

## **Why does our world suffer chronic disaster?**

*Bible Lecture presentation by Pastor Clifford Owusu-Gyamfi  
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This week, China experienced the strongest typhoon of the year. The disaster claimed 28 lives and it is thought that 15 people are missing. The typhoon, known as Meranti, destroyed over 18,000 houses and caused an economic loss of about 2.5 million USD.

On October 12, 1979, the world experienced the greatest storm of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its name was Super Typhoon Tip. It had a wind speed of about 300kph, and a circulation size of about 1,380 miles. Super Typhoon Tip was a huge storm that destroyed both lives and properties.

In 1976, there was an outbreak of a fatal disease that came to be known as Ebola. Two years ago, in March 2014, there was a heavy outbreak of Ebola in West Africa. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that out of a total of 28,652 suspected and laboratory-confirmed cases, a total of 11,325 precious lives were lost to the virus. The death rate of the recent Ebola outbreak supersedes all previous outbreaks combined. It was a bad pandemic.

Today I am very sorry to bring you bad news about this world. Our world is suffering from chronic cataclysms; disasters that are fierce and without cure. In a few moments, I will define what I mean by a “chronic disaster”, and why it needs our attention. By the end of this presentation, it is my prayer that we will all come to understand the urgent need to live consciously and wisely in this chronically disastrous world. The biggest question I intend to tackle is, “Why should our world suffer disasters”?

### *Definition of a disaster*

According to The Johns Hopkins University and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), disaster may be defined as “a sudden overwhelming and unforeseen event. At the household level, a disaster could result in a major illness, death, a substantial economic or social misfortune. At the community level, it could be a flood, a fire, a collapse of buildings in an earthquake, the destruction of livelihoods, an epidemic or displacement through conflict.” When I use the term “chronic disaster”, I mean to affirm the fact that these disasters have become chronic, meaning, they are unstoppable, recurring, destructive, and something with the potential to bring this world to its final close. That means this world is on the apocalyptic watch.

For the purpose of understanding this chronic disaster in context, I have grouped them into two main categories: (1) Human suffering as a disaster, and (2) Natural disasters.

### *Human suffering as a disaster*

There is the disaster of human suffering. The human condition is subject to diverse sufferings that range from death, psychological traumas, health related problems, social challenges, crimes, war crimes, etc. Human civilization suffers a trail of despair.

If one takes, for example, global suicide rates, according to the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “From 1999 to 2014, the suicide rate rose by 24%.”<sup>1</sup> The World Health Organization (WHO) affirms similar facts. According to the WHO:

- There were an estimated 804 000 suicide deaths worldwide in 2012.
- The global suicide rate is 11.4 per 100,000 people.
- On average, someone commits suicide every 40 seconds somewhere in the world.
- 1.4% of worldwide deaths are suicides.

Our own sweet beautiful country, Switzerland, has become the capital for suicide. That means not everyone is happy in this rich country.

On wars, since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the world has witnessed two major wars and several civil wars that heavily impacted the human race. More than 71 million lives were lost in the two major world wars. Today, the world continues to fight and put human lives at stake. Human beings have difficulty living with each other—just look around you at the threatening advances of terrorism. As a friend once disclosed to me, “I’m not even safe in my own neighborhood”. This is a huge human disaster. (Now let me shift your attention to natural disasters)

### *Natural disasters and the scientific apocalyptic theories of a mortal world*

There is a Big Bang genesis and a Big Bang apocalypse theory of the universe in science. The Big Bang genesis is what we know as the Big Bang theory, the supposedly explosion that gave birth to the universe. The Big Bang apocalypse is science’s speculation of how the universe will come to an end.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.economist.com/news/united-states/21697852-suicide-rates-are-rising-america-and-other-rich-countries-saddest-trend> Last visited 20th September 2016.

Several speculative theories in the scientific world propose the destruction of the earth by some kind of natural disaster. According to some of these theories, the world is mortal and lies in wait of a global cataclysm. The most popular theories include: Eruption of a Super Volcano, Explosion of a Massive Star, Spread of Deadly Disease, Global Warming, Deployment of Nuclear Weapons, Computer Takeover, Asteroid impact, and Death of the Sun. In order to save time, let us examine global warming.

