

The South Florida Avenue **MESSENGER**

CHURCH OF CHRIST

A Friendly Church With a Vital Message Proclaiming the Unsearchable Riches of the Lord Jesus.

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SUNDAY SERVICES
Bible Study.....9:30 a.m.
Worship.....10:30 a.m.
Evening Worship.....6:00 p.m.

WEDNESDAY
Ladies Class.....10:00 a.m.
Bible Study.....7:00 p.m.

HOME OF
Florida School of Preaching
since 1969

MISSION FIELDS
Dub Hill.....Russia
Don Iverson.....India
Marc Veary....Malawi, Africa
Graham McDonald..Scotland
J. Paguaga....Honduras, C.A.
Joey Treat.....Pacific Islands
Ted Wheeler.....Ghana, W.A.

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Sundays @ 8:30 a.m. Check local listings

The God Who Spares

By Hiram Kemp

Among all the attributes God possess, may we never forget God's mercy (Psa. 136:1). God is not only merciful, but he also delights in extending mercy toward humanity (Mic. 7:18). Throughout the Bible, we have accounts of God sparing those who were undeserving of his mercy. Sodom and Gomorrah were two ancient cities that dripped with wickedness, and God was ready to destroy them because of their sin (Gen. 18:20-22; Jude 7). Yet, before God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah he bargained with Abraham over the righteous who would be spared that remained in the city (Gen. 18:23-33). God knew there were no righteous people in Sodom besides Lot before he began bargaining with Abraham, but God still wanted to show Abraham his desire to extend mercy to humanity. Likewise, Nineveh was given a forty-day notice of her destruction in the days of the prophet Jonah for the sinfulness of the city; and yet upon the repentance of the people God spared the city her well-deserved fate (Jon. 3:4-10). So, we see from Scripture that even when people who are on their way to destruction repent, God in his infinite mercy turns and pardons.

Mercy We've Seen

All the news reports we received last week told of Hurricane Irma's devastation brought on small islands and the eventual ruin awaiting Florida if she made landfall at full strength. Most meteorologist predicted that Hurricane Irma would make landfall on Florida as a Category 5 hurricane at worst and category 4 hurricane at best. The winds of a category 4 or 5 hurricane range from 130-157 mph or higher. We were all bracing ourselves for a powerful storm and rightfully so. Many of the Caribbean islands struck by Irma early last week have been described as inhabitable as a result. Cuba received a large amount of rain and strong winds as Irma made landfall as a Category 4 storm.

When Irma finally reached Florida, she was still a very strong hurricane and she did a lot of damage to the Florida Keys. On Sunday night, as she came through Polk County, her strength had weakened to a category 2 hurricane. The winds of a category 2 hurricane still range from 96-110 mph. Those winds were strong and brought down many trees, business signs, and knocked the electricity out of thousands of homes. Yet, for all the devastation caused, we can all agree that we were spared the worst of it. As the eye of Irma passed over us, the eye of God watched over us and he heard our prayers (1 Pet. 3:12). While there was much

uncertainty surrounding the strength that Irma would maintain as she made landfall in Florida, there was certainty among God's people in his ability to deliver now as he has done so many times in the past (2 Cor. 1:9-10).

To be sure, there is no need to look on the devastation suffered by other countries and other parts of the state as Divine judgment (cf. Jn. 9:1-3). However, Christians should still rejoice in the fact that God in his mercy heard our prayers and withheld the worst that Irma had to offer. God is in control of the weather and has often used it to bless his people (Lev. 26:4-5). Even those who do not have a relationship with God enjoy the blessings of the rain he sends (Mt. 5:45). Jesus awoke from a boat and stilled the raging sea as his disciples panicked and thought they would perish (Mk. 4:35-41). Our God is not only in control when circumstances are calm and easy, but also in times of trouble and turbulence. We have an anchor that we can hold to (Heb. 6:18-20). As we ride throughout Lakeland and see the signs that are broken, trees that are uprooted, and stoplights without power, we can only imagine what the outcome would have been had the storm contacted us at greater strength. Much like the psalmist, we can conclude if it had not been the Lord who was on our side, we would be in utter dismay and despair (Psa. 124). Many are still without electricity. All is not perfect, but things could have been worse. God does not always totally deliver his people from physical destruction, but even in times when prayers are not answered with the answers we desire, Christians can take comfort in the fact that God can use all things for his ultimate good (Mt. 26:39; Rm. 8:28). We should all prepare ourselves like the faithful Hebrew boys who, though servants in Babylon, said our faithfulness to God is not contingent on deliverance from all physical harm (Dan. 3:16-18). Still, when God does rescue us from physical peril or relieve some of the harm we anticipated, we should be experts in offering praise and thanksgiving to the God who spares (Psa. 9:1-2, 18:1-6).

