

Some Things To Think About

If you're visiting with us for the first time, my name is Rob Willey, I'm the Senior Pastor, and I'm glad you're here. We all are. So welcome.

And if you're joining us via live stream, I also want to extend a warm welcome to you. I trust in the future you'll be able to join us in person.

And for those of you at our West Campus, it's good to be together. God bless you.

Having been away last weekend, I'm thankful for Pastor Garth who preached in my absence. It was LIFT weekend, our in-house *student* retreat, and God did a work. 200 students, 45 leaders, 5 decisions for Christ, a bunch of *re*-commitments, and a whole host of sanctification and encouragement. Praise the Lord.

➤ I originally intended to start Acts 2 this morning, but due to a growing list of things on my heart, I decided not to.

Plus, with baptism and Spring Break coming up, it would have separated the parts of the message by too many weeks.

So I want to share 4 things I've been thinking about recently, and commend them to you as well. For *your* thoughts, and *your* prayers. Your consideration.

So let's turn in our Bibles to Ps 94:3-7, and start with the heavy stuff first.

Some things to think about. 2 *heavy* ones, and then 2 good ones. The first is this . . .

• A somber reminder

That's the first thing I'd like to think about together. Referring to the Florida High School shooting a week or so ago. I hope that's not old news yet.

B/c it's a somber reminder that evil lurks and life is fleeting.

All last week the large flag across the interstate was flying at half-mast. And every time I looked out my office window, I saw it.

Serving to *remind* me of the carnage. *Remind* me of the tragedy. Every time I looked up

➤ And I'm pretty sure I'm in good company when I say I'm tired of it.

I'm *tired* of evil like that. *Tired* of such rampant wickedness. *Tired* of such dysfunction and loss of life.

In my weaker moments, it tests my trust in God's sovereignty. And leaves me feeling helpless. Even hopeless. At least *this* side of eternity.

And who doesn't feel a bit *calloused* these days? B/c of the frequency of such things.

Not great. And in the days following I found myself praying, "How long O Lord?" Just like the Psalmist in Psalm 94:3.

[3] O LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked exult [rejoice in triumph]? [4] They pour out their arrogant words; all the evildoers boast. [5] They crush your people, O LORD, and afflict your heritage [the way of life according to his word, that passes from one generation to the next]. [6] They kill the widow and the sojourner, and murder the fatherless; [7] and they say, "The LORD does not see; the God of Jacob does not perceive." How long O Lord? It's the cry of a tired heart.

And sometimes I add, "Come quickly, Lord. Maranatha. Just end it already."

➤ But he continues to tarry, doesn't he? And while he does, things like this are a somber reminder that this world is not our home. We're just passin' through.

A somber reminder that we live in a fallen world among fallen people. Where bad things *happen*.

A somber reminder that people need Jesus more than ever. Both the *perpetrators* of such crimes, *and* the victims. Including their families and friends.

We can legislate behavior 'til we're blue in the face. And we should. But apart from a heart change, hate will spread. People need Jesus.

Events like this are a somber reminder that evil lurks and life is fleeting.

➤ All of which means we need to **pray**. And fr afar, that may be the *only* thing u can do. But previous to last week, when was the last time you prayed that God would *suppress* evil among us? Of *any* sort?

When was the last time you prayed for courage on the part of our lawmakers? Or wisdom on school boards? Or safety for our kids?

When was the last time you prayed that parents would fulfill their responsibility to actually be *involved* in their kids' lives?

Loving them, and teaching them, and disciplining them. We need to pray.

And while we're at it, we need to **entrust** our souls to God. Christian. Believer. That's where the peace is. Entrusting your life to God above.

With the quiet confidence *that to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* (Phil 1:21)

The sure hope that to live, means more opportunity to *exalt* Jesus, and to die means being *with* Jesus. Even better.

Crucial to our peace, is entrusting our *lives* to that truth. *Before* tragedy strikes.

And crucial to others, is sharing the truth. We *have to share*. The good news of Jesus. Tragedies like this are a somber reminder that life is fleeting, and people need it. They *need* life. Capital L. They *need* truth. Capital T. They need *Jesus*.

And it's up to us to share him. To *share* the truth. *Share* the gospel. (**Summary**) 3 actions, in light of this somber reminder.

The 2nd thing to think about, is . . .

• A despicable flyer

This showed up on my driveway Valentines evening. Feb 14th. Maybe you got one too. It's a flyer that says, "Love Your Race" at the top, with a picture of a blonde-headed, white woman in the center, and the organization at the bottom. National Alliance.

