



“Storm Warning”

Last week the east coast of Florida was struck by a category 4 hurricane. Thankfully, although the damage was widespread, the loss of life was very small. The Caribbean island of Hispaniola did not fare as well, as some three hundred Haitians were killed by this same hurricane.

As Christians there are several lessons to be learned from a disaster such as this. First, of course, there is compassion. It is easy to enjoy the comfort of our own secure surroundings and then to respond to televised images of destruction and human suffering as if watching a fictionalized motion picture. But the damage and disruption to people's lives in this case is all real. We ought to pray and, if possible, help to alleviate the suffering of the less fortunate.

I use the word “fortunate,” but I really mean something more. And that goes with the second lesson we can learn from this calamity. We do not believe in fortune or luck. We do believe in providence. God, for His own eternal purposes, permits tragedy to come into the lives of some people, while others are spared. Does this mean we are especially favored because we are safe from disaster of this magnitude, or that the people of Florida or Haiti are under a special curse? Not at all. In Luke 13, Jesus warns against assuming that people who suffer hardship always do so because of specific sin. Sometimes disaster can be linked to specific sin. However, many times it cannot. We all are sinners, and apart from the saving grace of God in Christ, we all are under the wrath of God. The whole of creation groans under the burden of the fall. Until Jesus comes there will be wars, earthquakes, and calamities. Thank God that we were spared this disaster.

Lesson three is that an event like this can help us to arrange our values and priorities. A few people along the coast refused to evacuate. They either disbelieved the storm warnings, or feared their property might be looted if they did not remain behind to protect it. Some placed a greater value on material possessions than on their

own lives and the lives of their loved ones. For most, however, leaving your possessions to save your life was an easy choice. When the storm warning is up, our values tend to be focused and our priorities arranged. Dr. Samuel Johnson famously said, "Depend upon it, Sir, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully." If people value things less, life more, and consider the fragility and brevity of life because of this storm, some good will have come from something bad.

A fourth thought is this: There are things we cannot control. I actually heard both a politician and a television reporter ascribe this hurricane to man-made "global warming," However, devastating storms existed long before hairspray and automobiles. Nothing mankind does or does not do can create or alter a weather event such as a hurricane. While God did give man dominion over creation, there are aspects of "the works of God's hands" that man cannot manage or restrain. "What is man that thou art mindful of him... thou hast made him a little lower than the angels..." (Ps. 8:4, 5). Humility should be learned from this.

Lastly, the Bible says, "The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away" (Ps. 1:4). The prophet Isaiah said that in the day of God's judgment, the nations shall be "like a rolling thing before the whirlwind" (Is. 17:13). A storm of God's judgment is coming that will make a hurricane seem like a gentle summer breeze by comparison. The day of the Lord will sweep away all who do not know Christ. But like this recent hurricane, this fearful judgment does not come without warning. As people along Florida's east coast were urged to evacuate, the Bible urges us to "flee from the wrath to come" (Lk. 3:7). Those who place faith in Christ as their Lord and Savior will be sheltered safe from the stormy blast of the judgment to come.