Eternal Lessons to Ponder

The week leading up to Hurricane Irma was filled with many illustrations relating to the judgment and the end of our world. While there was sufficient warning concerning the coming of Hurricane Irma, there will be no such warning when Jesus returns as Judge of the world (2 Pet. 3:9-10). It was surprising to observe, that though so many prepared after hearing the reports of the coming storm, many were passive in their preparation. Jesus told the parable of the wise and foolish virgins to emphasize the need for personal preparation concerning the judgment (Mt. 25:1-13). One is not able to borrow the provisions of others or go out and buy more supplies when the time of destruction comes.

Much like God in his mercy spared Polk County and other cities the worst parts of the storm, those who put their trust in God in this life will be spared the eternal fires of hell in the judgment. Paul warned those in Athens that God has fixed a day when he would judge the world in righteousness and therefore they needed to repent (Acts 17:30-31). God spares us his wrath, not because we deserve it or because we are good, but because he is rich in mercy (Eph. 2:4-5). God is wanting to spare the entire human race the eventual destruction that will come on those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of his Son (2 Thess. 1:7-9). Hurricane winds come through and destroy everything in sight, Jesus will come back in flaming fire and destroy all accountable beings who do not know God and have not accepted his merciful offer of salvation. As many effected by Irma regained electricity, we happily announced it to our friends and neighbors. We wanted them to know we were safe and could enjoy life again at our normal pace. Those of us filled with the light of Jesus must announce to our friends and neighbors that we have found the light and want them to enjoy life to the abundant degree God wants everyone to share in (Jn. 10:10). God is just, I am thankful for that (Deut. 32:4). God also is merciful, and a God who spares, and I will praise him throughout eternity for that (Psa. 103:8).

Thank You SFA Members For Letting the Lord Work Through You!

Storms of life can bring out the best in people and sometimes the worst. No doubt, SFA members showed the best by letting "your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven"! In preparation, SFA members helped secure the church building, boarded windows for those who could not themselves, and shared their supplies. After the storm, SFA members checked on others, helped others clean up, and again shared their supplies. We're thankful for the peace of mind we have in Christ, even through storms. Now others see it and will, hopefully, seek it through Gospel obedience!

SFA FAMILY MATTERS

We Give Thanks to God for His Protection Over Us! As Far as We Know, No Members Here Suffered Major Damage, Though Many Are Still Without Electricity. We Are Truly Blessed!

Prayer List

Our Members: Please keep Ginny Hamby in prayer as she continues treatment. Also keep Jim Turner, Margaret Coone, Vince Daughtery, Sharon Washington, Carol Eason and Josephine Bowman in prayer.

Relatives: Richard Sheffield, (Ginny Hamby's brother).

Shut In Members: Virginia Plumlee, Dick & Joyce Burbage, Don Starks, Sharon Edler and Duane Nelson.

Others: Joyce Stearsman, Chrissi Fuesner, Jack Pinckert, Corey Perry and Joy Baker, (Michelle Paulin's cousin) her cancer has returned.

Upcoming Events

Saturday Sept 16th: Men's Breakfast at the Hilltop Church of Christ in Winter Haven at 8:00 a.m.

Tuesday Sept. 19th: F.S.O.P. Ladie's class at 7:00 p.m.

Sunday Sept. 24th: Lads to Leaders kick off meeting. More details as the time gets closer.

Sept. 29th - Oct. 1st: Rush at Freed Hardeman University for middle school and high school students.

Saturday October 7th: South FL. Avenue's Ladies Day!

Hither, Thither and Yon

Please keep Hiram Kemp in prayer as he travels to Tennessee to preach in a gospel meeting on Sunday Sept. 17th. He will be back with us on Sunday Sept. 24th. Brian will be in Denver at a lectureship from Sept. 14-17, returning the 18th. They will surely be missed.



Tune into AM 1330 (station WWAB) with your friends and neighbors every Monday from 5:00-5:30 p.m. for the "Way of Truth" program. This is a joint effort to evangelize involving Terrance Brownlow-Dindy (6th Street) and Hiram Kemp. Let's point our community to the Bible!

Watch ...



In Search of the Lord's Way

Sundays @ 8:30 a.m. Check local listings

SCHEDULED TO SERVE

September

Charles Paulin Table C.J. Grimes
Tucker Sweeney Assist Bobby Sheumaker

Sunday, Sept. 17, 2017
9:30 A.M.

