

Surviving the Storms

September 2004

The tour guide was pointing out the local subtleties of historic Charleston that would escape the casual tourist. He told of families who originally built the homes; he explained the orientation of the houses so as to minimize the summer heat and welcome cooling Atlantic breezes; he noted the meticulous gardens that graced the properties that had seen several generations of Charlestonians come and go.

Then he said, “Do you see those round medallions on the exterior of the older homes?” A second glance brought into focus the strategically spaced discs. I had casually observed these, thinking they were merely decorative. The guide explained: “Those are covers for reinforcement rods that have been placed through the structure to give it stability. These are the homes that have survived 200 years of floods and hurricanes.”

Sure enough, the exterior walls of these homes were not plumb; they tottered this way and that. But they still stood; sentinels that harkened back to Colonial days when our nation was in its infancy. And I thought how those old homes were a fitting analogy of human life.

The storms of life are going to come (Mt 7:24-27). Let us not be fooled by the shallow and self-serving critics of God who complain, “If your God exists, then why isn’t He answering your prayers? Why did He not keep you from hardship?” Storms will break upon the lives of all, whether we like it or not, whether we can explain it or not, whether we believe in God or not. The real question is: “How will I survive the storm when it comes?”

No, our God will not keep the storms from coming, for in them he sees refining, cleansing power. He uses them to refocus our wandering attention, to sharply remind us of the things that really matter, to reprimand us for drifting into the notion that we have control of our lives. God has His own constructive purposes for the storms, but at the same time He gives us the means to stand firm:

“Whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock” (Mt 7:24-25).

Secondly, there is a noble, stately beauty to the house that has been weathered. Unlike the newly built structure, the boards may not be straight, the finish not pristine, the smell not new. We say it has *character*. And so do those who have faced the storms of life and have come through intact. They have *survived*, and they bear the scars of struggle.

But they don’t merely exist. After each storm they have rebuilt, reinforced and redecorated. The improvement is not merely cosmetic. These are people who truly understand life, who have their priorities ordered, who are not naïve and frivolous but who have stared down tragedy, failure and loss. And like the historic houses of Charleston, they continue to provide shelter, comfort and enjoyment to others.

Paul said, “*our outward man is perishing*” (2 Cor 4:16) and “*I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus*” (Gal 6:17). Stoning, shipwreck, exposure and illness had taken their toll on Paul’s body, but what that beaten and battered body said about his soul! “*Yet the inward man is being renewed day by day*” (2 Cor 4:16b).