

9/11 - - Eighteen Years Later

This past week the networks, newspapers, radio shows, and social media recognized and remembered the events of September 11, 2001. At that time my family lived in Jonesboro Arkansas. It started like any other day with the sun shining, people going to work, and children already at school. There was a group of Christian men who came together the second Tuesday of each month in a nearby city, Paragould, AR. As usual I went and we had a good time talking about stuff, it was not until I reached the counter to pay my bill that I realized the radio was on. The first words that registered were "terrorism has hit the United States." Afterward, I heard about a jet slamming into the World Trade Towers. Everyone looked at each other with shock and disbelief. Although the word terrorism was heard I still thought of it being an accident. How could a plane accidentally hit one of the World Trade Towers? A second plane then flew into the second World Trade Tower, then news of a third plane hitting the Pentagon and more were killed. A fourth plane was reported to have crashed in a field in Pennsylvania. None of us knew exactly what was happening and who were responsible but we knew that day would live in the history books.

As a nation we were attacked by 23 hijackers in four planes. Over three thousand people died. After the initial shock, Americans asked questions and wanted justice. What lessons did we learn that day and afterward?

Religious zeal without knowledge is deadly. "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have zeal for God, but not according to knowledge" (Romans 10.1-2). Paul did not doubt the sincerity of his fellow Jews in their persecution of Christians. We do not know how many died in the

first century due to such zeal without knowledge. Later, supposed Christians lead crusades to "make Christians" of other religions. If one did not convert, they were killed. Likewise, on September 11th, 2001, men boarded planes on a suicide mission in order to please Allah in order to enter "heaven". They were zealous and ready to die for their beliefs. Jesus did not tell us to kill the infidels but to teach them the truth. "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16.15). Killing does not teach; it ends the opportunity to teach. The remedy for ignorance is the knowledge of the one and true God.

Emotions fade without commitment. People felt the need to express their sorrow and patriotism. Stores sold out of American flags overnight. Cars, houses, stores, and desks were draped with flags. People wore flag pens and placed O'Glory just about everywhere possible. God's name was heard again as prayers were offered up to Him. Church buildings were full that following Sunday.

Eighteen years later things have changed. Actually, one year later political infighting started and some suggested we deserved such treatment. It reminded me of Jeremiah 3.21, "A voice was heard on the desolate heights, weeping and supplications of the children of Israel. For they have perverted their way; they have forgotten the Lord their God". Like the nation of Israel in the Old Testament that occasionally showed signs of repentance but quickly forgot their God; America drifted back to neglecting Him. In June, 2002, a Federal District Court Judge ruled the Pledge of Allegiance unconstitutional due to the words "under God." Again, church buildings had plenty of room for visitors and Bibles were left on store shelves. Once again God is out of vogue.

Emotional change is often short lived. We get over or adapt to our fears and wounds. The sorrow from funerals are quickly forgotten. One time I was preparing for a funeral when I heard a knock on the door. The

deceased's grandson wanted to have a Bible Study so immediately after the service, I approached the young man to set up a time. He was already too busy to commit to such a study and would get back to me in the future. Such is the way of emotionalism.

People will change when they are convicted and converted, read John 16.8-11. Only when a person is taught the truth and sees the need to obey will there be a long-term change of life. Long term change means how we think which will then lead to a change in feelings.

Human suffering will not end until this world ends. The Humanist believes we can create utopia here. If we cast off religion and strive to be the best we can be, we will have a better world. The Premillennialist believes Jesus will come to set up an earthly kingdom and peace will reign over all creation. Others believe religion is designed to be social in nature and relieve the afflictions of the world.

They are all wrong. This world contains suffering for three reasons. First, because the wages of sin is death, (Romans 6.23). Even if we can feed all the people and establish peace between all conflicting religious doctrines, we still die. Second, because evil people commit murder, steal, lie, and do all kinds of violence against their fellow man. There will always be those that will harm others. They will have their reward in the lake of fire, (Revelation 21.8). Finally, because we live in a physical world. Things wear out, accidents happen, people are harmed and we die.

The only place we will find everlasting joy and peace is in heaven. "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21.4). -- Dennis Tucker