

Born to Win

While We Can

by Ronald L. Dart

For many generations in England, it was the custom, when a person who lived in the village died, that the church bell would be rung. And these were not just a single bell in these churches. These churches had combinations of bells and they had a team of ringers who took great pride in their work. And they had peals for different occasions. They had peals for every church season that came along, they had peals for the movable feasts of the church, they had peals for when someone died. And I think I recall reading somewhere that they had a combination of rings for the number of years that a person had lived out their life. So if you were working in the fields and you heard the bell ring that someone had died, before you came in you would have an idea of who it might have been, or at least the age of the person who died. And, knowing everyone in the village, you probably would know by then who it was who was gone. If from this custom that John Donne wrote a well-known meditation:

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

John Donne - Devotions upon Emergent Occasions - Meditation xvii

On Tuesday, September 11th, the year 2001, I came to understand this in a way I had never really understood before. Over 5,000 people (maybe over 6) who were complete strangers to me, died in the most spectacular act of terrorism the world has ever seen.

It isn't that there hadn't been, in time, greater loss of life; there *has* been—in London, in Dresden, Tokyo, Hiroshima, Nagasaki. Those last two names you might have expected, but you may not realize that more people died in Dresden and Tokyo, from the fire bombing attacks there, than did in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But this is the first time in history where so many have watched, in real time, as so many people have died.

I couldn't help thinking, as I watched the images of people running for their lives, and then of people running to *save* lives, of what the people of London went through during the Blitz. They did not just have two buildings collapse; they had their entire city nearly bombed to ruins—night after night after night. And the firemen who fought those fires in London in those days were out there while the bombs were falling, saving lives, carrying out people, trying to put out innumerable fires that they could not hope to ever control—night after night after night. And I've been profoundly moved to the core of my being by the courage of those who have gone *straight into the mouth of danger* to save other people's lives, and by those brave firemen who died *in* that building as they had helped so many people get *out*. When I watched that first building come down (and I had did not see either one of the planes, but I had been watching, maybe, for three or four minutes when the first building came down) I had no idea—or any hope—that they had been able to get so many people out of those buildings, and I knew from what

I'd read before 20–30,000 lives may be disappearing right in front of my very eyes. It is a relief to know that it's only (if I can use that word) 5,000 or 6,000 who have died.

And as I watched all this, and as I thought about it, I had a contrary thought: It is *natural* to be moved to acts of courage to save lives. Now, we may think that we would be cowards in the face of danger, but we're very wrong. Those people who are running into that danger—those people who take terrible risk to save other people's lives—are people *exactly like us* who had no idea what they would be able to do, or what they would be willing to do, until they actually faced the danger and faced the challenge and saw what they had to do and went and did it.

Ordinary people. And what they did was natural. And then came the corollary of that thought: It is *unnatural* to take life. It is *unnatural* to destroy life. God did not make human beings with an urge to destroy human life. That, in fact (it's well understood) human beings, as a part of their nature and a part of their makeup, have a drive to *save human life*. That's the way our God made us.

Now, being a country boy, and optimistic by nature, there are some things that take a little time to work their way through my thought processes. But not long ago, I watched in stunned belief as the story of Andrea Yates played out on television. I...I could not cope with that story. How could a mother remorselessly drown five little children in a bathtub? How could anyone do it, but in particular how could a mother (knowing how God made mothers to be) do that? And I know every mother here wonders the same thing, and cannot fathom—has no explanation, no way of understanding—how it would ever be possible. Even though they have, maybe sometimes, been angry and sometimes said things they wish they hadn't. But to do that would be utterly impossible.

I couldn't keep the images out of my mind of her holding them underwater; and taking them one at a time; and laying their little, wet bodies out on the bed. I struggled with this. I didn't say much about, at first. I didn't give a sermon on it, didn't run in and do a program on it, because I really didn't know what to say. I was so *baffled* by this event—by what it meant. I mean, I could give people the easy, quick answers of this type of thing: “Demon possession, crazy people do crazy things”, and all this. But, somehow or other, there was something inside of me that said, “No, don't say anything right now, because there's something more involved in this.”

