

The Storms Of Life

INTRODUCTION:

1. In the spring and fall of each year we face severe and damaging weather...as we have this year.
 - A. We face serious thunderstorms, with lightning, often followed by flooding that washes out roads, etc.
 - B. But, more disconcerting to most of us here is the strong winds that come, sometimes as tornadoes, because they can be so damaging to houses, property, and lives.
2. But, another side of these storms that intrigue me is what they do to the trees.
 - A. After these storms I sometimes find trees laying across the roads, even across my driveway and in my yard, which means a loss of trees, but more importantly, these are something that *I must clean up!*
 - B. I am also interested in what these storms tell me about the trees when I can examine them closely.
 - i. I often find that other things were at work in the demise of certain trees that likely played a far greater part in its demise than did the storm.
 - ii. And, when we compare these events to our spiritual lives, we can find that it provides some meaningful analogies and lessons for the times in life when we face our own personal *storms*.
3. That is what I want to talk about today—how storms affect the trees—in hopes of presenting some meaningful analogies that we can learn from and be strengthened by in the faith.

BODY:

I. Storms knock down, uproot, and destroy trees.

- A. Some, despite their enormous size and girth, are destroyed because they have *rotten cores*.
 1. On the trail Tricia and I walk, a storm last year (2017) twisted up and destroyed a huge oak tree.
 - a. I was amazed at the power of the storm that could do that to such a tree.
 - b. Upon closer look, I found this tree was likely lost because it was structurally weak *on the inside*.
 - i. It appeared healthy and strong on the outside, but because much of its inner core was dead and dying, it could not withstand the storm.
 - ii. I was surprised to see that even though the inner core had been dying for years, the problem was hidden from view until that storm came and uncovered it.
 - c. This growth of the rottenness that was growing from the inside out allowed it to be destroyed by a storm that likely would not have damaged the tree so badly years earlier.
 2. Many Christians end up in this same condition—decaying spiritually from the inside out.
 - a. At first, they are alive, having hearts of faith and love toward Christ. But, Satan lures them into the easy path of paying more attention to the *outward* man than the inward.
 - i. It is **easier** to give the *appearance of faith and spirituality* by outward actions (i.e., attendance, worship, doing for the church) than to have true faith and spirituality of heart.
 - ii. Don't get me wrong, these works are very important to our spiritual life. But, if those deeds are not connected to a deep love and faith toward God, inner decay will follow.
 - iii. We see this inner decay in the scribes and Pharisees, the spiritual leaders of the Jews (Matt. 23:27-28 – “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.²⁸ Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”).
 - b. No wonder Paul prayed in **Eph. 3:16-19** that God would grant his people, “according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit **in the inner man**,¹⁷ that Christ may dwell in your **hearts** through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be **filled with all the fullness** of God.”).
 - c. We must to be sure that our inner man/core is alive and growing in the grace of God in Christ, which requires daily meditation about God directed by His word and expressed in prayer!
- B. Some trees are destroyed by storms because they have *shallow roots*.
 1. Trees with shallow roots look like all other trees until the storms root them up.

- a. I know this because we had tall, seemingly healthy pines that were rooted up by a moderate ice storm because these 50+ ft. trees had root foundations of about 2+ ft. deep!
 - b. Why, I am unsure; but it was likely the product of an easy means of gaining nourishment. It didn't have to sink its roots deep into the ground.
 - c. So, while the weather was good, they continued to live and grow. But, when the ice storm came, their weakness was exposed and they were toppled, uprooted, and left to die.
2. Many Christians a fall away from Christ because they, too, have shallow roots.
- a. Jesus warned that Christians can *spring to life* in Christ without allowing the seed, the word, to establish deep roots in the heart (Matt. 13:5-6, 20-21 – “Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. ⁶ But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away... ²⁰ But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.”).
 - b. Christians will fall if effort is not made to cultivate the soil of our hearts, working to remove the rocks of worldliness and the weeds of sin that block the roots of Christ from sinking deep.
 - i. There is no easy road to this end and it does not happen automatically.
 - ii. It begins with *obedience* to the truth (1 Pet. 1:22-23 – “Since you have **purified your souls in obeying the truth** through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, ²³ having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever”).
 - iii. But, Simon the sorcerer, who spent time with Peter after he was saved, reminds us that continued, diligent effort is required to keep one's heart **right in the sight of God** (Acts 8:20-21 – “But Peter said to him, “Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! ²¹ You have neither part nor portion in this matter, **for your heart is not right in the sight of God.**”).
 - iv. Cultivating a pure heart requires a willingness to sanctify one's life, putting away evil and pursuing righteousness (2 Tim. 2:20-22 – “But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. ²¹ Therefore **if anyone cleanses himself from the latter**, he will be a **vessel for honor, sanctified and useful** for the Master, prepared for every good work. ²² **Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace** with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”).
- C. Some trees are knocked down because other trees are falling.
1. During that ice mentioned above, a large pine fell and hit two more pines causing them to fall, which then hit another pine, which although it did not immediately fall, died soon after!
 - a. One tree rarely falls on my property without taking others with it.
 - b. Those trees almost hit my deck, which would have been costly to repair/replace. And many do hit houses, cars, outbuildings, etc., costing owners and insurers a lot of time/distress/money!
 2. The spiritual fall of a Christian almost always causes collateral damage to the souls around them.
 - a. Satan tries to convince us that our actions will not hurt us or anyone else; but it is a lie!
 - i. Even *careless actions* can cause serious spiritual damage to oneself and one's brethren (1 Cor. 8:9-12 – “But beware lest somehow this **liberty of yours become a stumbling block** to those who are weak. ¹⁰ For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? ¹¹ And because of your knowledge shall **the weak brother perish**, for whom Christ died? ¹² But when you thus **sin against the brethren**, and wound their weak conscience, **you sin against Christ.**”)
 - ii. Think of how many times you have witnessed a fellow member of the church leave the faith which causes someone influenced by them to be forever disillusioned concerning Christ.

