

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!

I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but the end is coming. I've doubled, tripled checked the dates; not believing myself that it could be true. I've scorned books and texts, anything that could disprove the horrid truth, but alas..... the end of August is coming. And it's just 12/11 days away!

While for a lot of you that might mean making plans to close up the cabin or maybe it's time to do a little bit of shopping for what comes with every fall. It might mean the end of carefree days of relaxation with a warm breeze or it might mean the winding down of a chaotic summer of growing or building and repairing.

But for me, the end of August means something else. It has become a time of remembrance for me. 12 years ago on August 29<sup>th</sup> Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans. Just a refresher as some of us here may not have that great a memory or were not even born yet.

- Largest Hurricane to hit the US, 3<sup>rd</sup> Strongest in recorded US History
- \$81 billion in property damages, 150 Billion in Economic Impact
- The final death toll was at 1,836, primarily from Louisiana (1,577) and Mississippi (238). More than half of these victims were senior citizens.
- 705 people are reported as still missing

It was Tragic then, it is nothing but tragic now. So much Destruction, so much loss, so much death. To me these would just be numbers beyond comprehension if a few of my friends hadn't convinced to jump on this old blue and green school bus with New Orleans or bust on the back and make the trek down there.

Words don't describe what I saw, Pictures don't compare, videos wouldn't come close to doing what I experienced there justice. Mile after mile after mile after mile of total and complete destruction. And the stories. The sense of hopelessness that was there in these peoples darkest hours. I'm sure you a lot of you remember the stories of the Superdome. Those types of stories weren't isolated. It was everywhere.

There was this focus on the loss, what was taken away, what would never return. It's just all so horribly sad to think about now.

If you're not careful, you could easily get a sense of hopelessness from what Paul is writing to the Romans. This whole section of Romans is devoted to Death. Paul is under house arrest is writing this letter knowing that he is going to die soon. So understandably, he is talking about death a lot. He just won't stop talking about it; 11 times in 11 verses a lot. That's a lot of death. That's a lot about sin. That's a lot of destruction.

It becomes uncomfortable to hear about that much death. We don't want to go there; we want to glance over it as quickly as possible. It seems almost unbelievable.

But Paul knows this. He is trying to do something very important here. He is trying to change how we understand the very concept of death. How we view death. How we understand death. In order for him to stay this change he does something very important; with every mention of death there is also a proclamation of newness, freedom, hope, and LIFE. So much abundant LIFE. Paul changes the whole conversation so that we can no longer talk about death without talking about Life as well because of Christ. We no longer fear death because we have been freed from its touch

on our lives. We fear not the death from wind or waves, cold or heat, from sickness or age. No. We know we have an abundant everlasting life in the embrace of Jesus Christ. The part of this promise of new life that I always love the most is that this new life starts right now, this change started in your baptism. It has turned us into something else. It is turning us right now. This new life is so much more than what we could ever have bargained for.

It is this new life that we tend to find ourselves hating and fearing on a day to day basis. That radical new life that says love your neighbor as yourself. It Says Love your enemies that says go and sell all of your belongings and Follow me, that says forgive as you are forgiven. This is the death that we don't want to face. The death of our old selves. Death to our own judgements. Death to our own stubborn pride. Death to our own greed. Those are the real things that are hard and the things we don't want to face every single day. Our Call, our new life is in Forgiveness and Love. Period We surrounded in this world be anger, division, pain, so much real and horrible pain. We cannot let those earthly things overwhelm us, divide us, from God and each other. We are one in this new life and in this ministry to the world.

You know there were plenty of people of people that said New Orleans deserved what with Hurricane Katrina. Those people were hoping to spread hatred and judgement. Those people were hoping to put themselves first instead of God.

God's reaction to Katrina was a little different.

In the 2 years after Katrina there were over 14,000,000 hours of volunteer service to the people and area that Katrina hit.

In some perspective, that's you living and doing nothing else but rebuilding for 1600 years. 1600 years of service in 2 years.

People tore down, rebuilt, cleaned up, fed, clothed, and sheltered.

People helped others stand up and then walked with them in their pain until they could walk by themselves in full health

This response was echoed from around the world. Christian Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, I know God was working across the globe

*· Kuwait made the largest single pledge of \$500 million, but Qatar 100, S Korea 30 mil, India 5, China 5mil, Pakistan 1mil and Bangladesh 1mil 800 mil offered in total. Cuba offered 1500 doctors*

People saw pain and loss and responded. People saw death and knew that the only response was to give life. This is the only response that we know, where there appears to be death we must proclaim life. Whether Black or white, poor or rich, or anything else that would dare to divide us; the response is with love and life.

And here we are today. This week has been horrible. This week has been tragic! So much hate has filled our eyes and ears. And death. Irrational, illogical ignorant Death. Now is the time, my new friends, my sisters and my brothers. Now is the time to stop this cycle of hatred that leads to more death. Now is the time to stand up and respond

with compassion, love, and forgiveness; we do not chant death. We proclaim life, we nourish life, we give life. Now is the time.

We do not sit here fearing death and sin or fear losing what we have, we are here because we have been changed and are new eternal creations. We are ready to move at the call of Father and the Son at the first opportunity with the Holy Spirit guiding us. We are going to our neighbors, to our friends, to our enemies with Life. Now is the time. Right Now. Amen