

REMEMBERING 9/11

Eighteen years ago this morning about 3000 people perished as four passenger jets were deliberately crashed by Muslim terrorists. Two were flown into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in NY; one was flown into the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and the fourth crashed into a field near Shanksville, PA, after passengers confronted the terrorists who evidently planned to fly it into either the capitol building or the White House.

Many of us remember where we were and what we were doing when the news of this attack reached us. Beyond dispute, 9/11 changed this country. I expect that those of us who remember it would say it changed us. I hope it changed us for the better. Let's take a few minutes to talk about three of those changes and how they relate to us as disciples of Jesus.

First, 9/11 shook this nation out of its complacency, at least for a time. Large-scale terrorist attacks were things that happened in the middle-east. One previous attempt had been made to bomb the World Trade Center, but it failed miserably. Things like that just couldn't happen here . . . except it did! I think Christians in this country are still complacent. We read about the apostles & other early Christians enduring imprisonment, beatings, torture, and death. But that was almost 2000 years ago. Maybe it still happens in Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and North Korea, but it can't happen here . . . except it can! So then, what should we do? The answer is not to be fearful, but to be faithful! We must remember Who is in control – and that isn't us, nor is it civil government, though they might think they are.

But that takes us to a second thing that happened on 9/11, namely a dramatic increase in religiosity. You heard “God bless America!” and “In God we trust” almost constantly. Unfortunately that didn't last long, and never really resulted in genuine devotion to God. It was more like God was an emergency first-aid kit, so

as soon as the bleeding stopped, we could put Him back in the cabinet until next time we're in trouble. But now, what about us? Is our walk with God consistent, or do we follow our own path until we find ourselves in a tight spot and then ask Him to rescue us? We ought not to treat God like a spare tire – unnecessary until an emergency, and then to be used only temporarily before being put away again.

The third & final change that I noticed when 9/11 happened is that the nation came together in a way I had never seen before & have not seen since. Republicans & Democrats, liberals and conservatives, black & white, young & old, male & female – all of us were Americans. Unfortunately this, too, was only temporary. Before long, we were back to calling each other ugly names and accusing each other of believing or doing or wanting horrible things. While discussion and even disagreement can be healthy, unity produces strength. Jesus said a house divided against itself cannot stand. President Lincoln quoted that and applied it to this nation. We can still make that application today. But I am even more concerned about the unity of the body of Christ. Jesus Himself prayed for unity among those who believe in Him (John 17). That unity, He said, would be based on His word – not on what I think, what I want, or the rules I make up. Christian unity is disrupted today by two extremes. One insists on taking liberties that are not authorized in God's word – adding instrumental music to the singing is but one obvious example among many others. The other extreme binds human opinions as if they were divine legislation. Whether to use church treasury funds to help people who are not members of the body of Christ is but one of many examples of such legalism. I would urge us not to follow either extreme. Both are in error, and both disrupt unity. Don't think that one extreme is preferable to the other. No matter which side of the bridge you drive off, you will end up in the same creek!

As we think about 9/11, let's stop being complacent; let's make certain our walk with God is consistent. And let's pursue the unity for which Jesus prayed.