

Spiritual Questions in the Wake of Hurricane Katrina

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PHIL: John, I've been watching, as I know you have, the news about the devastation left in the wake of Katrina. And my first thought, of course, was of people I know, friends...I have several friends who are pastors in the affected area, and people on our mailing list who listen to Grace To You, thousands of them live in the affected area, and I know our hearts go out to them. We want to talk today a little bit about that disaster.

JOHN: Well the whole thing is heartbreaking to me. It's...you know, in one sense, spiritually those people who were lost and without Christ and without hope and without salvation were so before the hurricane. But there's something about seeing people in that level of despair that intensifies one's apprehension of the truth of their condition. You saw all those people milling around in the water, and you saw all those people on the bridges, and you saw the people in the..in the Superdome where, by the way, I preached, I stood on the 50-yard line there and preached to 25,000 pastors in the bleachers a few years back, the Southern Baptist Pastors Conference there, so I know the city and I'm familiar with it, but there's something about seeing those people at that level of despair that is sort of pulls the mask off. And that really, to me, was a huge metaphor for the real horror of that city and any other city, pick your city, that is the lostness of humanity...no hope, no where to turn, that was like a huge metaphor of their spiritual condition.

From time to time you met a person in the media or the news who seemed to have some trust in Christ and some hope...they were pretty few and far between. There was a sense of anger and a sense of horror, a sense of dismay. There was a hopelessness. I could help but think, "You know, that's the real truth when the mask is off." There's something about our culture, there's something about our culture that pulls the mask down in front of reality. You can look at a third-world situation in Haiti, you can look at the tsunami in Indonesia, you can look at other disasters in other places, and life is sort of on the edge like that all the time. But for us, we do a good job of looking happy and looking successful and everything is fine and not until that comes do you see the real horror of the hopelessness of the human heart. So it just really does give us a huge dose of reality.

PHIL: Earlier this year after the tsunami, you preached a special message at Grace Church about disaster and where is God in the midst of disasters like this. We titled it, "Supernatural Lessons from a

Natural Disaster." And interestingly, we just broadcast that on Grace To You a month ago and it was fresh in people's minds, I know that because I took a telephone call this morning from a man who lives in the affected area who begged us to put it back on the air because, he said, "For them it's more timely than ever," and he wants to hear it again.

JOHN: Well, and we're going to do that, right?

PHIL: Right. In fact we're going to air it tomorrow.

JOHN: Well that's good and, you know, you don't know how important that truth is until you need it desperately. And I can understand that, even though people heard it, they didn't hear it with the same ears they're going to hear it with having gone through all of that, and having been exposed to it. So that's good.

PHIL: It's interesting, isn't it, how quickly disaster turns the daily water-cooler conversation into a discussion about theology. You hear all these questions...we saw it after the earthquake in 1994. We saw it after September 11. We saw it after the tsunami. And again now. People want to know what does this calamity signify? Where was God when this happened? Why does He permit things like this to happen? Is it possible that things like this happen outside of God's control? And you hear those same questions and they go on and on and on and they're hard questions.

JOHN: Yeah, and I'm sort of waiting for a call from the Larry King Show because this is the kind of thing that causes those questions to rise and they immediately call and say, "Will you come on and talk about where was God when all this happened?" Sure, it resurfaces all those questions. Again as I said earlier, just strips everything down to bare reality. And then the question of intent and purpose, the cosmic questions, the bigger questions, the prevailing realities of goodness and sin and righteousness and judgment all come to the fore.

PHIL: Would you say those are fair questions to ask?

JOHN: Yeah, they're the right questions to ask. And, you know, I think it's true to say this, there have always been these horrible disasters. There have always been humanly inexplicable horrors, the massacres of infants, tragic deaths, terrible plagues, diseases, millions of people dying in the Bubonic plague in Europe. There have always been these massive kinds of disasters all the way back into history. And they always raised the question why, always. You know, why is this happening? I mean, you go back in to the Old Testament, why do...why does God allow bear...bears to come out and rip up young men? Why does God open the ground and swallow people? Why does God allow Israel to conquer and kill Canaanites in His name? Those are direct acts of judgment that God has authorized.

But you have all the indirect disasters in human history, and even biblical history and the question is always raised...why do these things happen? And the answer always comes back to the same issue, this is what is waiting everyone...death. And you don't know when it's going to happen so be warned, understand the nature of the looming threat of death. It may not be a tsunami. It may not be a hurricane. It may not be a 9-11. It may not be a terrorist act, maybe something else. But it will come and it...for most people will come unexpectedly.

