

A Time Of Need • Hebrews 4:16

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Good Morning

1. It *is* a good morning my brothers and sisters in Christ, because the dawning of another day in our nation and world means one more opportunity God has given us to seek Him and to do what *must* be done.
2. What *must be done* is what I am compelled to speak about this morning.

B. Hebrews 4:16

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

1. We can come boldly to the throne of God today because that throne, as it says, is a throne of *grace*,
 - a. unmerited, undeserved favor and blessing.
 - b. if it was a throne of merciless justice or unhesitating wrath and condemnation,
 - c. we could *not* come boldly; we could not come at all!
2. But the throne God bids us come to this morning is one established on grace and it is grace that flows from it to those who approach it boldly —
 - a. not a boldness based on self-confidence or arrogant pride,
 - b. but a boldness which looks in complete reliance on the sufficiency and forgiveness of Jesus Christ.
3. Our nation has been struck a disastrous blow and we are reeling from its consequences.
4. We *will* be for quite some time as the recovery teams continue their back-breaking labor and as officials revise and develop new policies for national security.
5. If ever there was a time of need in our nation, this is it!
6. The events of this week will go down in our history as among the most significant.
7. Our nation is in desperate need of grace and mercy.
8. It is our duty, as the People of God, to come to His throne and find them.

II. OUR RESPONSE

A. Three Responses

1. This last Wednesday evening as we gathered for our mid-week study, we took some time to consider how we ought to respond to the events of last Tuesday.
2. We realized that there are three different responses that are proper;
 - 1) Our response as *individual* followers of Christ
 - 2) Our response as a Nation
 - 3) The response of the Church – as individual believers unite to speak for God in the midst of this Time of Need.
3. I want to cover that ground again this morning and then to expand on the response of the Church of Jesus Christ
4. There is so much talk and so many voices giving us counsel and direction at this time, we need to consider God's counsel.

B. The Response Of Individual Believers

1. First - What's the right response as Individuals who are followers of Jesus?
2. We need to make a *distinction in our citizenships*.
 - a. as Christians, we carry a dual citizenship;
 - 1) we are first and foremost citizens of the Kingdom of God,
 - 2) *then* we are citizens of the USA.
 - b. in these duals roles, we must distinguish between what is *required* of us.
3. Listening to the news this week, what we hear a lot of is outrage and anger.
 - a. as President Bush said in his speech – there is “a quiet, unyielding anger.”
 - b. we have been told the government will investigate and find out *who* is responsible for these attacks, and then pursue retaliation.
4. While most of the world expresses it's grief and sense of anger at what happened here in America, there are reports of certain groups who rejoice and delight in our pain and suffering.
 - a. they consider the terrorists to be heroes!
 - b. this only serves to inflame our sense of outrage and the desire to exact revenge.
5. It's imperative in the midst of all this that we do not allow ourselves to give in to the *temptation to hate*.
 - a. that would be playing right in to the devil's hands.

- b. Jesus made it clear that we are to love our enemies and seek to do good to them.
6. I realize this is an *incredibly difficult* thing to hear right now, but it is nevertheless true and was lived out by Christ Himself when hanging on the cross He said, “Father forgive them; they do not know what they are doing.”
7. Friends, it was *hatred*; blind, unreasoning hatred that flew those planes into the WTC.
 - a. the *physical* enemies of our nation were driven by a religion of hate but our *spiritual* enemy would love nothing more than to *splash* that hatred onto *us* and move us to *respond* in hate.
 - b. we must not yield to these darker impulses of our flesh.
 - c. if we do, then the damage of Tuesday *continues*.
8. You’ve seen the images of the towers falling again and again.
 - a. as the debris fell, it collided with the surrounding buildings and made them unstable; some of them have since fallen.
 - b. this is called “collateral damage.”
9. While the recovery and construction workers deal with the aftermath in NYC, it’s important that the followers of Christ realize there’s *spiritual* collateral damage from all this.
 - a. it comes in the form of *hatred*.
 - b. we must flee from it and make sure it does not consume us.
10. While it’s the duty of our elected officials in government to pursue a course of justice, it’s NOT the duty of Christians to seek for or exact revenge.
 - a. God’s word makes this abundantly clear in Hebrew 10:30 where he says, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.”
 - b. God often *uses* governments as the agent of His righteous vengeance,
 - c. but Christians must leave this to those ordained and authorized by God for such.
11. Our calling, our task, as the people of God is to be agents of reconciliation & forgiveness.
12. The importance and priority of forgiveness was taught again and again by the Lord.
 - a. in fact, He said the *absence* of forgiveness and the presence of a bitter and resentful spirit that desires to exact revenge was evidence of a bad heart that wasn’t born again.
 - b. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount that hatred, harbored and nurtured in the heart is equivalent to murder.