I'd never heard of National Alliance, but I knew it couldn't be good with those words and that picture.

Plus, it was odd in that it was wrapped around one of those free community newspapers and placed inside a plastic bag. Clever.

And as I was trying to figure out who distributed the thing, I realized that the connection between the flyer & the newspaper was intentional. It wasn't just a means of delivery.

B/c that particular edition was extolling the virtue and value of diversity among us. A good thing. Front page. Only the article inside was *removed*.

A passive-aggressive way of saying, "Diversity among us is bad, and we don't even want you to read about it."

➤ So, at the risk of being soiled and feeling dirty, I went to their website.

And it didn't take long to realize that "The National Alliance is a white supremacist, neo-Nazi, anti-Semitic and white separatist political organization." (Wikipedia)

Promoted in this case, by a man who lives right here in Davenport. And that, is despicable. On all fronts. From the ideology, to the flyer, to the promotion. *They pour out their arrogant words; all the evildoers boast.* (Ps 94:4)

And we *must not* allow it in our community.

We must reject, in no uncertain terms, the ethno-centricism that thinks this country is the exclusive domain of white people . . .

And all other races either don't belong or don't measure up. It's sick, and wrong. And just as evil as a school shooting.

➤ We are *all* made in God's image. Every last one of us (Gen 1:26-27). Every last one of us bears the marks of God himself.

And every single one of us has been *formed* by God. In the womb. Ps 139 (v13). From the color of our eyes, to the color of our skin.

And God has marked out the boundaries of every single person's lineage. Acts 17 (26). IOW we are his workmanship in the *physical* sense, just as much as we are his workmanship in the spiritual sense. Every single one of us.

Which means that every single person on the face of this earth deserves the common decency, respect, and acceptance . . .

That goes along *with* that workmanship. *With* his image.

Just b/c people are different, doesn't mean they're bad.

Just b/c they're a minority, doesn't mean they're less-than.

Just b/c their heritage isn't European, doesn't mean they're disposable. Or don't belong among us. They do.

Red, brown, yellow, black, *and* white. Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, *and* Christian.

Does that mean everything someone believes in the religious sense is good and true and praiseworthy? No.

But to the extent *their* freedom of religion is infringed, *ours* is at risk.

And even worse, to the extent we judge someone by the color of their skin, we sin.

Race is not a reason for bigotry. And neither is anything else.

All of which makes this flyer, and *everything* for which it stands, a blight on our city.

And we must not allow it to spread. We must speak against it.

➤ So let me start by saying, "This is despicable. Completely and categorically."

And if you think anything otherwise, you need to repent. And start seeing people as the *souls* they are, instead of the *color* they are.

And if you're a minority among us, ethnically, religiously, or otherwise, I'm sorry about this. I hate that you have to see it. I hate that you have to hear it.

And I hate that you have to endure it.

We love you, our church loves you, and we're with you.

Something to think about, and stand against.

Alright. Those are the heavy things. And I trust you'll take them to heart.

On to the good ones. Starting with . . .

• A godly man

Referring of course, to Billy Graham. Who died this week at the age of 99.

A homecoming that no doubt is resulting in joy unspeakable for him. Can you imagine?

And not just him, but for God too. B/c **Ps 116:15** says – *Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.*

Saints, referring to *all* those who trust him by faith. All God's people are saints.

And he *loves* it when one of us comes home. It's *precious* to him.

But there's no getting around the fact that it's our loss.

When a godly man like Reverend Graham dies, God's gain is our loss.

➤ So I spent some time thinking about him the past few days, and especially the *legacy* he left. B/c he impacted *so many people* (**photo**). Listen to these numbers.

Over the course of his life, Billy Graham preached the gospel to 215 million people, in more than 185 countries and territories.

With 3.2 million responding to his invitation to *receive* Christ.

None of which includes the millions more he impacted through TV, video, film, and the internet.

And who *knows* how many through the 34 books he wrote, and Presidents he advised.

Hands down, he preached the gospel to more people in person, than anyone else in the history of the world.

And as of 2008, his estimated lifetime audience, *including* radio and television, was over 2.2 billion people (Obituary and Wikipedia). He impacted many.

➤ And I was one of them. 18 years ago.

When he gathered pastors and evangelists from all over the world, at *Amsterdam 2000* (**photo**). A time for encouragement and training. And I just happened to go.

I was working for a post-prison ministry at the time, and went as an exhibitor.

