

RESPONDING TO GOD'S HURRICANE

Considering How God's People Should Respond to Hurricane Katrina

I'm sure most of you saw the news reports a few years ago that showed us the destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina. It seemed surreal; it was like we were watching a movie. But it wasn't a movie; it was reality. Furthermore, God didn't send Hurricane Katrina to entertain us, but to rebuke us and challenge us. How then should we respond to this or any other "natural disaster"?

Of course we should pray for the refugees and their families. If possible, we should send money to provide relief, and we could even go ourselves and minister personally. In addition to these responses, which are noble and biblical, how does God want us to respond? I want to address the responses I believe God is looking for, which you did not hear on the evening news.

First, we need to respond by realizing that a sovereign and loving God commanded the wind and the waves to do their damage. "God thunders wondrously with his voice; he does great things that we cannot comprehend. For to the snow he says, 'Fall on the earth,' likewise to the downpour, his mighty downpour...By the breath of God ice is given, and the broad waters are frozen fast. He loads the thick cloud with moisture; the clouds scatter his lightning. They turn around and around by his guidance, to accomplish all that he commands them" (Job 37:5-6, 10-12). We have to start here. Too often even Christians are practical Deists. Some think God is like a clock-maker. They imagine that God created the world, wound it up, and then let it run all by itself without His personal involvement or interference, except maybe for the occasional miracle. Nothing could be further from the truth. God is personally involved in every detail of His creation. He makes the sun to rise, and he sends the rain (Matt. 5:45). Mother nature does not have a will of her own; it's God who commands the winds to blow, thus bringing disaster (Isa. 31:2). Martin Luther once said, "The devil is God's devil." By this he meant that God is over the devil, and that the devil always does that which ultimately fulfills God's purposes. For the same reasons, we can say that Hurricane Katrina is God's hurricane.

Second, we need to respond by repenting of all known sin. "He brings the clouds to punish men, or to water his earth and show his love" (Job 37:13, NIV). Rain can be an indication of God's love or God's chastisement. When it is clearly the latter, repentance is the appropriate response. One thing we can say for sure about Hurricane Katrina is that God is calling all of us to repent. In Jesus' day He used "news reports" about tragedies to call people to repentance (Lk. 13:1-5). It is not a stretch to imagine Jesus saying, "Do you think that those living in New Orleans were worse sinners than all the others who lived in America? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

Third, we need to respond by praying for revival. One of the greatest verses in the Bible related to revival is 2 Chronicles 7:14: "if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land." But what is the context in which we find this famous verse? God says, "When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face..." (vv. 13-14). God sovereignly commands nature to bring about affliction, so that His people will be humbled and brought to repentance, so that He in turn can bless them again. But the key word in verse 14 is "if." This is a conditional promise. Nevertheless, it is a promise, and God will do His part *if* we do ours.

Fourth, we need to respond by standing in awe of the glory of God. The Bible often uses nature to help us "see" God. The sun, the sky and the storm all reveal the awesome majesty of God. When my wife and I were watching the coming of Hurricane Katrina on the news one evening, my wife responded, "My God is huge." Isn't that an appropriate response to the power of nature? The sun is an illustration of the truth found in 1 Timothy 6:16, which says that God "dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see." Hurricane Katrina was an illustration of the truth found in Hebrews 10:31 which tells us that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. When an unbeliever sees a hurricane, he says, "Wow", because he sees only wind and waves. But a believer cries out, "Glory", because he sees the infinite power and terrible wrath of God.

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