

“Double Time Before the Storm”

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The Holy Spirit began this message in me, believe it or not, at the Edmonds Arts Festival. A certain watercolor painting, which the artist had titled *Double Time Before the Storm*, caught my eye and the message of it gripped me with such a sense of urgency and destiny for God’s people that I contacted the artist. When I shared my impressions of the painting and explained why it was so important to me he cried over the phone. He explained that he was a Christian and that even as he was painting the picture he sensed that God had a message in it but was not sure how that message would be received.

Every day we turn the on news, cringing in anticipation of what we might learn. There is a rising storm and we can no longer ignore its approach

There is a rising storm of radical Islamic terrorism.

In 1998, there were simultaneous attacks on the US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. In 2000, they attacked the USS Cole, docked in Yemen. How could we ever forget, in September 2001, the attack on our own soil, on the twin Towers and the Pentagon? And in December 2001, in New Delhi, Islamic terrorists attacked the Indian Parliament while in session.

In the year 2002 terrorists attacked:

- The US Consulate offices in Calcutta, India
- A church full of worshippers in Pakistan
- A synagogue in Tunisia
- The US Consulate in Pakistan
- A Jewish Center in Morocco
- An oil tanker off the coast of Yemen
- A busload of French Tourists in Pakistan
- A night club full of American and Australian tourists in Indonesia
- A theater full of Russian civilians in Moscow
- A Marriot Hotel in Kenya

In 2003 terrorists attacked:

- Two housing compounds for western workers in Saudi Arabia
- Another Marriot Hotel, this time in Indonesia
- The British Consulate in Turkey
- Two synagogues, simultaneously, in Turkey

In 2004 terrorists attacked:

- Hundreds of train commuters in Spain
- Oil company offices in Saudi Arabia
- A school in the Russian republic of North Osetia, killing mostly children

- The US Embassy in Indonesia
- A popular resort in Egypt
- Another housing complex in Saudi Arabia
- A Shiite mosque in Najaf, Iraq, full of worshippers

In 2005 they attacked:

- The buildings that house the newly formed Iraqi government
- Several trains and buses of commuters in London.
- Another resort hotel in Egypt

In summary, since 1998, 5,150 people have been killed and 13,350 wounded in an openly declared war on Americans and their allies, perpetrated by Islamic extremists, in 17 nations of the world.

There is a rising storm of natural disasters in the world today.

In December 2004, there was an unprecedented tsunami that decimated most of the nations in the 10/40 window. Not long afterwards, Pakistan was hit by a devastating earthquake, and thousands lost their lives. The 2005 hurricane season was one of the worst in the recorded history in the U.S., causing billions of dollars of damage, and displacing hundreds of thousands of people. In the same year, flooding inflicted millions of dollars of damage on the East and West coasts of America, and we are seeing it again this year.

When it was not flooding, the West Coast found themselves fighting wild fires, while the Mid-Western states were hit this year with an unprecedented number of tornadoes. Finally, all of the world health organizations are warning that the bird flu, when it mutates as a human to human virus, has the potential of altering life as we know it in America. Experts say it is not a matter of *if* but *when*.

There is a rising storm, within the borders of our own nation, against the One True God.

Since the decision of our courts to sanction the murder of unborn babies in 1963, over 45 million lives have been taken in the abortion clinics of America.

Now lawmakers want to approve partial birth abortion, where a baby is drawn into the birth canal, a metal tube is forced into its head and brain tissue is suctioned out while the baby is still alive. Embryonic stem cell research, which takes a human life to be harvested, has produced no known cure for anything, yet there is a rush all over the nation to protect the taking of human life.

God's holy institution of marriage, between a man and a woman, is only being defended by a dwindling majority of the public.

The "F" word is tolerated in society, but people can lose their jobs for saying "Merry Christmas."

The Ten Commandments are the basis of our Judeo-Christian legal system, but are illegal to display on public buildings.

The media is doing everything in its power to blaspheme what is right, just and pure only to glamorize what is vile, corrupt and wicked.

There is a rising storm of increasing personal tragedy and crisis.

For some the storm has come in the form of a serious health issue. Maybe it has been a broken marriage or painful family relationships. Even in the middle of a booming economy, perhaps it is a financial crisis that has darkened the skies of certain lives. In the last few years it has seemed like a growing number of the people in our congregations have been affected by tragic accidents. Finally, the last enemy to spread an ominous cloud of fear and darkness over any of our lives is the death of someone we love.

