

## WHEN TRAGEDY STRIKES

### INTRODUCTION:

1. The only difference between reality and fiction is fiction has to make sense. - Tom Clancy
2. Certainly the events of this past Tuesday do not make sense.
3. We recall the famous words of Franklin D. Roosevelt, who, when speaking of the disaster in Pearl Harbor, referred to Dec. 7, 1941 as "a date which will live in infamy."
4. It is hard to believe that the loss of life from Tuesday's tragedy far exceeds that of the event at Pearl Harbor.
  - 1) Approx. 2403 lives were lost at Pearl Harbor, and some 3,581 wounded.
  - 2) The deaths from Tuesday will be a great deal more (more than 5000 with the WTC alone).
5. Like you, I mourn for the horrific loss of life; but I am more troubled by the realization that thousands of souls lost their lives unprepared to meet their God.
  - 1) We recall the words of our Lord: **Matt. 16:26** *For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*
  - 1) We recognize that there may have been members of the Lord's church in those buildings, both in New York City and at the Pentagon, not to mention the various hijacked planes involved in this tragedy.
  - 2) But how troubling it is to realize that the vast majority lost their time and ability to repent.
  - 3) By the hands of terrorists, they made the passage of **Prov. 27:1** come to the forefront: *Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.*
  - 4) And what of James who warned those who take life for granted.  
**James 4:13-15** *Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:*  
**14** *Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.*  
**15** *For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.*

### DISCUSSION:

#### I. THE REALITY.

- A. Russel Baker once said, "I am cheerful to the point of stupidity."
  1. More commonly phrased, "ignorance is bliss." We can bury our heads in the sand like the ostrich, but it won't change the facts.
  2. Often when traumatic events occur, the initial reaction is one of shock and denial.
  3. Sometimes in such instances, we find ourselves pretending that it really didn't happen.
  4. And unfortunately, this type of sentiment is often confused with hope.
  5. Edward Brock: "Denial is a position that pretends that disappointment, loss, limitation, tragedy, and death do not really exist, or their reality is minimized."
  6. It is one thing to see something on television, or hear it on the radio, but quite another to witness it first hand. (Many watched from neighboring office buildings, on the street, or on the Brooklyn Bridge.)

- B. When we read of suffering and death in Scripture, we know that the recorded events are very real.
1. All Scripture is inspired of God (**2 Tim. 3:16-17**).
  2. The events recorded are true, to the last detail.
  3. Even of the Old Testament, Peter writes:  
**2 Pet. 1:20,21** *Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.*  
**21** *For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*
- C. Looking back in biblical history, I would site to you the biblical example of the story of King Hezekiah. (Illustration used by Richard Priddy)
1. This 25 year old king brought great reform to Judah.
  2. He cleansed the temple, restored the priesthood, and the observance of Passover; tore down the idols; and brought back to Israel decency and justice.
  3. The nation was in better shape than it had been in years.
  4. But as you open Scripture in **2 Chron. 32:1** comes the disturbing words:  
*After these things, and the establishment thereof, Sennacherib king of Assyria came...*
  5. Sennacherib was a godless, immoral heathen who led some of the most vicious, cruel, war like people this world has ever known.
  6. Just when things seemed to be going well, a great evil entered the picture.
  7. It wasn't until God intervened and his angel destroyed 185,000 Assyrians in one night that Judah was spared.
  8. We can only imagine the shock and dismay for Hezekiah and the people of Judah when the Assyrians came knocking at their door.
- D. We think also of the prophet Jeremiah, who witnessed the fall of Jerusalem.
1. Judah had sinned and rebelled against God, and faced devastation because of it.
    - 1) I am not citing this example to suggest what transpired this week was an act of God.
    - 2) I use it to convey to you the shock and horror that Jeremiah must have felt seeing the devastation of Jerusalem.
  2. **Lam. 1:1,2,14** (NKJV) *How lonely sits the city That was full of people! How like a widow is she, Who was great among the nations! The princess among the provinces Has become a slave!*  
**2** *She weeps bitterly in the night, Her tears are on her cheeks; Among all her lovers She has none to comfort her. All her friends have dealt treacherously with her; They have become her enemies.*  
**12** *"Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Behold and see If there is any sorrow like my sorrow, Which has been brought on me, Which the Lord has inflicted In the day of His fierce anger.*
  3. As the prophet stood outside the burning ruins, it no doubt was hard for him to accept the reality of what had happened.
  4. But in fact what he witnessed was very real.

