

Hurricane Katrina

Note: Originally written in early September 2005.

We have all watched in shock, grief and awe at the physical destruction of Hurricane Katrina these last several days. The death toll in New Orleans is unknown at this point as the authorities work to rescue those who are still living. Other communities such as Biloxi, MS and the surrounding areas are absolutely devastated. As soundly saved Christians and Biblical evangelists we must weigh our response to this tragedy very carefully.

Whenever a national or global tragedy strikes, our tendency is to simply react. All too often we let our emotions carry us while we put all that we know on the back burner. What modern Christianity, particularly modern American Christianity, lacks is balance. The American church moves almost exclusively in the realm of extremes. Our Lord was nothing if not balanced in His responses to life in a fallen world. When confronted with the death of His dear friend Lazarus, Jesus alternately taught on eternal life, wept, and raised him from the dead. His emotions weren't so dominant that He could not teach the truth or deal with the problem at hand.

Reactions:

Consider two possible reactions to this tragedy:

1. New Orleans was a wicked city, rivaling Sodom and Gomorrah in evil and deserved this judgment from God. Anyone whom we encounter from New Orleans ought to be told in no uncertain terms that they are simply reaping what they have sown.
2. The hurricane was simply a hiccup in the natural world and has nothing whatsoever to do with an act of a Sovereign God. The people of New Orleans are innocent victims of a terrible tragedy and we should simply give them everything they need to recover, no questions asked.

The Truth:

The truth lies somewhere in between these two extremes, these two reactions.

The problem with view number one is that New Orleans was not the only city to be devastated by this hurricane. It is the one that is facing the most devastation, but many other towns in the region were also destroyed. The homes of believers and non-believers were destroyed alike. It's safe to assume that the death toll will include both soundly saved believers and non-believers.

Another problem with view number one is the fact that God has not judged the Bible belt cities as of yet. The Lord had his harshest words for religious hypocrites (see Matthew 23). Who would the Lord be more upset with today: people who claim to know Him and yet live just like the world or those who have nothing to do with Him whatsoever? If God judged New Orleans, then why hasn't He judged Dallas\Ft. Worth? Why hasn't He wiped out Southern California? Sexual immorality, drunkenness, and crass materialism absolutely abound in these areas where church attendance is the greatest. Perhaps our day is coming soon. We ought not be like Jonah who hoped for the destruction of Nineveh. We ought to imitate Jeremiah, who wept for Jerusalem in spite of their deserved judgment.

We who love the holiness of God and deeply reverence His wrath and anger must be careful not to revel in it. If we truly understood the terrors of Hell, we certainly wouldn't come across as if the populating of it were an occasion to be celebrated, but a time of mourning and grief. We would lose sleep over the hundreds, if not thousands, who were swept into Hell!

The problem with view number two is that no one is innocent. Every single human being, whether they be from New Orleans or Jackson Hole, Wyoming is a Law breaker. We have all broken God's moral Law, the 10 commandments. Sometimes victims of a tragedy like this one will cry out against God, "I don't deserve this!" Instead, they ought to be thankful that they, as survivors, have not received what they do deserve. God has shown them mercy.

When we tell lies, we are liars. When we steal, we are thieves. When we look with lust, we commit adultery in our hearts. And when we take the Lord's name in vain, we are blasphemers. The Word of God is plain: people who do such things are worthy of eternal punishment in a literal Lake of Fire (Rev. 21:8; 1 Cor. 6:9-10). Christ's blood was not shed by accident; it was by Divine Purpose. Christ became sin for us that we might be made right with God (2 Cor. 5:21). Only His blood can remove the full brunt of God's wrath (Rom. 5:9). His blood was not shed for innocent men and women. It was shed for criminals, the Law breaking cursed of the earth (Gal. 3:10). Our response must be to repent (Acts 3:19) and believe (Jn. 3:16).

The people of New Orleans are neither innocent nor more guilty of sinning against a holy God. They are just as guilty as every other Hell deserving sinner. They are just as guilty as we were without Christ. May we never forget it.

So what is our Biblical response? We should do what Jesus did. When questioned about a tragedy in Biblical times, Jesus did not speculate about the cause. In Luke 13:4 it's recorded that the Tower of Siloam fell and killed eighteen people. Jesus asked His listeners this: "Do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem?" Perhaps the Tower of Siloam was the equivalent of the French Quarter in New Orleans to the minds of the Pharisees. He answers the question for them in verse 5: ***"I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."***