The most talked about apocalyptic dread of our world today is global warming. Global warming is “the term used to describe a gradual increase in the average temperature of the Earth's atmosphere and its oceans, a change that is believed to be permanently changing the Earth's climate.”<sup>2</sup> According to astrophysicist Ethan Siegel, "The Sun as it exists today ... is about 20% more energetic than it was at the earliest times. If it weren't for the greenhouse effect of our atmosphere, early Earth would have been as frozen as Mars is today. But as time goes on, the Sun will continue to heat up. This won't affect us on timescales of hundreds, thousands or even millions of years, but rather as the years tick by in the hundreds of millions.... In other words, at some point, the Sun will become so hot that the Earth's oceans will boil. This is the ultimate form of global warming: a world so hot that water is impossible. At this point, life on our planet's surface will be rendered impossible, although some clever species may make a new home in Earth's (cooler) upper atmosphere"<sup>3</sup>.

Whether Global Warming is a hoax or no-surprise, “the scientific consensus on climatic changes related to global warming is that the average temperature of the Earth has risen between 0.4 and 0.8 °C over the past 100 years.”<sup>4</sup> In a Global Land-Ocean Temperature index released by NASA<sup>5</sup> this year, August 2016 has been declared the hottest month in the last 136 years. This data supports the reports of massive depletion of the ozone layer.

World leaders today fear global warming and there are an ongoing series of conferences, summits, and governmental policies geared towards finding answers to curb the climatic menace. We shouldn't be naïve to think that global warming could be a global warning of a dreadful future.

Science is never oblivious about the fate of this world. Neither is the Bible; scripture declares in plain words that this world suffers a chronic disaster:

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.livescience.com/topics/global-warming> Last visited 20th September 2016.

<sup>3</sup> (Astrophysicist who professes physics and astronomy at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, in Forbes July 19, 2015) <http://www.forbes.com/sites/startswithabang/2016/05/31/how-global-warming-will-someday-end-life-on-earth/#25306aa27438> Last visited 22. 09. 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> [http://data.giss.nasa.gov/gistemp/tabledata\\_v3/GLB.Ts+dSST.txt](http://data.giss.nasa.gov/gistemp/tabledata_v3/GLB.Ts+dSST.txt)

*"The earth reels like a drunkard, it sways like a hut in the wind; so heavy upon it is the guilt of its rebellion that it falls--never to rise again" (Isaiah 24: 20).*

*"We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time" (Romans 8: 22).*

*"Lift up your eyes to the sky, Then look to the earth beneath; For the sky will vanish like smoke, And the earth will wear out like a garment And its inhabitants will die in like manner; But My salvation will be forever, And My righteousness will not wane" (Isaiah 51:6).*

*"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away" (Matthew 24:35).*

*"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare" (2 Peter 3:10).*

Before scientists could provide any empirical evidence of a mortal and wounded universe, the Bible had already given us clues. The ancient prophets of God forewarned humanity about the destruction of the world and their voices still speak today. As I take a transition into the Bible, one thing we need to know is that the presence of evil and the destruction of the world are not conspiracy theories or hoaxes, they are real and daily-felt phenomena of our world history which are undeniable by science.

Now, what may interest us is not the ugly fate of the world, or to bombard you with intelligent information, but the most important question is whether there is any meaning and purpose at all in our world? What went wrong? And how can we live in certainty of the future?

### *In the beginning of the mess*

The book of Genesis tells of the genesis of our world, and the book of Revelation tells the story of its restoration. "In between, we're able to see God's plan for us and our planet. The first two chapters of the Bible show us that God created a world that was perfect—free from suffering and evil."<sup>6</sup> In fact, death was not part of the plan. In Genesis 1:31, it is written

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<sup>6</sup> John C. Brunt, *Good News for Troubled Times*, p. 10.

that “*God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.*” Note, it was not only good but very good. Human beings were crowned with honor, glory and dignity as it is written: “*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them*” (Gen. 1: 26, 27). God never left any work undone or halfway. Creation was a very good thing, and a gift to humanity from a good God. But there was a chaotic turnaround.

In Genesis chapters 3 & 4, there came a distortion in the order of things. Adam and Eve fell from the perfect will of God. The fall of humanity unleashed a terrible canker called sin into the world. Curses came upon humanity and the earth (Gen. 3: 14-19). As a result of sin, we found Cain murdering his own brother (Gen. 4: 8). Humanity was set against each other. In Genesis chapter 5:1, we found the death of Adam, and subsequent generations. Genesis chapters 6 and 7 record the evil of humanity upon the face of the earth. The evil behavior of mankind grieved God. We read in Genesis 6: 6, “*The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.*” [Sin grieves God. It is not a good thing. Let us stop sinning].

God’s response to evil was a global flood, a huge flood. People died as well as animals. The flood was a destructive judgment from God against evil humanity, but it was also an escape of salvation for Noah and his family.