The storm is not a surprise.

There are two things that are important for us to know from God's Word about this storm and God's intentions as it approaches. First, the gathering storm must not be allowed to take us by surprise. The things we are seeing and hearing about are simply the visible evidence of an unseen battle that has been raging on the earth since the beginning of creation.

For the last 6,000 years Satan has been doing everything in his power to destroy the purposes of God in all the earth. The earth is the vortex of this battle because it is the only place in all creation where God's gift of free will allows us to accept God's kingdom and His ways, or reject them. In John 10:10, Jesus tells us that Satan is in the world to "steal, and kill and destroy", and we can see his finger print on every one of the storms.

Jesus' arrival on earth—His life, His death and His resurrection—spell the defeat of Satan and his agenda in the lives of those who have put their trust in Christ. The apostle John writes of Jesus, "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." 1 John 3:8

There is a day coming when Satan will be completely cast out of the earth and assigned to a hell prepared by God for him and his angels. In the meantime, it is no surprise that this world is in the grip of a spiritual battle. Satan was defeated on the cross, but has been allowed limited operations on the earth where our choices give him a base of authority until the day when he will be forever cast down. As the end of all things approaches it is absolutely understandable that the intensity of the battle will increase as the storm intensifies.

Jesus said, in Matthew 24, that in the last days:

- there would be wars and rumors of wars

- nation would rise against nation
- lawlessness would increase
- there would be famines and earthquakes
- false prophets and religions would mislead many
- most people's love for God would grow cold
- we would be hated by all nations because of Him
- it would be a time of tribulation at the end that would be unequalled in human history
- and right after this time, the Son of Man will appear with power and great glory

The rising storm should not be a surprise, nor should it be viewed as something strange—even as some of us get caught in its fury.

God is aware of the coming storm.

Secondly, God is neither taken by surprise as the storm clouds rise, nor is the storm the focus of His attention. The Bible says, in 2 Chronicles 16:9, that you and I are the focus of His attention. “For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.” (2 Chronicles 16:9)

In the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 6 (in the context of teaching his disciples about prayer and fasting and living according to God's priorities), Jesus said not to worry about this life! Do not worry about what you will eat or drink, not about what you will wear, not about your livelihood. “For [unbelievers] eagerly seek after all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matt 6:32-32)

The storms of life do not unsettle God or cause Him to fret. He has got you and I covered. Jesus is at the right hand of the Father; the Bible says he is ever living to intercede for us. (Heb 7:25)

As we see the storm rising in the world, in our nation, or in our personal lives, that is the very time to draw near to God.

Double time before the storm.

Jesus said about that many will fall away in these kinds of times in (Matthew 24:10). Some will fall away because of fear. Like Peter trying to walk on the water to Jesus, but transfixed by the storm and the waves, fear cancels faith, and faith is the only thing that pleases God.

Some will fall away because they don't see the significance of the days we are in and go about thinking it is life as usual. The storm will sweep away those without faith or those with only a nominal faith in Christ. So there is urgency to this message.

Some might see this rising storm, be filled with fear, and see it as a reason to retreat. But this is not a time to shrink back. It is a time to double our investment in a growing faith in Jesus Christ and in our pursuit of an intimate relationship with God.

This is not the time to fall in love with this present world, to be distracted by useless things, or to be ashamed of Jesus or his Gospel. This is a time to double our watchfulness concerning what we are investing our time and resources in, and to double the value we place in so great a salvation. It is a time to double our efforts at loving Him, at proudly carrying His Name in our lives and relationships and to ask the Holy Spirit to help us love God more than ever.

Now is not the time to be indifferent concerning the souls that God has placed all around, but rather to double the effort in the harvest fields because the storm is coming. Now is the time to know God intimately in His Word, to be familiar with His ways, to be a person of prayer, to be a worshipper, to draw near to God every day, and to be filled with the Holy Spirit. It is the time to be holy.

In the book of Joel, it is the elders, the priests, and those who minister before the altar, who are commanded to mourn and to cry out to the Lord for the nation and its people. Let us, as we continue to seek God for our state and this nation, *Double Time Before the Storm* in our call for revival in the Church of Jesus Christ.