

Seven Years On

by Coty Pinckney 9/11/08

This week marks seven years. Seven years since the towers fell. Seven years since terrorists hijacked four planes, aiming to kill tens of thousands of innocent people. Seven years since they succeeded in killing almost 3,000. Seven years.

In God's providence, the Bible reading plan I developed eight years ago schedules for the 11th reading in September Jeremiah 39 and 52 – the accounts of the terrible destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BC. In the following days I read the Psalms that look back on that event – Psalms 74, 79, and 94 – as well as the book of Lamentations. On September 11, 2001, I read of Jerusalem's fall without much feeling in the morning; that evening, knowing of the attack and the destruction of the towers, I reread the account, and continued to read these psalms and Lamentations – and wept.

Today, much of our visceral reaction to that attack has faded from memory. Newspapers this year used more ink talking about lipstick on pit bulls and pigs than they devoted to remembering 9/11.

But we must remember. We must remember.

What must we remember?

First: *The crime is horrendous, and justice demands that it be recompensed.* As the psalmists say:

They crush your people, O LORD, and afflict your heritage. They kill the widow and the sojourner, and murder the fatherless; and they say, "The LORD does not see; the God of Jacob does not perceive." (Psalm 94:5-7)

How long, O God, is the foe to scoff? Is the enemy to revile your name forever? Why do you hold back your hand, your right hand? Take it from the fold of your garment and destroy them! . . . Arise, O God, defend your cause; remember how the foolish scoff at you all the day! Do not forget the clamor of your foes, the uproar of those who rise against you, which goes up continually! (Psalm 74:10-11, 22-23)

O LORD, God of vengeance, O God of vengeance, shine forth! Rise up, O judge of the earth; repay to the proud what they deserve! (Psalm 94:1-2)

This is not vindictiveness. This is a righteous call for justice. Those who planned and carried out the brutality of the destruction of Jerusalem, those who scoffed at God as they did it, deserve to experience His wrath. Those who planned and carried out the brutality of the destruction of the World Trade Center likewise scoffed at God and likewise deserve His wrath. God is just. We are right to call upon Him to exercise that justice.

Second: *Our sins are horrendous, and justice demands that they be recompensed.* Again, consider what these same psalmists say:

Do not remember against us our former iniquities; let your compassion come speedily to meet us, for we are brought very low. Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name; deliver us, and atone for our sins, for your name's sake! (Psalm 79:8-9)

The psalmist is not saying that the sins of the Jews are morally equivalent to the sins of the invaders. He's not

comparing sin to sin. Instead, he is confessing that the people sinned – and they did, horribly, turning their backs on God and His prophets, mocking His messengers who called them to repentance. The psalmist knows that the Jews too deserve God's wrath, that God has brought this destruction upon them, and that unless He atones for their sins, they have no hope. Furthermore, he knows that the only basis for that atonement will be God's glory, His name's sake.

We too have sinned. We too must acknowledge that we deserve His wrath. We too have hope only on the basis of God providing atonement through the blood of His Son, our Savior, Jesus.

Third: God is sovereign, and He alone is our hope.

Yet God my King is from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth. You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the sea monsters on the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan; you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness. You split open springs and brooks; you dried up ever-flowing streams. Yours is the day, yours also the night; you have established the heavenly lights and the sun. You have fixed all the boundaries of the earth; you have made summer and winter. (Psalm 74:12-17)

God has always controlled all forces. All times and all powers are in His hands. Nothing is hidden in the night from His sight; He limits the waters, the night, the seasons – and He similarly limits evil men. Perpetrators of evil are responsible and deserve wrath; yet God is fully able to stop any sinful act by any man.

Acknowledging God as sovereign provides neither an excuse for sin ("God didn't stop me, so it's really His fault!") nor a rationale for being lackadaisical ("Since God is sovereign, we need not capture the terrorists or improve airport security.") Instead, God's sovereign goodness provides us reason for hope in the midst of disaster and carnage. He is just. He is good. He is gracious and merciful. He is completing His plan of redemption. His Son will rule for all eternity; He will right all wrongs. His blood covers the sins of all who come to Him, weary and heavy laden, of all who come to Him with broken and contrite hearts.

So on this seventh anniversary, let us remember:

- There is terrible evil in this world, but God will judge it.
- There is terrible sin inside each of us, but God's Son will cover it, if we have faith in Him.
- There is tremendous mercy, grace, and sovereign power in our Lord and God, and He will shower all that on His people. We will respond by praising Him forever: "We your people, the sheep of your pasture, will give thanks to you forever; from generation to generation we will recount your praise" (Psalm 79:13).