## **II. THE REACTION.**

- A. Some react to tragedy with denial, and some in despair.
  - 1. Try as we may, we cannot avoid tragedy.
  - 2. Some have sought to bury their grief and despair in alcohol and drugs; others by withdrawing from society; and yet others try to escape with apathy and indifference.
- B. Brock offers reasons that we give into despair.
  - 1. It is a point of view that fails to see the whole picture.
    - 1) It is true that life at times can be very hard to the point of seeming to be unfair and cruel.
    - 2) But in a balanced approach, there are times when life is also beautiful and joyous
  - 2. Despair is limiting because one in such a reaction fails to see the possibilities and hope that can come out of tragedy.
  - 3. Already we have seen a sentiment pour out over our country; as people are putting aside their various differences and rallying together
  - 4. The loss of life was horrific, and can never be understated; but something good has come out of this disaster as America is growing stronger because of it.
  - 5. Flags are flying, songs are being sung, tears are being shed, and how wonderful it is to hear God being mentioned on a national level.
- C. One of my favorite passages in Scripture has to be that of **Rev. 4**.
  - 1. The apostle John, himself banished to the Isle of Patmos for his faith is afforded a vision in which He sees God on the throne of Heaven.
  - 2. **Rev. 4:3** *And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.*
  - 3. Why does that have a bearing when we are thinking of hope?
    - 1) In the background of this marvelous book Christians were being persecuted; many dying for the cause of Christ.
    - 2) Some were in prison, some witnessed the death of loved ones, and may themselves have been facing imminent death.
    - 3) They needed hope, and here they are given the reassurance they were seeking.
  - 4. They were witnessing death and destruction and now revealed in beautiful symbolism is God seated upon His throne of glory.
  - 5. **Dan. 4:17** *This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.*
  - 6. Even in the midst of their suffering and fear, they were assured that God was still on His throne, and still in control.
  - 7. But to add the proverbial icing on the cake, John sees a rainbow; true, not like one we have ever seen; but a rainbow none the less.
  - 8. How beautiful it must have been in its various shades of emerald or green.
  - 9. Students of Scripture know the significance of the rainbow.
    - Gen. 9:13-15** *I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.*
    - 9:14** *And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud:*

**9:15** *And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.*

10. The significance of the rainbow was a reminder to those Christians who were suffering that God had not forgotten man; nor had He forgotten the promises made to man.
- D. Someone this week railed out, "Where was God when this happened?" My response, the same place He was when His Son was crucified.
  1. Just because He did not stop the atrocity that took place, doesn't mean that God doesn't care. Quite the contrary...
  2. Beautiful song: *Does Jesus care?*

### **III. THE RESPONSE.**

- A. In times of tragedy, there are two responses that are often manifest: either it will cause people to draw nearer to God, or it will drive them further away.
  1. In many cases people turn from God because they have been misinformed; or out of ignorance.
  2. Illustration: A lady on TV said, "Why should we be praying to God; He is the one that caused it."
  3. It is true that there are instances in Scripture where tragedy was the result of sin and it brought the wrath of God.
    - 1) It caused the northern kingdom of Israel to be carried off into captivity about 722-721 B.C.
    - 2) It also caused the southern kingdom of Judah to be carried off into captivity, with the subsequent destruction of the city of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (We have already noted Jeremiah's lamentation over it.)
  4. It is also true that this nation is not what it once was due to sin; but to step forward and proclaim it a judgment of God is without basis.
  5. To what end does God punish his people with terrorist activity?
  6. It seems much more likely that someone else was behind the scenes in this disaster.
  7. The same one who appeared before God in the book of Job seeking to afflict righteous Job.
  8. It is the same one who was behind Rome's relentless persecution of Christians in the book of Revelation.
  9. I am, of course, speaking of our adversary, known as the devil, or satan.
  10. How ironic it is that Islam declares the U.S. as the "great satan," and yet they are blind to the reality of who is behind their efforts.
- B. As we consider a response, I would certainly pray to the end that you would not allow tragedy to separate you from God.
  1. **1 Pet. 5:7** *Cast all your care upon him; for he careth for you.*
  2. **James 4:8** *Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you...*
- C. What our response should entail is a number of things:
  1. Prayer; may we never doubt the power of our prayers.
    - 1) Sick, afflicted -- those who have suffered injury due to this horrible tragedy.

