

Christian Reaction to Terror

Lessons from the Past

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Sermonette

I cannot say that we had a good week here in this country; but I hope, personally, you were safe and peaceful and able to really think about what has gone on from Tuesday onward. And not just Tuesday, but before that even—thinking about tying together America's recent past with American's most recent disaster.

As you know, the U.S. has suffered a terrible and savage attack at the hands of, most likely, Osama Bin Laden and a conspiracy of other terrorists (and maybe even nation states that backed them). Thousands are dead. Thousands are hurt. And many more thousands will be affected—have to suffer and grieve—because of lost loved ones, or injuries. A lot of people have not thought about the maiming that probably occurred, and many people will have to live with certain injuries for a long time. Of course, terror is aimed not at the body, necessarily, but at the mind. They want to inflict distress, terror, and fear; and, once that occurs, they have won a great victory.

The tragedy also has far-reaching social, economic, political, and military implication for this country—and for the whole world. We do not know what the days and months and years ahead will bring. It is going to be a time of trouble, and a time of constant surprise, and a time of weakening. I would imagine that something like this cannot bring a great deal of strength in the long run. There is a certain amount of unity that it may bring immediately. As Martin said yesterday, it is like two [siblings] fighting. When suddenly somebody from outside hurts one of them, then they band together and they turn and strike the enemy. But when that is done, their basic argument (the reason why they were in the fight in the first place) has not been solved.

I have heard many analysts say that life in America will never be the same, and that is true. It is true for air travel. Certainly it is going to affect what we do. It is going to take more of our time. It is going to cause inconvenience. And it is going to cause a certain amount of fear and trepidation and wonder about what could occur.

It could lead to heightened distrust in America, not just of Muslims, but of each other. Who knows if the guy that is sitting next to you on the plane (whether he looks Islamic or not) is carrying a bomb or some sort of weapon? Who knows? It is going to make us all look around a lot more frequently, and see who is around. All those sorts of things do not bode well for social cohesion in the future.

Other commentators have said that, once this occurred, our old squabbles and worries seemed inconsequential. But, you know if you have been listening closely to what is going on—some of those 'inconsequential' problems are already beginning to bubble back to the surface. "Politics as usual," we might say. So we are going to see some changes in the way Americans function.

But, in the end, I predict that nothing of spiritual consequence will change.

How should we as Christians—whose lives are more in the spirit than in the flesh (or, should be)—react to something like this? Let us begin in Psalm 83, to give us some sort of guidance. Mostly, I am looking here at Asaph's reaction to a similar sort of sneak conspiracy attack upon Judah. I just want to read some of this. And I do not want to say, either, that this attack that happened on Tuesday is a direct fulfillment of this particular psalm. But I do want to say that some of the things that are in it "fit," and we can gain instruction from it.

Psalm 83:1-4 Do not keep silent, O God! Do not hold Your peace, and do not be still, O God! For behold, Your enemies make a tumult; and those who hate You have lifted up their head. They have taken crafty counsel against Your people, and consulted together against Your sheltered ones. They have said, "Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more."

What he does in these four verses is set the scene. This is what has happened. Then, in verses 5 through 8, he tells you who is involved.

Psalm 83:5-8 For they have consulted together with one consent; they form a confederacy against You: The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites; Moab and the Hagrites; Gebal, Ammon, and Amalek; Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre. Assyria also has joined with them; they have helped the children of Lot. Selah

"Think about this." Reflect about who these enemies are. And, basically, they are the traditional enemies of Israel—that have all gotten together. Some of these people (who were involved in the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon) may, indeed, be descendants of some of these very people that attacked Judah at this time here. It is kind of interesting that people like the Palestinians, we believe, may be descended from the Philistines. It is very possible that they could be mixed up with many of the other types of people that are mentioned here—Moabites, Edomites, Gebalites, Ammonites, Amalekites. Those are the sort of people who tend to be at the forefront of the terrorist organizations that are working around the world.

In verses 9-15, we have Asaph's opening reaction to this happening. It is very interesting that it is very similar to the same thing that has been happening here in America.

Psalm 83:9-15 Deal with them as with Midian, as with Sisera, as with Jabin at the Brook Kishon, who perished at En Dor, who became as refuse on the earth. Make their nobles like Oreb and like Zeeb. Yes, all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna, who said, "Let us take for ourselves the pastures of God for a possession." O my God, make them like the whirling dust, like the chaff before the wind! As the fire burns the woods, and as the flame sets the mountains on fire, so pursue them with Your tempest, and frighten them with Your storm.

