

Where Were You?

Few singular events have the power and impact to make us recall precisely where we were and what we were doing at the time we became aware of its occurrence. Even fewer events have the force to captivate an entire nation or world for that matter. For me, the infamy of the attack upon the citizens of the United States of America by Arab terrorists has the unenviable distinction of joining with the assassination of President John F Kennedy and the Columbine Massacre in answering the question, Where were you?

Next week marks the one year anniversary since the infamous events of September 11th. Millions of Americans will once again have their thoughts drawn to the horrors and heroism of that day and its ensuing aftermath as graphic and painful images of the multiple attacks are rebroadcast. For thousands of Americans who lost family and friends that day, this first anniversary will rekindle the grief over the senseless death of loved ones. All of us will most likely grieve on that day over the tragic loss of so many. In this time of grief and struggle, it is most important that we turn to God ... and each other ... for comfort, support and encouragement. Please remember to say a prayer for those who be grieving and reliving the suffering they experienced last September 11, 2001. My own experiences at ground zero remain fresh in my mind.

I recall first viewing the scenes of devastation from Ward Hill, an area of Staten Island that overlooks New York Harbor and downtown Manhattan. The image etched in my mind of the billowing smoke obscuring lower Manhattan as it drifted over New York Harbor shall always remain. My mind was incapable of processing what I was witnessing. I was not able to accept that both towers were disintegrated to piles of ash until a few survivors of the World Trade Center showed up and relayed their personal experiences.

I recall the images and emotions of working on the "bucket brigade" as we removed debris in a frantic search for survivors. I think I was the only minister at ground zero during the first week following the attack. I recall the exhilaration of being called to the top of a 60 foot mound of twisted metal, ash and debris along with a doctor as the prospect of rescuing a survivor was impending ... only to experience the gloom a few hours later of not being able to get him out without heavy equipment.

I remember the range of conflicting emotions that I experienced ... Shock and Calm ... Disbelief and Faith ... Anger and Compassion ... Peace and Anxiety ... Patriotism ... Faith ... Unity. As I reflect upon the events of that day and the past year, I thank God for His grace and healing of crushed and devastated hearts that crumbled with the towers. There are places hidden deep within our hearts that it seems can only be revealed through extreme pain. The deeper the pain ... the deeper our search for direction and purpose. The power and grace of God in cleansing us purifies the spirit and strengthens our character. Very few, if any, are willing to dig that deep under normal circumstances.

I am left with a renewed urgency to be a better ambassador for Christ. A deeper intensity of purpose to proclaim the saving grace of Jesus for the forgiveness of sin and the renewing of the heart, mind and spirit prevails. The need for the gospel has never been more pronounced and more urgent. Speaking to people about Jesus is the single most important thing I can do. Events like 911 remind me of how helpless we are apart from God.

Where Was God?

Probably the most common question asked me by people is, "Where was God on September 11, 2001?" A fair question, no doubt, and one that deserves a response.

God was with the rescue workers who ran into the buildings as most people were running out.

Psalms 18:29

¶ For by You I can run upon a troop; And by my God I can leap over a wall.

God was with the flight attendant who called her husband as her plane was being hijacked to tell him that she loved him.

Proverbs 31:10

¶ An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels.

God was with the hundreds of rescue workers who died trying to save others.

John 15:13

"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.

God was with the two men who carried a wheelchair-bound woman down 70 flights of stairs to safety.

Isaiah 40:31

Yet those who wait for the LORD Will gain new strength; They will mount up [with] wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary.

God was with the strangers in cars, picking up strangers stranded in the city and taking them home to their families.

3 John 1:5

Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially [when they are] strangers;

God was with the people who were begging to volunteer, to do anything to help.

Isaiah 1:17

Learn to do good; Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless, Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow.

God was with those who perished ... those who cried out to Him in their despair and anguish.

2 Chronicles 20:9

'Should evil come upon us, the sword, [or] judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we will stand before this house and before You (for Your name is in this house) and cry to You in our distress, and You will hear and deliver us.'

God was with the hundreds of thousands of people flooding blood banks thousands of miles away to help people they have never met.

2 Samuel 10:12

"Be strong, and let us show ourselves courageous for the sake of our people and for the cities of our God; and may the LORD do what is good in His sight."

God is with the people who are comforting someone even when they don't know what to say.

Isaiah 57:18

"I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will lead him and restore comfort to him and to his mourners,

God is with the people who watched and cried for the suffering ... They may remain anonymous in name, but never in their sacrifice.

Lamentations 3:48

My eyes run down with streams of water Because of the destruction of the daughter of my people.

God is in my neighborhood where I see flags waving from every home.

Romans 13:7

¶ Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax [is due;] custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

God was with the rescue workers who looked at 100 million tons of rubble,

yet saw hope in finding survivors.

Psalms 9:18

For the needy will not always be forgotten, Nor the hope of the afflicted perish forever.

Psalms 42:5

Why are you in despair, O my soul? And [why] have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him [For] the help of His presence.

