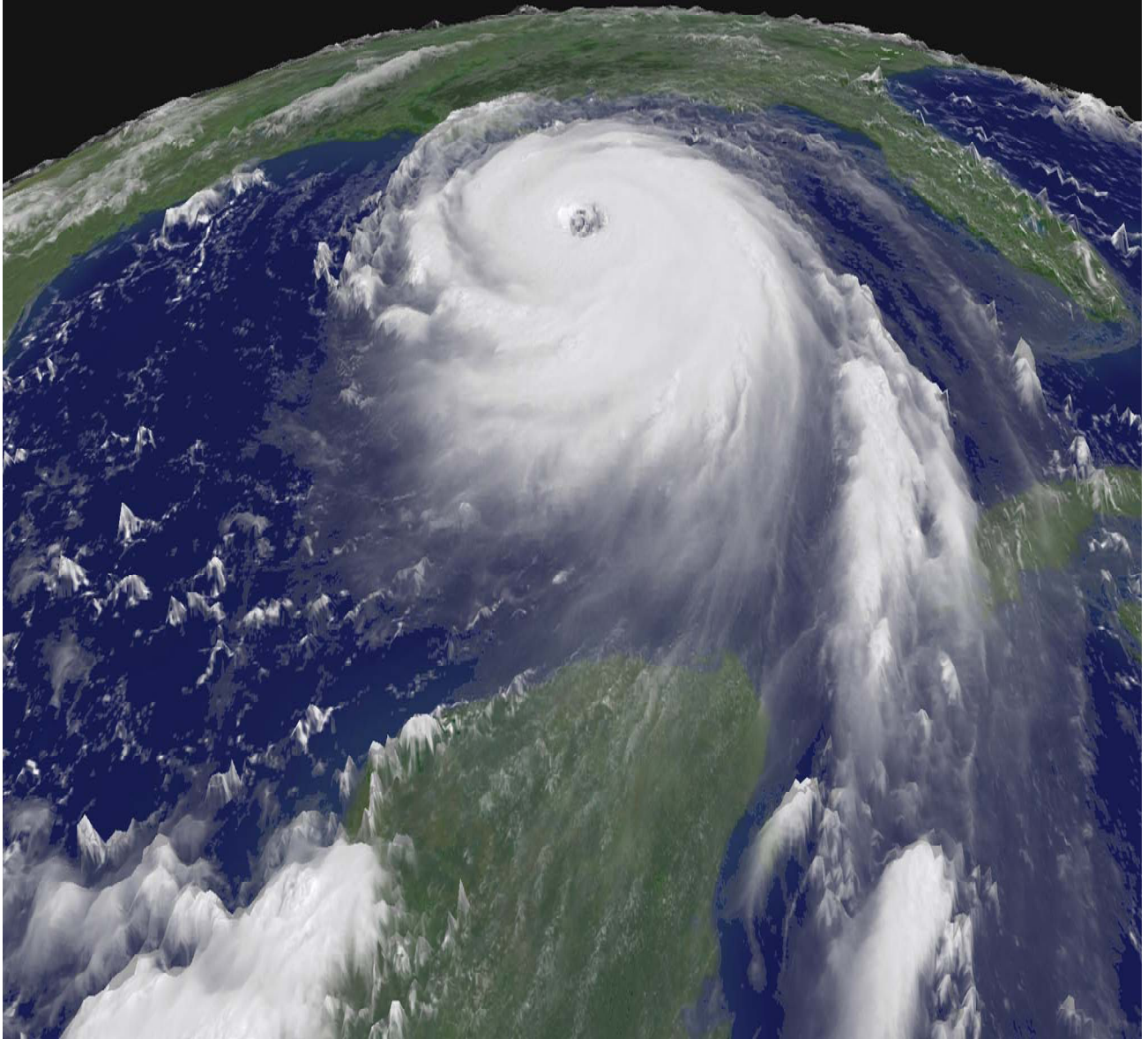


# QUESTIONS ABOUT HURRICANE KATRINA



**PASTOR MICHAEL JACKSON**

## **QUESTIONS ABOUT HURRICANE KATRINA**

Shortly after the events on September 11, 2001, I preached a message in the pulpit entitled, *Can Someone Tell Me...?* The sermon focused on six very important questions at the time. Those questions were:

1. Where was God when the four planes crashed on September 11?
2. Why would God allow this terrible thing to happen?
3. Was this God's will?
4. Is this the end of the world? By the way, I stated here: "In my opinion, the next big event on God's prophetic calendar is the return of Jesus Christ – not the end of the world."
5. What are some scriptures that would provide comfort to a frightened friend or loved one?
6. Will life ever return to normal?

As I look back on the message now, I realize all the more just how important those questions were for that day and hour.

This morning I want to again revert to a question format for today's sermon. The events that have transpired over the past week have raised some very serious issues that beg for some answers I believe that those answers can be found in God's Word. Before I get to the questions though, I want to talk to you for a few minutes about tragedy.

Tragedy strikes the deepest when it hits when we least expect it. I believe that is one reason that 911 was such a shock to the American public. We seemed so safe, so secure, and then our security was shaken to the core as those planes plowed into those twin towers. The same thing happened with the hurricane. Thousands of people disobeyed the mayor's order to evacuate. Why? Their house had withstood Hurricane Camille. Other hurricanes had seemed to fizzle out before they made landfall. New Orleans had not been hit with a major hurricane in decades. The city was somehow exempt. Then Katrina came calling and the result was possibly thousands of lives were lost. That which couldn't happen, happened and New Orleans and much of the gulf coast may have experienced the "greatest natural disaster in the history of the United States"!

Disasters are sudden, destructive events resulting in widespread and catastrophic loss of life and property. Events like:

- tornadoes ripping through towns in the US heartland – including towns like Stoughton.
- wildfires in the Canadian Rockies
- a stampede in Iraq
- torrential flooding in Bangladesh
- volcanic eruptions in the Philippines
- earthquakes in California, India, Turkey, and Iran

In spite of all our efforts to make the world a safer place for ourselves and our children, it is marked by violence, disasters, and catastrophes.

In 2003 there were 380 recorded natural and man-made catastrophes worldwide that claimed the lives of 60,000 people. Sigma, a Swiss firm that researches natural and man-made disasters, published figures documenting 2003 as the seventh highest loss of life year in over 30 years. The December 2003 earthquake in the Iranian city of Bam, in which 41,000 people were killed, was the most devastating: the fourth largest loss-of-life event since 1970.

In a world of pronounced danger and uncertainty, one thing is certain—we're all at risk. All the air-port screeners, homeland security, and hi-tech surveillance equipment cannot guarantee absolute security against such events. Effective geological research cannot prevent a devastating earthquake. Doppler radar and satellite imaging cannot hold back surging floodwaters, still a hurricane, or stop a deadly tornado. The issue isn't our ability to research and predict potential disasters; it's our inability to

prevent and protect ourselves and loved ones from them.

### **HOW DO WE RESPOND WHEN SOMETHING LIKE KATRINA STRIKES?**

I was talking to a pastor friend a couple of days ago. He said that he has been glued to the TV since Monday. Somehow these larger than life events grab a hold of us and they don't let go.

As you may recall, Lisa Beemer's husband Todd was one of the passengers on the ill-fated United Flight 93 that crashed in a Pennsylvania field. Lisa was to write:

"I made my way to my bedroom and sat down on the edge of the bed, staring out the window in a near-catatonic state. I didn't move; I didn't speak. It was as though time had come to an abrupt halt, and I no longer existed. In a desperate, futile attempt to make sense of it all, my heart and mind had temporarily shut down. I was numb. I could see and hear, yet I simply continued to stare straight ahead."

What Lisa experienced is normal. For someone who has been blindsided with the fateful news of a tragic loss or who has survived going through a disaster, confusion and disorientation are normal.