So he is saying, "God, take vengeance for us." Of course, in America we have been saying, "We're going to take vengeance for ourselves! We're going to hold the sword." Here, Asaph is a bit more righteous; and he asks God to do it for him. He knows that it says, "I am the Lord your

God. Vengeance is Mine. I will repay." But now notice, in the next few verses, how he turns this. It shows a much more righteous approach than we have been seeing on our televisions over the past few days.

Psalm 83:16 Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek Your name, O Lord.

What did he ask them to do? He says, "Shame them, so that they can become our brothers (not our enemies)."

Psalm 83:17 Let them be confounded and dismayed forever. Yes, let them be put to shame and perish.

Now he asks for their death. If they are not going to turn to God, maybe the best thing for them is to perish. Then he asks for another things go happen here.

Psalm 83:17-18 Yes, let them be put to shame and perish, that they [all men] may know that You, whose name alone is the LORD, are the Most High over all the earth.

What did he do? He turns this back into a witness for God—not to assuage our national desire for vengeance. He says, "If You are going to take vengeance, then let them be put to shame. If possible, let them return to You. But if they won't return to You, then let them perish—so that everyone (all men) will know that You are God, and that You are not going to take this sitting down—because there's been an attack on Your people. "When you attack the apple of God's eye, you attack God.

But there are other things that we have to consider here as well. Yes, Jesus does say to pray for our enemies—those who persecute you and spitefully use you. Asaph, here, seeks the best for the enemy if such a possible outcome may occur. Even though they were at the forefront of the attack, that they might be turned to God. How much of this have you heard since Tuesday? How much wondering, even? I have heard a little bit—wondering about the enemy and their mindset, and whether they could ever be changed from their fanaticism—but not much. There has not been very much in the forefront of their analysis.

Even the religious leaders that we have heard on the radio and television have almost as one condemned them to death. Billy Graham, yesterday, was talking about how this will backlash on them and that they are, in effect, going to feel the sword of America and the rest of the world, rather than saying that maybe there is a possibility that they could be converted. Probably the chances are very low, but it is something that righteous people should think about—rather than immediately wanting the blood of ones enemy.

Let us go to Lamentations, which is most likely written by Jeremiah. He is the traditional author of the book. And Lamentations is rightly (aptly) named. It is a lament over what had happened to Jerusalem. And here comes in another factor that we have to consider in all of this.

Lamentations 2:1-3 How the LORD has covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger! He cast down from heaven to the earth the beauty of Israel, and did not remember His footstool in the day of His anger. The LORD has swallowed up and

has not pitied all the dwelling places of Jacob. He has thrown down in His wrath the strongholds of the daughter of Judah. He has brought them down to the ground. He has profaned the kingdom and its princes. He has cut off in fierce anger every horn of Israel. He has drawn back His right hand from before the enemy.

That is, He had been holding them off with His right hand while He comforted His own people. And what this verse says is that He withdrew His hand from the enemy and let them come.

Lamentations 2:3 He has blazed against Jacob like a flaming fire devouring all around.

Lamentations 2:8 The LORD has purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion.

Is that not what happened? A wall came crashing down on Tuesday. We had thought that terrorism on the soil of America would not happen, that we were safe over here. People had been saying that we had better not think that way, because it could happen. But, up until now, we have been pretty sure that we could keep it at bay. This says "The wall of the daughter of Zion" has come down *at God's purpose!*

Lamentations 2:8-9 He has stretched out a line. He has not withdrawn His hand from destroying. Therefore He has caused the rampart and wall to lament. They languish together. Her gates have sunk into the ground. He has destroyed and broken her bars. [These are defensive things that he's talking about.] Her king and her princes are among the nations. The Law is no more, and her prophets find no vision from the LORD.

Lamentations 2:14-15 Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions. They have not uncovered your iniquity, to bring back your captives, but have envisioned for you false prophecies and delusions. All who pass by clap their hands at you.

Did you see the video of people in the streets, shouting and cheering and doing all those ululations that the ladies do over there? Passing out candy—almost like what God predicts when the two witnesses die. That is what it first reminded me of. "They gave gifts to one another."

Lamentations 2:15 They hiss and shake their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem: "Is this the city that is called 'The perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth?'"

Can you imagine that? Was not New York thought to be just 'the first city of the world,' basically? Is that not where they put the UN?