PHIL: It's a frightening thought, isn't it?

JOHN: But it's the truth. Everybody dies. And as I said originally on the Larry King program, the first time I was on, when he said to me, "What is the lesson?" And I said, "The lesson is pretty simple, you're going to die and you don't know when. And you're not in control of that." And that's the message.

PHIL: That was the very answer Jesus gave in Luke 13, and I think...you keep going back to that.

JOHN: Right. Sure.

PHIL: Every time there's a disaster like this.

JOHN: Yeah, nobody...nobody died in Louisiana, Mississippi, or Alabama that wasn't going to die anyway. They just couldn't control the timing. And, of course, when Jesus preached that great sermon in Luke 12 and 13 in which He was offering salvation and telling people to confess Him as Lord and repent, and all of that, He said to them, "Look, you don't know when the Lord's going to come. You don't know when this age is going to end with the return of Christ. You also don't know when you're going to die." They had been asking a question about Pilate's men going in and slaughtering some Galileans. And there was another event about a tower falling down and killing 18 people. And the question in their minds was articulated by Jesus, "You're wondering whether they were worse than the people who didn't get killed. Were they worse because Pilate's men killed them? Were they worse because the tower fell on them?" And He said, "No, but if you don't repent, you're going to perish too." Well what He was saying is they perished. In other words, they died without salvation. They died without hope. They were consigned to eternal judgment. They perished and so are you if you don't repent. The message is always the same message, death is inevitable, after that the judgment, you're not in control of when it's going to happen.

PHIL: Now, since we are going to broadcast that tomorrow and you answer and deal with many of those questions in tomorrow's broadcast, I just want to encourage listeners to tune in tomorrow and hear that and sort of jump beyond those questions today. Because in the end we're going to have to

come to grips with the reality that there are some questions we all wonder about that God, frankly, doesn't owe us any answers to and doesn't offer us any answers to.

JOHN: Yeah, it's like Job. You know, you would think that if anybody deserved an answer, it would be Job, right?

PHIL: That's right.

JOHN: The most righteous man on the planet by God's own assessment. God says to Satan, "He's the most righteous man there is." Isn't he at least entitled to know why? All his kids are killed. He loses all his crops. He loses his health. All he's got left is a cantankerous wife who has given him bad advice. The level of misery is incomprehensible. And then to add to his misery, he has a bunch of friends who come and tell him all the wrong information and give him foolish counsel. If anybody deserved an explanation, that good righteous man deserved one, and he never got one, absolutely never got an explanation from God. God just did say to him, "Who do you think you are even asking?" So God does not...does not consign Himself to some necessity to answer our great questions, except the prevailing reality is, this is a fallen world, you are sinful, calamity suits itself perfectly, it adapts perfectly to a fallen, sinful world and a sinful humanity. It is inevitable. Death is inevitable and you need to be prepared for it.

PHIL: And beyond that, we have to do what Job did, basically, and put our hands over our mouths and let God be God.

JOHN: And trust in the wisdom and the sovereignty and the perfection of God.

PHIL: One thing we've seen in all these disasters is if you look closely at what has happened and what could have happened, there's always a lot of mercy as well as judgment mixed in with these events, right?

JOHN: Yeah, I think in the things that we've seen, there is mercy mixed with judgment. But that's characteristic of God because, and I go back to this, Phil, if God wanted to destroy all sinners, He can destroy all sinners. I mean, He can do that and He will. There will come a day when this...this world burns up and everybody on it goes. Until that time, God is by nature, the Bible says, a Savior. He is by nature compassionate. He is by nature merciful so that these disasters are the exception and not the rule. With the single sort of exception of the great Flood of Genesis chapter 6, all these other judgments are partial, limited judgments. But they illustrate what all men deserve immediately. But God in His judgment and His justice always demonstrates His mercy because this is the time when God is manifesting Himself as a Savior. And so these things come as warnings.

In that same Luke 13 passage where Jesus talked about the tower and the soldiers that killed the people who were worshipping, He also told a story about a man who had a vineyard. And the man had planted the vineyard and come back three years in a row expecting some fruit and there was no fruit. And so he said to the guy who was hired to take care of it, "Cut it all down." And you remember the man said, "Please, just one more year and if there's no fruit then cut it down." And Jesus was saying, "You are all living on borrowed time. This is a time of mercy. This is a time of grace, but it's a borrowed time and judgment is coming."

