This is going to be my last day; this could be my last day." People think, "Well that would be a horrible way to live to get up in the morning and to think, 'Well, this could be my last day.'" Not so according to Jonathan Edwards. Listen to what he wrote: "Resolved, to think much, on all occasions, of my own dying, and of the common circumstances which attend death." I think often of my own dying.

Brainerd did the same thing. You read his biography, and this is a man who lived a short life before he died at 29 years old. He talked about how he meditated often on his own dying. Now, I'm well aware that this could be taken too far and become very unhealthy, but as soon as you hear this picture of thinking when you wake up in the morning, this could be my last day. Before you think, "Well, that would be a horrible way to live", I want to remind you why it is good to think about the unpredictability of death. Why it is good to think, even often, of your own dying, because we need to be reminded that all of our money and all of our jobs and all of our houses and all of our cars and all of our clothes guarantee us nothing in this life; they guarantee you nothing. All of your comfortability in this world guarantees you nothing today, and we need to be reminded of this.

I implore you, ladies and gentlemen, to remember Hebrews 9:27. *"It is destined for every man to die once and after that to face judgment..."* (Heb. 9:27). It is good to remember this. Students, in the prime of your teenage years, remember this: You're not guaranteed today. Parents, remember this. Children, remember this. Senior adults, remember this. Not one of us in this room is guaranteed today.

Natural disasters remind us that death is unpredictable. I'm convinced the Adversary would like nothing more than for you to be watching the news on CNN this last week and see news about an earthquake in China and a cyclone in Myanmar, and flip the channel over to the basketball game and think in your mind, "That could never happen here." It's the worst way we could respond to this news. Flip to the next channel like everything is fine. We need to be reminded that death is unpredictable.

### **Natural disasters remind us of the penalty of sin which plagues all of us.**

Second, natural disasters remind us of the penalty of sin which plagues all of us; natural disasters remind us of the penalty of sin which plagues all of us. In the background here is you've got a group of people who are coming to Jesus, who believe that when tragedy strikes someone, there must be a reason behind that. There must be something to explain it.

It's the picture in John 9 with the man born blind. The disciples come to Jesus, and they say, *"What happened that this man was born blind? Was it his sin or his parents' sin?"* (Jn. 9:2) Somebody obviously sinned for Him to be born blind, for this to happen to Him. It's the same picture you've got all throughout Job when disaster strikes Job's house, when his children are swept away in an instant and his supposed friends come to Job and they say, "Obviously, your children sinned against God. That's why this happened to you."

Jesus looks at a crowd with that background thinking, "Well, these Galileans were sacrificed, were killed, obviously, because they had done something wrong. These people had a tower who fell on them because they had done something wrong." Jesus looks at them very clearly and says in this passage, that their dying on that day, their dying in those instances, had nothing to do with their righteousness or unrighteousness.

Instead, He brings it home to the people who are asking the question. He says two truths that the Bible echoes throughout that I want to remind you of this morning when it comes to the penalty of sin which plagues all of us. Truth number one: Our sin is universal; our sin is universal. Now, don't misunderstand me here. When I come to Luke 13, and we're looking at this text, we need to realize Jesus is not saying that the people who died in either one of these instances were innocent. He is not saying that they were innocent. Instead, He is saying that none of us are innocent; not one person, including them or including you who are asking the question. Not one of you is innocent.

This is the picture we have all throughout Scripture. Romans 3:9-20 sums it up best. *"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one"* (Rom. 3:10-12). There are no innocent people in the world. None. No innocent people in the world. This is a picture of the penalty of sin which plagues all of us. As a result, any attempt to compare your sin to the sin of those who have been affected by a tragedy is fruitless. It is in vain.

Now, I want to be careful here at the same time, because you go to the Old Testament to places like the book of Amos, and you'll find that God at times in the Old Testament, brings calamity on a people and judgment upon their specific sin. This is a reality that we see at different points in the Old Testament. But Jesus is saying very clearly here in Luke 13, "It is not your place to play God and decide who deserved to die and who didn't. You didn't die because you didn't deserve to die." This is the whole point. Jesus says, "All deserve this fate."

Jesus is saying, "The question is not, 'Why did this happen to them?' The question is, 'Why did this not happen to you?'" Do you hear that? The question this morning is not, "Why did this happen to these thousands upon thousands of people in China and Myanmar?" The question is, "Why has this not happened to us?" We don't think like this. We think we deserve blessing and prosperity. We look at any instance of tragedy, we look at any instance like these natural disasters, and immediately, we say, "God can't be good and let this happen. God can't be great and powerful and let this happen." We question His very existence. "Is God even there when this happens?" The tragedy is that we respond to issues like this and begin to treat God like a whipping boy who should do what we think should be best, when the reality is we fail to realize our own sinfulness.

