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What Do Hurricanes Teach Us?
GPBC
9.23.18

Introduction – As Florence was gaining strength in the Atlantic and headed for the East Coast as a Category 4 hurricane, I had someone ask me the question that always gets asked in times of crisis. With a look of disbelief mixed with anger he wanted to know why would a loving God send something like that to cause so much destruction? (It is interesting to note that I've never been questioned about the existence or character of God when the skies are clear and sunny!)

If God is loving why do bad things happen? In our minds those two things cannot co-exist. Either God is not loving or either He is not in control, or even worse, He actually doesn't exist. From the world's viewpoint, those appear to be the only answers to the dilemma of events like Florence. The existence of God, the sovereignty of God, and the compassion of God are called into question as people face horrifying circumstances beyond their control. As people of the Bible though, we know that God has revealed answers to these difficult questions. Biblically speaking, there is no one-answer-fits-all, but rather a collection of truths that address what's going on when bad or evil things happen like a hurricane or health crisis or even terrorism. I want us to look at 10 biblical truths that will ground our faith when the winds and flood waters shake it.

- I. The Ongoing Effects of the Fall
 - a. The question why do bad things happen if a loving, sovereign God exists is actually a faulty question to begin with because it only acknowledges the existence of 2 realities where 3 realities actually exist. In addition to the reality of God and the reality of bad events, there is also the reality that we live in a fallen world. Ever since the Fall of Genesis 3, sin has entered into creation and has corrupted and tainted and twisted every aspect of creation, including the weather.
 - b. In fact, the Bible teaches that creation itself is groaning for and awaiting the redemption of a new heavens and a new earth.
 - c. Romans 8:20-22 – For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know

that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. Things like Florence are a groaning of creation that is awaiting redemption.

- d. We see the first indications of creation being corrupted and subjected to futility in Genesis 3 when God tells Adam that because he sinned against the Lord the ground is cursed and thorns and thistles shall grow and by the sweat of his brow and in pain will he till the soil.
 - e. So the framework is not just bad+God; it is bad+God+sin.
- II. The Existence of Our Sinful Nature
- a. Not only has creation been corrupted in every aspect because of sin, we have also been corrupted in every aspect because of sin. To question God when bad things happen actually points to a deeper reality and a greater problem. We believe we are innocent. We believe we deserve only comfort and safety. We believe God owes us a peaceful existence. Anything less than what we want and when we want it, we call God into question. How dare He not do as I see fit for Him to do. In other words, to even ask the question indicates how sinful and selfish and self-centered we truly are.
 - b. Rom 3:10-12 – None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.
 - c. Instead of glorifying God for the 364 wonderful days that we didn't deserve, we criticize Him for the 1 day life gets upturned. Bad things expose how bad we are.
- III. The Frailty and Brevity of Life
- a. The purpose of this sermon is not to dismiss or diminish in any way the incredible suffering that people endure when faced with natural disasters and other tragedies. The spectrum runs from having life disrupted to losing material possessions to even the loss of life. The pain and anguish that some face during these crisis times is truly heartbreaking.
 - b. But even that reminds us of a truth that we tend to forget on sunny days – this life is really frail and really brief. Man in his fallen state often thinks himself too heroic and bold to fail. But no amount of

man's ingenuity, intellect, power, or will can measure up to the intensity and fierceness of sweeping catastrophe.