PHIL: And so, for those of us who don't live in the affected area, there's a lesson for this, for us in this, right? That when a calamity like this happens in front of us, rather than spending our time speculating on the gravity of the evil that caused it, what the Lord instructs us to do is examine our own hearts and remember that we are also sinners in need of desperate...desperate need of repentance and that we should be prepared.

JOHN: Yeah, and I think for us who are believers, we would view it in a very different way. For those who are Christians, they were ushered into the glory of the presence of God. So the great message is for those who are not.

And I think, Phil, and I have to say at this point, this is a note that is absolutely missing in Christian preaching today. This is a note that is missing even in evangelism. Where is this note of warning? Where is this note of threat? I mean, Jesus said in that same sermon, "You guys look at a cloud and you say it's going to rain. Or you feel a hot wind and you say it's going to be hot today. You know, you're minor league weathermen. But what you don't understand is the looming threat that hangs over your head. You can't even discern the times. You don't get it that God has sent His Son. You don't understand that you are placing yourself under eternal judgment. You know, you are supposed to be theological experts and you don't get it." Jesus' preaching was so strong, so filled with warnings about His coming, about His judgment, about death, about borrowed time. In fact, that great sermon ends with all of those very powerful, penetrating, confrontive, threatening emphases. And then, of course, He follows it up by saying...the disciples respond by saying, "Are only a few being saved? I mean, this is not an attractive message. You know, this is not drawing the crowds." You know, you might be able to fill some stadium with a message that everybody likes, but Jesus never did that. I kept thinking about that. When He preached that message with all those warnings, it says there were ten...ten thousands of people, *mirioudan* which is...it means ten thousand. There were multiple ten thousands of people, huge crowd. And there were so many they were stepping on each other, it says.

And I ask the question. Today if I had an audience of tens of thousands of people, what would I say to them? Most preachers today would try to find something that everybody would like. All Jesus ever did was pronounce judgment, pour out threats, warn them about God who was able to destroy their soul and body in hell. Tell them that they too would perish if they didn't repent and they were all living on

borrowed time. Where is that note in preaching?

PHIL: You're right, it's missing.

JOHN: It's completely missing, and yet it is the message. And the whole church is going to fail to capture the spiritual potential of this disaster if we don't turn to that kind of preaching...in the light of it.

PHIL: That's good. Well I do want to turn another subject that's also important in the midst of that and that is encouragement. We have lots of people, I'm sure, who are listening to us today who have been dispossessed and left homeless and they've been moved to other areas where perhaps they can still hear the broadcast, and I'd like you to just maybe share some words of encouragement that might come out of this. Beyond all the questions and all of that, there's some things we can be absolutely certain of.

JOHN: I would say one thing on a practical level is that people are going to be higher in their...raised higher in their sensitivity toward death who have been through it. So you who are Christians have a tremendous opportunity right now to capture that fear and that threat that can cause people to think deeply about the realities of life and death and time and eternity. So I think the good that comes out of it is going to come when Christian people come to these people who are fearful, who are, in some cases, terrified because of what they've survived and are looking at life in a very different way. And this is a marvelous opportunity to say to them, "You better repent or you too will perish." I think evangelistic opportunity is opened up. And that is the ultimate mercy. The greatest mercy in this whole thing is not that God spared some house or spared some family. The greatest mercy is that God sent a message about the threat of death and the inevitability of death but this is still the time of grace. So to me, the goodness of God, the goodness and, as the Bible puts it, the goodness and forbearance of God, or the goodness and patience of God is here being manifest. For those who died, and it may number in the multiples of thousands when finally determined, it was the end, just like it was for the Galileans in Jerusalem or the eighteen on whom the tower fell, or anybody else caught in a disaster or who dies.

But for everybody who's left, the Lord reaches out in grace with the gospel of Jesus Christ and you have the time and you have the opportunity and herein is the goodness of God. And that...that is for the benefit of those who are lost and it's also for the benefit of believers who now can take the gospel to these people. And I think that's what we need to do as much as we possibly can. That's why from my viewpoint, I've done my part personally to give to the Red Cross and try to help in that effort, and will continue to do more, if we can, to rescue people on a humanitarian level and to assist them in that fashion. But for me, the great enterprise that has to come out of this that I want to invest in is the enterprise of extending the grace of salvation to those that survived and to everybody else in this country who now has a new sense of the threat of those kinds of things. You know, we just get...we

just think we escaped the terrorists, and now we get this. And again, there's no way to run from these kinds of things, but this is the time of God's goodness, this is the time for us to be faithful to proclaim the message of the gospel. And I hope preachers will step up in the manner that Jesus did, articulating the threat and the reality of death and preach the gospel against that background.