We can see vividly from Genesis chapters 3 to 8 that the fall of Adam and Eve was chaotic; anarchy resulted from their disobedience. The transgression of mankind resulted in death, murder, evil and finally, the destructive flood. We can say with certitude that the root cause of all our troubles in the world is evil. Humanity was created to be in harmony with creation and divinity. But whenever people depart from God, chaos takes over. As the prophet cried, “*If you consent and obey, you will eat the best of the land; “But if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword” (Isaiah 1:19-20).* Chaos is the fruit of evil.

Friends, evil has a far-reaching consequence. It exploded the world into chaos. Paul said in Romans 5:12, “just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.” Sin was a cosmic disaster. It is not only humanity’s problem. It is a problem for the entire world. The entire creation is in “bondage to decay” according to Romans 8:21. We should expect a gradual deterioration in creation such as in desertification, a high mortality rate, depletion of the ozone, natural disasters, immunodeficiency, and all sorts of degradation that one may find in creation. Death is decay, and it is a substance of every natural object!

As we stand flabbergasted at the fierce and vicious disasters of our world today, we shouldn't think of ourselves as "I-don't-care" spectators. We should be aware of the presence of evil and its sweeping and damaging effects in the world. Then we can order our way of life for now and the future. And this is not a gospel of fear—it is the gospel of fact!

*The quest for a new earth*

Today, scientists unanimously agree that this earth will not last forever. In 2005, the then NASA Administrator Michael Griffin revealed to the Washington Post how scientific research is ongoing for an outer space settlement. Griffin said, "There will be another mass-extinction event. If we humans want to survive for hundreds of thousands or millions of years, we must ultimately populate other planets." He continued, "I'm talking about that one day, I don't know when that day is, but there will be more human beings who live off the Earth than on it."<sup>7</sup> Human beings are looking for refugee camps in outer space. That is the Big Bang apocalypse theory of science. The earth will not endure forever.

*What does the Bible say about a new earth and the future of humanity?*

In the Bible, we are told about the disappearing of the earth and the heavens—i.e. stars and planets. *"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare"* (2 Peter 3:10). The climactic appearance of Christ will collapse the old world to begin a new life. God will then take history from its temporality into His eternal history. As the apostle puts it, *"so we will be with the Lord forever"* (1 Thess. 4:21). The ultimate hope is eternity in the presence of the Lord. The second advent of Christ marks both the redemption of creation and the recreation of the old world. There is no episode in history that is so glorious and eventual, in my opinion, than the second coming of Christ. Therefore, Christians embrace the future with certainty, knowing that the second appearance of Christ ushers the children of God into the culmination of His eternal plan of salvation.

The revelator also points us to a future of new beginnings. Revelation 21:1: *"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea."* Friends, the new world begins with "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1). It is another genesis of newness. All things beginning in newness should

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/09/23/AR2005092301691.html?utm\\_term=.8ebb278766f2](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/09/23/AR2005092301691.html?utm_term=.8ebb278766f2)

be understood as renewal, not necessarily replacement. The Greek term *kainos* is understood to mean unlike before. It is this old earth, our natural habitat that is renewed in quality because every stain of sin and its effects are eradicated. The new earth becomes the seat for the New Jerusalem<sup>8</sup>. The kingdom of God finally realizes its glorious physical exaltation on planet earth. Adventists believe that God “not only refurbishes the earth, He exalts it. Transcending its pre-Fall status, it becomes the capital of the universe.”<sup>9</sup> Just like the first creation, God Himself shall be the architect of the new creation (Rev. 21:5)<sup>10</sup>.

The new creation is a celebration of God’s redemptive work. The whole creation embraces a new order of God’s aestheticism. Paul noted that “*For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God*” (Rom. 8: 20-22). The redemptive work of God renews creation. A New Testament theologian, in the person of Richard Bauckham identifies this beginning as the redemption of “the whole community of creation for which God has a future, and humans will attain their eternal destiny only along with the other creatures with whom they are inextricably connected in the complex web of life.”<sup>11</sup> The new creation, however, undoes every curse of evil that has subjected the world to corruption and created hostility between creation and humanity. This chronic disaster shall be a thing of the past. Humanity shall once again regain paradise lost. This is God’s solution to our chronically disastrous world, and this is the Adventist message, Jesus is coming again! Amen!

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<sup>8</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*. Oakland, Cal., New York: Pacific Press Publishing Company, 1888, p. 678.

<sup>9</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines*. Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005, p. 418.

<sup>10</sup> He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

<sup>11</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Renewal of Nature: Reading Isaiah and the Gospels ecologically*. A lecture given at St Tikhon’s Orthodox Seminary, Moscow, October 2009, p. 1.