

Are You Ready?

(Our heart-felt prayers go up for all the survivors, workers and pets that have been so terribly affected by hurricane Katrina.)

“ . . . for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” Matthew 5:45

Hurricane Katrina certainly poured plenty of rain on both the just and the unjust! Let us make one thing clear. God is sovereign! “Mother Nature” did not bring hurricane Katrina with all its destruction, God did! Jesus told us: *“Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will.”* (Matt. 10:29) God has a specific reason for all that He allows. Jesus promised us greatly increased trials and tribulations as we enter into the last days prior to His return to earth. BUT, He never promised that we, His people, would escape those trials and tribulations. We are going to be right in the middle of them, even as the Christians were who lived in the areas struck by Katrina. Are you ready? Are you ready to be smack in the middle of the next disaster --- the next 9/11, the next hurricane, tornado, tsunami, school shooting, auto accident, etc? Are you ready to endure afflictions and trials and tribulations? Ready or not, we believe we are going to see more and more such disasters strike various places around the world. Yet Jesus said, **“All these are the beginning of sorrows.”** (Matt. 24:8) Just the beginning, not the end! We are just barely getting started in the disasters we are going to see.

So, we have two choices. We can get mad at God and rail at Him and say that He is unfair to allow something like this to hit Christians, or we can behave in such a way as to bring glory to His name.

Daniel and I did not suffer through hurricane Katrina as so many did, but I, Rebecca, have had my own set of afflictions to deal with recently. For the past four weeks, as the result of being placed on chemotherapy, I have been so weak that I have lain on the couch almost continuously except for numerous trips to the bathroom to vomit. I have felt totally worthless. I did not get an August newsletter out, and I had to cancel my speaking engagement in New York, which caused a great deal of inconvenience to other people. I deeply apologize for this! (I finally simply stopped taking the medication, and am now beginning to recover my strength. I thank all of you who have been praying for me.)

I know that there are many of you reading this who are going through your own set of trials and tribulations. I would like to share with you some of the things the Lord has been teaching me as a result of these difficulties in hopes of encouraging you.

Do you know what two things God values most in our life? They are *faith* and *patience*. Do you know how we develop faith and patience? Through trials and tribulations! Now

why are these two things so important to God? That has been my question to Him these past four weeks. I would like to share the answer with you, but first, let's look at some scriptures to back up my assertions.

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony.” Hebrews 11:1-2

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” Hebrews 11:6

To begin with, it is not possible to come to God or enter into a relationship with Him without faith. We cannot even please God in any way without faith!

A number of years ago I read through the four gospels and wrote down every direct commandment Jesus gave to us to follow. Do you know that by far the most frequent command was to “believe that Jesus IS!” Example:

“You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.” John 8:23-24

Over and over again Jesus commands us to believe that He is God. That requires faith! What is faith, anyway? Well, there are two kinds of faith. There is the spiritual gift of faith (Daniel will be writing about this in the next newsletter), and then there is our own faith. Faith is a decision. It is a choice made by our own free-will. We choose to accept something as truth or not. Let me give you an everyday example. If you held a book in your hand and then let go of it what would happen to it? It would fall to the ground wouldn't it? You accept that that is true. Why? Why would the book fall to the ground? Why wouldn't it fly up into the air? Because of gravity. You accept the reality of gravity. But, can you see gravity? No. Can you feel gravity? No. Yet, you live your whole life based on your faith in gravity. That's why you don't step off of a ten story building. You know you would fall and go splat! You have chosen, with your free will, to accept as true, that gravity exists. Small children have not yet made that choice, that is why we must protect them. So, our own faith is an exercise of our free will. It is something that we must exert and use daily. We must have faith in God's very existence. He doesn't come down and supernaturally manifest to us daily. We don't see Him, most of the time we don't feel Him, we must choose to accept as fact, that He IS. Now why is our faith so important to God? Why isn't He willing to give us some supernatural manifestation all the time, something that we can see and feel, so that we don't have to use faith? I asked the Lord this question. His answer was as follows. *“Faith requires the use of your free will. You have to choose to believe that I AM. Free will was the most expensive gift I could ever give the human race. It cost Me My Son. With their free will man has chosen to sin and turn against me. I had to give My Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the price for that use of their free will. Jesus paid the price for sin. Only through My Son Jesus Christ can I have a relationship with human beings.”*

God is determined that we exercise our free will every day! We must use it to believe in Him! We must use it to obey Him. We must use it to hear from Him. We must use our

free will to choose faith! ***Faith is choosing to accept, as fact, that God IS, and that His Word is truth.***

So, when trials and tribulations come, are you going to use your free will to continue to have faith in God? Or are you going to become angry and say, “God shouldn’t be like this! God shouldn’t allow this to happen to me!” Are you going to allow your faith to grow? Or are you going to allow trials to destroy your faith? Are you going to choose to be like Job?

