

## ***Madmen and Falling Towers 9-16-01***

As I listened to all the comments and opinions about the horrible day this week in which the World Trade Towers fell I was disturbed. I was in shock at the sight and angry with the perpetrators but my spirit was troubled about something else. We will not forget that day. Enough has been said that I do not need to describe it. You have seen the pictures. We grieve for the families of those who lost loved ones and we should all be praying for them, and for our nation. What has God allowed to take place and why? I can't answer that, but we can look to the Word of God for direction and comfort, for instruction in righteousness.

People asked Jesus about calamities in his day and He offered an answer I did not see on CNN or hear from the interviews I saw. I did not hear it from the lips of religious representatives that were interviewed. Jesus only speaks to please the Father, without concern for man's opinions. He just tells the truth, because He is Truth. We may not like it, but that doesn't make it less than true.

In the days of Jesus' ministry, a cruel Roman governor ruled over Judea. Most Roman appointed leaders tried to be sensitive to the Jewish faith so as to not stir up unnecessary trouble, but not Governor Pilate. If the people didn't like it, out came the swords and off went the heads. In fact, some of the men from the zealot territory of Galilee were murdered just so he could mingle their human blood with his sacrifices to Roman deities. He murdered them to be zealous in his religious worship. Just being Galilean was enough to condemn you without trial. To maintain order, Rome gave Pilate the right of the sword, meaning he could condemn to death anyone he wanted.

About the same time, in Jerusalem, a tower that was named Siloam collapsed and killed 18 people. Jesus addressed both situations. The first was human brutality operating in total disregard for the value of life. Most Jews hated Rome because of their restricted freedoms and the taxation. If we were to hear comments from Jewish leaders and respected folk of that time on Pilate's brutality, it would probably have sounded like most of the comments we heard this week. The comments would be on things like how to prevent it from happening again, how to get even, how to bring him to justice, how wicked he is, etc. None of this would be said in the earshot of Rome of course.

The tower falling was another matter altogether. It was what we would call today, "an act of God". Jesus addressed both catastrophes in the same passage.

Luke 13:1-9 (NIV) *1. Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.<sup>2</sup> Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?<sup>3</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.<sup>4</sup> Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them--do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?<sup>5</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."<sup>6</sup> Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any.<sup>7</sup> So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?'<sup>8</sup> "Sir," the man replied, 'leave it alone for one*

*more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it.<sup>9</sup> If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down."*

The people telling Jesus about the incident with the murdered Galileans seem to be implying that those men were evil. They believed that those men were Divinely picked out and brought to justice through the unwitting instrument of this madman, Pilate. Jesus changes the focus of their attention. *"Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?<sup>3</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."* He is telling them that they are no more or less wicked than those murdered men. They needed to examine their hearts and get right with God. If they did not, He warned, they too would die. They all knew they would die physically. I believe Jesus is speaking of their spiritual death.

It seems the majority of people today wouldn't even think along the same lines as those who told the news to Jesus. Our world is teaching a view that denies the Sovereignty of God. We no longer speak of God as Providence. Instead we just think random things happen and either we prepared and planned or we did not do enough. We have the attitude the prophet Zephaniah said would be prevalent in the day the walled cities and corner towers fell, "The Lord will do neither good or bad." (See Zephaniah 1:11-18) Today we would devise strategies on how to avoid being around Pilate, how to influence Rome to limit his power, or any other means available to us to change the possibilities of being a victim.

Jesus is speaking to us today also. It is not about what we can do to avoid catastrophe, it is an opportunity to examine our own hearts. If you desire to be safe, be right with God. Then you will walk with God through anything that comes your way.

The answer to terrorism is not a better spy network, or better security at airports, or more money for defense, all of which may be prudent natural steps. The answer is a repentant heart. The thing that disturbed me as greatly as the loss of life is the hardness of the hearts of America that we do not look to our own condition and ask why has the God of Providence allowed this. No, we don't even believe in a God that is Sovereign, we believe in our great technology. When Israel was in its last days, kings believed that better fortification and deeper cisterns for water storage and better alliances would save them. None of that helped at all. The one thing that would have saved them was to turn to God and quit calling evil good and good evil. (See 2 Chronicles 14 and following)

We have been watching the morals of our nation slide down an abyss that seems to have no bottom. We entertain our nation with violence just as Rome did in their coliseums. We take the lives of the unborn at our convenience and call it a right. Our leaders flaunt their sexual misconduct and we are told their private life is not our concern. Should we be surprised that God did not intervene and miraculously stop this evil plot? The miraculous intervention maybe that two of those planes never reached the White House. Do we even consider that and thank God for it?

In the passage we read, Jesus encourages us to consider that we may have been in that tower or one of those men chosen for death. I heard that Franklin Graham was bold enough to say that some of the people in those towers were ready to meet their Maker and some were not. God uses the wicked to punish the wicked. We would ask about the innocent.