Some of the most common feelings that assault us in the aftermath of a tragedy are:

#### **Shock.**

That is what Lisa experienced. Shock is a form of emotional numbness that sets in immediately after we witness, survive, or receive the news of a tragic event. It's the emotional circuit breaker that trips to protect us from a massive overload that could result in total shutdown and the inability to function. Shock is the body's first line of defense against the overwhelming chaos of a tragedy. It's a short-term emotional disconnect, allowing us time to slowly absorb what has happened.

#### **Pain.**

In spite of all our best efforts to prepare for it, nothing can shield us from the searing pain that rips through us after a tragedy, especially if we've lost someone close to us. A jagged hole has been torn in our hearts.

If we love deeply, we'll hurt deeply when we lose those we love. C. M. Parkes writes, "The pain of grief is just as much a part of life as the joy of love; it is, perhaps, the price we pay for love, the cost of commitment."

#### **Fear.**

Fear and panic descend on those who are desperately struggling to find solid footing after being rocked by a disaster. In this stage of vulnerability, people grapple with thoughts like:

- Am I going to make it through this?
- What am I going to do without him or her?
- What am I going to tell my friends and family about this?
- Will my life ever be normal again?
- Will I ever laugh again?
- Will I ever be able to forget what I've experienced?

The unfairness of the whole situation leads us to anger.

#### **Anger.**

"This can't be happening to me! It isn't fair! What did I do to deserve this?" are normal responses from people struggling to find meaning in the turmoil of a disaster.

Remember, anger over a tragic loss is to be expected. Normal is no longer normal. Everything has changed. And we don't like the changes. We want life back the way it was. And because we can't have it back, we get mad.

If you have read or listened to the news reports, you will see much anger directed at the local mayors along the gulf coast, the governors, and even President Bush. I can also assure you, there have been more than a few angry words directed at God, even though I haven't read any such words in the newspapers.

### Isolation.

When hit by a tragedy, we often feel alone and isolated by a silence that grips our hearts. We don't feel like talking because we think: "No one could possibly understand what I'm going through. How could they? They haven't walked in my shoes. They haven't seen what I've seen. They don't have a clue what I'm feeling. No one can fully understand my pain, loneliness, and fear!" We therefore, attempt to shut everyone else out.

I really appreciate the writings of H. Norm Wright. He has written numerous books on Christian counseling, marriage, and other relevant topics. Anyway, he has come up with a chart that tracks one's emotions following a crisis. **I want to go over the chart with you: (Explain)**

**The Normal Crisis Pattern**

	Phase I Impact	Phase II Withdrawal Confusion	Phase III Adjustment	Phase IV Reconstruction/Reconciliation
	Time-Few hours to a few days	Days to weeks	Weeks to months	Months
<b>Response</b>	Should I stay and face it or withdraw?	Intense emotions. You feel drained. Anger, sadness, fear, anxiety, depression, rage, guilt.	Your positive thoughts begin returning along with all the emotions.	Hope has returned. Self confidence.
<b>Thoughts</b>	Numb, disoriented. Insight ability limited. Feelings overwhelm.	Thinking ability limited. Uncertainty and ambiguity.	You're now able to problem solve.	Thinking is clearer.
<b>Direction you take to regain control</b>	You search for what you lost.	Bargaining-wishful thinking. Detachment.	You begin looking for something new to invest in.	Progress is evident and new attachments are made to something significant.
<b>Searching behavior</b>	Often Reminiscing.	Puzzled, unclear.	You can now stay focussed and begin to learn from your	You may want to stop and evaluate where you've been and where you're

The thing that I want you to pick up from the chart is this – you will live. Life goes on. You will survive. The curve eventually bottoms out and starts to go back up.

Jesus told a story about two houses built on different foundations. Listen to Matthew 7:24-27, **“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew**

**and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”**

Both houses were hit with the same torrential rainstorm that produced flash flooding and gale-force winds. One crumbled, but the other didn't. The one built on a foundation of solid rock endured the storm while the one built on sand was destroyed.

Tragedy has a way of exposing our foundations. No matter what the cause, how we weather the storms of life will ultimately depend on the foundation on which we've built our lives.