Song at Bible Class Frank Hamby
Prayer Kyle Bingle
Announcements Stacey Paulin
Song Leader Jason Hendrix
Opening Prayer Matt Willcut
Sermon C.J. Grimes
Closing Prayer Tim Croson

6:00 P.M.
Song Leader Paul Romine
Opening Prayer Fred Strickland
Sermon Casey Paulin
Closing Prayer Jim Edmonson

Greeters The Frenchs
Att. Cards Antonio and Paul
Open & Close Building Jimmy Sweeney

Wed. Sept 20, 2017

Song Leader David Williams
Opening Prayer Tucker Sweeney
Closing Prayer Fred Strickland

Please meet in the library. If you cannot serve, please call Chuck Wyatt so he can get a replacement - (863) 602-9005

Sunday, Sept. 24, 2017
9:30 A.M.

Song at Bible Class Jim Turner
Prayer Tucker Sweeney
10:30 A.M.
Announcements Stacey Paulin
Song Leader Jason Hendrix
Opening Prayer David Anderson
Sermon Hiram Kemp
Closing Prayer Jim Edmonson

6:00 P.M.
Song Leader Paul Romine
Opening Prayer Kyle Williams
Sermon Hiram Kemp
Closing Prayer Jeff Bingle
Greeters Darlene T./ Brenda M.
Att. Cards Paul & Ian
Open & Close Building Jimmy Sweeney

Wed. Sept. 27, 2017

Song Leader Jim Turner
Opening Prayer Bobby Sheumaker
Closing Prayer John McShane

~ HOW ARE WE GIVING ~

Aug 20.....	\$4,954.00
Aug 27.....	\$5,034.25
Sept 03.....	\$5,383.00
Sept 10.....	\$.....N/A
Contribution Average.....	\$5,333.49
2017 Weekly Budget.....	\$4,716.51

When "Never Forget" Was Forgotten

One reason why government offices, banks, and the Post Office shut down on national holidays, especially the not so familiar ones like Columbus Day or Presidents Day, is so people will not forget. It is a "forced reminder" of that particular memorial in American history. Normally, Americans would not forget the anniversary of what happened on September 11, 2001, but on September 11, 2017, this writer forgot all about it. On Saturday, September 9, 2017, like most homeowners in our area, he was busy all day getting ready for Hurricane Irma, who took a path no model nor expert thought likely a few days before. On Sunday, September 10, 2017, after a worship service in the house with his family, this writer spent the rest of the day, until the strong winds began arriving, shoring up potential weaknesses in anticipation of the storm.



Then, around 11:00 p.m. the force of Irma came and her torrents continued until about 4:00 a.m., September 11, 2017. After awaking from a short nap, to see daylight, damage assessment and checking on neighbors and church family began. Thankfully, God spared us from what could have been! This writer was so focused on protecting his family and property that "911" was the furthest thing from his mind. In fact, he found it difficult keeping up with what day of the week it was, not to mention what dates of the month it was! From this, two lessons emerge. First, when preserving life, it has to be "all in." When calamity is coming, there is only one shot (*continued below*)



**South Florida Avenue
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1807 South Florida Avenue
Lakeland, FL 33803-2653

Return Service Requested

The End of Your Search for a Friendly Church . . .



No matter your age, make plans to attend our L2L "Kick-Off" meeting! Your help is needed in many areas!

Remember, kids,
go straight to
Bible classes
instead of the
auditorium first.



**Ladies Day @ SFA
with Kathy Pollard
Oct. 7, 2017**

(*continued from above*) at adequately preparing. There are no "do overs." It is too late to board windows when debris is flying everywhere, or to seek higher ground when floods have swallowed the escape. Preserving spiritual life necessitates even more the "all in" attitude (Mt. 22:37). Unlike hurricane protection, where even the best preparation may be for naught, God has guaranteed safe results when we follow His eternal preparation plan (Mt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15-16; Acts 2:38). Second, when lives are at stake, many matters once thought significant lose their level of importance. In no way do I disrespect memorializing the heroic human deeds in the face of death and the many lives that were lost due to the "911" terrorist attacks on our country, but that memorial pales in importance to an individual who is fighting for his very life. Think of the souls at stake in the ultimate calamity for the unprepared. When the Lord comes again, it will be to judge the world (Mt. 25:31-46; Jn. 3:16-17; 5:28-29). Only those who have readied themselves according to God's word will pass through that calamity unscathed (Heb. 9:27-28), due to the redemptive work of Jesus (Rev. 1:5 cf. Col. 3:3-4). Yet, too many have placed worldly things in a more important place than spiritual things of God! May we prepare for eternity as deliberately and diligently as we did for Hurricane Irma!  Brian