13. We must be ultra careful that we repent of any hatred for the poor deluded people who have been taken captive by satan to produce a harvest of hatred in their acts of terror.
14. If we do not repent of hatred toward the terrorists, then that hatred can easily blossom in to a larger hatred called *racism*, where we grow to hate *all* the people of a specific ethnic or national background.
 - a. incidents of this are already taking place around our nation.
 - b. Americans of Middle Eastern background are being targeted with violence.
 - c. they are concerned that they will be looked at with disgust.
 - d. Muslims living here are fearful.
 - e. make no mistake – Islam is a religion of hate – but most Muslims are themselves *victims* of the terrible deception *called* Islam.
 - f. one of the most powerful things individual Christian can do right now is to *love* them.
 - g. love, in the face of such blatant demonstrations of hate, cannot be gainsaid!
 - h. we must live out the example of Christ who loved those who were mocking and torturing Him.
 - i. it is love, not hate, that will turn the hearts of men and women to God.
15. Hatred is not part of the lifestyle of the followers of Christ.
 - a. on the contrary, we are a people of love and must seek to look at those who would do us harm through the eyes of God –
 - b. who loves them as much as He loves us and longs for them to come to faith in His Son.
 - c. rather than desire a slow and painful death for them, we ought to pray for their salvation!
16. This is how we ought to respond as *individual believers* in Christ.

C. A National Response

1. Second - As a nation, and in our role as citizens of the USA, we respond a bit differently.
2. We must not confuse the moral and spiritual obligation of individual Christians with the duty of our nation's government.
 - a. people often make this mistake.
 - b. they see the Bible's command that when we are struck on one cheek we are to turn the other also,
 - c. and they apply this to the *role of government* – saying it is wrong for us to retaliate for acts of aggression

- d. many people oppose capital punishment on the grounds the Bible says “Thou shall not murder.”
 - e. what they fail to realize is that the same Bible which prohibits murder, commits to civil government the solemn duty of *executing murderers!*
 - f. the point is, capital punishment, when applied in a Biblically consistent and just manner isn’t murder!
 - g. & the command to offer the other cheek is meant to govern *interpersonal relationships*; it was never given as a principle for the rule of civil governments.
3. On the contrary, our elected officials have the God-ordained task of protecting the people and interests of the country from both foreign and domestic threats.
 4. In Romans 13 we read that God gives to government the *power of the sword* to keep the peace.
 - a. when that tranquility is threatened or violated, it is the solemn duty of government to take *whatever measures* are necessary to deal with it in a just manner.
 - b. Christian philosophers and theologians for generations have done a more than sufficient job of proving how the Bible reveals wars of defense are *morally justifiable*.
 - c. indeed – God *judges* nations on how they treat the innocent and defenseless among them.
 - d. this last Tuesday– the innocent and defenseless were *purposely targeted*.
 - e. it is the moral and God-ordained *duty* of our government to ensure *justice is carried out*.
 5. But at the same time – the government must ensure that it is JUSTICE that is being carried out, not revenge for revenge’s sake and to satisfy the blood-lust of a voting populace.
 6. Our role as citizens is to support our officials with prayer and to remind them to move forward prudently, using the pursuit of justice as the guiding principle in their investigations and in any retaliation that follows.
 7. We ought to renew our commitment to the virtue of *loyalty*, not mere chauvinism.
 - a. not an unbalanced and unqualified loyalty that says, “My country – Right or Wrong!”
 - b. our loyalty is to the godly principles of the Republic,
 - c. designed and built by the Founding Fathers on God’s Word.

