

## "CHANGING THE CLIMATE"

### INTRODUCTION

We here in the north-east were strangers to hurricanes, relatively speaking, until the year 1938. Since that time we have been getting better and better acquainted with them. A few weeks ago, after Hurricane Esther had slashed its way through our part of the country, there was an article about hurricanes in one of our local papers. It caught my interest, captured my imagination, and after reading it, I clipped it and put it into my sermon file.

It began something like this: "Meteorologists cannot explain down to the 1st detail what causes a hurricane". And this, it went on to explain, was in spite of the fact that the National Hurricane Research Project has been in operation for six years, that it owns two DC 6's, that these planes fly into tropical storms, record their pressures, wind speeds, water content, and other information. In spite of this serious attempt to discover what causes a hurricane, the article began by saying that meteorologists at this time do not know what the cause of a hurricane is.

This article went on to say this: "Hurricanes require certain conditions for spawning and those conditions are most prevalent in late summer and early autumn. Hurricanes which strike the eastern United States are born in the Atlantic Ocean, just north of the equator, in the calm, warm, moist air of the doldrums".

Now I have a confession to make to you, and perhaps you won't believe it, but until the day I read those words I never knew that the doldrums referred to a place. Ever since I was a youngster I have heard people occasionally say they were in the doldrums, and I always thought that they meant they were down in the dumps, and the chances are that this is what they meant. But they might have been referring to a place they had once been. Again, if you can believe it, I went to the dictionary to find a definition of the "doldrums", and from there on to the encyclopaedia, and in both places I found among the first definition of the word "Doldrums - the region of relatively calm winds near the equator".

### MY IMAGINATION WENT TO WORK

I was tremendously interested then to learn that the hurricanes which can be so destructive which the people of Galveston learned last month, are born in the doldrums, and my imagination began to work on this, and I began to think of storms and hurricanes of a quite different kind, not the storms that come in the sky and shatter the landscape, but the storms that come into a person's life and sometimes wreck it. I thought to myself, isn't it true that nine out of ten of the storms that wash out a person's life begin in the doldrums?

For instance, think of a marriage that is totally wrecked by a storm. The chances are that if it were possible to look at that marriage before the storm blew it apart, you and I would discover, nine times out of ten, that it had been resting in the doldrums for some time - lifeless, clam, motionless, static, without interest, without affection, without romance, without depth, without the things that bind people together, and out of these doldrums a storm was finally born. This is not always true, mind you. Storms sometimes come out of a bright, blue sky. But more often than not, I would think it is true.

Then I began to think of my own life, and I realized that I could say with absolute honesty that nine times out of ten when I have experienced rough stormy weather in terms of my own inner life, those periods have come at a time in my life when I was standing still. In other words, those times have come when I was not at my best, when I was not moving forward, when I was not alive with incentive, drive, desire and notice. In other words, those storms have grown out of idleness, inactivity, boredom, and a general state of listlessness. I'd venture to say that you and I are alike in this respect. Making this even more person, I'm sure that my wife would testify to the fact that I'm much easier to live with, much easier to get along with when my thoughts and energies are absorbed by my work than I am when I take a day off and sit around the apartment with nothing to do, accomplishing nothing.

I began to think of this on a larger scale. The same thing is true, I suppose, of the big storms that occasionally tear our world apart. Think of the First World War and the conditions of the western world just before it. I wasn't around then, but some of you were, and you'll remember that Britain ruled the waves and a great part of the world, and did it better than most. Let them rule, most people said, unless they happened to live in India or Africa, or some other part of the world where they would like to be free of outside domination no matter how benevolent it might be. The United States was happy and safe, surrounded by two oceans which protected it from physical attack. The Christian Church was on the march; the motto of the Student Christian Movement in 1912, two years before the storm broke was "The Kingdom of God in this generation". I would call that state of affairs the doldrums - complacency, lack of awareness of what was really going on, blindness to the facts - these were the doldrums - the calm, warm, moist air in which a hurricane is born.

Think of the second World War. Our attention is concentrated on Germany and there is no question about the situation in which Germany found itself. It was a defeated nation - not only defeated, but humiliated ground into the dust. It was in defeat, in disgrace, in debt - and into these doldrums stepped Hitler and who in time stirred up a storm such as the world has never before seen.

Then we come to the present. I am not in a position to make any predictions and I am not a prophet, nor am I prepared to say anything about the rest of the world, but I say this out of love - the United States has been in the doldrums now for some time - not the doldrums of defeat and poverty, but the doldrums of success, abundance, indifference, and ease. We have too much money, too much comfort, too much freedom for our own good, too little imagination, too little willingness to suffer, too little desire to stand for something, and almost no sense of national purpose. Our leaders are aware of this, and personally I feel our President is doing his best to get the country moving again, and there are times when I think he is rising magnificently above the heads and shoulders of us all, but in the long run, like water, no leader can rise any higher than his source, and the source in this case is the American people.

