

## Time to Turn

‡ **The watchmen keep calling. (vv.7-9)**

‡ **New life is here! (vv.10,11)**

In the name of Jesus, our Rescuer, dear grateful Christians:

Question: How do you turn a hurricane? Answer: Easier than turning a sinner. Just ask your friends who attend some of the fastest growing churches in America where the back door is as big as the front door, where the theology is a mile wide and an inch deep. Ask them if their pastors preach Christ-crucified, because as I listen to them on radio and TV, I rarely hear the Name of Jesus Christ. Ask them if “sin” is mentioned, and if so, what specific sins are pointed out? And do their pastors have a Biblical concept of “hell,” or have they bought into the modern lie that “everyone is going to heaven”?

From a Biblical point of view the human race is pedal-to-the-metal on a wide open freeway to hell. And how can sinners away from destruction when the warning signs are covered or removed? Church people want their pastors to be CEO’s and camp counselors to make everyone feel good about themselves, to preach “smooth jazz,” “easy listening” sermons to soothe their spiritual sleep. But today the dear Holy Spirit takes us up in God’s helicopter above that freeway into New Orleans. He wants us to look down and see the fallen road deck of concrete crumbled into the water. Rushing along in a hurricane, we suddenly see a bright yellow warning sign. Dear friends, it’s **Time to Turn**.

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Could you have settled down in the “Big Easy”? Whether it’s “Minnesota Nice” or mellow middle age, going along to get along looks attractive. Who wants to offend people? What pastor wouldn’t rather make friends than enemies? And the message God has given us to proclaim is just as strange today as back when another city felt the fury of God’s wrath. His own treasured Jerusalem with the one temple on earth dedicated to the LORD God of Israel was about to fall any day. Ezekiel was with the exiles in Babylon while Jeremiah was riding out the storm in Jerusalem. Through both of them and many other prophets as well, God kept warning His people of the consequences of their sins. But a hundred years earlier Isaiah had asked, “LORD, *who has believed our message?*” (Isaiah 53:1) And now the LORD would soon tell His prophet Ezekiel that everyone was coming to be entertained by his fine preaching style. No one was really listening or taking the message to heart. Sound familiar?

Years ago when New Orleans was settled, it was much closer to sea level and to the shoreline. No one would have built a city on such a site today. But years and years of silt washing down into the Mississippi delta raised the water on the river side of the levees and the lake on the other side of the city – while everyone kept taking fresh water out of the wells beneath. Gradually the city sank while the river and lake on both sides got higher and higher. No one builds a city in a bowl. For forty years civil engineers have been warning of catastrophe “not *if*, but *when*.” One hurricane after another veered off east or west and left the metro residents wondering why they nailed up all that plywood. So why spend millions to upgrade levees from Category 3 to Category 5 hurricane strength? If you’ve been partying all night, and the smoke alarm goes off, it’s easier to roll over in bed. And if your job requires you to wake people up about a danger they’ve never seen and which many deny.... I must confess to my shame that I personally understand as a pastor why the LORD had this stern warning for His prophet Ezekiel:

*“Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked man, you will surely die,’ and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will*

***hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself.***

My home pastor used to drive around the block several times before he could screw up enough courage to stop and confront an erring member for his sin. It's hard to tell our members at New Life that when your life pattern is to skip church and keep refusing to come to Bible class, you are breaking the Second and Third Commandments by dishonoring God's Name. You are despising preaching and God's Word. And if you cause children to sin by not bringing them perhaps in spite of their complaints, Jesus says, ***"It would be better...to have a millstone tied around [your] neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea."*** (Matthew 18:6) Breaking one commandment makes us as guilty as a death row inmate. When we turn away from a fellow sinner in need or fail to ***"love your neighbor as yourself,"*** God says we deserve to go to hell. And if I fail to point this out or soften the message of God's holy, unbending, all-condemning law, God holds me responsible for your blood just as the mayor of a city is responsible for lack of disaster planning no matter how hard he may try to blame state and federal authorities. It's easier to go along to get along. It's hard to warn people of the eternal consequence of loving yourself more than God and your neighbor. But God, the righteous Judge, commands that **The watchmen keep calling.** My dear fellow sinners, it's **Time to Turn** because God has an awesome plan for you and me.

### **† New life is here! (vv.10,11)**

You're hearing the question on TV from the father with an infant a few months old, but with no diapers, formula or even water. ***"How then can we live?"*** the elderly were asking as they died in their seats at the Superdome with nothing but a note left for loved ones when finally someone came to take them away. If only people could turn down the media volume and turn up the sound on God's Good Book. Then everyone could understand that sin brought death and destruction into God's good creation. Now God wants each of us when we see such things to repent of our personal sins. ***"How then can we live?"*** Understand first why the Jews were asking, then see God's glorious answer.

***"Son of man,"*** the LORD liked to call Ezekiel, reminding of his need for a Savior. ***"Say to the house of Israel, 'This is what you are saying: "Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?"'"*** Did you hear that? Not just bad thoughts, words and deeds. Not just sins of omission in good things left undone and unsaid. But personal characteristics of guilt, what we would call being a bad person, that's what weighs us all down before God and sinks us into hell's destruction. So Ezekiel, ***"Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?'"*** Can you hear the pleading heart of God? Can you sense in your soul that **New life is here?**

It seems to me that Hurricane Katrina illustrates our plight as children of rebellious Adam. We build our lives near beautiful beaches, deep blue waters, personal pleasure and sensual delight. We want our own grand parties night and day. But the wells we dig keep sinking between silt piles and levees dropping deeper into a hole. Life's raging storms drown our wealth and trap us on the roof midst floating bodies, sewage, alligators and snakes. Desperate sinners we.

It's **Time to Turn** as **The watchmen keep calling.** **Turn** from death to life, for **New life is here!** Chop your way through roof if you must. Listen for the sound of God's helicopter. Help is on the way. Will you be awake when it comes? Will you accept what He brings?

Come the Christ of God. The Father piloting, the dear Holy Spirit navigating, our Savior hanging on the line to rescue us. His life in our place, He took it back again in victory. His nail-pierced hands lift us to the hold of God in heaven. "Thank-you!" rushes past our lips as dying waters swirl away beneath us. One burden remains: Who else needs rescue? Bring them to God in prayer. Proclaim new life in Christ. God's rescue team leads more souls to safety. So blessed are we. Amen.