

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Special Messages		Pastor/Teacher
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September 11, 2001

LOOKBACK: Fifteen years ago, on Wednesday, September 12, 2001 after meeting with my high school apologetics class, I went home, packed my camping gear in my Dodge pick-up, and made my way out in a very remote area of the Arizona desert. I wanted to get away for a three-day period of time to prepare this sermon and to reflect and consider all that had happened on Tuesday of this past week. I took along a radio and kept up with the news as it unfolded. It wasn't until Thursday that the force of what had happened really began to sink in and grip me. I did not receive any divine inspiration during this three-day period other than to reflect upon a number of specific passages of Scripture and seek to organize my thoughts around these three points that will serve as an outline for this sermon.

I. THE NATURE OF THIS EVENT

Over the past thirty years we have been exposed on an almost annual basis to the reality of terrorism, especially what has identified itself as *Islamic terrorism*. Even though this may seem to be a fairly recent phenomenon, it actually sketches back over a thousand years. What we, here in the United States, are only beginning to comprehend is that we are witnessing *worldviews* and *ideologies* in conflict. Islam and Western Culture, which was strongly influenced and shaped by Christianity, have never seen eye to eye. Even though Islam reveres Jesus as one of the prophets and Christians and Jews are referred to as “people of the book” (Koran 29:46) they are nonetheless likewise described elsewhere as enemies of Islam and must be dealt with as infidels (Koran 2:140) since they are guilty of idolatry (Koran 6:20-23) and are therefore subject to the judgment of God (Koran 22:17). The judgment is seen particularly as being executed by the people of Islam (Koran 9:4). George Grant writes: “In other words, Christian were a legitimate target for the *Ji'had*, the holy war. Like the Jews, they were either to be subjugated and brought under *Dhimma*, or they were to be killed. No other option was tolerable to the faithful Muslem: ‘Who will protect them, by night or by day, from the Lord of Justice? Yet they are unmindful of their Lord’s remembrance. Have they any other means to protect them? Their idolatry will be powerless for their salvation. Nor shall they be protected from our scourge. Good things have been bestowed upon these men and upon their fathers. They have lived long and prospered. But now, we shall invade their lands and curtail their borders. Can they then triumph? They have been warned by inspiration, but the deaf can hear nothing (21:41-46).’”¹

To those who accept the authority of Scripture there is another obvious factor in all of this. The hand of a supernatural evil was involved. Listen carefully to the texts. “Know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one” (I John 5:19). “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one

time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts” (Ephesians 2:1-3). “And the Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will” (II Timothy 2:25, 26). These texts and many others underscore the fact that Satan does exert a tremendous amount of influence in this world, and especially in seeking to keep humanity shut-up in spiritual darkness (cf. II Corinthians 4:4).

II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS EVENT

In addition to satanic involvement, sin and wickedness are directly traceable to *human depravity*. We labor under the illusion that deep down people are innately good, and all we need are the right circumstances and conditions, along with the proper education and humanity, to achieve perfectability. The Bible says the exact opposite. The human heart, declares the prophet Jeremiah, “is deceitfully wicked above all things and beyond cure” (57:9).