I noticed in last Sunday's NY Times an add concerning a new book recently published, written by the same gentleman who wrote, "The Ugly American". Some of you read that book and probably recall that it was a penetrating analysis of the actions of many Americans abroad. His latest book deals with Americans at home, and is entitled "A Nation of

Sheep". The chances are that he will tell us in so many words that we are resting in the doldrums of indifference, ease and abundance, and that we are motionless, happy go lucky, enjoying our riches and thinking very little about the people in the rest of the world who have practically nothing. To be sure, we are often generous to an incredible degree, but people who have never had anything need more than generosity. They need understanding, companionship, patience and guidance. It troubled me to read recently where some of our leaders in Congress have come out and said that we should no longer give foreign aid to neutral, uncommitted, undeveloped countries - that if they are not with us in this great power struggle between East and West, that if they remain neutral, we ought not to give them foreign aid. There is something in this attitude that rests uneasily on my soul. It's like the little boy who says, "If you don't play the game my way, I'm going to pick up my marbles and go home, and you won't play at all"

The word of the prophet comes therefore to this country right out of this article on the hurricanes and the word is this: beware, for hurricanes are born in the doldrums.

DOLDRUMS OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT  
CAN BE CHANGED....

Of course, there is something else that needs to be said, something else we need to remember: the doldrums near the equator cannot be changed, whereas the doldrums of the human spirit can be changed. While we do not know all of the causes of the storms that threaten to destroy humanity, we do know more or less the climate in which the storms are born, and we know that the climate can be changed, and if any people under the sun are called to do something about changing it, it is the Christians. We may not be able to turn the clock back; we may not be able to stop the development of nuclear physics and the development of nuclear weapons; we may not be able to bring about a disarmament program of any great significance, but we can do our very best to change the climate in which a storm could occur. This is our task, and in the few moments we have left, I should like to be specific and suggest three things you and I can do along this line.

First of all, I think we can change our attitude toward the government. And here I refer not to this particular administration, nothing that has to do with partisan politics. I am thinking about the government as those chosen by us to manage and administer the system which orders our life. Remember when we were children in school, and how when we were assigned lessons we didn't like and were forced to take exams we hated, we had the feeling that the teachers and the principal were against us, that they were our enemies, that they were trying to make things difficult for us. I draw something of a parallel here and suggest that many people in this country have the same sort of attitude toward their government that a child has toward his school. That the government is against them, making things difficult for them. We saw an instance of this during the summer, in the terrible way that men of our police force here in the city were treated by supposedly law-abiding citizens. We see something of this when it comes to paying our taxes. None of us enjoy paying them. The attitude of the average American is that the government in levying taxes is doing it to hurt him, doing it unfairly, reaping the benefits of his labor and using them for its own pleasure, never realizing that the taxes are for him, to educate his children, defend his life and property, manage his country. Unless this climate changes, we may someday be in for trouble.

It seems to me that a good citizen living in a country that has a considerable degree of freedom in the choice of its government, will pay taxes, obey laws, involve himself in civic responsibilities because he knows that in the long run the government is for his benefit, and he will do it not with childish evasiveness but with mature appreciation.

And then in the second place, and this may have for meaning for some of you, Christians can also change their attitude toward money; not so much toward money itself, as toward the things money can buy. Remember last spring reading about the basketball player who was charged with receiving money for losing games. What he said when he was questioned was what hurt: "I did it for the money - for my bride, for my baby, then unborn". He was in the doldrums. He had not learned that there are things that money cannot buy, that there are more important things in life than money, that money cannot solve every problem. You and I can help to change our country's attitude toward money and remember that there is something more Almighty than the Almighty Dollar. We need not give our children everything they ask for; we can stop spending all the money on ourselves and give it away. We need to train our children so that they come to see that an upright character is more to be desired than money. Unless we change our cultural climate, we may someday pay the price.

And in the third place, only briefly mentioned because it is so difficult to describe, Christians can change the climate of this country by enjoying life in its fullness and beauty, in spite of its transiency, pain and violence, because they see more than the little scenes taking place on the world stage, because they see our world ultimately as God's world and are mindful of the fact that this is a universe ruled by moral law, that in the long run goodness triumphs. This should change the look on your face, the spirit in your heart, and in turn help to change the climate of the nation.

As a teen-age boy I remember once coming across some lines which have a bit of a poetic flavor. Somehow these lines came to mind this past week as I was preparing this sermon. I share them with you here at the end, to put into your thought, into the place in your life where you keep the things that are most important:

"Everyone can listen to God.  
When men listen, God speaks.  
When God speaks, men are changed.  
When men are changed, nations change"

LET US PRAY: In the deep silence of these moments, may we hear thy voice speaking in our hearts. We pray for our country, and for our world - thy world. We ask for protection, but even more for guidance, for knowledge, but even more for imagination, for spiritual power - to do and to be the kind of people who change the climate and avert the storm before it starts.