

WHERE WAS GOD?

January 9, 2016

ADVENTURES WITH GOD SERIES

Early in December, I sat down to watch the film, "Where Was God? Stories of Hope After the Storm", expecting it to be an intellectual argument for the existence of God. I have little patience for those types of intellectual arguments. I believe that if you really know God, and want to prove His existence, then you should do that by demonstrating His power and love. If you can't do that, then I'm really not interested in listening to your arguments.

But I was pleasantly surprised, and "Where Was God?" has quickly become one of my favorite films. It's a film about real stories from real people who lived through the tragedy of the tornado in Moore, Oklahoma, on May 20, 2013. The EF5 tornado touched down that day with winds peaking at over 200 mph. It stayed on the ground for about 39 minutes, plowing through 1,100 homes and two elementary schools where seven children were killed. When the monster tornado finally lifted, 24 people were dead and over 200 people were injured.

But the devastation was not the real story of the film. It was really about how God demonstrated His love in tangible ways to several families whose lives were impacted by the tornado of May 20, 2013.

Comfort Out of Loss

One of the stories that came out of the overwhelming tragedy in Moore was that of Kayla Carmona, a 14-year-old girl who traveled with her mother to Oklahoma to help those who had suffered great losses in the tornado. But what could a 14-year-old girl do?

Kayla was from Joplin, Missouri.

Just two years earlier, her family had been at church when an EF5 tornado tore through her town and leveled the church building while she was in it.

She described how her father shielded his family and others with his own body, bearing the weight of the fallen building for about an hour. When he finally heard that everyone had been pulled out of the rubble, he breathed his last breath, but not before telling his daughter that he loved her.

Kayla became a powerful source of strength and comfort for the families of Moore as they recovered from the tornado that struck their town. The bond became so strong between the Carmonas and the citizens of Moore that Kayla lives there now, surrounded by the friends who have become as close as family.

Protection in the Midst of Destruction

Even as I was watching the film, the message of "Where Was God?" was playing itself out in my own life. I had no idea at the time that God was also using this film to help prepare me/us for what would come our way in just a few short days.

I didn't realize how timely these stories of the Moore tornado would be until the night of December 26, the day after Christmas, here in Dallas, Texas, where I live. On that night, at least nine tornadoes touched down around Dallas, causing tragic destruction and loss of life.

My brother was hosting a family Christmas party that night. As my mother and I stopped off at a restaurant to pick up food for the party, we could hear the loud storm sirens that were warning of dangerous weather conditions in the area and signaling for people to take cover immediately.

At my brother's house, we watched the weather reports on TV as the storm progressed. As reports of the damage came in, the apartment complex in which my nephew lived was named as one location that had suffered severe damage. My nephew was with us, thankfully, when the tornadoes hit, but he left the party early so that he could try to get back to his apartment.

Two days later, when my nephew was finally able to get back to his 2nd floor apartment, he found everything just as he left it. Even though many other apartments in the same complex had been destroyed (as all of us could see in the news reports) his apartment was untouched. As he described it, even the patio furniture on his balcony had not moved a single inch.

The Wake-Up Call

And yet, where was God for all of the other people who were affected by the storms that night? According to news reports, eleven people died in those storms. Hundreds of homes were damaged or destroyed. Where was God? When we surveyed the damage after the storms, the one thought that seemed to come to all of our minds was that it was a wonder that only eleven people lost their lives in a storm that caused this much devastation! When you see all of the homes that were so heavily damaged, and think of how many family members lived in those homes, how is it possible that only eleven people lost their

lives? And most of those who lost their lives were not in those homes. They were in vehicles that were caught on the road when the tornadoes hit.

When you really look, evidence of God's protection is overwhelming in the midst of the devastation, and it began months before the tornadoes struck.

In my newsletter on September 30, 2014, I wrote this:

"On September 14th, just a few weeks ago, I had a dream in which I saw a record label on an old 45 single that read, "Little Susie". I had a sense that this was a theme song. I turned to look at a member of my church who was standing there also. She was crying, or had been crying, and had tears rolling down her cheeks. I don't know her very well in real life, but in the dream I asked her, "I wonder why this is the theme song?" Then I immediately turned back to look at the record label, and now I could see the full title. It was "Wake Up Little Susie" by the Everly Brothers. As soon as I saw the full title of the song, I heard the Everly Brothers singing it.

"My sense was that it was not just a theme song for the dream, but for all of us, and the time in which we are all living. We all must wake up. We are living in a very different time that may become much more intense soon in many areas. We may need to prepare and make adjustments to new circumstances that change without much warning."

I had already begun my own preparations to deal with times of crisis before I had this dream, but because this dream included a member of my church who seemed to be hurt, I felt a responsibility to share this with a leader at my church. I explained to him that I felt the dream was a "wake-up call", and that whatever the dream was warning us about could result in church members being personally affected in negative ways, and that I felt we may need to take precautions to prepare appropriately.

On January 7, 2015, I met with two of my church leaders to discuss in detail the dream's "wake-up call" and what might be appropriate ways to respond and prepare.

In light of the tornadoes that directly affected members of my church on December 26, God's care for us is beautifully evident. By giving the "wake-up call" dream, He gave us months to prepare to respond appropriately to what was coming. Not only that, but by warning us to prepare in advance, He was giving us the opportunity, not only to prepare to care for ourselves and our families, but to be equipped and ready to be on the front lines, in a leadership role, caring for others when the crisis came.

God does this more often than we realize. When Pharaoh responded appropriately to the warning he was given in his dreams in Genesis 41, and began preparing in earnest for the crisis to come, it positioned him and his country to be in a leadership role unequalled in the world at that time.

Over the past several months, I've had time to align myself with organizations that could provide the training and credentials to serve on the front lines, "inside the yellow tape", in the event of disaster situations. Just after midnight, when the tornadoes struck our area, I started receiving email messages from the Dallas Office of Emergency Management, giving me clear instructions on when and where to report should I be able to respond to help those directly affected by this situation.

Because of God's advance warning, I was able to be equipped, prepared and connected with organizations that already had a plan in place for dealing with the crisis when it happened.

God With Us

Where was God? He was everywhere. So many stories are coming out now about people and property that were remarkably protected and preserved in the midst of overwhelming destruction. But even months before, He was there, warning and preparing people, like myself, to be equipped and ready to care for people when the devastation hit.

Looking back, even my last newsletter on October 9 was a message of comfort that seemed to anticipate this time. As I wrote in that newsletter:

"But why did this God of love allow Satan to bring such destruction and devastation into the life of Job? Why does He at times allow Satan to bring tragedy and great loss into *your* life?...

It will be impossible to understand and reconcile in your mind the thought of a perfect, thoroughly good, loving God allowing such evil into our lives *unless* you also understand that God is a just God and that He makes recompense available for every unjust loss....

If we've done nothing to bring this upon ourselves, why does God ever allow evil into the lives of His children? He doesn't, *unless* He knows that the temporary injustice that we will experience will allow Him, in His justice, to repay us in ways that far surpass what we had before! Job received twice as much as he had before the tragedy came into his life. You may also be entitled to double—or more—than what you lost."

With blessings,
Alan Drake