- 2) For the mental anguish of those traumatized by what has transpired.
- 3) For those who have lost loved ones, realizing the hurt and pain in their lives now that voices have been silenced.
- 4) For our government: **Rom. 13:4**...*for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.*
- 5) For our president and other leaders:  
**1 Tim. 2:1-3** *I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men;*  
**2:2** *For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.*  
**2:3** *For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior.*  
**1 Pet. 2:17** *Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.*
- 6) And perhaps surprising to you, to pray for those responsible for the acts of terrorism.
  1. No, not to condone the atrocities which they have committed; but to pray for their souls, and that they will repent and seek God's forgiveness before it is everlastingly too late for their souls.
  2. **Matt. 5:43-44** *Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy.*  
**5:44** *But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.*
2. Our response should also entail acts of compassion; but let's clarify something; acts of compassion to the glory of God.  
**Matt. 5:16** *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*  
**Col. 3:17** *And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.*
3. And certainly, we would hope that your response would manifest the love of Christ.
  - 1) Song: *Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.*
  - 2) When Jesus gave the parable of the Good Samaritan (**Luke 10:30-37**), He spoke of the man found injured; and the priest and Levite who passed by.
    1. But the Samaritan, when he saw this man who had been beaten by robbers he had compassion and saw to those man's needs.
    2. Such can only be possible from a loving and a caring heart.

#### IV. THE ROCK.

- A. I realize that we don't like to admit our frailties and weaknesses.
  1. We have been raised in a society that pretty much teaches us the philosophy: "I can take care of myself."
  2. But there are times, especially in tragedy and disaster, that we have no where else to look but up.
- C. When King Hezekiah had the Assyrian army knocking at his door, he did not trust in his own strength, for he knew that Judah alone was no match for these vicious, bloodthirsty Assyrians.

1. This king was very wise, and with the people trembling at the sight of this great army that surrounded them, he had some words of encouragement.
  2. **2 Chron. 32:7-8** *Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him:*  
**32:8** *With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God to help us, and to fight our battles. And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah king of Judah.*
- B. This nation was founded upon its belief in the sovereign power of God.
1. I find quote after quote of the forefathers of this country expressing humility and their belief that God is in control.
  2. If this nation is to survive, we must not rely upon our own power, but that of the Sovereign Ruler of this universe.
  3. As the apostle Paul expressed it so well:  
**Rom. 8:31** *If God be for us, who can be against us?*
- C. Our strength is in God, who is our rock and our fortress.
- Psa. 18:2-3** *The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.*  
**18:3** *I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies.*  
**Psa. 18:46** *The LORD liveth; and blessed be my rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted.* (familiar song we sing)  
**Psa. 31:3** *For thou art my rock and my fortress..*

## CONCLUSION:

1. In the face of this tragedy, we need to turn to God; with humble hearts seeking His grace and mercy.  
**Psa. 46:1** *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*
2. But I also would again remind you, that many souls have gone into eternity unprepared to meet their God.
3. It is so troubling to see the pictures of the disaster; to see the calousness of people even cheering it on; but as horrific as that is, my heart breaks realizing that sinners did not, and won't, get another opportunity to repent.
4. We take time and our own human lives for granted.
  - 1) We just automatically assume that we will wake to see another day.
  - 2) Those people who boarded those planes, and who went to work, had no idea that they were going to die that morning.
  - 3) This is a harsh reminder of the reality that indeed *we don't know what a day may bring forth.*
5. I want to ask you a question, and I want you to answer it in your thoughts honestly: If you had been on one of those planes, or in one of those buildings; and you had died Tuesday; can you say, at that time, you would have been ready to meet God?
6. *Today is the day of salvation, tomorrow may be too late.*