

Sermon

Grace Street Fellowship, Dr. Jim Burgin, pastor

Sunday, February 18th, 2018

2 Chronicles 7:14

When Tragedy Happens

CAN WE TALK?

1. Different Approaches to Pastoring

- a. The man I still refer to as “my pastor” had an approach to pastoring which led him to coach the congregation about the Christian response to major crises happening throughout the world. There is a lot of good in that approach, and many people appreciated knowing how the Bible applied to contemporary topics, and they loved knowing what the pastor thought about a variety of issues.
- b. My path as a pastor has taken an alternative route.
 - i. Of course I have opinions about most things happening in the world, and I tend to believe that my position is informed by my faith more often than not.
 - ii. But my words are not the words which contain eternal life (John 6:68 / Isaiah 55:11); And the temptation is all too near to let the world’s news set the agenda, so that what you have here becomes little more than politics sprinkled over with scripture;
 - iii. As importantly, I believe that you don’t need your pastor to tell you how to respond or what to believe. You have soul freedom and soul competency in a way that you don’t need a priest (or a pastor) in between you and God. This is your holy privilege and your sacred responsibility. But today is different.

2. Responses to Tragedy Which Fall Short

After Las Vegas (2017 – 59 killed), Virginia Tech (2017 – 33 killed), Sutherland Springs (2017 – 27 killed), and now Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School (2018 – 17 killed), we have all been affected. Several common reactions:

- a. *Fear, Anger, & Worry* – normal human emotions, but we can’t let them dominate our response.
 - i. John the apostle reminds us that “There is no fear in love, because perfect love drives out fear (1 John 4:18);
 - ii. Paul tells us that we can be angry, but we aren’t to sin in that anger, nor to let the sun set on our wrath (Ephs. 4:26);
 - iii. Paul also taught us that worry is ineffective – “Don’t worry about anything. Instead pray about everything (Phil 4:6).

- b. **Apathy or Indifference** - the law of diminishing returns. Just hard to feel shocked when this, despite our best efforts, seems to be the “new normal” in our world.
- c. **Secular/Political** – Interesting responses even among survivors of tragedies – we want action, not “prayers and thoughts.” The modern, secular mind has no other place to go. You change things by building a better society, and the primary way they have of doing that is through politics.
 - i. Am I saying that Christians shouldn’t have political views? – absolutely not. I believe it is our duty to pray for our leaders and to vote.
 - ii. I am saying that you change the world through changed hearts. The Welsh Revival is a great example of that. (<http://www.revival-library.org/index.php/catalogues-menu/1904/the-story-of-the-welsh-revival>).
 - iii. Neither am I saying that we should isolate ourselves – pray in a corner, but not engage in the world. Christians are to be the salt & light of the world. One author reminds us that salt does no good when it stays in the shaker, and light that is hidden by a bush leaves the world dark.

WHICH SCRIPTURE SPEAKS TO OUR CONCERNS?

1. I’ve chosen a clear text where God tells his people the conditions he requires for him to 1) hear from heaven; 2) forgive our sin; 3) heal our land.
2. The context for this discussion is the dedication of the Temple by Solomon.
 - a. It was built under Solomon’s reign in the mid-10th century before Christ. The Temple is finished. They worship. The priests install the ark of the covenant into the Holy of Holies using long poles. The musicians began to play cymbals, harps, and lyres, accompanied by 120 priests sounding trumpets. The trumpeters and singers joined in unison as with one voice to give praise and thanks to the Lord. They sang “He is good; his love endures forever.
 - b. God’s presence fills the Temple, and the priests could not perform.
 - c. Solomon praises God – there is no God like you in heaven or on earth – you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way. Will God really dwell on earth with men? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built.
 - d. Lord, May your eyes be open day and night toward this temple, this place of which you said you would put your name.
 - e. When Solomon finished praying, fire comes down from heaven and consumes the burnt offerings and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. All Israel saw the fire, and the glory of the Lord, and they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshipped and gave thanks to the Lord, saying “He is good; his love endures forever.

