**Homiletical Full Text: Responding to Disaster**

**Sermon Purpose:** That my fellow Pastoral Ministries students will never cease to rely upon God, no matter what occurs in their lives.

**Homiletical Proposition:** Never cease to rely upon God no matter what happens!

**INTRODUCTION:**

Imagine: You’re seventeen years old, home alone after a day of school, watching television when the colored bars of the emergency alert system run across the screen. Then, above the noise of the television, you hear the sound of the wind pick up until it sounds like the horn of a locomotive, charging right at your house. Terrified, you run into the nearby bathroom and huddle down in the tub. Clinging to the fixtures, you close your eyes as house starts to shake and the wind begins to come right through the walls at you, plastering you with debris.

Then, as suddenly at it came, the wind goes away. You open your eyes as you begin to feel the rain hit your body. Looking up, you realize the roof of your home is gone. [Look and Point up] It’s all gone,” you think, “It’s all gone…Was I being punished for something?” “I’m still here…why was I spared?”

Then things get worse. As you work your way across the yard, amidst the debris, you find your neighbors. [Pause] They didn’t make it. Suddenly instead of asking, “why me?” you find yourself asking, “why them?”

These are tough questions for anyone to be asking, let alone a seventeen year old kid…but these questions get asked every day. Every day disaster strikes. Every day someone faces tragedy. And every day these questions are asked in response to tornados, earthquakes, tsunamis, crimes like murder and rape and theft, the sudden loss of a child in the womb, a car crash, or a house fire…the list of tragedies goes on and on and on and on, as does the list of questions. And long after the winds of the weather have died down, the winds of pain and doubt continue to whip around us. In the midst of these tragic circumstances, the physical survivors lose more than their possessions, they lose their spiritual life. The spiritual storms will tear it away from them.

As a pastor—a professional spiritual leader, these men and women, victims of disaster will endure these hardships right before your eyes. And you’ll watch many of them as the pain and the questions of the tragedy wash away their faith alongside their possessions. And as a human being, you’ll face your own share of tragedy. You’ll have your own pain to endure and your own questions that you need to answer. The winds of this sinful world will whip and roar around you, they will tear away your loved ones and your possessions, your health and your comfort. And they will tear at your spiritual life too.

Today’s sermon is about more than just physical storms, it is about the spiritual storms that come with them. Storms in which our exegetical work and our well-made arguments and our long theological answers cannot be heard over the roar of the wind. Storms that will easily overwhelm us and destroy us if our spiritual lives are not properly anchored. Today’s I want to talk to you about securing your spiritual life to a foundation that will hold in the midst of these spiritual storms and their hurricane force winds.

Today we are going to look at the message of the book of Job through chapter 13, verse 14 - Job 13:14, and the message of Ecclesiastes through it’s concluding exhortation in 12:13-14, and the words of the prophet Jeremiah 17:7-8. [Repeat] In these texts we are going to find the only security for our lives in the midst of disaster. Then, we will discover the benefits of security in times of disaster. And lastly, we will look at some ways we can secure our lives properly in preparation for disaster.

Let’s begin by searching for the right security for our lives in times of disaster. As I highlighted in Erik’s story before, people ask lots of questions in the midst of disaster. And we often think that the solution to our pain and our problems is in the answers. But as both the book of Job and particularly the book of Ecclesiastes highlight for us, the search for answers often proves fruitless. Job and his friends spend thirty-four chapters trying to explain why Job is suffering tragedy, only to have Job’s friends be condemned for their theories and Job go without answers for his questions in the end. [Repeat] The seeker in Ecclesiastes searches all of life for the answers to his questions, only to conclude that the search is fruitless, “Vanity of Vanities!” its inquirer concludes repeatedly throughout the book. His search for the answers only leads him into despair. In these books, the human characters are occupied with questions, just as we often are in the midst of disaster. But as I mentioned before, even the best answers are often silenced by the roar of the winds that surround us. C.S. Lewis experienced the same thing in his own life. After writing the book, The Problem of Pain, Lewis lost his wife. He records that during the time of mourning, all his good arguments were useless because he could not “see through the tears.” In fact, he later published his thoughts from that experience under a pseudonymous name, because he was not comfortable with the experience. The overall picture of both Job and Ecclesiastes warns us not to anchor our lives in having the right answers. Answers will fail us at some point. And if our lives are anchored in having the right answers, our spiritual lives will be swept away by the storm.