PHIL: It's interesting to me that you...you see the goodness of God in this. And certainly that's a strong theme in Scripture, it's of the Lord's mercies that we're not consumed.

JOHN: Right.

PHIL: But a lot of people who raise these questions...where was God? Why would God let this happen? There's a tone to those questions that seems to challenge whether maybe God isn't righteous, maybe God isn't good after all. What would you say to someone who's grappling with that question?

JOHN: That kind of an attitude demonstrates an ignorance of God. People who think like that, act like that and speak like that are either ignorant of God or they don't believe in Him. I could never say that about God because I'm not ignorant of who He is. You know, one of the sad realities is that we have a country of people who think they know the God of the Bible, they think they know who He is. They've heard about Him all their life, you know, eighty-five percent of Americans say they're Christians. So, you know, they think they know about this God of the Bible. But that kind of questioning of God, that kind of response to God, anger, hostility toward God, a feeling that God has done something terrible or failed to prevent something terrible, is reflective of ignorance. They don't know the God of Scripture very well. They don't know that that is in its purest and truest sense an act of mercy on God's part to send as a warning. And that's the only way that I can view it because I know the God who has revealed Himself in Scripture. And this is mercy and this is forbearance. Yes it was judgment to those who....who rejected Him, but that's going to come to everybody and God could destroy the whole world now and be perfectly just in doing that, perfectly righteous in doing that. But He continues to extend His mercy to us. And I think it's ignorance.

Or it's unbelief. They may know that the God of the Bible is presented as a God of grace and mercy but they choose not to accept Him.

PHIL: There are other people who ponder that question, where was God...why would He let this happen...and decide then that maybe God just isn't powerful enough to stop this. How would you answer people like that? In fact, before you do, let me read you this from a famous Christian leader, it's actually Tony Compollo, he says this "Whenever there's a catastrophe, some religious people inevitably ask...why didn't God do something? Where was God when all those people died? Unfortunately," he says, "there are lots of bad answers. One such answer is that somehow all

suffering is part of God's great plan. In the midst of agonies, someone is likely to quote from the Bible telling us that if we would just be patient we would eventually see all things working together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purposes." Then he quotes Romans 8:29. He says this, "Statements like that dishonor God and are responsible for driving more people away from Christianity than all the arguments Atheistic philosophers could ever muster." He says, "Perhaps we would do well to listen to the likes of Rabbi Harold Kushner who contends that God is not really as powerful as some have claimed. Nowhere in the Hebrew Scriptures does it say that God is omnipotent. Kushner points out that omnipotence is a Greek philosophical concept but it's not in the Bible. Instead, the Hebrew Bible contends that God is mighty, that means God is a greater force in the universe than all the other forces combined," unquote.

How would you respond to that?

JOHN: Well basically that's...that's a misrepresentation...a misrepresentation of the God of the Bible. I think that's an attack on the nature of God. But that's real popular today. You can say God is either impotent to some degree and doesn't have the power to prevent these kinds of things, or as other theologians today are saying, it's an oops deal because He doesn't know what's coming and so when it came, it's too late. And even if He is powerful enough, since He doesn't know the future, this is the openness of God viewpoint, He doesn't know the future, doesn't know what's going to happen, He's just sitting there waiting for it to happen like everybody else cause He can't know what hasn't occurred, He has to react to it and try to fix it after it's already happened. Any of these kinds of view of God are unbiblical views of God. First of all, Rabbi Kushner doesn't know the true and living God whatsoever. He has misinterpreted the Old Testament indication of God's omnipotence. God is mighty and if you question how mighty He is, then you only need to look at the fact that He created the entire universe in six days by simply speaking it into existence. That ought to be enough power to stop a hurricane, or any other natural phenomenon of which He is the creator. So that kind of foolish musings about God only reflects a person's ignorance.

The sad part is that some evangelical or so-called evangelical would buy into that because that is...that is a failure to honor God, a failure to worship God, a failure to give to God the glory that is due His name. And that's a very serious failure. I know that's not popular. I know that's not popular. When I was on the Larry King program and I talked about God sending people to hell, I was told on that program by one of the participants, "I don't like a God like that." I understand that. I understand that sinners don't like a God who sits in judgment on sin. I understand that. I understand that if you want to accommodate sinners and be nice to sinners and enjoy the fellowship of sinners and win over their friendship, then you've got to take God down from being a righteous judge...as well, and an omnipotent, and omniscient God. That's a tragic accommodation to do, however, and call yourself a Christian and say that you're still worshiping the God of the Bible.

