

Bad or Good?

What are your recollections of Hurricane Rita? For most of us that was so bad we never want to go through that again. There was confusion and traffic gridlock. It is hard to forget being stuck on the freeways for hours during a very hot time of the year. Some had car trouble. Most had trouble getting to any safe haven, then on returning, we were relieved that the storm had largely spared our area, but yards needed clearing and many of us were without electricity, some for days. It may be all we can think of about Rita is bad, bad, bad!

Let me share with you this story. When Rita threatened, people were made aware of the uncertainty of life and the awesome power in God's universe. One couple in Pasadena, Nick and Becky were a typical couple—good people living lives with little regard for the Lord and the hereafter. The possibilities of death and destruction posed by this storm made them aware they needed to serve God and be ready to meet Him if this storm happened to bring destruction on them. This led them to the Southside Church of Christ where they are serving the Lord with great joy. If you were to ask Nick and Becky, "was hurricane Rita bad or good?" What do you think their answer would be? What may seem bad may really turn out good if we do not quit and dwell on what seems bad.

Mary and Martha, who had frequently entertained Jesus, sent word to Jesus when He was across the Jordan telling Him that their brother, and His friend Lazarus was seriously ill. Jesus purposely delayed going to Bethany to heal Lazarus. This seemed bad to Mary and Martha. They expressed their feelings when each said, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." They were disappointed. It looked bad. All of this changed when Jesus with a loud voice raised Lazarus from the dead.

The apostle Paul wanted to preach in many places on his second journey, but was forbidden to go to Asia and Bithynia (in what is now Turkey). This must have been frustrating, confusing and may have even seemed bad. He received a vision calling him to come to Macedonia where he found fertile soil in Philippi. This led to the beginning of a truly great church in Philippi (Acts 16).

Things really looked bad for the Jailer that night in Philippi when it was hit with an earthquake and all the prison doors were opened. It looked so bad the Jailer drew his sword and would have taken his life had Paul not stopped him. After the Jailer found out all the prisoners were safe and he heard, believed and was baptized, along with all his house, he rejoiced (Acts 16:33-34). What looked like the darkest day of his life turned out to be the best day ever.

The book of Job tells us of all the bad things that happened to Job (see Job 1:13-19). Job accepted this and still trusted God. Even when "Satan went out from the presence of the LORD, and struck Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head" (Job 2:7). His wife urged him to curse God. Three of his friends came to "comfort" him, but instead accused him of being a great sinner. Job was so troubled in

body, mind and spirit that he wished he was dead. After God appeared to him, Job completely changed his mind. What had been so bad turned out for good. The Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than he had before—more family, more possessions and a greater appreciation and understanding of God.

It may be we lack the patience to “wait on the Lord” when bad things happen. We want instant results. Consider all that happened to Joseph. His brothers plotted his murder, but sold him as a slave instead. In spite of and even because of his faithfulness he was falsely accused and thrown in prison. He befriended one of the prisoners who promptly forgot him about for two years who remembered him only when it was to his advantage. This went on for at least thirteen years. All these years Joseph did not know why his father had not come searching for him. After many years it became clear to Joseph why these bad things had happened as he explained to his brothers, “But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive” (Gen 50:20). What if Joseph had lost patience or had given up?

The greatest example of something bad working good was the crucifixion of Jesus. The disciples sought to turn Jesus aside from such a death. We cannot even comprehend the effects of what Jesus went through. He suffered shame, humiliation, mockery, illegal treatment, lack of sleep, water and food, scourging with whips that would cut into the flesh, the points of the crown of thorns, the unbelievable pain as the nails were driven into his hands and feet and He was forced to hang suspended on the cross. It seems His greatest pain was to be forsaken by the Father. No wonder there was darkness for hours. Out of His suffering and the cruelty of mankind, He made it possible to us to be saved and live in hope.

Just remember. Things may not be as bad as they seem at times. They may be the prelude to something good.

Robert Goodman