

WE WILL NEVER FORGET

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Ten years ago today, we watched with shocked incredulity as plumes of smoke rose from the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, and then, horrified, we saw both towers collapse to the ground, taking thousands of lives with them.

The memory of traumatic experiences does not pass easily or quickly. It is saved, not to random access memory, but to permanent storage. As if stored also on a distant server, when we hit “delete” it disappears only temporarily, then reappears, without warning, as though it had never been removed in the first place. Since these painful memories are so resilient, how can we use them to build a better tomorrow?

Natural reactions include anger, fear, blame, withdrawal, retaliation, denial, vengefulness—none of which are recommended by Jesus; all of which add further negativity to the original trauma.

What are our alternatives? Can we control or redirect those feelings? Should we? By what power?

Can we find *other* memories attached to the same event? Perhaps there are some good memories. Did anything positive come of it? *“We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God—those whom he has called according to his plan” (Romans 8:28).* So, how can we capitalize on those things?

Never Forget

Some may say:

We will never forget our humiliation!

We will never forget the pain you inflicted!

We will never forget the losses we suffered!

The unspoken truth is this:

We will never forget, and, therefore, we cannot be healed.

Godly love does not keep a record of wrongs (1 Corinthians 13:5). “Never forget” is tantamount to “never forgive.”

Nations cannot afford to forget, but Christians cannot afford *not to*.

Jesus taught us to pray, *“Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us”* (Matthew 6:12). And He warned, *“If you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins”* (Matthew 6:15).

Some people will sin against you; it’s a tragic fact of life. Are you prepared for it? Are you prepared to forgive them? If not, why not? Have you forgotten how freely and fully Christ forgave you?

I wholeheartedly recommend “premeditated forgiveness.” The alternative, for a Christian, is unthinkable. The “get even” mentality is sin; it is demonic.

"Pastor, are you saying that America should not have engaged in the war on terror?" No. No civilized nation can permit acts of terror to persist unchecked, just as no city can turn a blind eye to criminal activity. And those who have sincerely engaged in such resistance are all national heroes.

American Idols

What I am saying is that we are all-too-susceptible to the idolatry of nationalism. We are tied too much to this world and not enough to the next. We are more inclined to sensuality than spirituality.

For a Christian, nationalism is idolatry. The Bible does not say, "God so loved the United States of America"; it says, "*God so loved the world*" (John 3:16).

"Honor the government," urged Peter (1 Peter 2:17). Not, worship the government.

Our cry can never be "America first!" It must always be "Jesus Christ first!" "The Kingdom of God first!"

This same error permeates so much pro-Israeli sentiment among the church today. Paul unequivocally said, "*Not all those who are descended from Israel are truly Israel*" (Romans 9:6). The political nation of Israel is not the Israel of the Scripture; the will of the Knesset is not the will of God. But we persistently want to turn God's invisible Kingdom into something visible and tangible—and that is the essence of idolatry.

Is the family tree of Abraham still chosen and blessed by God? Indeed. But the story only *begins* there; it does not end there.

*Jesus loves the little children
All the children of the world
Red and yellow, black and white
They are precious in His sight
Jesus loves the little children of the world*

Is that true? Or, does He love only the little *Christian* children of the world?

Is that true? Or, does He love only the *good* little children of the world—like Santa Claus?

Or, does God (to our consternation) make the sun shine on the bad *and* the good, and make the rain fall on the upright *and* the wicked?

Matthew 5

⁴⁴ *But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!* ⁴⁵ *In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike.*

America is great! It is not perfect, but it is great. America is not now, nor has it ever been, a Christian nation, though it was plainly founded on Christian principles (and these, I hope, may be preserved). There is nowhere else on earth I would rather live. I respect its heritage, I pray for its future, and I labor for its improvement.

But I am not confused about who my Savior is. God is not American; He is neither Democrat nor Republican; His native language is not English; His Kingdom is not a democracy; His economy is not capitalism. God's throne is high above all human governments and will outlast them all!

His ways are altogether right, and His law is love. His wisdom is supreme and His compassion is never-ending. He is the First and the Last. The Beginning and the End. The Alpha and Omega. There was no one before Him, and no one is coming after Him. From everlasting to everlasting, He, and He alone, is God. To Him be all the glory!

Who Is a Patriot?

What, then, does it mean to be a patriot?

