

Remember

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This past weekend has been a time of remembrance. Saturday marked the twentieth anniversary of the attacks of September 11, 2001. Those of a certain age remember clearly the shocking events of that day. Coping with the events of 9/11 is difficult; yet, remembering is healthy.

By remembering, three important exercises are accomplished. 1. We honor the victims. 2. We reflect on how the events affected us. 3. We consider a path forward with a greater sense of purpose. As we reflect on the events of that September morning, note some lessons to remember.

Remember...

1. Evil is in the world. Our lives are rather quaint. We live in nice neighborhoods. We work each day. We are busy raising families. We enjoy eating at restaurants. We look forward to long weekends and taking vacations. In a society like ours, we can easily forget that evil is in the world.

In the quaintness of our society, evil hijacked airplanes and killed nearly 3,000 people. Some described the intrusion as a loss of innocence. By 10:30 that morning, evil was not a theological abstraction. Evil was a clear, present, deadly power in our world.

The Bible reminds us of the danger of evil in the world. John wrote that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one (1 John 5:18). In a more detailed fashion, Paul wrote, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12).

The active presence of evil in the world is why Paul urged saints to protect themselves with the armor of God (Eph. 6:11-18). We must not allow the comfort of our culture to blind us from discerning evil in the world. As Peter wrote, we must be alert to this danger: "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith... (1 Pet. 5:8-9).

2. The world needs a Savior. What can be done in response to evil? God provides us with a Savior. God offers salvation from evil in a surprising fashion. He offers to save us through faith in the cross of Jesus.

God allowed evil to put our Savior on a cross; yet, through His death evil was defeated. Jesus understood how His death would destroy the evil one. In His farewell discourse, He described His leaving/death as a judgment against the ruler of the world (John 16:11).

In the aftermath of 9/11, some began searching for a savior. Our search must begin and end with Jesus. We certainly cannot save ourselves. Twenty years have passed and the world is still trying to solve the problem of evil in the world. Governments can legislate against evil. Governments can punish evil. Governments cannot save us from evil. Only Jesus can provide salvation.

The cross of Jesus was the fiercest battle between good and evil, God and Satan. God was victorious over Satan by raising Jesus from death. The cross helps us to discern tragic events. The intrusion of evil in the world led to the death of Jesus; yet, God raised Him to life. Likewise, if the intrusion of evil in our world brings our lives to an end, we have the hope of eternal life. The hope of those who die in the Lord is the comfort of the living.

3. We need to love one another. The reactions of the survivors of 9/11 were inspiring. There are many harrowing accounts of people helping each other. Rick Rescorla was part of the security detail in the south tower. He helped evacuate people down the narrow stairwells. He used a bullhorn to give instructions and sing. His singing helped calm people. After everyone he was responsible for was safely out, he went back up the stairs to help anyone who may have been left behind. Rick died in the collapse.

Acts of service happened far away from New York City. The town of Grandter, Newfoundland took in “plane people” whose flights had been diverted on 9/11. Thirty-eight planes landed with nearly 7,000 passengers. The small town did not have hotel/restaurant capacity to take in all these people. Citizens welcomed complete strangers into their homes until flight travel resumed. This was true hospitality.

Reflecting on what the town did, mayor of Grandter, Claude Elliot said, “Our world today is in turmoil...All we see on television and in the news is nothing but bad stuff. This is a good story about humanity and how we can help each other. We need to show [that] love and compassion can outdo hatred every time. I’ll never get tired of telling it as many times as I can tell it.”

Our Savior died to be an example of self-giving love for us. Love compels us to live in harmony with Him. Likewise, His love shows us how we can live in harmony with one another. Love is a more excellent model to live by than hate (1 Cor. 12:31). We are all living on the earth together. We have to find a way to get along. We must put the well-being of others before our own (Phil. 2:4).

Who would have imagined that twenty years after 9/11 we would be experiencing a global pandemic? Today, we need to relearn the lessons of love. People are frustrated and angry with one another. Division abounds in communities, families, and churches. Relationships that were once vibrant have been harmed. The pleas of Jesus for us to be one, to love our neighbors as ourselves, and to treat others how we would want to be treated are urgent.

Conclusion

The events of 9/11 changed the world as we knew it. Families lost loved ones. Our nation went to war with two countries. New security measures were implemented. In the history of our nation, that day was a moment of transformation.

As horrific as the events were, they brought clarity to many people. Priorities refocused. People came together. Even members of the United States Congress gathered on the steps of the Capitol and sang "God Bless America." Sadly, much of the goodwill expressed that fall was short-lived. We adjusted to a new normal. We went back to our quaint lives. And, we forgot.

Like so many things that happen to us in life, we tend to forget. We may pause and reflect for a moment, but life goes on. God wants us to remember that the world is a dangerous, evil place. God wants us to remember that He sent us a Savior. God wants us to remember to love one another. We must never forget.