God was with the heroes, most of whom will never be interviewed, nor on the news ... whose stories will only be told to their closet friends and family; Those courageous souls who saved someone's mother, father, sister, brother, daughter, son, husband, wife, grandmother, grandfather, aunt, uncle, cousin, colleague, acquaintance, teacher, mentor or friend with a single act of kindness, compassion and bravery.

Hebrews 12:1

¶ Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

God was NOT with the people that caused these inhumane events ...

Proverbs 6:16-18

There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil,

However, God was indeed there, where and when He was needed most.

Deuteronomy 31:6

"Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you."

If we as a nation would continue to love God and obey His commands as revealed through His Son Jesus, this nation would once again be blessed.

2 Chronicles 7:14

and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

If you did not know God on September 10th ... chances are you did not recognize Him on September 11th ... though He was there. God loves you and cares for you. He waiting with arms open ... will you seek Him now?

Isaiah 65:1

¶ "I permitted Myself to be sought by those who did not ask [for Me;] I permitted Myself to be found by those who did not seek Me. I said, 'Here am I, here am I,' To a nation which did not call on My name.

Closing Thoughts

If you do not know the ONE TRUE GOD as revealed in the bible as your Lord, I invite you to come visit our website and learn about God through the pages of Scripture. We have online bible study and discussion forums to assist you. You can interact with other Christians and learn the ways of the Lord, or contact us by email and we'll help you find a healthy, well-balanced local church.

I'd like to close with the speech given by President George W Bush at the National Cathedral on September 14, 2001.

"We are here in the middle hour of our grief. So many have suffered so great a loss, and today we express our nation's sorrow. We come before God to pray for the missing and the dead, and for those who love them.

On Tuesday, our country was attacked with deliberate and massive cruelty. We have seen the images of fire and ashes, and bent steel. Now come the names, the list of casualties we are only beginning to read. They are the names of men and women who began their day at a desk or in an airport, busy with life. They are the names of people who faced death, and in their last moments called home to say, be brave, and I love you.

They are the names of passengers who defied their murderers, and prevented the murder of others on the ground. They are the names of men and women who wore the uniform of the United States, and died at their posts. They are the names of rescuers, the ones whom death found running up the stairs and into the fires to help others. We will read all these names. We will linger over them, and learn their stories, and many Americans will weep.

To the children and parents and spouses and families and friends of the lost, we offer the deepest sympathy of the nation. And I assure you, you are not alone. Just three days removed from these events, Americans do not yet have the distance of history. But our responsibility to history is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil.

War has been waged against us by stealth and deceit and murder. This nation is peaceful, but fierce when stirred to anger. This conflict was begun on the timing and

terms of others. It will end in a way, and at an hour, of our choosing. Our purpose as a nation is firm. Yet our wounds as a people are recent and unhealed, and lead us to pray. In many of our prayers this week, there is a searching, and an honesty. At St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York on Tuesday, a woman said, "I prayed to God to give us a sign that He is still here." Others have prayed for the same, searching hospital to hospital, carrying pictures of those still missing.

God's signs are not always the ones we look for. We learn in tragedy that his purposes are not always our own. Yet the prayers of private suffering, whether in our homes or in this great cathedral, are known and heard, and understood.

There are prayers that help us last through the day, or endure the night. There are prayers of friends and strangers, that give us strength for the journey. And there are prayers that yield our will to a will greater than our own.

This world He created is of moral design. Grief and tragedy and hatred are only for a time. Goodness, remembrance, and love have no end. And the Lord of life holds all who die, and all who mourn. It is said that adversity introduces us to ourselves. This is true of a nation as well. In this trial, we have been reminded, and the world has seen, that our fellow Americans are generous and kind, resourceful and brave. We see our national character in rescuers working past exhaustion; in long lines of blood donors; in thousands of citizens who have asked to work and serve in any way possible.

And we have seen our national character in eloquent acts of sacrifice. Inside the World Trade Center, one man who could have saved himself stayed until the end at the side of his quadriplegic friend. A beloved priest died giving the last rites to a firefighter. Two office workers, finding a disabled stranger, carried her down sixty-eight floors to safety. A group of men drove through the night from Dallas to Washington to bring skin grafts for burn victims. In these acts, and in many others, Americans showed a deep commitment to one another, and an abiding love for our country. Today, we feel what Franklin Roosevelt called the warm courage of national unity. This is a unity of every faith, and every background.

It has joined together political parties in both houses of Congress. It is evident in services of prayer and candlelight vigils, and American flags, which are displayed in pride, and wave in defiance. Our unity is a kinship of grief, and a steadfast resolve to prevail against our enemies. And this unity against terror is now extending across the world. America is a nation full of good fortune, with so much to be grateful for. But we are not spared from suffering. In every generation, the world has produced enemies of human freedom. They have attacked America, because we are freedom's home and defender. And the commitment of our fathers is now the calling of our time.

On this national day of prayer and remembrance, we ask almighty God to watch over our nation, and grant us patience and resolve in all that is to come. We pray that He will comfort and console those who now walk in sorrow. We thank Him for each life we now must mourn, and the promise of a life to come.

As we have been assured, neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, can separate us from God's love. May He bless the souls of the departed. May He comfort our own. And may He always guide our country.

God bless America."

Pastor Michael
The Lord's Children Fellowship