

## **Lessons in the Storm**

What a week for Florida. Hurricane Ian, the worst hurricane to hit Southwest Florida, maybe ever. On spite of all the hype and constant frenzy of fearmongers on the news, it really wasn't any surprise once the radar images on the news made it quite apparent our area was definitely within harm's way. We were spared by the grace of God.

Preparation time was adequate with the advanced notices of the impending storm. The improvements in satellite technology and radar provided a good heads up of what was heading our way. What is tragic is those who failed to listen to the warnings for evacuation and took the threat maybe just a little too lightly. This really wasn't surprising as the way information is whipped up and embellished in most news services these days. The uncertainty of direction in the storm's path may have led some to take the approaching hurricane with any degree of seriousness. Couple that with a wind threat that paralleled Hurricane Irma, some may have felt "no big deal, we survived the last one." The major difference from Irma to Ian was the angle of approach and landfall. Even as Ian's landfall was imminent on radar, one weather forecaster said "we're still not sure where it's headed." Thank goodness he's not a heart surgeon...

Those who chose not to evacuate didn't take the storm surge seriously. I'm not sure anyone expected it to be catastrophic. After all, we didn't really have one with Irma, right? Well, so far, the death toll is over 30 and Ft. Myers Beach and parts of Lee County are decimated, destroyed and literally wiped off the map. Horrible lessons for sure and a certain bet, if and when the next hurricane heads our way, those in the bullseye will have departed upon the first notice. Failure to listen to warnings can be quite costly in respect to life and property. Failure to heed some warnings will have eternal consequences.

I remember scenes from Hurricane Donna way back in 1960, with sustained windspeeds nearing 200 mph. One area that was in the landfall location had a group of "brave" (possibly brain dead) individuals who elected to stay and shelter in place at a little motel across from the beach (I think it was in Alabama). After the storm, the motel was gone, along with the paved road out front. It looked pristine as there was no debris. The area was wiped clean, including the motel with the people who failed to heed the warnings. If you've seen any of the aerials of Ft. Myers Beach, there are several places where buildings used to be, that are now just sand and debris. The storm surge picked up structures and moved them out in the Gulf. So why were we spared? Folks will speculate as to why. I'm of the belief and faith, God heard our prayers. I remember telling Kristin on the phone, God will watch over you and it will not touch you. Praise His Holy Name! The northeast

eyewall crossed right over her house. While so many places were devastated, I believe God had His Hands around them. Stepping out in faith with statements may seem too bold but I know on Whom I believe and to Whom I prayed. We can stand on His Word.

We have discussed on numerous Sabbaths the topic of fear and faith. Perhaps this storm was a test of both for all of us who have been called. I heard one newscaster comment that the damage to Ft. Myers Beach was “apocalyptic.” Not to be negative but knowing what God has in store for Earth’s “renovation” this hurricane could hardly be apocalyptic. The sun and moon are still in place, mountains are still intact, the stars are still in the heavens and billions have not perished. With all of the Kum-by-yah moments on the news with “we’ll all get through this together” there was NO mention of God and prayer. Sad indeed.

**Matthew 24:29-** “But immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.” (**Mark 13:25**).

**Revelation 16:20-** “And every island disappeared, and no mountains were found.” (**Revelation 14:20**).

Satan loves to create panic and he is the father of all lies (**John 8:44**). He loves nothing better than to deceive God’s people (**Rev. 12:9**) and challenge our faith in

Our Creator. His mission is to distract, lie, kill and destroy. He is bent on distracting us and our focus on God and His Word. Crippling our faith with doubt and fear in any way he can.

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of **power**, and of love and of sound-mindedness,”-**2 Timothy 1:7**.

The Word of God is overflowing with His assurances not to fear and that He is always with us. “Say to those of a fearful heart, “be strong, fear not; behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the full recompense of God. He will come and save you.”-**Isaiah 35:4**.

**Hebrews 13:5-6**- “Do not allow the love of money to influence your behavior, but be satisfied with what you have; for He has said, “*In no way will I ever leave you. no- I will never forsake you in any way.*” So then, let us boldly say, “The Lord is my helper, and I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”

**Psalm 56:4**- “In God- I will praise His word- in God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?”

This seems pretty straight forward, “don’t worry.” As a human being, at times, trying not to worry may be more difficult than our faith can handle. However, as God’s elect, we are to live BY EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS FROM THE MOUTH OF GOD (Deuteronomy 8:3, Matthew 4:4, Luke 4:4). We go beyond

believing God's Word, we live it. When we "forget" His word, Satan is right there to cast his doubts and fears in your face.

The enemy would have us crawl into a cave at every rattle of his sword, causing us to doubt Our God and His Word. Fearing Satan and his wiles should not be in our thoughts if we truly are a called saint living by every word of God. Even if we cower in a cave, God's still small Voice will be there.

**1 Kings 19:12-** "And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. Then it came to pass when Elijah heard, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out, and stood at the cave entrance. And behold, a voice came to him and said, "What are you doing here Elijah?"

**James 4:14-** "You do not even know what will happen tomorrow! For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little while, and then disappears."