I was sitting around, though, wondering, “What in the world is our nation coming to?” And I was pondering, as I have so many times as I've done radio programs, “What is it in our culture—what is in our society—that has opened us up to where this kind of evil is beginning to enter into our society? What are we doing wrong?” And while I was thinking about it, Nikolay Soltys (a Russian immigrant, not a part of our society, not a part of our culture, having nothing to do with the American way of life) stabbed his wife to death, and then drove to another house where he killed his aunt and uncle, and killed two *beautiful* little grandchildren of theirs on that particular day—all with a knife, all stabbing them to death, cutting their throats—and then drove away, made off, with his little three-year-old boy in a car.

You know about it; you heard about it; and I'll give odds that, like me, you probably prayed for that little boy, and hoped *desperately* that that little boy would still be alive when this guy was found. The whole country held its breath in fear for the little boy. And then he was found. They never did quite make it clear whether he was beaten to death. But they did say his throat had been cut, and he was left to bleed to death in a cardboard box in a field. When that news broke, so did the hearts of the American people. I know mine did. I was absolutely devastated by the image of a father cutting that little boy's throat, and just throwing his body into a box, and driving away and leaving him there.

But my question of what our nation was coming to was busted up, too. Because this man was not an American, had nothing to do with our culture. While it is true that our nation has become morally corrupt, it is *also* true that there is a nameless evil afoot in the world and that it has come upon us. The world at large has a hard time with evil. Either we deny its existence altogether or we put some kind of an ugly, slathering face on it. And we just have difficulty, in many cases, even imagining that such evil

could really exist. “There must be a *cause* behind this, somewhere. There must be some *mistake* we have made in order to allow this evil to exist in our world.” But, as I say, we don’t understand what we’re dealing with. Now we know that the face of evil is a lot like the face of Andrea Yates—bland, remorseless, uncaring, loveless. Yeah, loveless.

And now the tragic destruction of the World Trade Center—bland, remorseless, uncaring, and utterly without love. No organization taking credit for it, no cause being advanced, no statement of vengeance —“We’re getting even with you for what you did back then.” Nobody has *even said a word* about this particular tragedy. In fact, perhaps the greatest and most widespread denials of any responsibility in the history of terrorism. When has there ever been an act of terrorism when so many different people involved in terrorism have *denied* that they had anything to do with this one. Usually people are willing to take credit for it, who had *nothing to do with it*, in order to advance their cause—because they want their people to know about their grievances; they want their people to know what they’re doing. Historically, acts of terrorism are for a *cause*. The people have a *cause* that they are fighting for; they have a *cause* that they’re trying to move along. Everybody knows about the IRA, and everybody knows what the IRA wants. Everybody knows Hezbollah has a cause that they’re after. No one had, though, to put a name on this act, because the cause was evident *in the act*. Ostensibly, the cause was the destruction of a way of life and of a system of governance and economics. But, actually, it was much, much simpler than that. No one, in this case, is fighting for a cause. The simple motive is *destruction*. And I hadn’t really understood that until just the last two days.

The conclusion that I’ve drawn from all this is that there is great evil in the world. It is a spiritual evil, and it’s beyond our power to stop it. We were *utterly* powerless to stop it from happening. We were *utterly* powerless to stop what happened in the World Trade Center. It’s *incredible*, when you think about it. Now, in hindsight, everybody’s out there researching, and now we see *all kinds* of indicators that it was coming. But the problem is, there was no contextual thing that allowed us to consider what they meant. We had never seen anything like this. We had never been able to even *imagine* anything like this. In fact, I would hate to be the kind of people who *would* imagine anything like this. And so, we couldn’t stop it. The act was completely irrational, from a human point of view. It was an *unnatural* act. And that’s the nature of perfect evil. It’s irrational, it’s unnatural, and therefore beyond the capacity of normal man to explain it.