- c. We are far more fragile than we realize, and things like Florence remind us to not take for granted every single day and every single breath.
- d. I heard the story of the man found dead in his yard and they suppose he was blown down by the wind.
- e. James 4:14 – What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

IV. A Proper Perspective on Man and God

- a. Things like Florence remind us that we are not in control, but God is. That we do not have the capacity or ability to manipulate or move or change a hurricane in any way, but God does.
- b. Florence puts our perspective back in the right place.
- c. Over and over again as I watched the meteorologists report, they continued to say how much they didn't know – what might happen – where it might go – how strong it might be – how much rain we might receive. They can track and the they can measure and they can predict, but they cannot know.
- d. And we cannot do anything about it but prepare and get out of harms way.
- e. Nothing like a CAT 4 hurricane barreling towards the shore reminds us that we are not in control.
- f. BTW – let me just observe here – when people get angry at God during times of crisis, the root of the anger really boils down to coming to grips with our insufficiency and inability. We get mad when we feel loss of control. When all along the truth is we are not in control, and sometimes it takes massive events like hurricanes to remind us of that fact. We are not independent; we are utterly dependent.
- g. Isaiah 45:7 – I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the Lord, who does all these things.
- h. We are not in control, we are not sovereign; He is!

V. The Power of Prayer

- a. As soon as the forecast begin to show that Florence would make landfall and was a CAT 4, people begin to pray. And guess what? God begin to move. Florence was going to rip into Wilmington as a CAT 4 and cause massive destruction all the way up through SC and on into other states before it died down to a simple storm. But an amazing thing began to happen just as it was building steam, it reversed its momentum.
- b. Down to a 3, down to a 2, and down to a 1. Again, I'm not saying it wasn't devastating, but I am saying it was nothing like what it could have been.
- c. And I am going even further by saying, prayer had a part to play in the fact that Florence steadily lost steam before it landed, when it landed, and as it moved ashore. People were praying.
- d. James 5:16-18 – The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.
- e. Don't tell me prayer cannot have an effect on the weather. Prayer goes to God and God is over the weather!

VI. The Mercy of God

- a. Yes, even with the destruction and devastation and even deaths, Florence tells us even about the mercy of God.
- b. Here's why. All of us in this room sin against God all the time. Furthermore, the evil that abounds around us grows increasingly mind-boggling. Every day we read of young girls being kidnapped, raped, tortured, and killed. Sex-slavery and human-trafficking is on the rise. Infants are shaken to death. The brutality and vileness is overwhelming.
- c. The question really isn't why did God allow Florence last week. In light of the horrid nature and enormous amount of our continued sin, the question really is why is there not a Florence every week? And the answer is the mercy of God.
- d. We truly don't get what we deserve.

- e. Psalm 103:8 – The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love – v10 – He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.

VII. The Fear of God

- a. Things like Florence remind us that it is right to properly fear the Lord. He is not only merciful, He is also just and holy and righteous.
- b. If we think a CAT 4 is fierce and mighty and destructive, what about the fierceness and might of the judgment of a holy, righteous God?
- c. If we can't stop Florence, what will we do with God?
- d. Deut 4:24 – The Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God. That doesn't mean He's envious of our other idols, that means it's not right to have other idols!
- e. Most of the problems in our society and homes and churches and lives today come down to this one truth – we do not rightly fear God! Yes, He is merciful, Yes, He is longsuffering, Yes, He is patient, but there is coming a day when mercy will give way to judgment!
- f. That's why our sin doesn't bother us – we don't fear God. When we make little of sin, we make little of God.
- g. The Bible says that once we die, we face judgment. Those who fear Him are prepared to meet Him.

VIII. A Call to Repentance

IX. A Reminder to be Grateful

X. An Open Door for the Gospel

- a. Luke 13 – this question of why do bad things happen is an age-old question. Innocent people died a cruel death – how do you explain that Jesus? If God exists why do bad things happen?
- b. Things like Florence are a call to repentance. Those who die tragically can no longer repent, but if you are alive and breathing there is still time for you. Repent!
- c. Things like Florence remind us to be grateful. Those who died tragically were not worse sinners or offenders of God. We all deserve to die, so be grateful for the good things God brings in our lives every single day.
- d. Things like Florence open big gospel doors. After 9/11 Muslims around the world flooded to the gospel!

Conclusion – Florence was telling us a lot about the existence of God, the sovereignty of God, and the compassion of God. We just need to listen.