

Amid Dire Warnings

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In September 2008 Hurricane Ike devastated twenty-seven miles of Texas coastline. Stilts that once supported houses looked like sticks haphazardly stuck in the mud left in Ike's wake; the houses they supported vanished. Slabs of concrete were all that remained of once busy local grocery stores and restaurants. Fish were stuck in chainlink fences, frozen in death where Ike's floodwaters deposited them. Even downtown Houston looked like the frontline of a war zone, glass shards filling the streets below from highrise windows blasted by Ike's fury. And still people stayed on Galveston Island, High Island, and Bolivar Peninsula when the mandatory evacuation orders were issued by government authorities! The National Weather Service warned residents of smaller structures that if they remained they would "face certain death." Looking at the pictures you know why they issued the warning.

One couple seeing the rise in water preceding Ike's arrival and waves as tall as fifteen feet crashing over Galveston's seawall decided riding out the storm was a bad idea. They loaded up everything they could take, including the pets, and left before it was too late to do so. But Emory Sallie of Galveston said he didn't think Ike would be any different than storms in the past; that he didn't believe the dire warnings (see AOL news, 12 September 2008). "If the island is going to disappear it has to be a tsunami. If it ain't your time you ain't going anywhere."

Why do people respond to "dire warnings" in vastly disparate ways? Some heed the warnings given to save them. They move with alacrity to protect their loved ones and belongings. They listen and obey because they believe it is the truth. Others hearing the same

dire predictions, shrug their shoulders and head back home. They don't believe. They think they know more than officials warning them to leave. They are callous to all attempts to get them to heed common sense for their own safety. It defies belief, as we oft say.

The Bible is filled with such “dire warnings” to the sinner. “Repent or else,” God intones. Still, some believe and some disbelieve (Acts 28:24). It is a predicament as old as human history.

Remember God's warnings preceding the plague of hail upon Egypt? God said He would send hail upon Egypt that had never happened since its foundation. He warned all Egypt to bring their servants and livestock indoors to safety. The text says: “He who feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and livestock flee to the houses. But he who did not regard the word of the LORD left his servants and his livestock in the field” (Exodus 9:20-21). The plague of hail was seven of ten. It gives new meaning to the phrase “slow of heart to believe” (Luke 24:25). How is it possible for people to watch six plagues come to pass, but not heed the warning of the seventh?

The text tells “why” the difference. Those who obeyed “feared the word of the LORD.” “Fear” means to hold in awe and reverence; to respect and honor. And that is the root of man's problem. Since we have freedom of will we often defy what we don't like; that with which we don't agree.

Tell John Doe child, “No cookies before supper.” His hand inches closer to the jar, all the while staring us down. As if what? - we won't respond! We slap his little hand. Five minutes later he's back with reinforcements, “Johnnie's mom said he could have a cookie before supper.” “If all the lemmings run into the sea do we bail off with

them? I said, 'No, and I mean No.'" Unless sufficient force is applied to the right region of their anatomy they will defy again and again.

Why do children come to “fear” their parents? They have learned by hard knocks to know their parents mean business when they command them. They come to learn their parents love them too much to let them run like mad Gadarene pigs to drown in the depths of immorality. They see the sacrifices made over and over for their sakes so that they might have a good life. What begins in the fear of pain ends in the awe of love and solace of devotion (cf. 1John 4:18).

Why do men not heed the warnings of their Creator? He warns because He loves. The consequences of defiance are real. Ike destroyed mightily just like we were warned it would. So, too, the Son of Man will come again, and the earth and all its works will be destroyed by fire (cf. 2 Peter 3:10ff.) He has warned us again and again. “Be holy. Be sober. Be vigilant.” The hearts that will heed are made pliable by fear, awe, and love. And yet, the hearts of stone remain hard in arrogant pride believing Man is the center of it all.

I wonder, “What do you suppose Galveston will do next time there is a dire hurricane warning?”