Now, we can stop airplane hijackings, and probably will. I have a feeling the next ten years may be just as free of hijacking as the last ten years were, because now no hijacker will ever be believed again in any statement he makes to the passengers. Whenever an airplane is hijacked, everyone would know, “We’re as good as dead already. We might as well take a chance on saving our lives as sit here and be sure we’re going to lose them.” So, hijackings? They probably will be a thing of the past. But know this: we cannot *possibly* imagine what this *evil* has in mind for us next. Without divine protection, we’re helpless.

Now, this line of thinking brought me to Revelation 9. And when I went there, I didn’t have the Feast of Trumpets in mind at all. I went there looking for a particular scripture in mind, because I was thinking about evil, and I wanted to look for a couple of names that I had seen. And so I came here by a roundabout route, and suddenly found myself (guess where) at the fifth trumpet in Revelation 9.

Revelation 9

AKJV

¹ And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven to the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit.

The abyss. The Greek word [*abussos*, ἄβυσσος, Strong’s G12] basically means “the deep that has no bottom”, so “bottomless pit” is not a bad translation for what it is. What’s fascinating about it is that there is a *key* for this pit, which suggests that the pit is a place of imprisonment—a place of locking up, a place of keeping something away—and suggestive that it is keeping it away from mankind.

Revelation 9

AKJV

² And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.

³ And there came out of the smoke locusts on the earth: and to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power.

⁴ And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.

What are we after? We're after men—particularly those men who have not the seal of God in their foreheads, those people who are not identified as belonging to God.

Revelation 9

AKJV

⁵ And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he strikes a man.

⁶ And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.

⁷ And the shapes of the locusts were like to horses prepared to battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men.

⁸ And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions.

⁹ And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle.

Poor John. He saw this and had *no* idea what he was looking at. All he could do was just give us his best shot at telling us what he saw.

Revelation 9

AKJV

¹⁰ And they had tails like to scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months.

And here's the verse that brought me to this passage—verse 11:

Revelation 9

AKJV

¹¹ And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue has his name Apollyon.

¹² One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter.

And that in itself may be the most frightening thing in the whole passage. This isn't the *end*; we're just getting started. The name *Apollyon* [Ἀπολλύων, Strong's G623] (which is why I was looking for it) means "destroyer". That's what he does. That's who he is. Don't get me wrong. I do not feel that we are *in these days*. I do not feel that what you saw in New York this week showed that we were in the time of this fifth trumpet. I cite this passage for one purpose only, and that is to *identify the enemy*. And you know what I began to wonder as I read this passage? (And I had never considered this before.) Most people think of *Apollyon* or *Abaddon* [Ἀβαδδών, Strong's G3] as another name for the Devil. But, you know, this identifies him as the angel of the bottomless pit, particularly. And it gives us his name, which is not the same name that we have for Satan and for Lucifer. And here we are...I begin to wonder if there's an evil spirit *even worse than Satan* who has been locked up in the abyss until now.

And finally, at this point in time, the angel is going to unlock that pit and let *the Destroyer* out of his hole where he has been kept. It also made me wonder if the bottomless pit—the abyss—is starting to leak already into our society, like it was leaking when these school shootings began to take place.

By the way, did you notice that none of these recent events had guns? Not a one of them. Andrea Yates used a bathtub. Nikolay Soltys used a knife. Terrorists used box cutters—and airplanes, of course. It is almost as though the evil spirit had decided to say, with his teeth bared, “It’s not guns, you fools. It’s me!” Because we have got to come to understand the presence of evil in this world. We will blame it on *everything we can find to blame it on*, except the one who is the author of it all. Because to do that would force us to take knowledge of God in return and begin to realize this is bigger than we are and, if we don’t turn to God, we’re dead meat.

So if we’re not at the fifth trumpet, where are we? Should we be afraid? I don’t know? I’m going to be honest with you; I don’t know. It’s tempting to say that “we have nothing to fear except fear itself”, and that may be true. I think there’s a good chance that we may go another ten years without an aircraft hijacking. I think it’s highly probable that we will. But for me as a speaker—as a preacher, as it were—there are two great temptations here. One is to try to use this to scare you into repentance and obedience—give you all the warnings about the terrible things to come, and read all the scriptures about things falling out of the heaven, and people dying and wishing to die, and all that. And then giving you the great call at the end of this thing and saying, “Now you need to turn your life around. Get right with God and begin to obey God. Keep the Sabbath. Keep the Holy Days.” Do the whole rigamarole—whatever I’m after where you’re concerned. That’s one temptation. The other is to reassure you that all things are going to be just fine. “Don’t worry about it. Tomorrow will be as this day, and much more abundant.”