The only reason any one of us in this room has breath at this moment is because of the great grace and mercy of God. "Do you think you in your sin deserve anything less," Jesus says. It's only the great grace and mercy of God that sustains you at this very moment. Sin is universal. God, help us to realize the seriousness of all of our sin and do not for one second think that people in Myanmar or China lost their lives because they were worse sinners than you.

Jesus says our sin is universal, and second, He tells us that our suffering is inevitable. These people are assuming that because they weren't victims, they had obviously done something to be blessed by God, to be spared by God. Ladies and gentlemen, I want to remind you that the same theology that's at work in the crowd in Luke 13 is the same theology that is at work all across the United States of America today. A theology that we have that says, "If you trust God, if you have faith in God, you will not suffer. You will be blessed with prosperity. You have faith, and you will have health and wealth. You will have all that you want if you have faith in God." It's a theology that we have exported from big church buildings and comfortable church worshippers who claim that Christianity involves prosperity, financial victory, financial success, worldly success, good health, easy lives now.

The only problem is, if that is Christianity, then Jesus Himself does not qualify. He was homeless. Not quite the picture of financial success and prosperity. He was supported by others and rejected by most. Good health? He was mocked and beaten and scourged and spit upon and nailed cruelly to a Roman cross. This is no prosperity gospel in the New Testament. If that's Christianity, then Paul, who wrote most of the New Testament, doesn't qualify. He was beaten with rods, shipwrecked, stoned, five times received the forty lashes minus one. This is the same Paul who wrote, *"I consider that our present suffering not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us"* (Rom. 8:18) He said in Romans

8, "Suffering leads to glory." We've got to be careful here. If we equate Christianity, faith in Christ with prosperity and the things of this world, then we have left the Bible behind, and our faith is meaningless.

I want to tell you why this is so important. Please don't miss this. This is why this is so important. Because amidst all of the unreached peoples in China and Myanmar who lost their lives over the last couple of weeks, I trust that there were missionaries who also lost their lives in the middle of them. These were people who had given their lives, who had sacrificed their ambitions, to go into the middle of unreached people groups and to take the gospel to them.

This is a reminder to us in this room, and we talk about the mission of Christ, that if you give yourself to this mission, you will not avoid suffering. You will be all the more susceptible to suffering if you give yourself to this mission. If we buy this garbage called the prosperity gospel, then we will run from situations like this. We will avoid situations like this. We will not go to the most dangerous places in the world. We will not send our children to the ends of the earth, because we would rather waste our lives on the prosperity this world can bring us. That is not biblical Christianity, and it undercuts the very foundation of biblical mission.

Our suffering is inevitable; our sin is universal. We need to be reminded. Jesus says, "Come face to face with your own sin when you hear about natural disasters." Listen to Jonathan Edwards. He said it so poignantly. "Resolve, to act, in all respects, both speaking and doing, as if nobody had been so vile as I, and as if I had committed the same sins, or the same infirmities or failings as others; and that I will let the knowledge of their failings promote nothing but shame in myself, and prove only an occasion of my confessing my own sins and misery to God.'

This goes beyond China and Myanmar. When you look on the news and you see what's going on in wars around the world and you see what's going on in this area or that area that is so hostile, do not ladies and gentlemen, do not, church, point the finger and say, "Look how vile they are. Look how sinful they are. Look how messed up they are." Look in your own heart and see how vile and sinful you are. You too, unless you repent, will all perish.

### **Natural disasters remind us to repent and be reconciled to God.**

This leads to the third reminder. Natural disasters remind us to repent and be reconciled to God. This is the main point of Luke 13. It's the main point. It's the context. Jesus is addressing here people who had grown cold toward God, that have lost sight of their sinfulness. Had lost sight of their need to repent.

What's interesting here is what Jesus does not do in Luke 13. When they come to Him with these questions, Jesus does not take their questions and use them as a reason to have a dialogue about why there's evil in the world, why this would happen. This was Jesus' opportunity to explain to them and to explain to us today why God would let this happen. "How can this happen? How can God be good, God be great and this happen to these people?" This was Jesus' opportunity to give us a philosophical answer.