The worst thing that could happen to us is we could lose our life. I'm sure none of us, myself included, has any desire to die. But if we no longer fear death and understand it is all God's timing to seal us when we've accomplished His will for our lives, death loses its sting. **1 Corinthians 15:55-** "O death, where is your sting? O grave where is your victory?" When we die, we go to our place of rest, sealed and await the First Resurrection. God's promise to those who endure to the end.

**Matthew 24:13-** “But the one who endures to the end, that one shall be saved.”

If we are to fear anything or anyone it is to be The Lord. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the holy *is* understanding.”-

**Proverbs 9:10** “But I tell you, My friends, you should not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that are not able to do anything more. But I will show you Whom you should fear. Fear Him Who after He has killed, has authority to cast into the fire of Gehenna. Yes, I tell you, fear Him!”-**Luke 12:4-5**. It is perfectly normal for us to have concerns in certain matters so long as we do not let them overrun our faith in God.

I know I sound like a cracked record skipping on a phonograph (what’s a phonograph, right?), but the way to overcome this infilling of doubt and deception is that “One on one” relationship with God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ our Savior. Living His Word, trusting in Him in ***all*** things and loving Him first! Improving our prayer life talking with God at every opportunity will get us moving in the right direction, especially on the Sabbath. As a product of our increased prayer life, we’ll grow in that relationship and our faith will increase as well.

It is critically important to be in right standing in our faith and in our walk with God. Our prayer life is a direct reflection of our faith and devotion to Him and His word.

**Matthew 6:7-** “And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions, as the heathens do; for they think that by multiplying their words they shall be heard.” These are the words of Jesus Christ and He’s not mixing any words here. This scripture contradicts repeated “Hail Mary’s and numerous “Our Father’s”, prayer cards and any other “stamped out” babblings in any Protestant or Catholic churches. God wants us to speak our heart to Him. Christ died to be our High Priest and our Intercessor to God the Father. We do not need any middle man, so called saint or other-wise. They’re all still dead.

**1 Peter 3:12-** “Because the eyes of the Lord are on His righteous, and His ears are open to their supplications. But the face of the Lord is against those who practice evil.”

**James 5:16-** “Confess your faults to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The supplication of a righteous man prevails much, being effective.” James further illustrates just how effective the prayers of a righteous man can be.

**James 5:17-18-** “Elijah was a man of emotions like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain upon the earth for three years and six months. And again he prayed, and the heaven gave rain, and caused the earth to

sprout its fruit.” God gives us plenty of examples in His Word to establish how He answers prayers.

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. Though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains shake with the swelling of it. Selah.”- **Psalm 46:1-3**.

Worry should no longer be in our vocabulary *if* we are truly loving and trusting God fully. **Matthew 6:26-27**- “Observe the birds of heaven: they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor do they gather into granaries; and your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much better than they? But who among you, by taking careful thought, is able to add one cubit to his stature?” God knows our needs before we do.

**Matthew 6:8**- “Now then, do not be like them; for your Father knows what things you have need of before you ask Him.”

**Matthew 6:34**- “Therefore, do not be anxious about tomorrow; for tomorrow shall take care of the things of itself. Sufficient for the day is the evil of that day.” (**Luke 12: 24-25**).

When we worry, we’re essentially telling God, “I believe in You but...” This will lead us into half-hearted prayers. We’ll pray with doubt and fear in our remissions



to the Almighty. “Lord, please help me *if* it’s Your will...” and we tend to get wishy washy in our words. We begin to think we’re overstepping our bounds or maybe we’re asking the Creator of the Universe for too much. Doubt of any kind negates our words and our faith. We can come boldly before the throne of grace.

**Hebrews 4:16-** “Therefore, we should come with boldness to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Just some food for thought on our prayers, when we pray, are we giving God our shopping list? Are we rubbing the lamp seeking the Genie to grant our wishes? Do we begin our prayers with thanksgiving and praise or jump right to the list so He can get busy? When we pray, are we asking to *get*, to *give* or to *glorify*? Praying for the needs of others before ourselves will also yield a closer relationship with God the Father, especially when we pray that He be glorified in the Name of His Son, Jesus our Savior.

**Psalm 86:12-** “I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart, and I will glorify Your name forevermore.”

**John 14:13-14** - “And whatever you ask in My name, this will I do that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.”

This doesn't include winning lottery numbers, new cars or TV's. Our prayers shouldn't be cluttered with wanting "stuff." Remember, He knows our needs before we do (**Matthew 6:8**).

**John 17:1**- "Jesus spoke these words, and lifted up His eyes to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your own Son, so that Your Son may also glorify You."

Being afraid or fearful in our prayers will usually get a busy signal to the throne room.

Being fearful also has its consequences in our walk with God. "But the *cowardly*, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, *and all liars*, shall have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone; which is the second death."- **Revelation 21:8**. If only all newscasters and politicians would take heed to this warning...

God will never give us a reason to doubt His Word, only Satan will do that. He may not always answer prayers the way *we* might expect or even desire, but it is His Will (as all things are except our free will choices for being stupid) but there's always a lesson attached somewhere, *if* we're wise enough to look for it.