Preachers are taking two tacks on this. (I’ve heard at least two; there are probably more than this.) One: “God is punishing us. God’s angry with this country, and he’s out to punish and chastise us—the United States.” Second: “God has taken his hand off of us. That is, he’s removed his protecting hand and we’re now exposed to the devil.”

“God has taken his hand off us.” Frankly, that is more frightening to me than the idea that God is punishing us. God has mercy; the destroyer does not.

There’s a passage of scripture back in 2 Samuel, chapter 24. I want to go back to it and just walk through it with you. Because whenever I come across things like this...and God has not spoken to me. He didn’t appear to me in my closet this morning during my prayer. He didn’t appear to me any time. Didn’t give me a dream or a vision last night in my sleep. So, when I don’t have that, I’ve got to go to the Bible to kind of try to understand what we’re talking about here. And the question of God’s chastisement or punishment on the one hand, and God taking his hand off us on the other, is what I’m aiming at here. 2 Samuel 24:

2 Samuel 24

AKJV

¹ And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.

² For the king said to Joab the captain of the host, which was with him, Go now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba, and number you the people, that I may know the number of the people.

And the objective can only have been, because of the results of the census that he took, to know *precisely* what kind of an army he could field in any case where he came up against something. It seems like a simple census, but there is something wrong somewhere. There’s a lot of speculation about *why* it’s wrong; the account here doesn’t answer the question.

2 Samuel 24

AKJV

³ And Joab said to the king, Now the LORD your God add to the people, how many soever they be, an hundred times, and that the eyes of my lord the king may see it: but why does my lord the king delight in this thing?

Joab did not think they should do this. Joab was the chief of staff—that is, of his military. He was the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. And he said, “We ought not to do this.” And the other men around him—the other fighting men—said, “We don’t need to do this.” But David’s word prevailed, naturally; he was the king.

2 Samuel 24

AKJV

⁴ Notwithstanding the king’s word prevailed against Joab, and against the captains of the host. [...]

No one but David wanted to do this.

2 Samuel 24

AKJV

⁴ [...] And Joab and the captains of the host went out from the presence of the king, to number the people of Israel. [...]

⁸ So when they had gone through all the land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days.

⁹ And Joab gave up the sum of the number of the people to the king: and there were in Israel eight hundred thousand valiant men that drew the sword; and the men of Judah were five hundred thousand men.

He could field an army of 1,300,000 men. And these were men with the bark on. These were people who were tough. You go back and read the story of the captains of David’s host, and the kind of men that David attracted and put together to fight, and they were *something else*. David’s army was impressive, but a funny thing happened. Verse 10:

2 Samuel 24

AKJV

¹⁰ And David’s heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said to the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech you, O LORD, take away the iniquity of your servant; for I have done very foolishly.

Now, I don’t know why David did it. I don’t know altogether why it was wrong. I don’t even know altogether why God was mad at him. That’s not the point that we’re going to in this particular passage. Verse 11:

2 Samuel 24

AKJV

¹¹ For when David was up in the morning, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Gad, David’s seer, saying,

¹² Go and say to David, Thus said the LORD, I offer you three things; choose you one of them, that I may do it to you.

¹³ So Gad came to David, and told him, and said to him, Shall seven years of famine come to you in your land? or will you [*And it doesn't mean just David; It means he and everybody else.*] flee three months before your enemies, while they pursue you? or that there be three days' pestilence in your land? now advise, and see what answer I shall return to him that sent me.

And “him that sent me” was God. And David said something profound, because he knew God.

2 Samuel 24

AKJV

¹⁴ And David said to Gad, I am in a great strait: let us fall now into the hand of the LORD; for his mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man.