- f. After 7 days, the people went home singing, joyful and glad in the heart, and Solomon was finally able to rest. Then the Lord appeared and spoke with him. (7: 11-12).

PLEASE NOTICE GOD'S HEART

1. He is present – Solomon had asked for God to see and to hear, but God says “my eyes will be open and my ears attentive,” but then he says something else – “my heart will always be there.”
2. He lends his Name – I have chosen and consecrated this temples, so that my Name may be there forever. The name of God, the name above all names. Name signifies the person – so God is moving into the place.
3. He turns over the keys to a blessed life – when there is tragedy in the land from drought, or locusts devouring the land or plagues, he tells us how the land can be restored. There are conditions for God to move to hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land.
4. This is a word to God's people – not for unbelievers.
5. So, what are we to do?

A GENERAL WORD

I want to begin by acknowledging that this could just be an admonition for believers to turn to Him – humble yourself, pray, seek his face, and turn from sin. I like the way it describes us coming to him before we turn from our sin. It is the sick who need a physician (Mt. 9:12) – and the Lord invites us to come just as we are – “Come, now, let us settle the matter. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow (Isaiah 1:18). When you come to him, you taste and see that the Lord is good, and you are then able to let go of your idols (Ps. 34:8).

A SPECIFIC WORD

Humble Ourselves

1. This means we cannot any longer be the center of our life.
2. The sin of pride is the original sin, and the root of all other sins.
 - a. Adam and Eve believed that if they sinned, they could be like God?
 - b. In Genesis 11, six generations after Noah, God's people wanted to build a tower which reached the heavens, so that “their name would be great.” They wanted this, so as to preserve their

unity, and they ended up speaking different languages, and being scattered to the end of the earth.

3. If you want to be ok with God, get off of His throne.

Pray

1. Talking and listening to God as our heavenly Father
2. Wanting His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven
3. This means we catch His heart beat, and our prayers become less about our needs, but about the expansion of the Kingdom of love and light.
4. This means that we don't just talk about prayer, but we actually pray.
5. This means that we deepen in our prayer life – not just a “Now I lay me down to sleep” kind of prayer, but honest, open communication with God.
6. Illustration by James Dobson, founder & former President of Focus on the Family¹

“I'm sure many of you have heard about the new movie entitled, *Darkest Hour*, nominated for both Best Picture and Best Actor at this year's Academy Awards. It depicts the account of Winston Churchill's improbable selection as the British Prime Minister at the beginning of World War II. This was a time when the world, including the American people, literally held their breath. The movie provides a deeply moving dramatization of this period in history, and, unfortunately, *Darkest Hour* failed to tell the most important part of the story.

Let's go back 78 years to an era when the fate of millions of people in dozens of countries hung in the balance.

1. In May 1940, the political and military situation in Europe was catastrophic.
2. Seven years earlier, Adolf Hitler had gained absolute power in Germany and immediately set about rearming his bellicose nation.
3. On September 1, 1939, he invaded Poland, destroying its inadequate army, and then turned his fury on the nations of Western Europe.
4. Hitler's "Lightning War" (blitzkrieg) rumbled almost unopposed throughout Norway, Denmark, Holland, Luxembourg, and Belgium.

The French army, which most military experts believed would hold its own against Germany, was humiliated in only 40 days. Nearly 500,000 British and French troops were trapped in a tiny coastal enclave called Dunkirk, where they faced certain annihilation. Hitler's armored divisions, commanded by Generals Heinz Guderian and Karl von Rundstedt, were only 15 miles away, while Hermann Goering's air force (the Luftwaffe), bombed and strafed the hapless armies below. Arguably, this was one of the most tragic moments in world history.