PHIL: Now some of our listeners may actually be confused about this though because they'll wonder, is God powerful enough to con...does He control things like this?

JOHN: Of course God controls everything directly or indirectly. I mean, that is to say did God blow the wind? No. Not immediately but mediately, God controls everything. God is...God allows everything that occurs. There is nothing outside the purview of His will and His purpose. We know that clearly from Scripture. Does God create the forces in the moment that they act? That's another question. I mean, did God all of a sudden say, "Okay, hurricane, you go there," or is this the conflux of all those providential elements that God has placed into existence that effect perfectly His will, even to the exact and precise life and death in every individual case? Yes.

PHIL: He's sovereign over it.

JOHN: He's sovereign over all of it.

PHIL: Of course I agree with that. It strikes me as a hopeless theology to say that God can't control His own creation.

JOHN: Well first of all, it's ridiculous since He is the creator of it all and the sustainer of it all and the consummator of it all, it makes no sense to say He can't control it because Scripture indicates that He controls it all...over and over and over again.

PHIL: The only hope we have that He will ultimately work all things together for good is the truth that He is sovereign over all.

JOHN: Yeah, and the bottom line for denying that is simply that people don't like that. They don't like the idea that God controlled all of that. They don't think it sells well or they don't like God to be so dominant in their lives. So they just invent the idea that He doesn't control it and say..."Well He doesn't know," or "He's not powerful enough to stop it." But that's...that's really against what Scripture teaches. And that's not the way to solve any problem. You know, if you think you can solve these problems by inventing God the way you want Him to be, you've just created a deception that is equally or more deadly than the problem. In other words, I would rather look at the hurricane down there and get it right about God than in response create a God of my own liking that would be the ultimate deception and even damning deception.

PHIL: And leave you in a hopeless state, too.

JOHN: Yeah, yeah. I mean, I'm not really interested in committing my time and eternity to a God who has limits to His power. That's pretty frightening.

PHIL: Another thing, just turning to a different subject and this is humanity, what we learn about humanity in all of this. There's a lot of illustrations here of our absolute need for a Savior. We're in the same boat spiritually that some of these victims are in physically...unable to save ourselves and in need of a Savior.

JOHN: Yeah, it is a great picture of that, isn't it? Stuck with nowhere to turn, nobody to rescue you and you hear all these people when they finally show up somewhere, "Where were you when I needed you?" Yeah, as I said at the very outset, there's...there's a real picture of the lostness and the despair and the hopelessness of people who can't do anything at all about their circumstances, nothing. The truth of the matter is, and this is a great thing to think about, those people could make virtually no contribution to their deliverance. They had no resources, no amount of money, they had no transportation. There was nothing that they could do. They couldn't...I guess you could say it this way, they couldn't send to the rescuers some paragraph on their virtue that would make the rescuers say, "Oh, I'll go get that guy cause he deserves to be rescued." They couldn't do anything. They were...they were without any possibility of contributing to their rescue. In a sense you could say they were sovereignly rescued without regard for their life, their economics, their morality, their circumstances, nothing.

PHIL: And another vivid image you have is all these people who when rescue shows up they refuse to get in the boat.

JOHN: Yeah, right. When rescue is offered to them and there is a Savior and there is a Deliverer, they would rather die where they are, they would rather hold on to what little meager piece of earth they have. And that to me is so strange, but again it's a graphic picture. You've got the rescuer there ready to come and take you out of your dire circumstance, and you'd rather hold to it than let go.

PHIL: Or the extreme illustration of human depravity, you have people shooting guns at rescue helicopters.

JOHN: Right, like liberal theologians.

PHIL: That's right.

JOHN: And cults. And those who hate the gospel.

PHIL: Well, John, we need to wrap this up. But do you have any word for our listeners in the affected area? Some of them will be listening because they've been evacuated to other regions.

