**The Fragility of Life**

Early Tuesday morning, a lone supercell thunderstorm tracked more than 275 miles across the state of Tennessee, spawning tornados as powerful as EF-4 with winds as high as 175 miles per hour. Two dozen people have been confirmed dead with the majority of the fatalities in Cookeville. Property damage has yet to be estimated but will undoubtedly run in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

Our hearts go out to the victims of this devastation and loss. The grief borne by surviving family and friends is simply unimaginable. Images of whole neighborhoods obliterated by the storm leave us speechless. The courageous survivors are intent on rebuilding, but there are things lost that are irreplaceable.

These kinds of catastrophic events are especially upsetting because of the suddenness in which lives are turned upside down. One moment families are busy with careers, school, hobbies and extra-curricular activities and the next, all their earthly possessions are gone and the things they considered important yesterday seem insignificant.

The wise man said in Ecclesiastes 7:2, “It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, because that is the end of every man, and the living takes it to heart.” Solomon is not trivializing the loss of loved ones. He is saying that such loss is inevitable for each of us and it is at those times that we are faced with the stark reality of just how fragile life is. Solomon knew that there is a natural tendency to fall into daily routines with little thought of eternity.

James described this “out of sight, out of mind” dilemma beautifully: “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.’ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away” (James 4:13-14). There is nothing wrong with planning, but we must be aware that there is so much that is outside our control. “Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that’” (v. 15).

When catastrophic events threaten the wellbeing of others, we must be quick to do what we can to alleviate their suffering. Some may be able to join the thousands who are volunteering to help with clean-up efforts. We can contribute to the reputable funds and organizations tasked with providing humanitarian assistance to those in need. But the best thing we can do is pray for our neighbors.

Most importantly, all of us must recognize that none of us is guaranteed tomorrow. We each will be held accountable for the way we have lived and judgment will come without warning (Hebrews 9:27).