- d. this is what made America Great
 - e. but here's where the tone of this message makes a turn –
 - f. we have *departed* from our historical roots and the intentions of the Founding Fathers that this be a nation governed by God.
8. This then, leads me to the third response . . .

D. Our Response As The Church of Jesus Christ

1. As individual believers band together in the Body of Christ, representing Him and bearing His name in this Time of Need, what service can we provide to our nation?
2. The answer is found in our primary text this morning – Hebrew 4:16

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

3. Let us come boldly, to obtain mercy and find grace to help.
4. Friends, we need mercy!
 - a. mercy means to *not* get what is deserved. What do we deserve?
 - b. as we take a good, honest look at our nation at the beginning of the 21st Century, what's a realistic expectation?
 - c. I can think of only one thing – JUDGMENT!
5. Friends, we have *forgotten* God!
6. What has made America great is not our technological genius or matchless creativity.
 - a. it's not our productive capacity - it's not the power of our industries
 - b. it's not the strength of the dollar or our economy
 - c. nor is it the energy of the American people
 - d. it's certainly not our innate goodness,
7. What has made America great is God!
 - a. the founders of our Republic sought to forge a covenant with God
 - b. it was their genius to seek to implement in the governing documents of our land the full counsel of the Word of God.
 - c. this is why there's such constant appeal to the Creator and His Truth in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.
 - d. the basic principle of liberty and personal freedom was penned with this conviction, voiced again and again by the Founders, that people will be governed either by the Bible or the bayonet.
 - e. Americans, they believed, needed little external force because they were inwardly moved by the power & love of God.
 - f. they needed no earthly king because they served King Jesus!

8. This conviction moved them to frame a form of government that has led to the greatest standard of living and the longest running form of government in the history of the entire world.
9. America's greatness is due to God's favor – for He took the founders at their word and blessed the work of their hands and lives.
10. Alex De Tocqueville, a Frenchman, visited the US in the 19th century, seeking to discover the secret of our success.
 - a. his conclusion, after many months of research and investigation was this –
 - b. “America,” he said, “is great because she is good. If she ever ceases to be good, she will cease to be great.”
 - c. de Tocqueville toured America extensively.
 - 1) he visited factories, farms, and capitals
 - 2) he sat in our courts and legislatures and watched the American system at work
 - d. he said that in none of these places did he discover the real key to American greatness.
 - e. not until he visited our churches did he discover it.
 - f. it was people's belief in God and the fact that they lived their lives in the light of His truth and love that made America different and made her great.
11. But that is no longer true. Our nation has turned from God.
 - a. we've removed the Bible and prayer from our schools
 - b. we teach our children that they owe their existence, not to a divine creator, but to cosmic chance.
 - c. God has been pushed from the public square
 - 1) nativity scenes are banned from parks and public buildings
 - 2) the 10 Commandments, which is the very heart and soul of Western civilizations ideas of law, cannot be displayed in our halls of justice.
 - 3) the name of God cannot be invoked at graduation ceremonies or sporting events
 - 4) businesses have developed policies that promote the teaching of tolerance of any and every perverted lifestyle, but Christians are not allowed to bring a Bible to work or pray on the job with other believers.
 - d. as God & righteousness are pushed out, evil and decadence flood in to fill the moral and spiritual vacuum.
 - 1) and so we see the death toll of abortion mounting with an estimated 40 million unborn children murdered since 1973.