Instead, He looks in their eyes, and He looks in every single one of our eyes, and He says this word, "Repent. Repent." This is the point of Luke 13. When you hear of natural disasters, repent and turn to God. This is Jesus preaching all throughout the Gospels. This is the preaching of the New Testament church. Acts 2:38, "*Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus* (Acts 2:38). Acts 3:19, "*Repent and turn to God that your sins may be wiped out. Repent and be reconciled to God*" (Acts 3:19).

That is the message of Luke 13 for us. Every single person in this room, in light of what has happened over these last two weeks, Jesus looks at you in the eye. Not just the person beside you, in front of you, behind you, but right where you're sitting, He looks at you in the eye, and He says, "Repent. Repent."

Are you right with God? There is no more important question to answer on May 18, 2008 than this question. Are you at this moment right with God? Are you toying with sin in your life? Repent. Have you grown cold toward God? Repent. Are you living in willful, deliberate sin? Repent. Have you grown apathetic in your relationship with God? Repent. Now, this morning, repent and be reconciled with God. Cast yourselves on the mercy of God. He gave His Son to suffer on your behalf, that you might repent and be reconciled to God today. That's the main point. We'll come back to it in just a moment.

Jonathan Edwards said, "Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life." What an incredible quote! What if we lived like that? "I'll never do anything unless I would do it in the last hour of my life before I go to meet with God." If that were true then, yes, we repent. Yes, we repent now and be reconciled to God now.

### **Natural disasters remind us of the urgency of our mission.**

Number four, natural disasters remind us of the urgency of our mission. Now, I want us to realize that Luke 13 is preceded by Jesus talking with His disciples about end times, about getting their hearts right with God because there's a day when He's going to come back. I want you to go back with me to Luke 12:35. I just want to read just a little bit of what Jesus had said just before this to help us understand the urgency that is being described here. Luke 12:35,

*"Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, and will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night, in the middle of the night. But understand this: That if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You must also be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."*

*Peter asked, "Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?" The Lord answered, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose the servant says to himself, 'My master is taking a long time in coming,' and he then begins to beat the men servants and maid servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers."*

*"The servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few*

*blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.” (Lk. 12:35-48)*

There’s so much to unpack in that passage right there, but the overall, overarching point is very clear: Be ready. Do not play games with your life and your relationship with Christ. Be ready.

Natural disasters remind us of the urgency of our mission. You say, “What do you mean by that, Dave?” Well, I mean, first of all, life is fleeting. This is the picture we’ve already seen in the unpredictability of death. It’s the picture of James 4:14, “*What is your life? Your life is a mist that is here for a little while and then vanishes*” (Jas. 4:14). Your life, ladies and gentleman, your life, every single life in this room, is a vapor. It is here one instant and gone the next. It’s a mist. It is here for a small moment and then vanishes. Life is fleeting. Life is short.

Jesus says to every single one of us, in light of what has happened over the last two weeks, “Your life is fleeting.” Not only is your life fleeting, but second, people are perishing; people are perishing. This is 2 Corinthians 4:3. It talks about how those who do not know Christ are perishing. Do we realize this? This is not just church talk, ladies and gentlemen. People are perishing. Children are perishing. Parents are perishing. Your neighbors are perishing. Your colleagues are perishing. Multitudes in the nations are perishing. Do we believe this book? If we believe this book, if we are not here just to play games then the reality is there are countless people who right now are face-to-face with a Christ-less eternity. They are perishing. There are billions around the world and a billion of them haven’t even heard the gospel. They are perishing for lack of knowledge. If this is true, then it radically changes the way we live our lives.

Life is fleeting. People are perishing, and third, eternity is coming; eternity is coming. All who are perishing today, who do not hear and receive the gospel tomorrow, will perish forever. That’s what this book teaches. Do we believe that? I mean really. Have we not come here just to have a time together and go on with our lives? Do we really believe this? People are perishing. Our lives are fleeting. Eternity is coming. That’s why Edwards said, “Resolved, never to lose one moment of time; but improve it the most profitable way I possibly can. Resolved, to live with all my might, while I do live.”

Ladies and gentlemen, live like this. Live like this because there’s coming a day very, very, very soon when it will not matter how much money you have made. It will not matter how nice your car or clothes or house were. It will not matter what you have accumulated in this life. All of that will burn up in the fire, and you will look back, and you will see for the first time how very much of our lives have been wasted on the things of this world. Jesus says in Luke 13, “See that and live with urgency. Live like you want to be ready to see my face.”