The wise person realizes that the storms are going to eventually come. They will come – I repeat.

- A life lived out of the Bible,
- a life that has been trained to turn toward God rather than away from Him,
- a life of faith that believes the best regardless,
- a life that believes that God is present and able to do something good for us, no matter how much our circumstances may seem to indicate otherwise is a life that is going to stand the test of the storm.

Jeremiah 29:11 promises, **“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’”** Romans 8:28 adds, **“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”**

Remember:

- Job died a rich man.
- Peter went on to be a pillar for Christ in spite of his early failures.
- David died in the faith, in spite of the various deaths that plagued his family, in spite of his sins with Bathsheba, in spite of his other failings.

You can and will make it.

**WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM TRAGEDY?**

Certain mental-health specialists argue that a confrontation with tragedy and death has "the potential to be a liberating and growth-enhancing experience." Their conclusions agree with those of the ancient writer of Ecclesiastes. He said in Ecclesiastes 7:2, **“It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart.”**

Like no other event in life, tragedy and death demands that we reevaluate how and why we live the way we do. Just as cream rises to the top, so it is that our times of adversity causes our core values to surface. Maybe you saw the political cartoon of the man in the first frame who was standing beside a pile of rubble. The caption said something on this order, “We have lost everything...” Then the cartoon moves to the second frame which shows the man holding his wife and children. The caption there says, “But we still have everything that really matters.”

Jesus distilled all the writings of the Old Testament down to two fundamental commands that help us maintain a godly perspective on life, even when tragedy strikes. The first is found in Matthew 22:37-38. **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”** This is the first and greatest commandment. This is not optional. It is essential.

Jesus completed His thought in verses 39, **“Love your neighbor as yourself.”** Who is most precious to us? Our spouse? Our children? Our parents? Our friends? All other relationships are most fully enhanced by our love for God that overflows into our love for others.

Tragedy teaches us to trivialize the trivial. It teaches us to quit majoring on the minors and to start majoring on that which really matters.

I think that we can also learn to trust in such difficult times. God is faithful all the time, however He seems to really show up and prove His faithfulness in those times when we need Him the most.

- John 16:33, **“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”**
- John 14:27, **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”**
- Psalm 34:1,4 (*King James Version*), **“I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise [shall] continually [be] in my mouth. I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.”**
- Psalm 112:6-8 cries: **“Surely he will never be shaken; a righteous man will be remembered forever. He will have no fear of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD. His heart is secure, he will have no fear; in the end he will look in triumph on his foes.”**
- Proverbs 3:24-26 adds: **“... when you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked, for the LORD will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being snared.”**
- Psalms 46:1-2 (*New Living Translation*), **“God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So we will not fear, even if earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea.”**

Tragedies happen. However they must not allow them to shake our faith or confidence in God. He is with His people even during those most difficult moments.

Now. I want to move on to some very general questions.

### **WAS THE HURRICANE GOD’S JUDGMENT ON AMERICA?**

Just to be honest with you, a number of good people are saying that it was. I understand where they are coming from. Some really bad stuff took place down there – I mean really bad stuff. So it just stands to reason that this had to be an act of divine judgment. Right? Wrong.

I don’t mean to burst anyone’s balloon, however, I just don’t see God’s hand in this. Let me tell you why. I will give you several reasons.

1. The worst part of New Orleans was spared – the French Quarter and Bourbon Street. That area of town is somewhat elevated. If God is judging the area, He left the worst part alone.

2. Amos 3:7 says, **“Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.”** *The New Living Translation* puts it this way, **“But always, first of all, I warn you through my servants the prophets. I, the Sovereign LORD, have now done this.”** I still believe that God speaks to His prophets and I didn’t hear one note that God was going to wipe The Big Easy off of the face of the earth.

Read the Old Testament. Time after time the prophets foretold disaster and calamity. Read the book of Revelation. Again, we see that each woe or judgment was predicted in advance. Even the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was announced before it took place.

