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October 2017 - "YOU ARE NOT A FAILURE"

Dear Friends,

During praise and worship in our Sunday night service on September 10 of this year, the Lord changed the sermon I was going to preach and led me in a totally different direction. In this month's letter I am giving you a summary of that sermon. I know that for some, this is going to be a tremendous challenge because of how people have been taught over the years. Even so, I urge you to meditate closely on scriptures I will be sharing.

If something is recorded in the Bible, it is true no matter what people choose to believe or preach. Some of these irrefutable truths are:

- Christians are to live by faith (Romans 1:17 and 2 Corinthians 5:7).
- Faith comes by hearing God's Word (Romans 10:17).
- We are built up on faith by praying in the Spirit (Jude 1:20).
- Using our faith, if we speak and do not doubt, we can have what we say (Mark 11:23).

During the weekend of September 8, 9 and 10, Hurricane Irma slammed into several islands and the State of Florida with never-before-seen intensity, wreaking havoc in a manner not previously experienced.

- It was the most powerful hurricane in recorded history.
- It had sustained wind speeds exceeding 185 miles per hour (297 km/hour) for over 37 hours, something no hurricane has ever produced.
- It was a Category 5 hurricane for three days, longer than any other hurricane.
- Storm surges produced walls of water over 15 feet (4½ meters) high pounding coastlines.
- Over 6.3 million people evacuated Florida.
- During the first four hours when Irma hit Florida, 1.3 million people were without power.
- The tropical storm force winds covered 70,000 square miles (112,654 square km).

Some people have foolishly and ignorantly stated that Hurricane Irma was a result of God judging the United States for electing Donald Trump as president. Does that mean that Hurricane Sandy of 2012, then the second-costliest hurricane in the history of the United States, was God judging the nation for electing Barack Obama as president? Neither hurricane was a result of God's judgment, and you'll understand why shortly.

Before Irma struck any islands or Florida, Christians throughout the United States began praying. Along with the prayers, they began speaking to the hurricane, telling it to stop and dissipate. They were following the pattern set by Jesus in Mark 4:35-39 when He rebuked a terrible storm by commanding, "Peace, be still," and a there was great calm. After all, Hebrews 12:2 tells us to look unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, and in John 14:12 Jesus said if we truly believe, we can do His works.

Therefore, knowing what God has said in scripture about what we can accomplish by faith and following the example set by Jesus, it would seem as though all of the confessions and commandments of, “Peace, be still,” directed at Hurricane Irma should have had some effect.

However, the storm did not stop, it did not dissipate and it did not turn away. Does that mean what we read in scripture is not true? That is impossible because God cannot lie. Does it mean that the unknown thousands of Christians praying, speaking and confessing against Irma are miserable faith failures? Absolutely not! Well then, what happened? The answer to that question is what God revealed to me during our time of worship in that Sunday evening service. In Matthew chapter 24, the apostles approached Jesus and asked Him for signs of His return and of the end of the world. In the very beginning of His answer, Jesus said:

⁴And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. ⁵For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. ⁶And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. ⁷For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. ⁸All these are the beginning of sorrows.
(Matthew 24:4-8)

Notice He said that signs of His return and the end of the world include famines, pestilences (contagious or infectious diseases and plagues that can reach epidemic proportions) and earthquakes in divers places (various locations throughout the world). This passage is repeated in Mark chapter 13, only with a little more information:

⁸For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles: these are the beginnings of sorrows. (Mark 13:8)

Again, He speaks of earthquakes and famines, but He also mentions “troubles.” This word “troubles” comes from the Greek word “terachē” and part of its definition is, “a stirring up, troubling, agitation, commotion; tumult and roiling of waters.” In other words, great, powerful storms involving the oceans. This is further confirmed in how Luke recorded the answer Jesus gave to the question about signs of the end times:

¹¹And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven.....²⁵And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring (Luke 21:11, 25)

Thus, we see that storms of great, destructive intensity – like Hurricane Irma – can be a sign of both the return of Jesus and the end of the world. The way this is all recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke implies not just the existence of such storms, but an increase in their occurrence. We are witnessing this prophecy come to pass. For example:

- On August 25, 2017, Hurricane Harvey (Category 4) hit landfall and produced unprecedented devastation in the Metropolitan Houston area.
- On September 8, 2017, Hurricane Irma made landfall, producing massive destruction.

- As I write this on September 11, Hurricane Jose (Category 4) appears to be headed to the same Gulf Atlantic islands and Florida.

Never in recorded history have three Category 4 or higher hurricanes formed so closely together. Oh, and let's not forget that on September 7, 2017, a staggering 8.2 magnitude earthquake hit Mexico and wild fires have been burning uncontrollably in over five western states!

Think again to what Jesus said: a sign of his return and the end of the world would be a most notable increase in what man would call natural disasters. *Jesus said these things ARE going to happen!* Furthermore, during His revelation of end-time signs and events in Matthew chapter 24 He said, **“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away,”** (verse 35). Stated very bluntly, it doesn't matter how much we pray, confess or speak to the storms, the earthly upheaval Jesus prophesied cannot be changed, *it is all going to happen!* We may be able to lessen the intensity to a point and can absolutely pray for, confess and see manifested protection during such times, but we are **NOT** going to change what has been recorded in scripture. You may believe differently, but I maintain that the hurricanes and earthquake mentioned above are a part of what Jesus prophesied.

