

Teaching God's People to Hear the Voice of their Shepherd

By Paul D. Norcross

Dearest Saints of God,

God bless you and greetings you in the wonderful name of Jesus Christ, our King, our Savior, our brother, our friend, and our First Love.

Almost everyone in both the United States as well as around the world has been dealing with the nagging question, "Why?" concerning the terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center buildings and the Pentagon. As national emotions swing through horror, sorrow and mourning, rage and revenge, it falls upon not just the pastors to search God and His Scriptures in prayer to receive an acceptable answer.

Keep Your Camp Holy

In light of the potential for greater loss, the nation as a whole is thankful that not more people were killed or injured. I have heard many personal testimonies about people who would ordinarily have been on location and killed in the disasters had not God intervened and kept them from being on time – train delays, cancelled meetings, impulsive whims for a cup of coffee outside the building, etc. And the rise of patriotism, the clamor for united action, the increased security focus, and the galvanizing of the church to prayer seems to be a gratifying uplift in the midst of national tragedy.

But the fact is, things of the spirit precede results in the natural. Despite the good things about the United States, there is a spiritual poverty that must be explored and corrected before catastrophe will cease visiting our shores. We all know the record of Genesis in which God declares to Abraham that for the sake of ten righteous men God would have spared even Sodom and Gomorrah. Why did this principle not have effect against the terrorist attacks?

It is because we are not the holy people we would like to think we are.

Proverbs 16:7

When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.

Our enemies are certainly not at peace with us. In our arrogance, we think this to be a problem with them, not with us. But the fact is, the problem is our relationship with the Lord.

Deuteronomy 23:14

For the LORD thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee; therefore shall thy camp be holy: that he see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee.

Osama Bin Ladin, or whoever is behind the attacks on our nation, could not have been successful in his efforts if God did not allow it. God allowed it because our camp is not holy. If it was holy, God would have exposed the scheme to us and the plot would have been foiled. Despite the fact that Amos 3:7 declares that God will do nothing without first revealing it to the prophets, it is noteworthy and very humbling to us here in the United States that not a single prophet the world over received a specific message from God ahead of time regarding this event. True, there are many false prophets who are scrambling to validate themselves through obscure references and questionable sayings, all of which underscore their spiritual poverty. Perhaps God did not need to use prophets to speak what was patently obvious and had already been the subject of high level reports by recent US government commissions on airport safety.

The fact is, God allowed the terrorism to happen to this nation. Why? Because our camp is not holy. Our enemies are not at peace with us, and God deliberately did not give them up to us. He visited our camp, but He did not find it to be holy.

Lessons From Isaiah

Isaiah 3:4 declares that for errant nations, God will give them children to be their rulers. We have just emerged from eight years of having a child as the president of the United States. God sets up rulers and He takes them down (Daniel 4:17, 25, 32; 5:21). God has been speaking to us, and we have not listened. Our day is like that of Isaiah wherein God told him:

Isaiah 1:2-31

2 Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.

3 The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.

4 Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of

Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.

5 Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint.

6 From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.

7 Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers.

8 And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city.

9 Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.

10 Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah.

11 To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats.

12 When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts?

13 Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.

14 Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them.

15 And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.

16 Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil;

17 Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.

18 Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

19 If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land:

20 But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

21 How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers.

22 Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water:

23 Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause

of the widow come unto them.

24 Therefore saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies:

25 And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin:

26 And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city.

27 Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness.

28 And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners shall be together, and they that forsake the LORD shall be consumed.

29 For they shall be ashamed of the oaks which ye have desired, and ye shall be confounded for the gardens that ye have chosen.

30 For ye shall be as an oak whose leaf fadeth, and as a garden that hath no water.

31 And the strong shall be as tow, and the maker of it as a spark, and they shall both burn together, and none shall quench them.

We must understand that "I am the Lord, and I change not" (Malachi 3:6) means what it says. God will not forsake the principles of His Word to accommodate the sin of the United States.

How Have We Sinned?

For starters, the United States has murdered over forty million born and unborn children through its progressive sanctioning of abortion. In God's eyes, what is the difference between the pagan Druid and Mayan sacrificing of children to nature gods and idols, and our sacrificing them to our idols of convenience and sexual promiscuity? We've even gone further. We traffic their body parts. The love of money truly is the root of all evil (I Timothy 6:10). Our camp is not holy. If the blood of righteous Abel speaks to God from the earth (Genesis 4:9-10), what about forty million infants and unborn children? God is dealing with us in as limited a fashion as He can and still get the message to us. This is mercy, not yet judgment. But judgment will not be far behind.