### **Three Responses ...**

#### **Pray for the church.**

You say, “Well, how do I not waste my life, then? How do I not waste, even this news over the last two weeks?” There are three responses I want to put before you. Here’s how you don’t waste your lives and waste this news. Number one: Pray for the church. How do we respond to natural disasters? We pray for followers of Christ in Myanmar and in China and in Lebanon. Pray for the church. Pray that these followers of Christ in the middle of Sichuan

Province, the middle of the plains of Myanmar, would be still and know that He is God in the middle of calamity. Pray that they would remember that hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, dangerous work cannot separate them from the love of Christ. Pray that God will meet all of their needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus and enable them to meet needs of those around them. Pray that God will shine brightly through our brothers and sisters during these days, that God will use them to show the goodness of God in the middle of tragedy. Pray for the church. If we are not praying for believers in China and Myanmar, then we have missed the point. This is what it means to be the church altogether. Pray for the church.

### **Pray for the lost.**

Second: Pray for the lost. Pray for millions and millions of unbelievers in the middle of central China and Myanmar and pray for the millions of unbelievers that are thousands of miles away from those places who are looking upon these tragedies. Pray for those who are blogging and writing editorials across our country, blaspheming God in response to these tragedies. Pray that unbelievers will not curse God. Pray that they will seek God's grace and mercy and power in the middle of all this. Pray that they will see a God who is not unfamiliar with our suffering, but a God who became a man who was familiar with all of our hurts and our pains.

Pray that they will see a Savior who has identified with us and our pain and suffering, who has taken the ultimate pain and suffering upon Himself, so that one day, there will be no more sorrow and no more sickness and no more pain and no more earthquakes and no more cyclones, and God Himself will wipe away every tear from their eyes when we see His face. Pray that unbelievers will see this during these days. Pray for people around you, around us in Birmingham, who see these events and wonder about God as a result of these things.

### **Pray for yourselves.**

Finally, pray for yourselves. Pray for the church, pray for the lost, and how do we respond to this news? Pray for yourselves. "What do you mean by that, Dave?" What I mean is that we need to pray that God would give us a proper perspective, a perspective that is grounded in Luke 13.

There are two groups of people in this room this morning. There are those who know Christ, and there are those who do not know Christ. If you do not know Christ, then Luke 13 says these three words clearly to every single person in that group this morning. Those three words are, "Repent or perish; repent or perish." Jesus says it with great force. "*I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will also perish...I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish*" (Lk. 13:3, 5).

You have sinned. We have sinned grievously against God, and He has made a way for us to be forgiven of our sins and to have new life through Christ, His Son, who died on a cross for your sin, rose from the grave with power over sin and He says to all trust in Him, "Turn from sin and trust in me. This is what it means to repent."

Eternity is at stake in what you decide when you're faced with repent or perish. Eternity is not to be toyed with, and God is not to be trifled with. Repent. Turn to God. The really amazing thing is the thrust of Luke 13. The really amazing thing is not that these disasters happened over the last two weeks. The really amazing thing is that God has enabled individuals across this room one more day to repent.

To all who do know Christ, I want to say this as nicely as possible. Life is fleeting. People are perishing. Eternity is coming, and God has given those who know Christ a mission to make the gospel known in all the earth. Therefore, I say to every follower of Christ in this room, when it comes to this mission, get involved in this mission or get out of the way.

I say this as a pastor, and I urge you to listen closely. I say this as a pastor of this church to every Christ follower in this room: If you are not willing to live urgently for this mission, then you will not be happy in this church. You will not be happy in this church if you're not willing to live urgently for this mission. I am not speaking to anyone in particular. I am not speaking to any group in particular. I'm speaking to every single follower of Christ in this room, including myself. If you are a follower of Christ, and you're not willing to abandon everything in your life and everything in this church to accomplish the Great Commission, then move out of the way. Between 100,000 and 200,000 people lost their lives, were swept away and swallowed up by the earth over the last two weeks, most of whom had never even heard the gospel.

This is not tolerable for the church today, not with all of the resources that we have, not with the glorious gospel that we have. We cannot sit back and spend our money and our time designing and indulging in programs that revolve around us and Christianity that revolves around us. We must be done with discussions and arguments in the church today about how we can best have our needs met. It is high time for us to start talking together, even maybe arguing together, about how best to feed the hungry and clothe the poor and make the gospel known among people who have never even heard the name of Jesus.