Frankly, I do not see God’s fingerprints on this storm. I also don’t want to go out from here and tell the world that God is responsible for the death of thousands and the destruction of the gulf coast of the US.

I still believe that John 10:10 applies to such events: **“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”**

I think I can be so bold as to simply say, Katrina has nothing to do with God's judgment, that is, any more than any other natural disaster. Rather, it has everything to do with the immense forces of nature that have been unleashed many, many times before and the inability of humans, even the most brilliant engineers, to tame these forces.

Giant hurricanes are rare, but they are not new. And they are not increasing. To the contrary. Just go to the website of the National Hurricane Center and there you will find this table:

Number of hurricanes by <a href="#">Saffir-Simpson Category</a> to strike the mainland U.S. each decade.							
Decade	Saffir-Simpson Category					All 1,2,3,4,5	Major 3,4,5
	1	2	3	4	5		
1871-1880	7	6	7	0	0	20	7
1881-1890	8	9	4	1	0	22	5
1891-1900	8	5	5	3	0	21	8
1901-1910	10	4	4	0	0	18	4
1911-1920	10	4	4	3	0	21	7
1921-1930	5	3	3	2	0	13	5
1931-1940	4	7	6	1	1	19	8
1941-1950	8	6	9	1	0	24	10
1951-1960	8	1	5	3	0	17	8
1961-1970	3	5	4	1	1	14	6
1971-1980	6	2	4	0	0	12	4
1981-1990	9	1	4	1	0	15	5
1991-2000	3	6	4	0	1	14	5
2001-2004	4	2	2	1	0	9	3

As you can see, the peak for major hurricanes (categories 3,4,5) came in the decades of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, when such storms averaged 9 per decade. In the 1960s, there were 6 such storms; in the 1970s, 4; in the 1980s, 5; in the 1990s, 5; and for 2001-04, there were 3. Category 4 and 5 storms were also more prevalent in the past than they are now. As for Category 5 storms, there have been only three since the 1850s: in the decades of the 1930s, 1960s and 1990s. (By the way, Katrina has since been downgraded to a category three storm.)

The recent onslaught of hurricanes "is very much natural," said William M. Gray, a professor of atmospheric science at Colorado State University who issues forecasts for the hurricane season." Indeed, there is no evidence that hurricanes are intensifying. For the North Atlantic as a whole, according to the United Nations Environment Program of the World Meteorological Organization: "Reliable data...since the 1940s indicate that the peak strength of the strongest hurricanes has not changed, and the mean maximum intensity of all hurricanes has decreased." Yes, **decreased**.

Friends, when God does bring judgment in the last days, according to the Revelation, people curse

God and hate Him all the more. Judgment doesn't always turn people to God.

I want to explore this blame God thing a little farther. In the early verses of Luke 13, Jesus alluded to a tragedy that had recently made news – a tower had fallen, evidently during construction – killing 18 people. In dealing with the issue, Jesus made it clear that human tragedies are not always divine punishments and that it is wrong for us to "play God" and pass judgment. Job's friends made this mistake when they said that Job's afflictions were evidence that he was a sinner. If we take that approach to tragedy, then we will have a hard time explaining the sufferings of the Prophets and Apostles, and even of our Lord Himself.

Let me share with you the comment of Warren Wiersbe in his *The Bible Exposition Commentary*:

"How would you explain the deaths of the people on whom the tower in Siloam fell?" Jesus asked. "Was it God's fault? Shall we blame Him? The eighteen who were killed were just doing their job, yet they died. They were not protesting or creating trouble."

When the blind English poet John Milton was old and obscure, he was visited one day by Charles II, son of the king that the Puritans had beheaded. "Your blindness is a judgment from God for the part you took against my father," said the king. Milton replied, "If I have lost my *sight* through God's judgment, what can you say of your father who lost his *head*?"

Jesus went on to show the logical conclusion of their argument: if God *does* punish sinners in this way, then they themselves had better repent because all men are sinners! The question is not, "Why did these people die?" but, "What right do you have to live?" None of us is sinless, so we had all better get prepared.