The World Trade Center. Even its name speaks of our arrogance. God has dealt with one of our idols. Against Egypt, He dealt with each of their idols one by one, giving them the chance to short-circuit the destruction each time the question was given through Moses, "Will you not let My people go?"

Which idol is next? Our gods of medicine? Will a plague of disease confound our most sophisticated medical researchers and make the scourge of AIDS look like a

mild cold in comparison? Will the world famous Mayo clinic be destroyed overnight? How about the military in whom we trust? I praise God for those forces, yet we dare not trust in chariots and horses (Psalm 20:7). We must realize, Osama Bin Laden is effectively hidden by evil spirits, and there are many more men like him waiting to enter the world stage. He will remain hidden no matter how skillfully we pursue a military solution UNLESS we heed the lesson of Deuteronomy 23:14 mentioned above. Our camp must become holy in order to consistently and effectively hear the revelatory voice of the Lord that will instruct us in the current crisis. Joshua found this out the hard way when he launched an attack against the city of Ai without revelation from God on how to do it. God laughs at our prideful reliance on military solutions, our blustering rhetoric from public pulpits, and the itching ears of the people to trust in them instead of trusting in the voice of the Lord. The arm of our flesh is weak against spirit – spirit that comes either from God or from satan.

If our nation has not yet gained a sense of repentance and spiritual responsibility for its direct contribution for the terrorist attacks this time, when and how will God speak next? How long will we be dull of hearing? We will not have to wait long. God will not let this message collect dust.

A Lesson From 2 Chronicles

2 Chronicles 7:14

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

This verse in 2 Chronicles is well worth memorizing, plastering up on our bathroom mirrors, and emblazoning into our hearts, for it presents both the fundamental problem and the solution. But lest we choose what we like in Scripture, and forsake what we don't, let's take a moment and review the context of this verse.

Reading the entire chapter of 2 Chronicles 7, we learn that it commemorates King Solomon's dedication of the temple, the glorious place where God consented to dwell. What an amazing time for God's people! The temple dedication was so spectacular, that the glory of the Lord filled the entire place (and it was huge!). The priests could not even stand under the weight of the glory of God. Oh how we long for the presence of God this way in revival for the nations of the world!! How we long for it in our churches!

God was well pleased with all the preparations for His presence to come and dwell in His temple. Today, in I Corinthians 6:19-20 we learn that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Believers in whom the spirit of God is – this is the temple of our Father today, where He is pleased to dwell!!

Or is He?

Is He pleased to dwell with the secret fornications of your heart? Is He pleased to dwell with your idols of failing to spend time alone with Him in order to learn to hear and obey His voice? Is your daily agenda so pressing that all God gets is a few minutes as you speak in tongues while driving to work? Are we really sheep who follow the Master's voice alone, or do we follow the voice of the god of "too busy" to devote our day to Him, and thus follow a different shepherd? Is your camp holy?

In 2 Chronicles 7, their camp was holy, and God was pleased to dwell with them. Let's continue the story.

2 Chronicles 7:11-12

Thus Solomon finished the house of the LORD, and the king's house: and all that came into Solomon's heart to make in the house of the LORD, and in his own house, he prosperously effected.

And the LORD appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him, I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for an house of sacrifice.

Because God was pleased, the next verse is all the more astonishing. Recall that it is being spoken to God's chosen people.

2 Chronicles 7:13

If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people;

Why would God insert such words here? An out-of-context remark? Hardly. What is God literally shouting? It is this – that even among God's chosen people with whom He is well pleased, there is every likelihood, given the weakness of men, for a quick reversal. What pleases God one moment, often becomes a matter of pride in man the next moment. We in America are proud of so many things, most of which have come from God's blessings. But how quickly we are blinded by our prosperity and materialism, our self-focus and confidence in our own ability to fix ourselves and others.

This verse illustrates many things. First, though the language appears to indicate that God is the author of destruction, the truth is that He allows the enemy to steal, kill, and destroy. This is known in theological terms as the Hebrew idiom of permission. Just as God had to legally allow satan to afflict Job due to Job's sin of fear and cursing himself (3:25 and 3:1), so God legally allows satan to afflict a people whose sin becomes overwhelming. Yet in the midst of devastation, God will QUICKLY respond to the cries of His people who recognize the truths contained in the next verse:

2 Chronicles 7:14-15

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place.