You're saying, "Well what does this mean then, pastor, for this family series? What about our families? Aren't our families important? Don't our families need to be pastored?" This is the point; this is the point. We're going to talk next week about marriage. Husbands and wives in this room need to stay together and love each other and submit to each other and sacrifice for each other so that the nations will know that Christ is good.

We're going to talk about parenting in a couple of weeks, and you are not a parent, the Bible says, so that your children can get a good education and a good job and a good life like you have. You are a parent to make disciples of all nations. Parenting is for disciple-making. We're going to talk about singleness. Why are so many of us in this room single? And the answer that Jesus gives and Paul gives, is so you can be more effective in mission, be more active in proclaiming the gospel. This is the whole point. We're going to talk on Father's Day about manhood, because it's high time for pansy men in the church who are so consumed with sex and sports and success, to put it aside and realize there's a lost and dying world around us that is going to hell.

What are we here for if not to make the glory of this God known in all nations? This mission is too good, and it is too urgent to sit idly by. This is the take away from Luke 13: That children and students and men and women around this room will join hearts and hands and say, "We will give our lives so that people in China and Myanmar and every other unreached people will never face a natural disaster again without first hearing and seeing the gospel through us." That's the takeaway.

Will you bow your heads with me? Bow your heads and close your eyes with me. I want to lead us in a time of response. This church went into high gear following Katrina. That was a good thing. It's time for this church to go into high gear today. I'm going to ask at this moment for church leaders, staff, elders, elders' wives to make themselves available across the front here and down the sides. If you would go ahead and begin to move there.

What I want to do is I want to give us an opportunity in this moment to repent and be reconciled to God. I want to call men and women, husbands and wives, students, children, all across this room to turn to God. To turn from sin and turn to God. Some of you for the first time to say, "I am turning from sin and turning to Christ today, because I'm not guaranteed the rest of this day. Now is the day." 2 Corinthians 6:2 says, "*Today is the day of salvation*" (2 Cor. 6:2). I want to urge you, in just a moment, when we begin to have a time of prayer and response, to move to a church leader, maybe somebody you don't even know. We don't do this all the time, but there is a time and a place all throughout Scripture for God's people to come before leaders and say, "This is what God is doing in my life, and I need you to pray for me, encourage me." That's what we're going to do.

If you have never repented and turned to God, I want to invite you to do that for the first time today. If there are believers in this room who are indulging in sin or toying with sin, then I invite you to repent and turn to God. Go to one of these leaders and say, "Pray for me in this."

I want to call followers of Christ around this room to abandon everything, to let this be a stake in the ground for many of you this morning. I'm praying that God, this morning, at this moment, would be calling out men and women, husbands and wives, teenagers who would say today, "I'm giving my life to what God is doing around the world. I don't know what that looks like, but I'm surrendering it all today. For the first time today, I'm giving God a blank check." Families around this room will say, "Today we are putting a stake in the ground, and we are being more bold, more passionate about this mission that's in front of us. We want to live urgently." This altar area is open for you to come and to kneel here. These folks are available to pray with you. I want us to have a time where we rise up and respond as Andrew begins to play.

Father, we pray that you would take these moments in response to this work and in response to what is going on around the world. God, we pray that you would rend our hearts. We all pray that you would grip our hearts with the love of Christ, with the compassion of Christ, with the work of Christ on our behalf.

Father, I pray that all across this room in these moments, people would repent and be reconciled to God. God, I pray that this moment would not be wasted so that we can get on to other things. God, I pray that people would turn and trust in you. That Christians who are indulging, flirting with sin, God, would turn from that and would live as if this was the last hour of their lives.

Father, we pray that you'd help us to live that way when it comes to your mission. God, I pray that all across this room, during these moments, families, couples would go running to a church leader or running to the front, kneeling before you and saying, "I give my life. We give our lives to you." God, use us in urgency for this mission. Make us the men and women, the husbands and the wives, the kids, parents that we are designed to be so that your grace and glory might be made known through us, especially among those darkest places in the world. We give you blank checks all across this room today, God. Make us a church, we pray, that is radically surrendered to this mission. We give you these moments, and we pray that you would lead us, you would guide us and you would enable us by your grace to respond to your Word.

These church leaders are available. I want to invite you now to begin to respond. If you would like to go to one of these church leaders, to come and to pray down here at the front. We're going to take this time in prayer and response. Even right now, how will you respond to this word? How will you respond to these situations? Will you let your hearts be hard or

will you be softened toward God and let this news, let this word, penetrate your heart and transform your lives? I invite you to respond now.

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