Does this mean we should stop praying and speaking to storms? In no way does it mean that. Not all storms and natural events are going to be a fulfillment of Jesus' end-time prophecy. Since we are very challenged to differentiate, we most definitely need to pray and speak against hurricanes, tornadoes, typhoons, droughts and all other destructive natural events. We can make a difference and, as Jesus did, we can demonstrate authority over detrimental events in nature.

What this also means is that we cannot think of ourselves as faith failures because our prayers and confessions did not stop Hurricanes Harvey or Irma. We can have faith so powerful we can raise the dead and walk on water, but no amount of faith will ever change or nullify what God has said in His Word.

Taking this concept of being a faith failure even further, how do you feel when you pray for someone to be healed and you don't see the healing manifest? Most Christians don't seem to want to talk about this, but on the inside, there is a tendency to feel like a total loser, a faith failure and even begin to question the validity of what scripture says about healing. One of the easiest ways around this is to say, “It must not have been God's will,” or “Healing is not for today.” You can believe that if you choose, but you will never change that God has said by Jesus' stripes we were healed and that we can lay hands on the sick and they will recover.

Jesus is our role model when it comes to our potential as Christians. No, we will never be another Messiah, but we can do as He did relative to such things as healing. Scripture reveals that every person who ever went to Jesus for healing received their healing. Some people approached Him on behalf of others and those others were healed. But it can be so disheartening when we do not see similar results, especially when we're believing with every bit of faith within. In fact, such a lack of results can be so discouraging we can be tempted to stop praying for people altogether. If we can't see the same kind of results as Jesus, then we at least want to see results like Peter, John, Paul or others in the New Testament.

Let's consider the Apostle Paul, a man used of God to write more of the New Testament than any other person. We know for a fact there were many signs, miracles and demonstrations of

power in his ministry, including healings. However, there are a couple of events in Paul's life that many Christians may have overlooked. Consider what he wrote to Timothy,

Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities. (1 Timothy 5:23)

Timothy was like Paul's right-hand man and traveled extensively with him. In fact, Paul's writings in Second Timothy indicate that he was handing the reins of his ministry over to Timothy due to his impending death. The verse above indicates that Timothy battled sickness somewhat frequently and that these sicknesses were somehow related to his stomach. Paul obviously knew this or he wouldn't have mentioned it in what he wrote. Do we honestly believe that Paul would never have prayed for Timothy's healing? I'm sorry, but there is no way I believe Paul would have ignored Timothy's struggles and not prayed for him. But that is not all.

¹⁹Salute Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. ²⁰Erastus abode at Corinth: but Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick. (2 Timothy 4:19-20)

How long Paul was with Trophimus at Miletum is unknown; but one thing is for sure: Trophimus was sick while Paul was in Miletum and he was sick after Paul left. As with Timothy, are we going to believe that Paul never prayed for Trophimus to be healed? I find it simply impossible to believe that Paul would not have prayed for friends, traveling companions and people in churches when he discovered they were battling illness.

What I do find extremely interesting is that he recorded in his letters the fact that some people did not receive healing manifested in their bodies. Does this mean that Paul was a faith failure? Would we even dare to consider such a thing? Yet, how many Christians today would feel comfortable admitting they told someone to take medicine (the equivalent of "take a little wine") or that they left someone laying sick somewhere. The way living by faith has been drilled into so many, such statements would be considered a terribly negative confession and an indicator that the individual is extremely deficient in faith. Who wants that kind of reputation to go before them?

However, Paul didn't seem too concerned about what people would think. Neither did he blame Timothy or Trophimus for a lack of faith to receive their healing. Furthermore, Paul didn't quit, he didn't stop ministering and he didn't question God's will concerning healing. What did he do?

***¹³Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,
¹⁴I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.
(Philippians 3:13-14)***

If we keep thinking about all the people who didn't see manifested healing when we prayed for them, we will take our eyes off Jesus, the One unto Whom we are to look. Our completeness and potential lie in Christ. We cannot allow what didn't happen in the past to dictate what we believe about what can happen in the future.

Just because people haven't been healed when we prayed and confessed over them doesn't mean we are faith failures. What it means is that we must keep pressing toward the mark of our full potential in Christ, revealed in the life of Jesus and recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Reaching this potential is a process; it doesn't happen overnight. God's Word is eternal truth. He said faith comes by hearing His Word; therefore, the more of His Word we sow into our lives, the more faith is coming. He said we build ourselves up on our most holy faith praying in the Holy Spirit; therefore, the more we pray in the Spirit, the more we are established on faith.

As we continually sow to our spirit, we will eventually reap the living promises contained in the Bible. We must refuse to get weary, frustrated and discouraged; God's Word cannot fail, it will produce what He said it will produce.

In summary, certain events leading up to the return of Jesus and the end of the world are recorded in God's Word. These events include many kinds of natural disasters such as hurricanes. No amount of prayer or confession will change these events, regardless of how much faith we have developed. Additionally, just because everyone you pray for doesn't get healed, it doesn't mean you are a faith failure. Keep pressing into God and you will see more and more results. You are NOT a failure, you are a work in progress!

In His Grace,

Jim

P.S. – The sermon I preached on Sunday night, September 10, 2017 titled “You Are Not A Failure,” is the basis for this letter. If you would like to have a CD of that sermon, please use the order form below.

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