- 2) do we really think that God is going to sit idly by and let their innocent blood be shed unanswered?
- 3) pornography has become a prime industry with up to half of all internet traffic being given over to the pursuit of smut.
 - a) the US is the world's largest exporter and user of pornography
 - b) and pornography has become so ingrained, so much a part of things that hundreds of thousands of young women today see it as a viable and acceptable form of income.
 - c) in a recent poll conducted by the Barna Group, 30% of those who identified themselves as *born again Christians* said pornography was morally acceptable. [\[1\]](#)
- 4) drug abuse has become so common and so pernicious that some years ago, our government launched a "War on Drugs." By all accounts – we're losing!
- 5) sexual immorality, violence, and profanity, instead of being cast as despicable, are used as entertainment.
 - a) and they are used so often and with such increasing intensity that we seem to have lost the ability to blush.
 - b) anything goes – and if it isn't shocking, then we yawn in boredom
 - c) I find it incredibly provocative that just last week, the major networks expressed their intention and got permission to turn up the level of sex, violence and profanity in their programming so as to compete with cable and video rentals.
 - d) taking the Lord's name in vain has been taboo, but now they have the go-ahead from the censors
12. In light of all this, we have to ask a serious question and stand soberly ready to hear the answer –
13. Was Tuesday, September 11th, 2001 a *warning* from God of impending judgment?
14. Indeed – was Tuesday a *manifestation* of that judgment?
15. C.S. Lewis once said - "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."
16. In Revelation 2 & 3 we find 7 letters that Jesus dictated to 7 churches.
 - a. He ended each with these words –
 - b. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the

- churches.”
17. It is the firmest conviction of my heart this morning that Tuesday was a message from God.
 18. Are we listening?
 19. Or will the call to a renewed patriotism drown out the more urgent call of God to a repentance that renews?
 20. God has sent us many warnings – but it seems we’ve not be listening.
 - a. I would go as far back as the 70’s and the Oil embargo
 - b. the proliferation of diseases like AIDS, hepatitis, and tuberculosis in the 80’s
 - c. the repeated cycles of sever economic distress of the late 80’s and early 90’s
 - d. then, more recently . . .
 - 1) the shocking occurrence of school shootings
 - 2) the apprehension of terrorists at our borders as they sought to infiltrate and wreak havoc on New Year’s Eve, 1999
 - 3) we have faced many, many close calls with terrorism, but the authorities have always managed to catch them at the last minute
 - e. all these were warnings – signs meant to awaken within us a sense of our distance from God and need to repent.
 - f. but we haven’t been listening and we haven’t repented.
 - g. instead, we’ve trusted in the FBI or in our traditional “luck.”
 - h. we’ve trusted in the resilience of the dollar and the productive capacity of our industries.
 - i. we put our confidence in the scientists, who seem to have discovered a solution to everything.
 - j. most of all, we’ve depended on good ole’ American optimism!
 - k. “Tomorrow will be a better day!”
 21. So – Tuesday morning came and with it tragedy of epic proportions.
 22. HOW WE RESPOND – AS THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST - WILL DETERMINE THE FATE OF AMERICA.

Some years ago, English Preacher John Stott was speaking in an American church on Matthew 5 where Jesus said that His people are the salt and light of the world. He made this observation . . . You know what your own country is like. I'm a visitor, and I wouldn't presume to speak about America. But I know what Great Britain is like. I know something about the growing

dishonesty, corruption, immorality, violence, pornography, the diminishing respect for human life, and the increase in abortion. Whose fault is it? Let me put it like this: if the house is dark at night, there is no sense in blaming the house. That's what happens when the sun goes down. The question to ask is, "Where is the light?"

If meat goes bad, there is no sense in blaming the meat. That is what happens when the bacteria are allowed to breed unchecked. The question to ask is, "Where is the salt?"

If society becomes corrupt like a dark night or stinking fish, there's no sense in blaming society. That's what happens when fallen human society is left to itself and human evil is unrestrained and unchecked.

The question to ask is "Where is the church?"

[John Stott, "Christians: Salt and Light," Preaching Today, Tape No. 109.]