JOHN: Well, we're going to try to do all we can to keep the message coming. Obviously we need to pray for some of the radio stations in that area. I have a list in front of me. I think there are twelve

radio stations in the affected area that carry Grace To You. Some of them are in Mississippi, some of them are Alabama, and some of them are in Louisiana and we just are going to pray that somehow things will get up and running so that the broadcasts can come back. We want to do whatever we can to assist these stations. We'll find out how that unfolds in the days ahead. And beyond the stations we know we have a lot of listeners that are being affected. I have a letter here in my hand, it's really an interesting letter from a gentleman down in Alabama. "I am writing on behalf of my brother-in-law who has recently been affected by hurricane Katrina. He was a student at New Orleans Theological Seminary." Where, by the way, I have spoken in the past. I did a conference down there and preached in a church at the campus there. But anyway, he's a student at New Orleans Theological Seminary. "As far as we can tell the apartment...his apartment remains under water. He had recently purchased a set of Dr. MacArthur's New Testament Commentaries. He also lost his MacArthur Study Bible as well as several books he had by Dr. MacArthur and other authors who have books listed on Grace Books International website. I'm sure out of all of the people who were affected it would be hard for you all to try to help on an individual basis, but if you have any thoughts as to where we may be able to get some help for him in starting to replace the books from his library."

Well the note also says his family, along with ours, greatly value Dr. MacArthur's teaching and the stand he makes for God's holy Word. We appreciate any information you can offer us.

Well I'll tell you what we will do for this young man in seminary. We'll just replace those books. So we'll let this gentleman know down in Alabama and we'll be happy when we can. We'll probably send them to him since it looks like he's dry. We'll just replace his books because we want to help. Obviously we have no idea of knowing how many others are in the same situation. We'll just do this by faith, believing that there may be some folks out there and there will be a lot more who will ask this....there are a lot of pastors...there are churches we know that were gutted and that meant the pastor lost his entire library. They're going to come back at us because we minister to so many churches in the south. That's, of course, the Bible belt. Louisiana is...there's a lot of Catholics there, but there are still some strong evangelicals in that area and the other areas in the area. So we will do all we can to supply that as long as we have resources to do that. So if any of our listeners would like to contribute to that kind of effort on our part, we'd be glad for those contributions and we'll use those to replenish the books in the libraries of these men who are ministering the gospel in that area.

PHIL: And there's so much more that needs to be done. I have several pastor friends in the area whose churches have been seriously damaged and destroyed, who have lost their libraries. The size of the task isn't even clear yet but we want to do as much as we can. And with your help we will do that. Also, tomorrow's message, in case you're not able to tune in, if you'd like a free copy of that, write to us here at Grace To You and we'll send it to you on CD or tape. The title of that is Supernatural Lessons from a Natural Disaster, perfect message for these times. Supernatural Lessons from a Natural Disaster. We'll be broadcasting it tomorrow. If you'd like a copy, write to us.

John, would you lead us in prayer just to close for people who are listening to us who have been affected by this disaster?

JOHN: Well first of all, Father, we do pray for Your grace to be abundant and to abound in that situation. We grieve for those who are without hope in this world. We grieve over those that have perished without Christ. We rejoice over those believers who have gone on to glory. We are heartbroken over the terrible suffering and tragedy of those people who were the poorest of the poor and had the very least and now have even less, and we pray that through this their hearts might be turned to you that they might not be bitter or angry, but that they might consider their own sinfulness, the inevitability of their own death, that they might know that they're living on borrowed time, that they might assess the threat the way it should be assessed, that life is short and death is sure. We pray that through this time many would turn to You, not to show anger and not to question You but to cry out for mercy and grace in repentance and believe the gospel. We pray that You'll strengthen churches and believers to proclaim the gospel in this time, to do it faithfully and clearly. May the church step up and speak honestly about judgment, about Christ's return, about the inevitability of death, about the potential for disaster. May we use this time to warn the unconverted of the coming tragedy of death without salvation. We pray that the church would abandon its weak message, abandon its superficiality and cry out with the truth of the fact that hell is a reality, death is inevitable, salvation through Christ is the only way of escape. So may Your church be faithful in this time and may many come to faith. We pray for those all around the country who are now viewing this and saying, Wow, what a horrible thing, I'm glad I escaped. May they too know that they must repent or they will perish. We pray that You'll strengthen churches as they minister, as they labor, as they show love in the name of Christ, as they help in the restoration and the rebuilding. We just pray that You'll use that as an opportunity for the gospel. We pray that You'll cause the radio stations to find their way back to the airwaves to declare Your truth again and the churches to be rebuilt to send forth the message of Jesus Christ. And may we know as well that this is what all of us in this world deserve is divine judgment and it's only by grace through Christ that we escape it and do so eternally through Your mercy. We commit ourselves, Lord, to You to be used in this time, however You would see fit. In Christ's name. Amen.

PHIL: Amen.

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