The people who lost their lives in those planes and towers were not more or less guilty than you and I. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. I would be surprised if there were not earnest Christians in that catastrophe, just as there were earnest Jews that wanted to please God in Judea that died at the hands of Rome. Jesus was asking those that heard to examine their hearts. He was saying the only way to escape annihilation, as a nation, was repentance. They did not, and instead leaned on their might and power. In 70AD the words of Jesus came to pass.

The fig tree is a symbol of the nation of Israel. Jesus brought home His point with a parable. God had warned the nation through events and catastrophe. It hadn't brought forth the fruit of righteousness, right living. So He gave it another chance, showering it with goodness, with all it needed to flourish. That good care was His words, and His own life, and the teaching of His Apostle. Israel bore no fruit. In fact, it persecuted what they called 'the Way'. They were plucked up by the ungodly nation of Rome. Did God let Rome go unpunished? Absolutely not! Pompey was buried in ash a few years later and thousands died.

The answer to catastrophe is repentance, to turn to God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. That will mean a change in the way we think and act as we turn to God instead of the ways of man. That was the thing missing in the comments I heard. That is very disturbing to me because it is an indicator of the heart of America. When religious leaders say, "pray to your god, whoever, Christian, Jew or Muslim" they are expressing our current attitude that any god is ok and all gods are equal. Yes, we are a nation of religious freedom but I do not believe our founding Fathers ever considered all religions equal. All day I never heard the name of Jesus used once. He is forbidden from public expression because He is too clear cut and politically incorrect. When our President quoted Romans 8:39, he left off the end of the verse. "...the love of God" (that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.) What would have to happen to turn this nation back to Jesus Christ?

I have sketched lightly over the God of justice declared in Scripture. He restrains evil when people seek Him and change their wicked ways. He is a God of mercy and compassion also. He is the One who brings warning after warning. He has been patient. His heart sees the destruction sin is reeking behind closed doors. We don't see a body count on the number of homes destroyed by sin every year in our nation and around the world, but God does. His character of mercy causes Him to act in judgement to turn us and wake us up. He would allow evil to break through to turn us from a greater calamity of sin going on unchecked. God loves the world. Even though we are guilty He sees and hears us in our misery.

Turn to Gen 16:1-14 (NIV)<sup>1</sup> *Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar;<sup>2</sup> so she said to Abram, "The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said.<sup>3</sup> So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife.<sup>4</sup> He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress.<sup>5</sup> Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me."<sup>6</sup> "Your servant is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best." Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled*

*from her.<sup>7</sup> The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur.<sup>8</sup> And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" "I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered.<sup>9</sup> Then the angel of the LORD told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her."<sup>10</sup> The angel added, "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count."<sup>11</sup> The angel of the LORD also said to her: "You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard of your misery."<sup>12</sup> He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers."<sup>13</sup> She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me."<sup>14</sup> That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered.*

What a tangled web we have in this story. The only innocent party is God. I wonder if Pharaoh in Egypt gave them Hagar when Abram lied about his relation with Sarai? Sarai so desires to have children she gives her servant as a wife to her husband. This was not an uncommon practice at the time but it should have been for the people of God. It is a good example of the people of God borrowing the ways of the world to try to do God's work. Abram seems to think he will fulfill God's promise without faith. Hagar gets arrogant when she finds she is pregnant and starts acting superior to the woman who gave the opportunity. Sarai gets mad at both Abram and Hagar and talks Abram into letting her abuse Hagar. Hagar, in desperation, runs away.

Here is where we find two of the wonderful names of God in the Old Testament. When Hagar thinks her world has come to an end, Jesus meets her. When we think we have taken all we can, Jesus is there. He comes to us in our brokenness because that is when we are finally ready to listen. First He says something similar to that which He spoke to those men in Luke 13. Where are YOU and where are YOU going? He is changing the focus from those we would hate to where our heart is. He tells her to go back and submit, and that her son will be the father of a multitude. Then He told her to name her son Ishmael – meaning, 'God hears your misery'. She named the well "The Living One sees me." It was enough for Hagar to know God saw her and that He heard her heart, her misery. He is there with everyone suffering loss that will turn to Him. I have heard some wonderful testimonies to this truth. The contrast with those who have no hope is so sadly different.

If you have friends and loved ones who were affected by the tragedy this week, or you have suffered loss, Jesus comes to you in your brokenness and hears your misery. He sees your condition and hurts with you. His focus for you is not on the perpetrators, nor on some physical solution. He asks, "Where are you and where are you going?" Let us pray for everyone affected that we can look to our own hearts to see that we get right with God. Are we submitted to Him, walking in Him so that we can meet whatever calamity may come our way and know we will be ushered into His presence with joy unspeakable and full of glory? Let us pray for our nation that it may examine where it is going. We need the convicting light of the Holy Spirit to make us aware of the many ways we have turned out back on God. Look at the history of the Kings of Israel and see the wonderful hand of protection when the nation turned to God. Consider the sad facing of consequences when they turned to their evil heart's desires. Revival begins one heart at a time. Jesus turns us to the condition of our heart. Listen to Him.