WORSHIP DAY STORM

In Nineteen Ninety Four, on Palm Sunday, a tornado passed over Shelby County and struck near Ragland and Neely Henry Lake. A woman was killed on the camp ground. It continued its northeastern track and struck a solid blow to Goshen United Methodist Church. Before reaching Piedmont where Goshen Church was located, it crossed Highway 431 knocking a van off the road into a ditch and killing a man in the process. When the tornado hit Goshen United Methodist Church, it caused a wall made of concrete blocks to crash in on the congregation. The wall was eighteen feet high and sixty feet long. Along with the wall falling in, the gabled roof which was made of timber and steel collapsed also followed by the rest of the walls. In all twenty of the worshippers were killed and ninety-two were injured. The tornado hit during evening worship.

My family and I were attending church at Twenty-fifth Avenue Baptist at the time. I well remember standing in the parking lot that afternoon and seeing the clouds rolling in from the south-west. That was a scary sight. Without the advantage of Calling Post we tried to reach those of our membership that we could and urge them to stay off the road. A few people came on to the church and we met in the basement and prayed.

One might ask if my faith was weak at that time. Well if I saw a car coming down the road I would not encourage my children to run out in front of it. I felt the same way with inclement weather and still do. There was no reason to encourage people to get out in such a storm. God had called me to be the under-shepherd of that flock so I was obliged to be concerned for them. Another might ask what we prayed for. I ask God to watch over our congregation and keep them safe. I prayed for my extended family that might be in harm’s way.

We acted similarly on March 11th, 1993. A large snow storm was being predicted. We called members and encouraged them to have secondary sources of heat and to have plenty of food supplies. Did we believe that God would supply? Yes but part of his supply was putting a grocery store just down the street from their house. Part of his provision was providing them with a hardware store that had kerosene heaters.

God never said that storms would not hit Christians. He never suggested that churches were immune from tornados, lightning strikes or even earthquakes. He **has** promised that he will not leave us during the time of the storm.

Yours in Christ,

Brother Randy Burtram