

“Rescued From the Rubble”

Amos 1:1-2

We have yet to hear details of survivor stories in the aftermath of the earthquake in Haiti. But I am sure there will be extraordinary feats of courage and sacrifice to save others. On December 7, 1988 an earthquake killed 55,000 people in Armenia. Susanna Petroysan and her daughter Gayaney were stuck in a basement beneath tons of collapsed concrete and steel.

Gayaney begs, “Mommy, I’m so thirsty. I want a drink.” After feeling around in the darkness, Susanna found some shattered glass. She used it to slash her left hand and then gave it to her daughter to suck her blood. Days passed. Susanna had no idea how many times she cut her hands. She only knew that if she stopped her daughter would die.

Hands were cut, blood was shed, and the child was saved.

Amos, God’s prophet to Israel in the early part of the 8th Century BC offers us rescue from the rubble. God’s judgment on Israel was coming. The earthquake in 760 BC that Amos said was coming “in two years” was so unforgettable that the prophet Zechariah could reference it several centuries later and count on people recognizing his mention of “the earthquake in the days of King Uzziah.”

God warned of the destruction of the earthquake to come. The earthquake was coming because of the sin of the people of Israel. God warned them to flee the coming wrath. God’s prophets repeatedly implored the people to repent, to turn from their ways, and to acknowledge and worship the One True God.

When sin entered the world, we no longer stood on solid ground. Sin causes unstable, ever shifting tremors that shake us to our foundation. Satan would love for everything that you hold dear to crumble and fall. He wants to shatter your lives, shatter your confidence, and make you think you are in “hell on earth.” But the minor tremors of trials and difficulties during our life are but a faint foreshadowing of the earthquake of judgment to come.

In a promotional piece, news anchor Brian Williams described Haiti in those terms: “It was hell on earth.” He is wrong. It is just like I said on Sunday, the gifts or events of Valentine’s Day or even the joy of a Super Bowl victory cannot bring “a little bit of heaven on earth.” Likewise, even in the darkest, bloodiest, or most gut-wrenching scenes of Haiti, it is not “hell on earth.”

The Gospel and the hope of salvation have not been crushed in the rubble. God and His people are still at work. Even more, the Word of God is still at work. Beyond the fires and torment described where there is “weeping and gnashing of teeth”, Hell’s greatest punishment is that the presence of God is not there. Being forsaken by God is the deepest pain of Hell.

The only person to actually experience “hell on earth” was the Son of God. Jesus is forsaken by His Father. He willingly carried the burden of our guilt and sin. As St. Paul says, “He was without sin became sin for us.” He became the personification of sin. He became the object of scorn and disgrace. He is forsaken by God. He endured Hell, so that we don’t have to.

Even when we are buried in the rubble of our sinful lives, we are loved; we are protected; and we are fed with the flesh and blood of someone who was willing to die so that we can live. Like with that loving mother in Armenia, blood has poured out of a hand; we drink it and live. Amen.