Lamentations 2:16-17 All your enemies have opened their mouth against you. They hiss and gnash their teeth. They say, "We have swallowed her up! Surely this is the day we have waited for. We have found it. We have seen it!" The LORD has done what He purposed. He has fulfilled His word, which He commanded in days of old. He has thrown down and has pitied, and He has caused an enemy to rejoice

over you. He has exalted the horn of your adversaries.

There have been a few—a very few—that have made it on to the national airwaves that have said that this has occurred *because of our sins*. Not because of *their* hatred, but because of *our* sins. Christian reaction to this sort of terrorism cannot be long focused on the enemy. It must immediately come back to see why, at home.

Over the past twenty-four hours Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson both rebuked America for our sins. They said that this attack was as a result of our allowing immorality to rise so high. We should not allow it at all! But they are right on the mark.

Lamentations 3 advises us to wait patiently on God—to take the punishment, and to know that He will eventually show mercy when He sees that our attitude is proper.

Lamentations 4:11-12 The LORD has fulfilled His fury. He has poured out His fierce anger. He kindled a fire in Zion, and it has devoured its foundations. The kings of the earth, and all inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy could enter the gates of Jerusalem—

If you had said something like this on Monday—about terrorist organizations being able to do such damage to the United States, on our own home soil, and to our very Pentagon (our very Department of Defense), they would not have believed that the enemy could have gotten this close.

Lamentations 4:13 Because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests, who shed in her midst the blood of the just.

It is interesting that God lays this directly on the ministry—the preachers of the land. We have already seen that in chapter two. That is where He laid it. The priests have seen false visions, and given false and deceptive sermons—letting everybody think that they are okay. And what it has resulted in is this: The blood of the just being shed in the streets. That is, "the just" are the righteous people. And who in this country has been slammed, insulted, and made to feel like dirt except those who are trying to follow the law of God? They may not be converted out there, but there is a whole bunch of people who are trying to get prayer back into schools, get the Ten Commandments posted in our government buildings and back in our schools—and they are reviled! The preachers, and ministers, and others across this land are not leading them to allow God back into our culture.

And they are being aided and abetted by the politicians across this land, who want to be in bed with every interest group that will bring them votes, and money, and power, and prestige. So the two of them together—the religious establishment and the political establishment—are walking hand in hand down what they see as a primrose path. But it is bringing this country to destruction. And God lays the sin right on their doorstep.

Chapter 5 of Lamentations is Jeremiah's prayer, at the end. It is his prayer of repentance.

Lamentations 5:15 The joy of our heart has ceased; our dance has turned into mourning.

There is no pleasure any more. They canceled the NASCAR race this week. They canceled NFL football. They canceled nearly a week of baseball. Those are how we, in this country, show our joy—our happiness. We love to do sporting events. We love to do things like go to dances and these kinds of get-togethers. This is what Jeremiah is saying. Because this is happening, we have no joy. This will quickly return back to a kind of normalcy; but right now, in the aftermath, this is how we feel.

Lamentations 5:16-18 The crown has fallen from our head. Woe to us, for we have sinned! [We've been laid low, because of our sins.] Because of this our heart is faint. Because of these things our eyes grow dim. Because of Mount Zion which is desolate [Mt. Zion is where the temple is—where people go to worship God. And Mt. Zion is desolate. There is no meeting between God and man.], with foxes walking about on it.

Foxes are very deceptive, tricky animals—little carnivorous beasts. And that is the image in the Bible that is used for tricky, sly, men (usually in government positions) that are trying to bring something down. Jesus called Herod "that old fox."

Lamentations 5:19-22 You, O LORD, remain forever; Your throne from generation to generation. Why do You forget us forever, and forsake us for so long a time? Turn us back to You, O LORD, and we will be restored; unless You have utterly rejected us, and are very angry with us!

He ends with a note of "I'm not sure this can be recovered." But Jeremiah does the right thing in saying to God, "We repent. Turn us back," because only God can grant repentance. It takes both an act of ours and an act of God for that to happen. So he asks that God would renew us and let us live, give us forgiveness, and let us show Him that we are better than what we have proven in the past.

Certainly, we can show our sympathy. We can give what help we can to the victims. But we should take this attack—as cowardly, as brutal, and as terrifying as it is—as a warning from God to take stock of our relationship with Him and to make the necessary changes that we need to make in ourselves. We can thank Him. Be profuse in thanking Him for sparing us this time. But we must make use of that mercy, as motivation to turn to Him with more devotion and worship than ever before.