These books teach us that the issue that is holds our spiritual lives together in times of disaster is not understanding what or why something is happening. The issue that holds our lives together in disaster is trust in God. The secure anchor point for our lives in the midst of the storm is God. That’s why God allows satan to attack Job throughout the book of Job…to prove to satan that Job trusts God no matter what. Chapter one, verse nine records satan’s accusation, “Does Job trust You (God) for nothing?” Yes, as the book proves, he does trust God for nothing! That’s the anchor point by which Job’s spiritual life remains intact. Look at the Job’s declaration in the midst of his trials, the first part of chapter 13, verse 14: “Though He slay me, yet I will trust Him.” [Repeat] Similarly, the book of Ecclesiastes concludes with this exhortation in chapter twelve, verse 13. “The end of the matter, all has been heard. Trust God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”

Both books are echoing the same reality, when you don’t understand, you dare not abandon God. The only security for our lives in times of Disaster comes by trusting in God. Without God, the winds of the storm sweep life off of its foundation, and our lives become part of the disaster. A good friend and mentor of mine, Gene, hurts to talk of the time that he was studying to be a pastor, only to find out that his wife was cheating on him. In the midst of that disaster, Gene abandoned God and allowed his life to spin out of control for a few decades. Though he has come back to a place of trusting God and serving others, he would be the first to tell you that the disaster in his life was not marital unfaithfulness, it was abandoning God in the face of marital unfaithfulness.

The only security for our lives in times of Disaster comes by trusting in God. [Repeat]

The Scriptures declare that those whose trust in the Lord fails are swept away in times of disaster, but they also declare that those who trust God in times of disaster, grow in the midst of their trials. Turn with me to Jeremiah seventeen, and look at verse seven and eight.

*‘But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him.
They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream.
It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green.
It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.”*

Jeremiah, the prophet who was locked in stocks, who saw one of his great scrolls of prophecy burned, who endured the famine and fall of Jerusalem, and who almost died at the bottom of one of the city’s wells, declares to us that the one who is anchored in God no matter what, can maintain a degree of spiritual vitality in the midst of these difficult trials. They “do not fear when heat comes”, and they “have no worries in a year of drought”. Their “leaves are always green” and they “never fail to bear fruit”.

Those who trust God grow in times of Disaster. As believers, that should make perfect sense to us. If God is the source of our life, then maintaining our connection to Him allows Him to work inside of us, and breaking that connection causes us to wither. If God is the source of our comfort, then trusting Him allows Him to have a channel by which He gives us comfort. If God is our healer, then trusting Him allows Him to speak healing words to our souls. And if God’s promises for a future free from suffering are hope to us, then that hope is only available to us when we choose to have faith in Him first.

So Job and Ecclesiastes teach us that the only security for our lives in times of Disaster comes by trusting in God. And Jeremiah 17:7-8 teaches us that those who trust God grow in times of Disaster. Therefore, how do we adequately trust God when times of disaster come upon us and our congregations?

Sailors in ancient and modern times, still take ropes and make lifelines by lashing themselves to the most stable part of the boat, to ensure that they are never separated by their vessel. They do this on vessels of all sizes to endure the wind and waves and they even do this on aircraft carriers to avoid being blown off the upper deck by the gusts created by planes and helicopters.

In our own lives, we have to find such a firm way to lash ourselves to the God of our salvation, to ensure that no amount of wind will keep us from clinging to God. Here are three very key, practical ways to ensure that you maintain your trust in God during these difficult times:

First, pray. Pray. Never stop talking to God. Job’s declaration that we read earlier says, “Though He slay me, yet I will trust Him. Nevertheless, I will argue my case before Him.” You can argue with God when you are hurt. You can fume and bellyache and wine. There is a place for that kind of communication toward God. The Psalms are filled with this type of language. Working through your pain ALWAYS starts with sharing your grief’s with someone who can speak back into your life, so share with God. And when you are helping others through their grief, pray with them. Model trust for them in your prayers, and encourage them to put their own continuing trust into words. Pray.

Second, hold onto your spiritual routines and disciplines. Refuse to stop reading the Bible and attending church. Keep yourself in places and around people who will help you hear God. This is a hard one. Church people give some of the worst counsel in times of tragedy. Some will challenge us to have faith that God will work a miracle. Others attempt to answer “why?” questions that they have no right to answer: “Well, I told him if he didn’t stop that, that God would get his attention one day.” Like Job’s friends, they can hurt more than help at times…but at least they are pointing you in the right direction. Pulling away from these places and practices—being on our own—is often the worst thing we can do. I often wonder how Job’s story would have been different if no one would have come to counsel him. Hold onto your spiritual routines and disciplines, and encourage those who are suffering around you to do the same.

Finally, establish a firm sign of your trust in God, for a time when you’ll need it. Now, I’ve never been a fan of body art, but when it comes to permanence, I can’t think of anything more resolute than a tattoo. And although I am not about to encourage you to get one, I want you to find a way to signify the permanence of your resolution in an irreversible way. Carve it in the doorframe of your house, ink it into your skin: and most importantly, etch it into the very fabric of your soul. “Though he slay me, yet I will trust Him”

I only got about 30 minutes with Erik. I met him outside of a shelter in Hackleburg, Alabama shortly after the tornado came through in late April of this year. I could see the storm of pain and doubt battering his soul as he told me his story, the story I shared with you earlier. He had questions to which I had no answers.

I spent a week in Alabama, and I met dozens of Erik’s. Always with enough time to hear their story, and a moment or two to give encouragement. The only advice I have in times like this is the advice I gave to you: The only security for our lives in times of disaster comes by trusting God.

Those who trust God grow in times of disaster.

Therefore, trust God when disaster comes upon you.