¹ James Dobson, “Family Talk:” “Dr. Dobson’s February 2018 Newsletter.”
<http://www.drjamesdobson.org/news/commentaries/archives/2018/february-newsletter-2018-em>

It is difficult to comprehend the panic that gripped peace loving nations at that time, especially Britain. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain resigned in disgrace in early May 1940 and was replaced by Winston Churchill. British leaders were staggered by the realization that this German madman, Adolf Hitler, and his henchmen had not only enslaved and dominated most of Europe in less than a year, but that Britain would be next. The Fuhrer was never closer to his ultimate victory than during those five days, May 24-28, 1940.

The loss of the British armies at Dunkirk would have left them naked in response to the anticipated Nazi invasion of England. Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax and other leaders began talking about attempting to bribe or cut a deal with Hitler. President Franklin Roosevelt even feared that British leaders would surrender the nation's prized fleet in return for concessions, and, indeed, that was a possibility.

Now we come to the misinformation in the movie, *Darkest Hour*. This portrayal completely ignored any reference to what I am about to write, but it is absolutely factual. This is the predicament in which British and French found themselves in late May of 1940. A half million of their soldiers huddled hopelessly at Dunkirk, waiting for inevitable death or imprisonment. It was at that dire moment that the churches in Britain called for a National Day of Prayer.

On that day, the British people gathered to pray. Church attendance skyrocketed, including a large gathering at Westminster Abbey, during which people pleaded with the Almighty to spare their husbands, sons and fathers at Dunkirk. No one could have anticipated what was to happen during the next three momentous days. Just 24 hours after the call for prayer, Adolf Hitler inexplicably ordered his armies to halt, to the surprise and dismay of even his own generals.

Hitler's armies remained stationary, not only on the 24th, 25th and 26th, but incredibly, until early June! To this day, no one knows exactly why. There is a more valid explanation. We believe the German armies were halted by the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who shut the mouths of the lions during Daniel's night of peril. Just as the Lord heard the prayers of the Israelites so long ago, I believe He was listening when hundreds of thousands of believers in the UK were praying for divine intervention."

7. A spiritual battle must be fought with spiritual weapons. R. A. Torrey: "When the devil sees a man or woman who really believes in prayer, who knows how to pray, and who really does pray, and, above all, when he sees a whole church on its face before God in prayer, he trembles as much as he ever did, for he knows that his day in that church or community is at an end. "²

Seek My Face

1. Jeremiah 29:13 says "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."
2. It is one thing to humble yourself and to pray, but it is quite another to seek his face.

² <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/1226755-prayer-that-is-born-of-meditation-upon-the-word-of>

3. In Exodus 33, Moses asks God to see His glory. Lord, Moses says, “If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways, so that I may continue to find favor with you. We can’t go out without your presence. Then he says, “Lord, show me your glory.” The Lord says, I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But, he said, you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live. Then he places Moses in the cleft of the rock and passes by – Moses sees God’s back.
4. Seeking God’s face means we want to be with Him. We will follow Him wherever he leads.
5. David says “I sought the Lord, and he answered me. He delivered me from all my fears (Psalm 34). Those who seek the Lord lack no good thing. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.
6. Where does He lead? Into the world where the hurting are, the lost, the afflicted.
7. I struggle with a view of Christianity that it feels like so many have – that it is about us. “I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses, and the voice I hear, falling on my ear, the Son of God discloses. And he walks with me, and he talks with me, and he tells me I am his own. And the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known.” The essence of our faith isn’t that God walks with us – which is true – but it is that we walk with him.
8. Illustration:

Turn From Their Wicked Ways – we will turn from our sin when we walk with the Lord.

CONCLUSION

1. Aaron Feis, an assistant football coach and security guard was fatally shot protecting students during Wednesday’s mass shooting. Geography teacher Scott Beigel reportedly shielded his students and paid with his life. Another victim, athletic director Chris Hixon was also killed while protecting students.
2. As a father and grandfather, I cannot imagine how grateful I would feel for someone who died defending my family.
3. I want to remind us that we too have been shielded from death by the sacrifice of God’s son.
4. I want to call us today to a 2 Chronicles 7 lifestyle, so that our community, and our nation can turn back to God.

INVITATION