¹⁵ So the LORD sent a pestilence on Israel from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people from Dan even to Beersheba seventy thousand men.

70,000 died in this three-day plague that took place there.

2 Samuel 24

AKJV

¹⁶ And when the angel stretched out his hand on Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people, It is enough: stay now your hand. [...]

As he came to Jerusalem, God said to the angel, “Stop.” Why’d he do it? Because he felt sorry for them. He relented, and he didn’t want to kill any more people. You know, that’s something important for you to know about God. God *does not like* to kill people. He doesn’t want to hurt people. He doesn’t want to chastise people. He just doesn’t want to be the causer of pain and loss of life and death. It is *contrary* to him in every way. It’s not what he wants, and David knew that. He knew that God would come to the place where God would know when to stop. But as for men? They don’t have any idea when to let up, when to quit, or when to stop. When God chastises, it’s always with a purpose, and is never completely destructive. It is *Abaddon* that is the destroyer, not God.

2 Samuel 24

AKJV

¹⁶ [...] And the angel of the LORD was by the threshing place of Araunah the Jebusite. [*And this was a Jebusite city at the time.*]

¹⁷ And David spoke to the LORD when he saw the angel that smote the people, and said, See, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let your hand, I pray you, be against me, and against my father’s house.

He was praying to God for this. “Don’t do this to the people. Do it to me!”

2 Samuel 24

AKJV

¹⁸ And Gad came that day to David, and said to him, Go up, raise an altar to the LORD in the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

¹⁹ And David, according to the saying of Gad, went up as the LORD commanded.

And it’s very interesting, as you read through here, that he negotiates with Araunah for it, because Araunah was going to give it to him. “Hey, hey, you take it. You offer there. I’ve got everything you

need here. You just go offer the offerings.” And David says, “No, I can’t offer a burning to my God that costs me *nothing*. I can’t make this gesture without it costing me something.” So he bought all this, and in the process he bought the threshing floor of Araunah, which was the place where the altar of God was, and it was the place where Solomon finally built the temple of God.

Now, perhaps you can see why, from this little example, I can hope that the chastisement that is upon this people is a chastisement from God, instead of his merely taking his hand off of us. Because God knows *when to quit*. God knows when to back off. God will feel sorry for us. God will relent. He will not utterly destroy. If he *forsakes* us, we *will be* utterly destroyed. If God has chastised us, there will be a respite in which we have time to repent, and time to come around, and time to change our lives, time to bring an offering to him that *does* cost us something, to bring our lives to him, and to lay our lives before him. If he’s taken his hand off of us, *the end is in sight*, we have no protection, and the destroyer is loose. For there’s been a great breaking forth of evil in the world. It has been among us in ways that it has not been for a very, very long time on the earth. The nation needs to repent.

But what do we need to repent of? You know, it reminds me of this section in the back of the Book of Malachi [**Malachi 3**] where he repeatedly chastises or corrects somebody and says, “Turn to God”, and they say, “What do you mean ‘turn’? Repent? What do you mean ‘repent’? What have we done wrong? Why should we have to repent? Why should we have to turn around.” Well, I want to tell you one thing: At the very founding of this republic, in the very first words put on paper in this republic, the founding idea was set forth and it was this:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

United States Declaration of Independence - July 4, 1776

And so it is that, in the *founding document*, from *day one* (the very second paragraph, I think, of the Declaration of Independence) the acknowledgment is that *all men are created equal* (and I think that means “before God”) and are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. I’m indebted to Alan Keyes for pointing out this little, simple fact that it is God who is the guarantor (and our Founding Fathers understood this). It was the Creator who was the *guarantor* of our right to life, our right to liberty, and our right to the pursuit of happiness—*not anybody else*. For a very long time now, the people of this country been teaching our children that there is no Creator.

