

In Spite of the Storm

In preparing for our Couple's Retreat I have been reviewing the 1900 Storm of Galveston, now often referred to as *Isaac's Storm* after Dr. Isaac Cline who had been appointed by the (then) newly formed National Weather Bureau to chart the weather from the focal point of Galveston. Our theme is *In Spite of the Storm*. Although most Christian marriages are smooth sailing, occasional storms are inevitable. How sad that many a peaceful marriage can become so topsy-turvy, even to the point of dissolution because we have not been prepared for the storms. Allow me to draw some parallels and finally some applications along the lines of our theme:

1. Surrealistic optimism prevailed.

Galveston, Texas awakened on September 8, 1900, on its way to becoming the most prosperous city in the nation, brimming with activity, commerce, and confidence. The following morning, it was a city decimated and humbled by nature, its businesses and homes unrecognizable, its hope swept away by what is still the deadliest weather disaster in American history.

On September 7, 1900, the day before the storm, the population was reported in the headlines of the newspaper to be 37,379 and growing. They proudly boasted that in ten years they had grown by 30 per cent. There were castle-like homes. Men walked about in their fashionable derbies and the ladies in their even more fashionable Victorian dresses. Galveston was the first city in Texas to have electricity. Five of the largest banks in America were located on the Strand, believed to be "Wall Street Southwest." To the north, residents of Galveston as "Mudville" - a sister, knew Houston city they thought of with a future that could never parallel their own.

The city sits on a 3-mile wide, 27-mile long barrier island. To the north is Galveston Bay; to the south is the Gulf of Mexico. The highest place on the island was 8 feet above sea level! For years it was suggested that the city should build a seawall. James 4:13,14 says, "*Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.*"

2. A false sense of security was established.

Isaac Cline was the first meteorologist to provide reliable forecasts of freezing weather. He also provided some of the first available flood warnings on the Colorado and Brazos rivers. In a day when few attended college, he held two degrees, one being that of a medical doctor. His credentials were glowing. And with his position in Galveston, few would have doubted his assessment of coming storms. In 1891, he wrote an article for the *Galveston Daily News* in which he gave his official meteorological opinion that the thought of a hurricane ever doing any serious harm to Galveston was "a crazy idea." Cline boldly declared a cyclone could never seriously damage the city, and that anyone who thought otherwise was delusional. Although many residents had called for a seawall to protect the city, Cline's statement helped to prevent its construction.

A sad note is added to the story. Cline's younger brother Joseph, also a weather man working under his brother, warned that the storm was coming and would possibly do severe damage. His warnings were rebuked by his brother. It was not until after the hurricane was slamming the island that Cline raised the hurricane flag to warn the residents. It soon became too late because the trolley trestle that was the form of transportation back to the mainland was soon washed away and the residents were stranded.

Days before, Cuba had warned that the worst hurricane of their history had just passed through and it was approaching America. But the weather bureau chief in Washington scoffed at this report, deeming it non-reliable.

Isaac Cline was so secure in Galveston that he built what he believed was a strong, storm-proof house. As the storm developed, people began to come to his house that he had bragged was like a fortress. A total of fifty neighbors crowded into his house that was to be wiped off the face of the map in the throes of the storm. Although he and his three girls were saved, he lost his precious wife who was expecting their fourth child. Three weeks after the storm they found her body under the debris that was used as a raft for Joseph, Isaac and his three daughters. She was so close to safety, but she never made it.

Jesus warns of those who build with false security: *“And he (a certain rich man) said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God”* (Luke 12: 18-21).

3. Small events can become large.

In *Perils of a Restless Planet*, Ernest Zebrowski, Jr., writes, “Could a butterfly in a West African rain forest, by flitting to the left of a tree rather than to the right, possibly set into motion a chain of events that escalates into a hurricane striking coastal South Carolina a few weeks later?” Thus “The Butterfly Effect” is a theory that one brief wind pattern caused by something as insignificant as a butterfly’s route would effect other wind currents and low pressures that would, in turn, be the cause and effect of a great storm.

This is only a theory, but we do know in fact when we trace our modern hurricanes that begin in Africa and build up over the Atlantic, that they start out as a small disturbance.

In storms of life and storms in marriages, it is often a small thing that can become a large thing if not addressed. In our marriage retreat this coming week, we believe God will use His Word and His messenger, Dr. Jeff Amsbaugh to help address areas that may hold “The Butterfly Effect.” We plan to find God’s optimism, not man-made surrealistic optimistic views. We believe rather than finding our security in this world, we will find our security in God. He alone is the giver of true love. He alone is the one who holds not only marriages, but life together. Psalm 39:5-7 says, *“Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah. Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them. And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee.”* Let’s keep this passage in mind as we pray for marital revival in the homes of our couples at Christchurch. We pray this “small event” will reap big results for you and your marriage!

- Pastor Pope -

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