23. 1 Peter 4:13 says that judgment begins at the House of God.
24. Was Tuesday a sign of judgment? Was it a warning from God?
 - a. many, including myself, think it was. Why do I think that way?
 - b. because of what I find in God's Word.
25. God tells His people that if they take a vow to love and serve Him, they better keep it because He will hold them accountable [Numbers 30 • Deut 23:21-23]
 - a. as I mentioned earlier, the Founding Fathers sought to initiate a national covenant with God
 - b. they would follow His word and in return asked for His blessing
 - c. God has kept His part of the covenant and showed His favor on us in dramatic ways
 - d. but we have not kept our end of the bargain
26. God warns *individuals* of their need to repent by allowing them to experience the result and consequences of their sins.
27. But He warns *groups*, such as nations, of the need to repent by using their enemies against them.
28. We see this over and over in Scripture – how God judged a nation by using another nation as the sword of His justice.
29. Many of us have been praying for national repentance and genuine revival for years.
30. It may be that God is answering our prayers just as He did

Habakkuk's.

- a. the prophet Habakkuk was grieved over the spiritual shallowness and moral corruption of his fellow Jews and pleaded with God to do something about it.
 - b. Habakkuk was scandalized by the decadence and appalled by the religious game playing around him and asked, "How long O Lord, till you act?"
 - c. but God's reply was not what Habakkuk was expecting
 - d. Habakkuk expected God to do something safe, something easy in effecting repentance
 - e. the problem was, the people were too far gone to seek God without a drastic wake-up call
 - f. so God said to Habakkuk – "I will work a work that is going to rock you back on your heels. Here's what I'm going to do, I am going to bring the Babylonians into the land and they are going to lay siege to Jerusalem."
 - g. Habakkuk was stunned – he knew all about the Babylonians – they were a wicked people who worshipped a false god.
 - h. he was perplexed on why God would use an instrument of judgment that was even more wicked than those being judged.
31. We may ask the same question – but let's not get sidetracked.
32. Let's make sure we are humbly listening to what the Lord is saying in the roar of the collapse of the Twin Towers.

E. Luke 13

1. Turn to Luke 13 for there we find an important message from Jesus Christ.
¹There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ²And Jesus answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all *other* Galileans, because they suffered such things? ³I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.
2. Galilee was a hot-bed of political dissent against the Romans.
 - a. bands of Jewish loyalists called "Zealots" regularly attacked Roman outposts
 - b. Pilate, the Roman governor, retaliated by grabbing a group of innocent Galileans Jews who had come to Jerusalem to celebrate

Passover and executed them

3. In the Jewish way of thinking, this had happened to them because there was some especially wicked thing they had done and this was God's special judgment.
4. Jesus corrected them.
 - a. the Galileans who'd been killed *hadn't* been more wicked than others
 - b. what befell them, occurred for reasons beyond our understanding
 - c. but the lesson such events ought to teach us is that this life is short and then we stand before God.
 - d. if we would escape judgment, we must repent – now!
5. Jesus then adds to this lesson to reinforce it's sense of urgency . . .

4 Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? ⁵I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

- a. part of the old wall of Jerusalem fell and killed 18 people
- b. again, it was natural for the average Jew to conclude the 18 who died had been gathered there by God so He could judge them for some heinous sin
- c. Jesus says once more – "Learn the real lesson of the fall of the tower – Life is short and repentance is essential before you check out."
6. I don't think anyone here today believes the WTC fell because the people there were more deserving of judgment.
7. NYC is no worse than LA or SF or Seattle, Chicago, Miami, Dallas, Blythe, Bakersfield or Oxnard; all of them are equally deserving of God's wrath.
8. Are we heeding the lesson the fall of the Towers in NY teach us?
9. Life is short, and then we stand before God.
10. Jesus concluded with this . . .

⁶He also spoke this parable: "A certain *man* had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. ⁷Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, 'Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?' ⁸But he answered and said to him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize *it*. ⁹And if it

bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.’’

11. Because our nation was founded on God and dedicated to His purposes, He expects to find fruit from it.
12. But the harvest it’s born for the last couple generations has been wickedness and evil, not righteousness.
13. Tuesday was a warning of His readiness to cut us down.
14. Now He waits to see if the warning will be heeded or not.

