

## WALKING FREE NEWSLETTER- January 20, 2011

Hi everyone

2011 has started with Queensland, Northern NSW and Victoria being inundated with water. Houses have been swamped, possessions destroyed and sadly, people have lost their lives.

Rockhampton, Emerald, Bundaberg and Gympie, towns in central Queensland, have been inundated with some homes and businesses literally covered with water. In the west Condamine, Chinchilla and Dalby have seen their towns flooded more than once. St George and Surat have been cut off by flood waters.

In the town where Liz and I lived a year ago, Toowoomba, we have seen the heavens open and a torrent of water going through the middle of town sweeping cars and people along like matchsticks. Sadly a few people lost their lives. At the same time that the heavens opened over Toowoomba, they opened up over Murphy's Creek, near Toowoomba. A torrent became a tidal wave of 4-5 metres that swept down the range causing havoc and destruction through Helidon, Grantham and the Lockyer valley. Houses and people were swept away and a number of people died.

That wave of water entered the Bremer and Brisbane river system and overwhelmed one third of Ipswich, a town of over 150,000 people and then onto to Brisbane and the TV has showed the havoc and destruction.

Then there is the flooding of the Clarence in Northern NSW, just 150 kms south of where we live not to mention the flooding of northern and western Victoria where over 70 towns have been affected.

We have seen unprecedented floods covering much of Australia at the same time with severe loss of property and personal possessions and sadly loss of life.

But we have heard wonderful stories of heroism where a young boy gave his life for his brother and mother; people pushing family through the manholes of the house to escape the waters and other people risking their lives to save others from roaring waters.

We have seen people respond to the needs of people that have rarely been matched as an army of volunteers with mops and buckets, dressed with gum boots and gloves, pitched in and turned the face of the disaster around.

Once the waters have receded and the houses have been cleaned up as best as they can, there will be the questions and required answers of what went wrong, what can be learnt. Will houses be permitted to be rebuilt in known flood prone areas? Can there be a better insurance system that can cater for flooding with common definitions of flooding? Was the Wivenhoe Dam managed properly when water was released into the Brisbane river at the time of a high tide?

There will be the theological questions also as we seek to understand what may God be saying and requiring of us. Is there something to understand from God that arises out of this terrible disaster?

On the one hand there will be the judgment soothsayers predicting the judgment of God and on the other hand there will be those who would say that God had nothing to do with it. Neither is an accurate response.

Let us be like the sons of Issachar they could discern the signs of the times.

While it may be too early to make definitive statements one way or another, let me offer some thoughts gleaned from my reading and reflecting.

1. At the same time that Australia experienced this outpouring of the heavens, so did Brazil where 800 people lost their lives. At the same time South Africa has also experienced severe rain. At the same time Northern hemisphere was experiencing severe snow storms. We are seeing a change in the climate that is affecting the world and the intensity is growing each year.

Meteorologists are telling us that Australia is in an El Nina cycle that has not finished yet and more severe storms and rain may yet come.

I suggest that Australia is entering a period of life where severe natural disasters and potential loss of life will not just be read about or seen on the news in other countries but may be experienced more and more by Australians first hand. We need to be ready for this and our thinking and planning should not be about 1-100 year occurrences but something far less than that. The extreme points of weather have changed!

As a church and as Christians we must be ready and use the opportunity to help, share our faith and understand the weather patterns. Paul writes in Romans 8:19-22 that creation is waiting and groaning for the coming of the Lord. At the end of His ministry, Jesus warns about the natural disasters that will come to impact the world and affect people's lives. While it may not usher in the Second coming, they will affect deeply the lives of people.

1. We need to rethink our theology of judgment and grace and rediscover that they are the sides of the same coin. Bill Muehlenberg writes *"The God we serve is the unchanging, eternal God who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is just as full of grace in the OT as he is of judgment in the NT. I have written about this frequently on this site.*

See for example: <http://www.billmuehlenberg.com/2010/05/27/on-divine-love-and-wrath/> . Just as judgment from God broke forth against a sinful and rebellious people in the OT, so too we find it in the NT. Consider just a few of the episodes recorded there, such as that of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5, or the judgment on Herod in Acts 12.

*Jesus spoke clearly about this in many places. Consider his remarks in Luke 13:1-5. He mentions two tragedies, including a fallen tower which killed 18 people. He simply notes these cases, then twice says this: "unless you repent, you too will all perish."*

*It is amazing how some Christians think they are more loving than Jesus was. But Jesus – who was too wise to make a mistake and too loving to be unkind – knew exactly what needed to be said. He knew that judgment was imminent, and that the most loving thing he could do was to warn people to flee the wrath to come.*

*The truth is that a black cloud of judgment hangs over all of us. Very often God indeed does use natural and human tragedies to get our attention, to realign our priorities, and to get us right with him before it is too late. And even the Jesus of the Gospels – who we want to tame, domesticate and transform into our image – makes this clear.”*

I believe there is a shaking going on in our world. There is the shaking by Satan where the mores and values of our Christian culture are being challenged and changed. The push for the change of the marriage act from marriage between a man and a woman to between two people is a significant change that undermines the orthodox view of marriage in Australia. There is the growing persecution of Christians and those threats have landed on our shores to the Egyptian Coptic church. There is the growing marginalisation of the Christian faith which we ourselves are partly to blame. There is also the deeper desire of Satan to rule the world and be treated as God that the book of Revelation and Thessalonians warn us about.