Which was quite a privilege, b/c 28,000 people *applied* to go, but only 10,287 were invited. And if you had any education or travel experience, you were told no.

Reverend Graham wanted the gospel to spread in places most couldn't reach, and to help those who were doing it on a wing and a prayer.

In fact, one man from the Philippines indentured himself for 2 years in order to borrow the money to go. And was overjoyed about it.

Which, as you can imagine, when the conference planners found out, they paid his way.

But as an exhibitor I was exempt from all that, and found myself in the most diverse gathering of people groups in the history of the world to that point. Literally.

211 countries were represented. Almost every country in existence at that time. And *far* more cultures. ****

So I pulled out my journal from that week, and re-lived some of the 36 messages in 9 days that I heard.

From people like Ravi Zacharias, Chuck Colson, J.I. Packer, Bill and Vonnette Bright, John Stott, and Anne Graham Lotz.

➤ But 2 things in particular, impacted me more than the rest.

The first, was the time in worship when they encouraged us to pray together in groups of 3 or 4. So I gathered with the person on my right and left, and we prayed. And I didn't understand a single word. B/c one of them was from an island off the cost of Madagascar, which is off the coast of Africa, and the other was from Ecuador. But we prayed anyway. And it impacted me greatly. B/c I don't care what language is spoken, when you're calling out to God from your heart, he's there.

➤ The 2nd thing that impacted me, actually changed the course of my life. Reflected in my **journal entry** on July 31, 2000.

After a long, but very good day at the conference, I wrote this:

"I wonder if I should get ordained or trained in preaching. I will pray about it."

And the rest is history. Here I stand. I was *one* of the many impacted. By the ministry of a godly man.

But *he's* with the Lord. And the mantle has been passed. To every single one of us.*****

So that just like those who went before *him*, we too would tell *the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD* (Ps 78:4).

We too would share the good news of Jesus with boldness.

This is *our* time. *Our* turn to be godly. *Our* turn to share.

Think about it, will you?

And then last, I want to tell you about . . .

• **A special group**

I told you 2 weeks ago that we joined the Great Commission Collective as a church, and that Becky and I were going to the SP's retreat.

We did, and I'm here to tell you that I'm fired up.

So much so I can hardly contain myself.

What a special group. Such sweet fellowship. Fervent times of prayer. Passionate worship.

Spirit-filled preaching.

One pastor wrote this afterwards: "[The] GCC meeting was so refreshing, so engaging, so obviously God led and God honored. Such a blessing." (Kenyatta Lewis)

It really couldn't have been any better.

➤ And I want you to know, this is about us. *I'm* not just a part of it, you are. Belonging together in mutual partnership as a *church*, with *other* churches.

So that, as **Habakkuk 2:14** says . . .

The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. That's the goal. That's what our Collective is about.

And we're a part of it. Together. Through our giving, our prayers, and our effort.

In addition to our ministry here, our *giving* enables us to spread the word elsewhere. By planting *other* churches. And *helping* other churches.

And our *prayers* ensure that it's of the Lord and Spirit-filled. Spirit-led.

And both our giving and our prayers, enable us to expend the *effort* it takes.

It's a special group and we're a part. Take a look at this **video** (Worshippers).*****

➤ I was talking to one of the pastors at the retreat, and sensing something different about the group, he asked me what I thought it was.

And the first word that came out of my mouth, was *godliness*. Becky/I both perceived it. A humble, hunger for the Lord. A notable surrender. A beautiful joy. Something we haven't felt in years. It made us feel like we've been to the mountain top.

So needless to say, I'm excited. We have no idea if God is going to bless it or not, but we sure are hopeful. We sure are prayerful. In fact, that's one of our **distinctives**.

Fervent Prayer. Along with *Passionate Worship, Bold Preaching, Purposeful Disciple-making, Courageous Evangelism, and Strategic Church Planting*.

➤ *I will build my church* Jesus said (Mt 16:18). It's a promise.

And I've repented recently of my doubt in that respect. Putting so many caveats on it that it's stripped of certainty. God said it, I believe it, and that settles it. (**Summary**) And I'm going to keep giving my life to see it happen. To plant, strengthen, and multiply Great Commission churches . . .

So that *the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD* someday. God's doing it, and we're a part. Something I hope we never stop thinking about.

Pray (servers prepare) – Father, thank you for using us to accomplish your will. Thank you for blessing us with a part to play. Help us to fight for what's right and oppose what's wrong. And spur us on to greater love and good deeds like those who have gone before.
