

### **On the Practice of Ministry Leadership: *Working for the Redeeming God***

A short time ago a large amount of rain fell quickly in a concentrated area noted for drought in recent years. That rain became a rising wall of water that surged destructively down the Blanco River on a violent journey to the sea. Homes were destroyed. Lives were lost. Whole families were washed away under the cover of darkness. It was awful.

I have no idea why God allowed such a thing to happen. Such instances of natural evil and human suffering invariably leave us asking, “Why?” I believe in a God who is omnipotent, who has in his hands supreme power and authority over the universe. He could have prevented this from happening, but he didn’t. It helps me to remember that in any situation there is always a lot more going on than what I know about. I’ve read Job, but still I have questions.

I also know that whatever happens, God has forever settled the question of how he feels about human beings. The cross answers that loud and clear. His disposition toward us is *redemption*. A lot of things happen that we don’t understand, but none of them thwart God’s eternal, redemptive purposes.

So in the wake of a tragedy, this is what I want to say to ministry leaders: *You work for the redeeming God*. He is the beauty-from-ashes specialist. By the nature of what you do, you encounter lots of broken lives and shattered hopes and deep disappointments. You can be overwhelmed by events in your own community and in your own church and even in your own family. This life to which we have been called is not for the faint of heart. We must remember that the redeeming God has redemptive purposes in each and every situation. He is always at work accomplishing his will.

Here are some practical suggestions for those who work for the redeeming God.

1. *Don’t try to answer questions that are above your pay grade.* Every now and then a high-profile preacher will say that a tornado hit a particular place because of something happening there, or some evil befell certain folks because they offended God. I’m not saying God cannot use natural forces to make his point; I’m saying that I doubt we have enough insight to pronounce on such things. We inevitably come off sounding like Job’s friends, expounding on heavy matters with self-righteous ignorance. It is much better to be silent for a while, to mourn with those who mourn and give aid to those who hurt without dropping too much (spurious) theology on them. Skip the platitudes. Lots of things that happen are above our pay grade. It’s best to be quiet about them.

2. *Don’t give the Devil too much credit.* When something tragic or unwanted happens, we need to be careful that we do not fall into dualistic thinking. There is a God and he is always working for our good. There is also a Devil and he is always working against our good. But they are not equal! There is no contest! The Lord is firmly in control of his creation. The Devil himself can only operate within the parameters God allows and none of his efforts in the natural or spiritual realms will thwart God’s eternal

purposes. Our concern should not be with the enemy. Our concern should be with the sovereign, omnipotent God and what he is doing in a given situation. We can trust that the Redeemer is at work.

3. *Ask the Lord how you can align yourself with his redemptive purposes.* This is really the issue for churches and ministry leaders in the face of evil and suffering. How can we participate in God's activity? What can we do that puts us in the flow of the redeeming God? I have been so encouraged by how BBA churches have responded in the wake of the flood. Through you the redeeming God is at work.

4. *Watch for God's redemptive work in difficult situations...and give thanks for it!* One pastor told me how the aftermath of the Blanco River flood has done more than he could have possibly imagined to repair the relationship between the church and their community. The church stepped up and now they are known for something very different – as the people who came to the aid of flood victims and community leaders in the midst of a devastating crisis. That church is going to have a different voice in that community now. There are bridges for the gospel to travel across that didn't exist before. Thank you, Lord!

So the lesson is this: The redeeming God is always at work. This is the God you work for, ministry leaders. Anchor yourself to the cross and God's redeeming purposes in each and every situation. Redemption is God's move. It's his specialty. You can count on him doing it until the day of Christ's return.

I hope your burden feels a little lighter now.