

March 2001

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Earthquakes: A Message in a Moment?

Seismologists and geologists are puzzled. Why did Olympia and Seattle bear the brunt of the recent 6.8 magnitude earthquake that rocked the Puget Sound region on February 28th? Experts agree that the city of Tacoma and its suburbs which were relatively unscathed by the seismic event, should have been the recipient of the greater portion of damage. The epicenter, after all, was located in south Pierce County.

Some people speculate that God was showing his displeasure with the wickedness of Olympia and Seattle. One represents the seat of authority and the other the center of commerce. Together, they have seemingly been shaking their fists in the face of God. Consider, for example, some of the poor judgments exercised by officials in those two cities—just in the month of February alone.

First, the Tumwater City Council (Tumwater adjoins Olympia) voted to require contractors who do business with the city to provide their employees with same-sex partner benefits. Six days later, the King County Council placed a moratorium on church growth in rural areas of the county. Then, within a few more days, Governor Locke introduced at least a half-dozen bills supportive of the homosexual agenda, and Rep. Pat Lantz (D-Gig Harbor) killed the Harmful to Minors Bill in the House Judiciary Committee. This measure, similar to those in 43 other states, would have protected children from exposure to sexually explicit material.

And, in the “there you go again category,” Seattle suffered another black eye when city officials could not bring themselves to enforce the law as an unruly crowd estimated at 4,000 went on a wild drinking rampage in Pioneer Square on the evening of Tuesday, February 27th. The unbridled revelry eventually escalated to violence resulting in looting, beatings, and, tragically, a homicide.And then came the shaking.

Hours later, on the morning of the 28th, it was as if THE LORD ALMIGHTY had something to say, but needed only 40 seconds to make His point. Sen. Dino Rossi (R-Issaquah), quipped, “...there was absolutely no separation of church and state, because there was a whole lot of praying going on.” (The Olympian, 3/13).

Historically, Christians have viewed natural disasters, calamities, and even variances in weather as signs from God. So it is certainly reasonable to wonder if this earthquake was also some kind of sign. If so, would it be to unbelievers who do not or cannot discern the voice of our God?

In exploring the Biblical pattern of God’s signs through natural phenomena, it is evident that in the past, when God sent signs to unbelievers, he also appointed a godly man to interpret those signs for them (Joseph, Moses, Daniel, and various prophets).

More often, God’s people assumed that a calamity meant there was sin in the camp—their camp! Even in modern times. During late spring of 1623, for instance, the Pilgrims of

Plymouth Colony experienced one of the worst droughts the region has ever seen. As crops began to wither before their eyes their thoughts turned to God. According to Edward Winslow, one of the Pilgrims, the lack of rain "...moved not only every good man privately to enter into examination with his own estate between God and his conscience, and so to humiliation before Him, but also to humble ourselves together before the Lord by fasting and prayer." ¹

Happily, Winslow reported that the 12-week drought not only ended within a day of the special call to prayer and fasting, but it also had a profound effect on the neighboring Indians. He noted, "...all of them admired the goodness of our God towards us."

But whether calamities came upon God's people or upon their enemies, the point is that God became the focus - not the calamity itself.

The message of Psalm 46 is comforting for believers, and tells us how to respond in the face of natural disasters: Verse 2 in King James says; Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. Verse 10 concludes; Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.

This psalm tells us not to be alarmed by the shaking or moving of the elements, but to turn our eyes to the Lord and know that He is God. We are to respond to God's awesome display of His power and sovereignty by seeking Him for a renewed awareness of who He is. If we do this, we may someday look back to this event as a turning point for the Church in our state.

Next month, I will share with you a move that is bringing change to many churches across the state. I believe it will begin to affect the political landscape - even this year. For now, I'll close by sharing a devotional that was passed along to me by our Communications Director, Carline Dally. I think it's appropriate.

"Isaiah had come to his place of devotions one day, just as we have. He describes the nature of the times "In the year that King Uzziah died...I saw the Lord!" (Is. 6:1). There is something powerfully instructive in his testimony, for we are shown the transient, changing, decaying rule of dying man contrasted with the steadfast, glorious rule of the Living God.

In the same way, the Holy Spirit's awakening us to the beauty of the message of "the kingdom of God" which comes at a time when world kingdoms are in a bewildering state of flux. These upheavals have a way of shaking the foundations of everything around us - family, job, personal security.

But as Isaiah, let's turn our hearts toward Him, hungry for the King Himself. See Him, the source of kingdom life, hope, and glory...Today!" ²

Rick Forcier

Executive Director

¹ The Light and the Glory, Peter J. Marshall, Jr., and David B. Manuel., Jr., Baker Book House Co., 1977, pg141-142

² Living the Spirit Filled Life: Daily Devotions for Personal Application, March 2