By dictionary definition, a patriot is:

1. a person who loves, supports, and defends his or her country and its interests with devotion.
2. a person who regards himself or herself as a defender, especially of individual rights, against presumed interference by the federal government.
3. a person who vigorously supports his country and its way of life.

The word comes from the Greek *patriotēs* "fellow countryman," and from *patris* "native land"; it is related to the Greek *patēr* "father"; and compares with the Latin *pater* "father," and *patria* "fatherland." The suffix *-otes*, expresses a static condition: "of our father" or "of our fatherland."

Oddly, for many years and long ago, the word was synonymous with a "rascal, who worked to subvert perceived governmental intrusion."

The connection with fatherhood and fatherland is compelling. When Paul lifted up prayer for the church in Ephesus, he explained, "*This is the reason I kneel in the presence of the Father from whom all the family in heaven and on earth receives its name*" (Ephesians 3:14-15; GWT). The Jewish New Testament explains further that "its name" means "its character." The Church (all the family in heaven and on earth) derives its character from God the Father, for we are His children.

We are urged, therefore, by Jesus and by the apostles, to think as God thinks, to speak as God speaks, and to act as God acts. The Holy Spirit is presently active to conform us to Christ's likeness—our whole spirit, soul, and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

Paul wrote clearly: "*We are citizens of the state (commonwealth, homeland) which is in heaven*" (Philippians 3:20; AMP). Therefore, Heaven is our Fatherland, and that is the place whose interests we are to vigorously love, support, and defend, with devotion.

When you show more concern for people whose heavenly privileges are being forfeited (because they have not heard the Gospel or it has been misrepresented to them) than for those whose earthly rights are infringed, then I will know that your heart is truly in the right place. While we seek to secure social justice for all (and we should), let's not displace our work for spiritual salvation. "*For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal*" (2 Corinthians 4:18).

Time to Remember

If September 11 is a "time to remember," then let us remember this:

- That we are vulnerable and mortal.
The very things that make you good and make you strong, also make you weak and vulnerable.

- That we are dependent.
As long as America relies on herself, she will remain vulnerable and fragile. This is also true of you and me.
- That we are interdependent.
The day of “rugged individualism” is over. The wild west is now confined to books and films. We need each other.

Time to Prepare

It is also a time to prepare: our safeguards, security, defenses, resources, and community.

- Time to prepare for difficulty.
Are you ready for hard times? Why not? Do you imagine they will never come? Why would you think that?

Some may call it “faith.” I call it denial.

Jesus said, “*Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows*” (John 16:33). Are you sure, Jesus?

He also said, “*Everyone will hate you because you are my followers*” (Mark 13:13). Really?

Only a fool would ignore His words.

- Time to prepare to stand.
When we are prepared to lean, then we will be prepared to stand. (The Roman quaternion—the smallest regular unit of the Roman army—were a guard unit of four, who were trained to guard each other’s backs.)
- Time to prepare to share.
To give. To receive. In times like these, you dare not stand alone.

Not of the World

Have you ever wondered if your uncomfortable sense of somehow being a misfit in this world... was actually a sense of *belonging somewhere else*?

What if you were actually made for another time, another place—another world?

What if your destiny is more than a car, a career, a home, a title, or a pension?

What if you were meant to achieve more than raise a family, write a book, be seen on television, or win an election?

Your real destiny...is to become all that God created you to be.

Your true inheritance...is to gain all that Christ has secured for you by His sacrificial death.

Your lasting identity...is to be Christ’s—to belong to Him, to become like Him.

Lessons for the Church

What, then, are the lessons for the church from the last ten years? I will suggest four.

1. There is a real enemy. He is not always who he seems to be. He may attack unexpectedly. He can be ruthless.
2. We can be wounded, but we can survive. We can recover. We can be healed.
3. But we will be different. Tragedy changes you. We must be willing to change.
4. We need each other in order to grow. Only then can we be fruitful. And only by bearing much fruit will we glorify God. That is where God's glory is displayed! In you!

The tragedy of 9-11-01 did not take God by surprise. The darkness of that day, and of these days which have followed, were known to Him long ago. Also known to Him, are the opportunities for glory in our midst right now. Hear the cry of Isaiah, still strong with hope after three thousand years:

Isaiah 60

¹ Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. ² For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you.

May it be so.