But there is the shaking of God to awaken us to His purpose and priorities. The message of Jesus' first sermon is simple: Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is near. This could be translated “*You are going in the wrong direction and will miss the opportunity of a lifetime. Turn around and receive it*”. Judgment is always imminent. God will have the last say. Turn back before it is too late and you have lost your opportunity for eternity now and forever.

These events are used by the Lord Almighty to awaken faith and belief in people as people turn to God because only He can save them. For some their eyes are opened. But for others their hearts become hard and cold.

We are called to use these opportunities to practice our faith and share our faith.

It is our privilege as Christians to be the face, hands and feet of God as we offer unconditional help to those in need. We have seen many Christians rise up as individuals and as a church to be the helping hand of God. We will only see down the track the spiritual impact that these people have had on God.

It will be interesting to see who will come to God through this event. It may not be reported in the media but it will be reported in the heavenly newspaper "The Lamb's Book of Life"!

1. In the midst of trouble and hardship, we still have a God who walks with us and helps us through the havoc and devastation. The words of the Prophet Isaiah are still true today:

*Israel, the LORD who created you says, "Do not be afraid---I will save you. I have called you by name---you are mine. When you pass through deep waters, I will be with you; your troubles will not overwhelm you. When you pass through fire, you will not be burned; the hard trials that come will not hurt you. For I am the LORD your God, the holy God of Israel, who saves you. (43:1-3)*

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Whatever we face in our life; whatever befalls us, we have a God who will get us through the waters that flood our lives even if they threaten to overwhelm us. God will provide in some amazing ways as people have discovered in the clean up and recovery of flood torn Brisbane.

It is a time to know the hand of God upon your life leading you as you wade through the waters that want to overwhelm you.

More importantly, He will be there helping you when the volunteers have gone back to their homes; when the organized help has finished and people have gone back to their lives. He will be with you in the weeks, months and years that are needed to rebuild your life.

We have started January with a flourish after we have returned from holidays. We will do 15 ministries in January.

In February we are looking to gather people to pray about starting a healing room. We have a small group of 6 who are interested and we look forward to seeing where God will take us in this venture. There is the Healing Room network that has come out of Spokane Washington and has a large network of Healing Rooms in Australia. Healing Rooms is a ministry that offers an off the street ministry of healing for approx 15-20 minutes. We see Walking Free as a complementary specialist ministry for deeper brokenness.

Thus the thought came from a person praying last year that the Healing Room would offer a GP role while referrals for deeper issues can be given to Walking Free which is the specialist ministry.

We need your prayers as we pray and seek God about this and get His direction for us.

The Toowoomba group is small but effective. They are praying each fortnight for clients and they have just started.

We plan to go to Toowoomba, once a month for our prayer meeting and encouragement time for our people.

We wish to explore how we might enlarge the team at Toowoomba. This must be a God thing. We are thankful to Middle Ridge Uniting for supporting our ministry through the use of a room attached to their church hall.

We ask you to pray for new clients for 2011. We ask you to recommend our ministry to friends and your church friends. If you need brochures or business cards to pass on, please let me know and I will post them onto you. If you could advertise the ministry through your local church, that would be appreciated. You may need your minister's permission.

The beauty of our ministry is that we can pray from a distance over the phone or via skype. The client does not need to be face to face!

The church at Coolangatta had a good year in 2010. Average attendance over the year increased by 2% and finances increased by 20%. We are now looking to employ a part time worship pastor (1 day/week) to lift the worship and creative time on Sunday mornings.

Our family also is having changes. Our son, David, with his wife Madeleine, is going to Chicago to work for his company. They will leave in April and be there until June 2012. There is the possibility of continuing beyond that date.

We are taking Long Service leave in May/June and going to USA to visit them and some friends in Wyoming as well as take in some sights. We booked very cheap flights last year with the possibility that David and Mads may be there, but nothing was finalised. The last long holiday like this that we have taken was in 2001 when we went to the Middle East. Most of the time our holidays is travelling back to South Australia to visit family. We are looking forward to this long holiday seeing a different place.

Naomi has just spent three weeks travelling Vietnam and Malaysia. She starts another year at Tyndale Christian School as year 6 coordinator. This will be her tenth year there.

Jess is still nursing and supporting her vast network of friends on her days off. She has a boy friend, Matthew, whom we met at Christmas time. Matthew is an engineer for United Water and goes to Concordia Lutheran Church. Please pray that God will guide their relationship.

Our parents are still alive and well. My father is 92 and my mother is 82. They are still living in the family home. Liz's mum is 88. She is in a Dutch aged care facility.

We are looking forward to seeing what God is going to do in 2011. It is always exciting because this year has never been created before. God has always got something special up his sleeve to surprise his children.

As you look forward to 2011, come with anticipation and excitement about the new thing that God is going to do in your life, ministry and church. Look to be surprised each day by the glory of God and His love in your life. Look to see increase in the blessing of God upon your life.



Invite Jesus to walk with you where you are and whatever you are doing.

May you continue to make a difference for the sake of the God's Kingdom every day in 2011!