

Tornado!

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“There is a tornado in Grand Rapids,” intoned the voice on the radio. “Please go to the southwest corner of your basement and keep tuned in for further developments.”

Yes, there was a tornado although Grand Rapids itself was not touched. Of the many tornados on April 2 and 3, sweeping through several states, one came through western Michigan. Hudsonville, a small town about 15 miles from Grand Rapids, was hit the hardest. Standale, a commercial suburb on the northwest edge of Grand Rapids, also suffered severe loss. The toll, exacted in a short time by the tornado, was very great. Nineteen people were killed, over 300 were injured. About 200 houses were demolished, leaving six or seven hundred people homeless. 200 automobiles were wrecked; 120 house trailers were smashed. Many commercial buildings were destroyed, 29 in Standale alone. Damage was estimated at 10 or 11 million dollars.

Although the path of a tornado is fairly regular, it has no rhyme or reason in its actions. It would seemingly pick its victims at random, completely destroying one house, but not even touching the next one. At one location it removed almost exactly one half of a house, leaving the other half intact. It took away the refrigerator out of the kitchen but left the kettle unmoved on the stove.

One family, who was riding in its car when the tornado struck, had this story to tell. The windows of their car were sucked out, the car was set upside down in the ditch, and a couple of seconds later was placed upright on the road heading in the opposite direction from which they had come. Aside from bruises, they escaped injury.

Another family, huddled in one corner of their basement, saw their house carried away and a car thrown into the opposite corner of the basement.

The havoc created by this storm was a sight to behold. Buildings, both large and small, lay on the ground like piles of kindling wood. Giant trees were uprooted or twisted off like toothpicks. Many automobiles were scarcely more than twisted steel.

What caused this tornado? The natural cause is that of an air clash, a fast-moving cold front hitting a thick moist air mass primed by high temperatures. And the temperature that Tuesday of 78 degrees was a record high.

Although the outer edge of the funnel reaches speeds of 500 miles per hour, the tornado itself travels slowly, between 25 and 40 miles an hour on the average, cutting a path usually about a quarter mile in width. It has a terrific, rumbling roar like a huge freight train. It generally comes from the southwest and travels in a northeasterly direction.

Although no one is really safe in a tornado, safety measures can be taken which can save lives. If you're at home, head for the southwest corner of the basement, provided your house is not brick. If you're in the open, run at right angles from the funnel or take shelter in a culvert or ditch. It is well to note that the majority of those who were killed did not know the storm was coming, were caught unawares, had no basement to flee into, or simply panicked.

But we must never forget that the real cause of this storm, though never mentioned once in the newspapers, is God alone. He it was that started it, guided its exact course, and used it to show His power. Though such a disaster may seem unnecessary to us, we know that our all-wise Heavenly Father had a divine purpose in causing this tornado.

What can we learn from this? Two very important things. First, our insignificance. Though man may boast that his power is well-nigh boundless and his might is great, he stands as

less than nothing before the all-powerful God. Man's power fades into emptiness as God reveals his might. Man is helpless and can do absolutely nothing to avert disaster. To have been in this storm or to have seen its effects can only humble us before God and cause us to say with the psalmist of old, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him?"

The second thing that we are taught is that God's controlling hand rules over all things. Nothing happens merely of chance. Although the tornado may seem to pick its victims at random, God is controlling its every action. This is a great comfort to us, for we know according to His Word that all things work together for our good and therefore we never need fear. He is constantly with us, watching over us every moment. Nothing can separate us from His love. He will never leave or forsake us, but always will avert all evil or turn it to our profit. And, "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

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