Don’t argue with this point with me. I know this to be true; everybody knows it. For a long time now, the public school system has been systematically teaching our children *there is no Creator*. You are the product of evolution, not of a Creator God. And this has been done without considering the consequences. The consequences being that we have no guarantor of life, we have no guarantor of our liberties, we have no one to guarantee that we have the privilege of pursuing happiness in our lives. And so, since there is no Creator to put a hedge around us, and since we have not maintained the hedge, we have just suffered a *terrible* loss of life in our country—in one day. Because we do not recognize that there is a Creator who guarantees our liberties, we are about to suffer a great loss of liberty in our country. And our pursuit of happiness has turned to gravel in our teeth.

I think it’s fair to say that God thought he had a deal with us. We honored him in our founding documents, and he honored us, gave us the choicest place of the earth, gave us beautiful blessings, made a great nation out of us down through all those years. And then we forgot all about God, despised his word, denied him as Creator, denied him as guarantor of our life and our liberty and our happiness. We trust *our own* devices, *our own* arms, *our own* methodology, *our own* intelligence systems. All

those things—they will take care of us and they will protect us. And then the World Trade Center brought us *all* to the ground at the same time.

This nation needs to repent. And it needs to start right here, right now, with us.

Why do *we* need to repent? How do we need to repent? Ah, let me count the ways. The greatest temptation that can befall a religious person is the temptation to self-righteousness, to smugness, to a presumption of moral superiority. I think it is the greatest temptation of religious people. It is the absolute certainty that we are right and the world is wrong.

Now, shall I ask you, you don't think we are self-righteous? Take a look at the splits and the splinters in Christian churches everywhere. Are these splits, all these splinters, are all these divisions taking place because we are humble? Are they the outgrowth of a meek spirit in God's people? Is that where they're coming from? Is it happening to us because we confess that we don't have all the answers?

Oh, I know why it's happening to us (and I hadn't thought about this). It's happening to us because of the overwhelming love we have for one another; that's why we're splitting the churches all over the landscape. I should have known.

I don't preach very much, because I feel you have to get up on a box to preach. Most preaching, to me, seems like it's talking down to people. And, candidly, I don't think we have any business talking down anybody (and I certainly myself don't feel like talking down to anyone). But perhaps if we are righteous—if we really are righteous, if we have the righteousness of God—we could pray the prayer of a *righteous* man. There is nothing wrong with adopting a prayer and making it our own. (We should all know that by now.) And we have a prayer from a righteous man in the Bible that fits this situation that we are in today to a "T". And I wonder if maybe we could make his prayer our own. The man is Daniel. And he is a man who is attested as one of the three righteous men of the Bible [Ezekiel 14] and his prayer is found in chapter nine.

Daniel 9

AKJV

¹ In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans;

² In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.

What he's telling us is, "I came to the place, in studying Jeremiah and reading the prophets, and it finally came and I understood clearly what God was going to do. We were going to be here 70 years and I am going to *die* in this miserable, rotten place. I won't get to go home, even though some of my countrymen will."

Daniel 9

AKJV

³ And I set my face to the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes:

⁴ And I prayed to the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, [...]

And right here begins the prayer—a prayer that, I think, we would do well to make our own, adapting it to our own circumstances.

Daniel 9

AKJV

⁴ [...] O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments;

⁵ We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from your precepts and from your judgments:

⁶ Neither have we listened to your servants the prophets, which spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.

You spoke; we just wouldn't listen. Remember, this is one of the three named righteous men in the Bible saying this.

Daniel 9

AKJV

⁷ O LORD, righteousness belongs to you, but to us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries where you have driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against you.

⁸ O Lord, to us belongs confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against you.

⁹ To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him;

¹⁰ Neither have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.

“To us”, he says repeatedly, “belongs *shame of face*.” You know, you think about this. We don't have any reason or any moral standing to go find ourselves a soap box on a corner somewhere and preach *down* to the people of our communities about what wicked people they are, and all this stuff is coming on *you* because *you* have rebelled and *you* have turned your back on God. No, that's not the approach Daniel took. Daniel says *we* have done this. *We* are all together in this thing. And you and I are as much to blame as the entire country is to blame if this country has gone away from God—that we ourselves have certain responsibilities that we also have not measured up to.