**“Naked I came from my mother’s womb,
And naked shall I return there.
The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away;
Blessed be the name of the Lord.” Job 1:21**

One day, as I was lying on the couch between spells of vomiting, feeling so miserable I couldn’t do anything, the Lord spoke to me and said, “Go get your bible and read the 11th chapter of Hebrews. I want to show you something.”

I struggled up and got my bible and started to read. Do you know how sometimes the Holy Spirit has specific scripture verses literally jump out at you? That’s what happened to me. Look at this:

There is the long list of the heroes of faith, then:

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland . . . but now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.” Hebrews 11:13-16

“And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise . . .” Hebrews 11:38

Do you see that? These great men and women of faith **did not receive the promise!** They did not receive God’s miraculous promises! BUT this did not stumble their faith. Why? Because their ultimate faith was not in anything here on earth. They did not have to receive a miracle from God to believe in Him. They did not have to be healed, set free from prison, have their homes restored, or anything else here on earth in order to believe in God and His Word. They did not value anything here on earth. Their desires and eyes were set on heaven! They desired to be with God throughout all eternity. That’s what was important to them, not health or wealth or any earthly thing. They **“desired a heavenly country.”** Do you know that your faith reflects your heart’s desires? Is your heart centered on God or the things of this earth? Is your heart centered on living a life of comfort, or a life pleasing to God?

Will God heal me from this rheumatoid arthritis? I don’t know at this point. But this I can tell you, whether He does or not doesn’t matter. I KNOW that God has a reason good enough for allowing this in my life. That is enough for me. All that matters is that I live in such a way as to be pleasing to Him and in the end, spend eternity with Him. Will

I receive God's promise of healing here on earth? That I do not know. But I do KNOW that I shall receive it in full, when I receive my glorified body in heaven. Hallelujah! THE most important thing to me is my relationship with God, and my eternity with Him. I hope it is the same for you.

(Interestingly, as I sought the Lord for healing, His response was: "Did it ever occur to you that I am more interested in your doctor's salvation than I am in your personal comfort at this time?")

Patience

Now what about patience, patience and faith are linked together.

"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ."
1 Peter 1:6-7

"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls." Hebrews 12:1-3

"Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand." James 5:7-8

True faith grows through patient endurance. We are an *instant* society. We want everything at once. We don't want to wait for anything --- including God! We might put up with pain or hardship for 24 to 48 hours, but for most people that is about the limit of their tolerance and patience. If we don't receive everything we need to live comfortably within 24 to 48 hours (Including healing if we need it), we become angry. AND we have to be entertained continually. One of the things I noticed in working with several hundred Katrina survivors brought to our area --- they nearly rioted after 24 hours without TV, cigarettes or alcohol. They ended up violent, demanding these things, and nearly destroyed the camp set up to help them! Food, clothing, water, showers and a bed to sleep on were not enough. We are most sympathetic to the terrible losses these people have suffered, but that is no excuse for their violent behavior when they don't get what they want when they want it. The sad fact is that far too many Americans are little more than petulant spoiled children, not adults able to endure hardship of any kind. God is not pleased with this. He highly values patience and endurance.

"He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints." Rev. 13:10

"Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." Rev. 14:12

How God values the patience of His saints! The purpose of these difficult end times is to mature us and grow our faith and patience. Why? Because patience and endurance requires the continual discipline of our *flesh*. What is this thing the scripture calls our *flesh* or *carnal nature*? It is that part of us that resulted from our choice to sin. Each one of us has a part of us that wants to do only evil all the time. I call this our *sin nature*. Some call it our *dark side*. Whatever you want to call it, we must crucify (put to death, strictly discipline) it daily. *Patience cannot be achieved without keeping our flesh under control*. Once again, Jesus had to die because of our sin natures. That's why God demands that we deal with them everyday of our lives. We won't be relieved from this task until we get to heaven. How wonderful it will be when we are at last totally set free from the desire to sin!

Are you in the middle of a trial and tribulation to which there seems to be no end? Be of good cheer, dear brother and sister. God **knows** what He is doing in your life. He is growing your faith and your patience as you endure all these things. *Your reward is in heaven, not here on earth.*

Let us heed the advice given to us by the Apostle Paul:

“Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.” Hebrews 12:12-13

God is God! So put your heart and your eyes on that “heavenly country” even if you don't receive the promises here on earth.

Copies

You are always welcome to copy any of our newsletters to give to other people. If you know of someone who would like to receive our newsletter, if they live inside the U.S., please send their name and address to us. We will be happy to add them to our mailing list.

Love Offerings

With all our hearts, we want to thank those of you who have given some extra to us in these past couple of difficult months. When Rebecca is not able to travel, our income is drastically reduced as the medical bills mount. We pray fervently and continually for those of you who give to our ministry. It is our heart's desire that God will richly bless you and your families. We are a faith-supported ministry. That means, we are directly dependant on your obedience to God to meet our needs and keep the many facets of this ministry going.

Please send your offering in the enclosed envelope. We ask you to pray about increasing your offering this month to help us during this time of difficulty.

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