

Rita Bears Down on Gulf Coast

At the time of this writing, Hurricane Rita is approaching the Texas and Louisiana Coast. Rita has been downgraded to a category 3 hurricane packing 125 mph winds and is predicted to cause wide spread damage. Billions of dollars will be spent in cleaning up the aftermath of the hurricane. Homes will be lost and lives forever changed. Interestingly, Rita is already causing damage without even coming ashore. Hundreds of miles of traffic coupled with record hot days are causing tempers to sore. Those who are waiting hours and hours for gasoline are witnessing physical fights and arguments as tempers flare. The emotions and patience of many are wearing thin. While we feel deeply for those evacuating from the Houston Metro Area, there are some lessons to learn.

True Character is revealed when one is under stress:

Paul said, *“Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know also how to abound: in everything and in all things have I learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want. I can do all things in him that strengthens me”* (Phil. 4:11-13). Paul had experienced shipwreck, being thrown in prison, beaten with stones and rods. There were times when Paul traveled that he experienced perils in rivers, from robbers, his own countrymen, from the Gentiles, in the city, in the wilderness, in the sea, and among false brethren (II Cor. 11:22-28). When we consider Paul’s hardships, waiting in a three hour gas line suddenly becomes little in comparison.

It has been said that one’s true character comes out in the harshest of trials in life. Though men treated Paul as the filth of the world he continued to pray and preach to the lost souls. Sometimes when we are treated badly or things are not so comfortable we lash out at others rather than dealing with the situation in a spirit of godliness. Job lost all his children and possessions in a trial by the devil. Though Job’s wife would have him curse God and die (Job 2:9), Job’s response was, *“Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: Jehovah gave, and Jehovah hath taken away; blessed be the name of Jehovah. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly”* (Job 1:20-22). I may not always respond as God would have me. When I think about Bible men such as Paul and Job I am made to feel ashamed for my reactions at times. May God help us develop that inner spirit of Christ *“who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to him that judges righteously”* (I Pet. 2:23).

True Disaster awaits the Unfaithful:

High temperatures, long gas lines, traffic jams, and the threat of danger can no doubt magnify distressful situations. What if you had to spend eternity in a highly stressful atmosphere? The apostle John describes hell by saying, *“And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where are also the beast and the false prophet; and they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever”* (Rev. 20:10). The loss of one’s home can cause great distress and sorrow; however, could you imagine loosing your heavenly home for eternity? God’s will is that all would repent of sins and come to Christ that they may be recipients of His grace (II Pet. 3:9). There are those who will never experience the heavenly

home that God intends for them to occupy because they live in sin (I Cor. 6:10; Eph. 5:5). Though disaster awaits in the wake of Hurricane Rita, true disaster is determined by the way one lives their life.

Patience is the key to Survival

What should those who are experiencing the life altering events trying to get out of Houston learn from such an event? They are to learn patience. James said, *“Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into manifold trials; knowing that the proving of your faith works patience. And let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing”* (James 1:2-4). While it is easy for me to say these things, while sitting at my desk typing, it is none the less what the Lord demands out of our trials. None of us relish the thought of traffic jams, long gas lines, the uncertainty of whether we will make it out of this jam safely, and high temperatures. Let us; however, think about those faithful men and women who have gone on before us and by faith made it through some tough times. We will pray for the physical and spiritual strength of those evacuating Houston!