Daniel 9

AKJV

¹¹ Yes, all Israel have transgressed your law, even by departing, that they might not obey your voice; therefore the curse is poured on us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him.

¹² And he has confirmed his words, which he spoke against us, and against our judges that judged us, by bringing on us a great evil: for under the whole heaven has not been done as has been done on Jerusalem.

It's never happened. And here we are today: Nothing like this has ever happened to us, in our own homeland. At least so we say. And yet we forget how many of our brothers we killed in the War Between the States. We forget many of the things that *we* have done, in years gone by, to ourselves.

Daniel 9

AKJV

¹³ As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come on us: yet made we not our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand your truth.

And that's something that we need desperately to do in this land. And, you know something? During this last week, a hundred million people did turn to God and pray. What a difference! And it's one of the ways in which I find some *light*, one of the ways I find some *encouragement* in our world today. For I have studied the prophets for many, many years now. I taught Old Testament Survey for seven years in England. And, of course, it's been a love of mine for many generations to study, to read, to try to know what the Old Testament says about many of these things. And the one thing I've come to conclude (and I came to conclude this before this ever happened, quite some time before) was that the degree of depravity to which Israel had fallen at the time when they went into captivity was *even greater*—far greater—than what we see in our country today.

The bad news, I said, is this: It's probably going to get a lot worse than it is right now. But, you know, I didn't allow for what happened in New York last week. As many people did not allow for what happened in this country on December 7th, 1941. We didn't allow for what the nation would do at that point in time. We didn't allow for the way the nation would respond. We didn't allow for the number of people who made promises to God—made covenants with God—about how they were going to serve him. We just didn't make allowances for them. And yet here we are.

Daniel 9

AKJV

¹⁴ Therefore has the LORD watched on the evil, and brought it on us: for the LORD our God is righteous in all his works which he does: for we obeyed not his voice.

¹⁵ And now, O Lord our God, that have brought your people forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and have gotten you renown, as at this day; we have sinned, we have done wickedly.

And the most wicked thing of all is to *forget God* and to make *things* our god.

Daniel 9

AKJV

¹⁶ O LORD, according to all your righteousness, I beseech you, let your anger and your fury be turned away from your city Jerusalem, your holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and your people are become a reproach to all that are about us.

¹⁷ Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of your servant, and his supplications, and cause your face to shine on your sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake.

¹⁸ O my God, incline your ear, and hear; open your eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by your name: for we do not present our supplications before you for our righteousnesses, but for your great mercies.

Get that? We're not making this prayer because we're righteous; we're making it because of *your great mercy* which we're trusting in. This was what David trusted in when he knew the whole country was in trouble because of him. He trusted in God's great mercy.

Daniel 9

AKJV

¹⁹ O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, listen and do; defer not, for your own sake, O my God: for your city and your people are called by your name.

While the New York tragedy is horrible for those involved. It could turn out to be for the good of the nation. For it has sent 100 million people to prayer. It's broken our confidence in our own means of defense. It's made us realize that wealth is transitory and money can't keep you alive. It's made us

realize we need to love our family and love our friends and love our neighbors while we can, before it's too late. It's made us realize there are more important things than working 60 hours a week so you can have more stuff. That all the great wealth that we've built up in the last decade—all the greatness that we thought we had, all the wonderful things, and all the great production of this country—all of it comes down in a cloud of dust. And we realize that we're mortal, that we're not God, and that we need God. It's also made us realize, I think, that children are precious and more important than words or things. It doesn't matter to the kids that you take them to a picnic in a 1970 Plymouth station wagon or a modern, brand-new SUV. What matters to the kids is having fun with Mom and Dad.

Where are we going from here? When it all depends, doesn't it. And we all know that. We all knew it from the get-go. It all depends. It depends on what we do. It depends on who we trust. It depends on how we live our lives. It depends on what we think is important; and what we give ourselves and give our attention, our thoughts, and our desires to.

God has given this nation—he has given *you and I*—a wake-up call. And I think it's important that we not stand above anybody else and look down our noses at the world at large and think, “Well, all these terrible people need to repent.” They do...and so do we. May God give us grace to see where we should go from here.

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