It is easier to talk about other people's deaths than it is to face our own sin and possible death. The American publishing tycoon William Randolph Hearst would not permit anyone to mention death in his presence, *yet he died*. I asked a friend of mine what the death rate was in his city, and he replied, "One apiece." Then he added, "People are dying who never died before."

## WHAT ARE WE TO DO NOW?

Three things.

### 1. We should give.

1 John 3:17, (*The New Living Translation*) says very plainly, "**But if anyone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need and refuses to help—how can God's love be in that person?**"

That is why we received an offering today. That is why we have encouraged every church in this city to give. God's love demands it!

### 2. We should mourn.

Just to be honest, mourning is not a pretty word, popular word, or an oft used word, nonetheless, it is a very important word. It's importance can be traced to the fact that the Lord pronounces a blessing on those who practice mourning. Do you mourn?

The New Testament was basically written in Greek. The word that is translated "mourn" here from the Greek is the strongest possible word that could be used in this particular instance.

- It is like the deep mourning and wailing that occurs over the death of a loved one. It is sorrow—a desperate, helpless sorrow.
- It is defined as the kind of grief which takes such a hold on a man that it cannot be hid.

Jesus knew what it was to mourn. He was called the "**man of sorrows**" and was acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3). Then too, we easily remember how He wept at the tomb of Lazarus. He wept openly. In fact, others saw Him crying and noted how He must have loved His dear friend.

In short, the word mourn conveys the (1) sorrow of a broken heart, (2) the ache of a wounded soul, and (3) and the torment of an anguished mind. As strange as it might sound, Jesus calls us to a place

of mourning. Again He says, “**Blessed are those who MOURN....**”

Thousands of people have lost their lives. Tens of thousands of Americans have become refugees within our own nation. Some have left this world only to face a Christless eternity. We should feel with them. We should sense something of their pain. We should mourn.

### 3. Finally, we should hope for the return of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 24 gives us a glimpse into the events that will herald the return of Jesus Christ.

The list includes among other things:

- Wars and rumors of wars.
- Famines
- Earthquakes in various places – in other words, various natural disasters.

And then in verse 8 He makes this observation: “**All these are the beginning of birth pains.**” I hope you picked up on the word picture that the Lord is painting here. Just as a woman goes through a time of labor, and just as her labor pains increase in severity and regularity prior to her child’s birth, so it is that the signs of the end times will begin slow and then grow both in intensity and severity until the end comes.

Following verse 8 we see this increased intensity and severity as Jesus speaks of:

1. Persecution
2. False prophets and more and greater deception
3. A falling away from the faith
4. The Antichrist will declare himself God
5. Great destruction will befall Jerusalem
6. Verses 21-22 then adds: “**For there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now--and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive.**”

I want to again remind you, these things are but the pains of one in labor.

How should the church respond to these events? Luke 21:28 answers the question: “**When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.**”

Why are we to look up? We are to look for the return of Jesus Christ in the air. He is going to return for His people. Acts chapter 1 says that He ascended up into heaven. It also notes that He is going to someday descend back down from heaven to receive His church. In the meantime, we are to look up in joyful expectation!

Let me take you now to the book of Revelation. Chapters 6-19 detail one terrible judgment after another. Then we move to the last chapter – chapter 22. The passage is only 21 verses long.

However, there is one recurring theme in the chapter. Listen:

Verse 7, “**Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.**”

Verse 10, “**Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near."**

Verse 12, “**Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.**”

Verse 20, “**He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."**

The promise is, Jesus is coming soon.

How did the apostle respond? He simply prays, “**Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**”

After viewing all of the tragic events of the end time, the writer voiced his desire for the Lord to return.

Friends, that is still a proper response for the church today. Hurricanes, stampedes, tornados in our

back yards, should prompt us to turn our eyes heavenward to that place where there will be...

- no more night,
- no more crime,
- no more sin,
- no more death and dying, and
- John even points out that there will be **“No more sea”** – no more hurricanes.

What is the Christians proper response to this? **“Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”**