- b. Causing spiritual damage to another is a serious offense (Matt. 18:6-7 – “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. ⁷ Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!”)?
- c. We must remember the words of Paul that “none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself” (Rom. 14:7). We must always consider the consequences of our actions on others.

II. The destructive force of storms are applied indiscriminately.

- A. A tornado will twist and maul one tree as well as another.
 - 1. There seems to be no fairness, no rhyme nor reason, for the destruction storms bring—why one tree is unscathed while another is not.
 - 2. Storms don’t seem to care about the beauty or majesty of a tree and will damage the beautiful as well as the not-so-beautiful.
- B. In the same way, the storms of life and suffering come upon Christians as they do on those in the world.
 - 1. Sin has made its terrible, miserable, mark on this world and in our lives.
 - a. The earth is cursed because of sin and all who live upon experience disease, pain, suffering, and death (Gen. 3:16-19 – “To the woman He said: “I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” ¹⁷ Then to Adam He said, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’: “Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. ¹⁸ Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. ¹⁹ In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; For dust you are, and to dust you shall return.”).
 - b. Life can be, and often is, very hard on this stricken earth!
 - 2. It may not seem fair, or right, but God’s people have always suffered in this life even though they trust in Jesus—the One that “...**even the wind and the sea obey Him!**” (Mark 4:41).
 - a. Heb. 11:35-38 – “...Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. ³⁶ Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented —³⁸ **of whom the world was not worthy.** They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.”).
 - b. These were not the slime of the earth, or those deserving of punishment.
 - i. These were the *cream of the crop*—those “of whom the world was not worthy”—yet they suffered severely in this life as servants of God!
 - ii. Should we expect any different?
 - 3. If you haven’t prepared yourself for these *storms*, they will devastate you, your faith and life.
 - a. To be prepared, a Christian must learn to put his/her cares in God’s hands, while also standing strong in the faith against Satan (1 Pet. 5:6-9 – “Therefore **humble yourselves** under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, ⁷ **casting all your care upon Him**, for He cares for you. ⁸ Be **sober**, be **vigilant**; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. ⁹ Resist him, steadfast in the **faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.**”).
 - i. *Humility* is required in the face of persecution and suffering to accept that God is in control and will exalt you in due time despite what you might be facing right now.
 - ii. You must be *sober* and *vigilant* in your resistance of Satan’s attacks, knowing that the trials and sufferings you may face are faced by your brethren as well!
 - iii. These instructions are so important because Satan knows that if he can convince you that you are alone, that God is not a real factor in this life, then you are vulnerable!
 - b. So, remember the words of Paul and trust in Christ’s power to bring you through (Phil. 4:12-13 – “I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have

learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. ¹³ **I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.**”).

III. Don't despise the storms

- A. I know we hate the strong storms, their un-predictableness, their threat to our physical safety.
 - 1. But, they do have a purpose, a pruning effect on the trees, clearing away the dead and dying limbs to make room for the new growth, without which they could never grow as tall or healthy.
 - 2. What I have often perceived as damage is nothing more than what is dead being pruned!
- B. In this same way, God allows trials and suffering in our lives to *prune* us that we might be strong **children of faith**—people that trust Him and not the things around them!
 - 1. Of course, I do not profess to understand it all, to know the deep thoughts of God, or how all things are under His control even when we think them to be spinning out of control.
 - 2. But, *I do know* that a life lived without trials, difficulties, or hardships will *struggle* to be a strong life of **faith**.
 - a. Without trials we will end up being like those pines that had no root foundation and fell when the ice came! (Parents are you setting your child up for failure?)
 - b. Trials show us what kind of roots we have, what we are on the inside, and our need to trust Christ to have the strength to endure (James 1:2-4 – “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”).
 - 3. I do know that we have a good who loves us and wants the best for us!
 - a. The difference for the Christian is that there is one who knows, who is watching, who is there to console and comfort, who truly cares (Lk. 12:4-7 – “And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. ⁵ But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him! ⁶ “Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? **And not one of them is forgotten before God.** ⁷ But the very **hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.**”).
 - b. Peter spoke of Christians “who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ 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 Pet 1:5-7).
 - 4. Remember, God chastens His children whom He loves! (Heb. 12:5-8 – “And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; ⁶ for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.” ⁷ If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? ⁸ But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.”). Don't despise the difficult times!

CONCLUSION:

- 1. Some trees fall because the forces against them are stronger than they are, or ever could be.
 - A. Tornados are going to rip up trees, while ice will break their limbs and bring them down as well.
 - i. There is nothing in these trees' design that will allow them to withstand.
 - ii. They are wood...and tornadoes and enough ice will break wood down.
 - B. I say this because if you are trying to live your life by your own strength and wisdom, understand that the forces of Satan are stronger than you and they will rip you up and bring you down!
 - C. Yet, with Christ there is the power to overcome the forces of Satan (1 John 4:4 – “You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”).
 - D. It is just that simple! The faithful in Christ overcome—they win—they endure the storms to receive eternal life!
- 2. Will you come to Christ in faith, repentance, confession, and baptism into Christ for the remission of your sins and be raised with the hope of eternal life?