

### WHEN TORNADOES HIT “THE BIBLE BELT”

This past Monday afternoon as reporters were going from wrecked and havoc-filled block after another they kept running into devout Christians in our wonderful sister state of Oklahoma. I would like to say I am not ashamed to live in a place often referred to as “The Bible Belt.” One man was caught by a reporter who had just lost his house and everything in it. As he stood in the midst of the rubble, having saved his crippled wife and himself alone, he was literally doing what the Bible says in Philippians 4:4, *“Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice”* as well as I Thessalonians 5:18, *“In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”* The reporter asked, what do you do in this situation? The Christian man said something to this effect, “Well, this is just junk that we have accumulated in a long life, but, Ma’am, we have Jesus, so we haven’t lost a thing, just junk. My life is not this stuff, our trust is in the Lord!” This morning it was so touching to see a Christian lady who was a member of the Highway Patrol saying how precious Jesus is and God is still good!” One man, as he emerged from his storm cellar to see the devastation, said “The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. All in my family are safe. Blessed be the name of the Lord!” I keep hearing these words, “We’re grieving, but trusting in the Lord.” Let the critics of the old-time religion call us weird and out of date, but the truth is found in the Holy Scriptures: *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble”* (Psalm 46:1). My thanks to God for the safety granted my son and his family, my brother and his wife and my many cousins, sons, daughters and grandchildren of my Uncle Phillip who are residents of Oklahoma. I am also very thankful that Grandma Callie Neese is okay. She is visiting some of her kids in the Oklahoma City area. Our prayers are lifted for the families of the deceased. May the Lord give discernment to those looking still for missing loved ones.

What lessons may we learn from this past week’s catastrophe?

#### **1. We don’t know when trials may come; be prepared.**

At very best, Oklahomans had sixteen minutes before the tornado struck. There is an old saying, “There are no atheists in the foxhole.” I would never argue that point, however, I must say, it would be best not to wait until the foxhole to start believing in God and doing your praying. The Bible says, *“Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth”* (Proverbs 27:1).

If someone reading these words is not a Christian, now is the time to receive Christ in repentance and become one! The Word of God says, *“...Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation”* (II Corinthians 6:2). God never says tomorrow. *“And he (Pharaoh) said, To morrow. And he (Moses) said, Be it according to thy word: that thou mayest know that there is none like*

*unto the LORD our God” (Exodus 8:10). The tomorrow in which Pharaoh intended to acknowledge the LORD as God never came. Paul was preaching to Felix and there was obvious conviction. The Bible says, “And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee” (Acts 24:25). The Bible never records a more convenient season ever came for Felix. Later in the book of Acts we read, “Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” (Acts 26:28). We cannot read of Agrippa ever becoming fully persuaded. God never tells people to be right with Him tomorrow. He never says to wait until a better time; today is the best time!*

If we Christians are going to do the right thing, now is the time. If God has called you, surrender to His calling. Go where He wants you to go and go now! Do what He wants you to do and do it now! The angel said, *“And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead....”* Let us quickly do the Lord’s bidding.

Solomon said, *“Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth” (Ecclesiastes 11:2).* He also said, *“Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it” (Proverbs 3:27).* If we are going to be a blessing, let us quit thinking about doing it and do it. *“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest” (Ecclesiastes 9:10).* Do it now while God has given you strength and health, because once you are in the grave, all that is left of you in this earth are memories. Will they be memories of a life well lived? Will you be known as generous and loving Christian? My old friend Lt. Col. Jim Cain always quoted his father, “Live like every day is your last, because one day it will be.” He told me that with a coy smile not long before he passed. I remember one day we finished eating lunch together and he said, “Pastor, let’s go get the widows some flowers and we dropped everything and did a flower run.” The colonel never lived in tomorrow; he lived well today. And when his last day came, he was ready. Are you ready? Is there someone to whom you should apologize or be right with? Call them today!

## **2. Have a safe place: intimate relationship with God.**

I suppose of all the sad stories in the Oklahoma tornado, the story of the children who died clinging to the hallway wall is the saddest. It seemed like the safest place, but it was not safe, not in an E-5 tornado. One of the great problems with a tornado is the unpredictability. David said, *“The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower” (Psalm 18:2).* He later said, *“My goodness, and my fortress; my high tower, and my deliverer; my shield, and he in whom I trust...” (Psalm 144:2a).* In this verse David is saying, the Lord is his High Tower. This means God sees down every path that leads to me. He sees every foreseeable danger and is watching out for me. He sees it coming before it

comes. He has seen that problem a lot sooner than a mere sixteen seconds; He has seen from the foundation of the world. Jeremiah said, *“O LORD, my strength, and my fortress, and my refuge in the day of affliction...”* (Jeremiah 16:19). The prophet of God was affirming that our Lord was strong enough to handle any difficulty or storm, for He is our Strength. Nothing overcomes Him; He overcomes everything! David said, *“Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort: thou hast given commandment to save me; for thou art my rock and my fortress”* (Psalm 71:3). The king is confessing that he went to the Lord “continually.” Herein is our knowledge of safety: *“...Safety is of the LORD”* (Proverbs 21:31). The Lord Himself is our safe place. *“He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty”* (Psalm 91:1). Therefore, let us be intimate with Him.

### **3. Hold on to that which endures: the Word of God.**

The Bible says of itself: *“For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven”* (Psalm 119:89). I have often pondered this verse and what it is saying. To the best of my ability, I understand that the Book that we consider sacred holding the very words of God and is in now in heaven and was there before time began and shall be beyond the end of time. The Word of God is a permanent fixture in the universe. God haters cannot eliminate it. Atheists cannot diminish its influence. Those who ignore and rebel against it shall one day be judged on the basis of what they have done with the truth enclosed within its pages. *“Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever”* (Psalm 119:160). The world often mocks us by calling us Bible thumpers and categorizing us as bigots. The truth is, we Bible believers don't thump our Bibles, we take very good care of them, we will cover them in the finest of leathers and we protect them from the elements. We open them with sacred reverence every day our lives. I promise you, the most unbigoted, broadminded people I know are Bible believers. They take the Word of God seriously and are filled with the love of Jesus toward everyone, as our Bible teaches us to do. Storms will come and go, even our flesh shall eventually give in to death but this Bible we love teaches us we who believe in Christ will be with Him for eternity and we shall even be granted a new body that shall never die. Through the process of change for us, the Word of God never changes. Let us, therefore hold close and adhere to that which endures. It will comfort us! *“Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away”* (Mark 13:31). *“...All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever”* (Isaiah 40:6b-8).

-Pastor Pope