F. Prophet

1. And that is where the Church can and must step in.
2. In this *time of great national need* – we can come boldly to the throne of grace and obtain mercy and find grace to help.
3. While each of us ought to renew our commitment to our citizenship as Americans in the face of this bold attempt to rip America apart, The Church must not allow itself to become the political pawn and mouthpiece of a national policy on how to deal with terrorism.
4. As The Church, we are called to play the role of Prophet to our generation – not soldier or statesman.
5. While our national intelligence agencies go to work to find the *physical* culprits, Christians ought to seek the Lord for the *spiritual* causes of this tragedy.
6. And once we find them, we ought to be diligent to *lead in repentance and prayer* for the restoring of mercy and grace for our troubled and broken land.
7. Let judgment begin at the house of God – at this house of God.

III. CONCLUSION

A. Genuine Repentance

1. We’ve seen it again and again in our nation; when trouble besets us, people return to church
2. But when the trouble lifts, the churches empty.
3. When the Gulf War began, churches were packed / when the war ended, the people stopped coming.
4. The repentance God looks for is more than *feeling sorry* for the *consequences* of our sins.
5. It’s sorrow for the sins themselves.
6. In Joel 2, God said to the people who were tearing their cloaks in grief at being invaded by their enemies – “Rend your hearts, not your clothes.” [12-14]

7. The repentance our nation needs is the kind that results in change.
 - a. where evil and wickedness are no longer tolerated
 - b. where sin is resisted instead of celebrated and virtue is honored instead of mocked
8. If our nation doesn't restore it's classic commitment to the sanctity and dignity of human life, all of it, from conception to old age –
9. If our nation doesn't resist perversion by calling evil, evil –
10. If our people don't restore honor as the abiding principle of all social exchange –
11. And if God is not returned to His throne in our thinking and living –
12. Then Tuesday was just the beginning of much worse things to come.

B. A Promise

1. But you and I have this promise in 2 Chronicles 7:14-15

¹⁴If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. ¹⁵Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to prayer *made* in this place.

2. God's eyes are open and attentive to this place today!

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

3. We need mercy – which means not getting what we deserve – which is judgment.
4. We need grace – which means getting what we don't deserve!
5. God is giving us another chance – the dawning of this day proves it!
6. But we must use this day well – we must repent – sincerely repent and turn back to God.

C. Calling Us To Himself

1. God is calling us - all of us – to Himself.
2. Repentance begins with you and me, right now – turning from our sinful attitudes and behavior.
3. Do you need to turn your backs on drugs?
4. Do you need to turn your back on pornography?

5. Do you need to turn your back on materialism, greed, and envy?
6. Do you need to turn your back on violence?
7. You may say – “But how do these things hurt others?”
8. Let me tell you a short story as we close.

D. Achan

1. There once was a man named Achan.
2. Achan was married and had children.
3. He was your normal, run of the mill average Jew who was part of the army that attacked Jericho when the walls fell.
4. Now, God had commanded that the soldiers take not one iota of booty from the battle.
5. That first conquest was to be wholly devoted to the Lord and set on fire.
6. Achan however, alone of all the people, snagged a nice garment and a slice of gold and took them back to his tent where he hid them in the ground.
7. In the next battle with a tiny little city not nearly as fearsome as Jericho, Israel suffered a humiliating defeat and several lost their lives!
8. Joshua realized the cause was *spiritual* rather than *strategic* and asked God what was up.
9. God told him the reason for the defeat was the presence of sin in the camp.
10. Achan’s stuff was discovered and he was dragged before Joshua to give account
11. His excuse was, “Oh, I didn’t think a shirt and a small piece of gold was such a big deal.”
12. The people then stoned Achan and his family because their silence was a complicity in his sin that had lead to such grievous consequences.
13. His *secret sin*, a violation of God’s will that he thought was innocent enough, resulted in the deaths, not only of other fathers and husbands, but his own wife and children.
14. There is no such thing as secret sin – and there is only one thing to do with it – Repent and return to the Lord.