**Isaiah 41:10-** “Do not fear; for I am with you; be not dismayed; for I am your God. I will strengthen you; yea, I will help you; yea, I will uphold you with the right hand of My righteousness.”

**Deuteronomy 31:8-** “And the Lord is He Who goes before you. He will be with you; He will not fail you nor forsake you. Do not fear; nor be dismayed.”

Should we ignore the news when warnings are issued? Does this mean we are to be foolish and ignore such even embellished warnings when we're told in advance?

Certainly not. But we have wisdom, discernment, prayer and faith in God and His Word to stand on. “For we walk by faith, not by sight.”-**2 Corinthians 5:7.**

We must live in this world but we have been called out of it, set apart, chosen.

“But you are a chosen stock, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for a possession of God, that you might proclaim His excellent virtues, Who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”-**1 Peter 2:9.** “Do not be conformed yourselves to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind in order that you may prove what is well pleasing and good, and the perfect will of God.”-

**Romans 12:2.**

We must not allow ourselves to be pulled back into the mindset of anxiety or worry, nor succumb to the frenzies forced upon us by the evening news. Falling

into this trap is a display of our lack of faith in God and His Word. It will serve as a poor example to our brothers and sisters of faith.

**1 Timothy 4:12-** “Do not allow anyone to despise your youth; but be an example to the believers- in word, in conduct, in love, in Spirit, in faith and in purity.”

Taking our eyes off of God and His Word will open us up to a falling away and a lack of any potential for growth. Losing concentration on God will cause the problems and storms of the world to become our focus.

**Matthew 14:25-32-** “Now the fourth watch of the night, Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled and said, “It is an apparition!” And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Be of good courage; it is I. Do not be afraid.” Then Peter answered Him and said, “Lord, if it is You, bid me to come to You upon the waters.” And He said, “Come.” And after climbing down from the ship, Peter walked upon the waters to go to Jesus. But when he saw how strong the wind was, he became afraid; and as he was beginning to sink, he cried out saying, “Lord save me!” And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, “Oh you of little faith, why did you doubt?” Do you think God would ask us the same questions when we pray with doubt? Always remember, the instant we

look away from God, Satan stands in the ready. We need not fear him but be aware of his tactics.

We know Our Savior Jesus Christ has overcome death and this world. “These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation. But be courageous! I have overcome the world.”-**John 16:33**.

Trials and tribulations will come. They will get worse (**Matthew 24:21**). The most important thing we can do as God’s elect is to be ready for when Our Savior returns. **Matthew 25:13**- “Watch, therefore, for you do not know the day or the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.”

**Mark 13:32**- “But concerning that day and the hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, not the Son, but the Father only.” We will not be in the image of Christ if we yield to the fears of this world. We may even risk our inheritance, remember the warning from Revelation 21:8. This is certainly a warning we need to pay attention to.

The news media will never let a good crisis go to waste. They will fan the flames of rhetoric and definitely make mountains out of mole hills. The focus now in the media is a “body count” or “death toll.” Fear driven sensationalism is the norm but we do need to pay attention to warnings of impending disaster when they come. I

can't imagine any one of us standing in the middle of a railroad track, hearing the approach of a locomotive and seeing the light closing in on us and fail to step off the tracks. God gave us the abilities for rational thought. As difficult as it is sometimes, I can almost hear Him say, "Don't be dumb."

He has already given us ample warnings in His Word of the storms that lie ahead, the real ones, the "apocalyptic ones." We do not live in fear. Would this hurricane have had a different outcome if the news reporters called for people to "pray, prepare and not panic?" Maybe have faith over fear? Wishful thinking. Will the Lord find faith when He returns? Not if He watches the news.

"I tell you that He will execute vengeance for them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, shall He find the true faith on the earth?"- **Luke 18:8**.

**1 John 4:17-19**- "By this spiritual indwelling, the love of God is perfected within us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment because even as He is, so also we are in this world. There is no fear in the love of God; rather, perfect love casts out fear because fear has torment. ***And the one who fears has not been made perfect in the love of God.*** We love Him because He loved us first."

Some folks lost trees, cars, homes, businesses and their livelihoods. Tragically some lost their lives. Were they prepared? Did they all ignore warnings? What did we learn from this hurricane? Not having the internet is definitely a great lesson for

sharing God's Word. Looking up scriptures and reading it is good preparation for the famine of His Word. **Amos 8:11**- "Behold the days come," says the Lord GOD, "that I will send a famine in the land; not a famine of bread nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord."

We were spared by the grace of God Almighty for His purpose for each and every one of us. Prayers of safety and His protection were answered, we're still here. Let us thank Him for His grace and mercy, His love and His Son Jesus Christ. May we all draw closer to God and be ready for the real storms that lie ahead.

Rather than live in fear and fall into the mainstream of paranoia, let us remember who we are and never forget Who has chosen us. We serve a living and awesome God. We can stand on His Word and His promises regardless of any impending storms. "You are of God little children, and have overcome them because greater is He Who is in you than the one who is in the world."-**1 John 4:4** Amen.

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