



The Church's Finest Hour

In the opening line of his classic work, *A TALE OF TWO CITIES*, Charles Dickens said, "It was the best of times and the worst of times." That sentence is an appropriate description of America the last ten days.

The horrors of Hurricane Katrina are still unfolding. From dead bodies lying in the streets, to brazen vandals and criminals roaming the back alleys of a dazed and devastated city, we have seen the worst of America. Yet, at the same time, we have seen the very best of America.

I have been impressed with how our military (both National Guard and active duty) has responded to this crisis. Their concern and professionalism should make any American proud. Relief agencies (Red Cross, Salvation Army) have risen to the occasion, going well beyond the call of duty. But, without doubt, I have been most moved by how the churches of America have responded. Caravans of supplies (food, water, dry goods, etc.), millions of dollars, and myriads of people have blanketed the entire Gulf region bringing with them hope.

Numerous leaders have divided the response to this catastrophe in three stages. (1) Rescue-save as many lives of those affected as possible (2) Recovery-retrieve the bodies of the dead and get power and water up and running (3) Rebuilding-rebuild infrastructure, businesses, homes and the emotional stability of those affected. The first two stages are primarily the job of professionals. The last stage, however, is something in which we as Christians, individually, and churches, collectively, can have a part.

Some of the H.O.P.E. Ministries staff, as well as several businessmen, will be leaving this coming Saturday to the Gulf for a survey trip of the area. Our goal is to assess how we can most affectively minister in the months ahead. We are making our huge tent available as both a distribution site, as well as a ministry location. Lord willing, we will set the tent up in one of the affected areas, helping the local people rebuild, and conducting services at night, bringing a message of hope through the gospel of Christ. Following our Savior's example, we want to meet the physical needs of people in order that we might meet the spiritual needs of those same people. Is this not what Jesus did? He demonstrated His love by healing the sick and feeding the multitudes in order that He might ultimately meet their spiritual need.

While much of our approach will be determined after our survey trip, we do plan to work with a large church in the city of Baton Rouge. This church is currently housing 600 evacuees, and has volunteered to assist us in our evangelistic efforts. We will keep you informed in the coming weeks as to how you can be involved. There will be manpower needs, as well as material needs. Many of you, who have called asking how you can help, could be part of a work team giving a week of your time to this effort. This will not be the work of several weeks, but the work of months and years. Hurricane Katrina, while tragic, has opened a great door of opportunity to proclaim the gospel. It's time for Christians to step up to the plate. This could well be the church's finest hour.

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