This past week we saw graphically the manifestation of human depravity. What about the *judgment of God*? Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson pointed fingers at the pagans in society as bringing down the judgment of God on this nation.² I was personally appalled by these remarks. I was reminded of what happened when Rome fell and the pagans in that society blamed it on the Christians, which prompted Augustine to write *De Civitate Dei* (The City of God) in response to that charge. Here we have two Christian leaders (neither one of whom even faintly measure up to an Augustine) making the opposite charge! The great Puritan Thomas Manton had far greater wisdom when confronting such things. Commenting on the tendency to interpret divine providence He wrote, “This observation must be to a good end; not to censure others, for that is malice: to speak even to the grief of those whom God hath wounded, this is condemned, as enemies did of the people of God in their affliction, Jer. 50:7. Neither must we do it to justify ourselves; that is pride and self-conceit, condemned Luke 13:5, ‘Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish;’ ‘but for instruction, that we may fear for ourselves’ Zeph. 3:7, ‘Surely now thou shalt fear me.’ And that we may be cautioned against the like sins, that we may see what an evil and bitter thing it is to forsake the Lord, Jer. 2:19; and that we may admire the Lord’s mercy to us, that we are not set out as marks of his vengeance, that we are not in their condition, Amos 6:2; that we may give to the Lord the glory of his mercy, justice and truth. Take one place for all: Rom. 11:22, there the apostle doth sum up these three, that we might not boast ourselves over others, that we may admire the justice God, and mercy to us-ward, and may learn to fear him, and walk cautiously and humbly with him, lest we contract the like judgment upon ourselves. In making the observation, there must be care that we do not make providence speak a language which it owneth not, the language of our fancies, and pry into God’s counsels without warrant. When you come to observe judgment, there must be a due reasoning from the provocation to the judgment, but not *e contra*, not judge of the wickedness of the person by the affliction of the person. The barbarians showed little reason, and less charity, in misconstruing the passage of the viper fastening upon St. Paul’s hand, Acts 28:4. The foregoing provocation must be evident before we interpret the judgment. The dispensations of God’s providence are common, and fall alike to good and bad, Ecces. 9:2. God by a sudden stroke may take off the godly as well as the wicked. Good Eli broke his neck, I Sam. 9:18, and Josiah dies in the army in the same manner that Ahab did, by an arrow in battle after he disguised himself, I Chron. 35:23. Therefore do not reason from the stroke of God. Shimei misinterpreted David’s afflictions: 2 Sam. 36:7, 8.”³

We certainly should take to heart the notion of God’s judgment anytime we are confronted with something of this nature – but it should cause us to examine our own lives first and not to point the finger at others. This is especially the case with Christians since the Apostle Peter tells us very plainly “judgment begins with God’s house” (I Peter 4:17).

Likewise we should remember that in our unconverted state we were also unrighteous (cf. Titus 3:1-11). Finally we should take to heart *the brevity of life*. No one is guaranteed their next breath (James 4:13-17). Therefore we need to heed the words of Moses: “Who knows the power of your anger? For your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you. Teach us to number our days aright that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:11, 12).

III. THE RESPONSE TO THIS EVENT

There are two responses we should have. First, as a nation we should defend ourselves against further attacks and we have a moral obligation to seek retribution. People who go around quoting the words of Jesus “If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matthew 5:39) or Paul’s words in Romans 12:17-21 where we’re told not to repay evil for evil have actually misinterpreted the Bible. These texts are not addressed to nations, but to individuals. In fact right after those comments in Romans 12:17-21 the Apostle Paul made this statement: “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God’s servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience” (Romans 13:1-5). The state does have the authority to exercise the sword. Those who would urge a pacifist position fail to understand that give the nature of man, only those nations who protect their people can survive in a fallen world and I might add, pacifists live in a country and enjoy their views because others fight and die to protect them.

There is a second response we should individually and collectively have – and that is repentance. We all should examine our lives in light of this event. We should re-evaluate our priorities. We should seek to live our lives not simply for the moment but in light of eternity. This is a time for sobermindedness and serious reflection. We should put aside the things that have for too long captured our attention and distracted us from living lives that are all too short and realize that we too are closing in on the end of our days. Heed the words of the Apostle Paul: “So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” (II Corinthians 5:9, 10).

¹ George Grant, *The Blood of the Moon: The Roots of the Middle East Crisis* (Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1991), p. 61.

² These comments were aired on Robertson’s 700 Club (Sept. 13, 2001) and printed in newspaper cf. The Arizona Republic (Saturday, Sept. 15, 2001, EX7). Both men later sought to amend their statements, but in my opinion this was a classic example of “hoof ’n mouth” disease!

³ *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton VIII* (rpt. Maranatha, 1973), p. 214.