God is ready to close off demonic attack as soon as His people shut the door to sin through admission of their guilt and through their repentance. He will quickly reverse what the enemy has been able to legally do -- the very things God longs to protect His people from. The human mind that does not know God well enough will say, "God, why did you do this to us? Why did you allow it to happen?" while the Godly-minded Christian will recognize his responsibility to repent and seek God's mercy. The truth is, God's heart cries more than ours in our pain.

Notice that the sin of a nation is rectified by the prayers of God's people. "If My people..." will humble themselves. God is not waiting for the unrighteous to repent. He waits for the church. But when His church has more divorces than the unbelieving population, when one in six pastors is secretly involved in pornography on the internet, when God's blessings are measured in material abundance and whole ministries preach health and wealth gospels with just enough Jesus to fool the simple, when the famous preachers of our day name their own ministries after themselves and seek to build their own kingdoms instead of seeking to follow the One who made Himself of no reputation, and when prophets for hire roam the world with words that flatter the sheep sufficiently to blind them from seeing the wolf feet protruding underneath their clothing, when slick marketing and self-promotion is primary and the Word of God is secondary, God takes a back seat. We are talking about a church that allows entertainment to mesmerize, and calls it worship. We are talking about a church that has not realized that participation is not relationship to the One who ever lives to make intercession for the saints. We are talking about a church that by and large has rejected the working of the Holy Spirit and thinks

signs, miracles and wonders died out with the apostles, and that God gave us doctors and threw out healing by faith.

But God doesn't permit such behavior forever. He is visiting your camp and mine now, to see if it is holy.

Master, Who Did Sin?

In Luke 13, Jesus dealt with the very questions the church is asking today. Once we accept that sin has occurred, the carnal mind naturally asks, "Who did it?" It often concludes that the people who were directly afflicted must have been at fault. But note how Jesus Christ addressed this issue:

Luke 13:1-5

There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things?

I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?

I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

God attaches corporate responsibility for a nation's sin. This is Jesus' point in the above passages. But His next point in the related parable that follows these verses is unmistakably ominous for our nation in the days ahead:

Luke 13:6-9

He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.

Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?

And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it:

And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

God deals with errant nations, first through appeals to His people to repent and pray. Next, He deals with them through "natural" catastrophe. For example, millions of acres of burning forest land in this country should speak to us. Selling off millions of cattle because the states of Washington, Montana, and Idaho can't grow

enough hay to feed them due to drought (read 2 Chronicles 7:13 again) should have caused our hearts to take notice and turn back to God. Unprecedented floods in North Carolina, Houston, and the Red River Valley towns in Iowa and the Mississippi valleys (millions of acres) should have caught our attention. Or how about the two hundred thousand acres of prime farmland in California this year that went un-irrigated out of political decree to save fish instead of make food for the hungry and keep farmers from bankruptcy? Do we take note of army worm infestations that gobbled up hundreds of acres of New England hayfields overnight this summer, or the billions of dollars of citrus crops spoiled by pestilence in the southern states this year?

These catastrophes are little voices to ears that are hard of hearing. But when enemy nations attack, which is the next way in which God speaks to errant nations, no one will miss the message. Unfortunately for most, it will be too late. "And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down." Read the rest of the chapter after 2 Chronicles 7:14, and you will see that the nation which persists in its idols will be plucked up from the roots and it will become a byword and a proverb. America is on the brink because "My people...." have not taken the lead to seek the Lord, repent of the wickedness of the land, and seek His face.

God's Purpose is Always Redemptive. So What's the Answer?

God is love. He has always desired our fellowship. He cannot have it without passing us through the filter of holiness. He will get that with our help or without it.

In the first dozen verses of Hebrews 12, God tells us that we must be chastened, corrected, as any son growing up to be pleasing to his father. Then the chapter speaks about Esau who sold his birthright for a cheap morsel of bread, and the people of Moses who refused to go up the mountain to hear the voice of God. This is a grievous error indeed, because the Lord frequently tells in Scripture that man is not to live by bread alone but by the rhema word (meaning "revelation voice") of God. In fact this is precisely where Hebrews 12 concludes:

Hebrews 12:25 (NRS)

See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking; for if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven!

The verses following speak of the shaking that God is sending. It is a shaking of both the earth as well as the heavens (that is, the spiritual). God is simultaneously shaking the earth through catastrophe to wake up those who cannot hear Him any

other way. He is doing it out of His redemptive purpose to turn hearts toward Him. He is also shaking the heavens, severing the moorings of Christians who have learned to trust more in religious man-made trappings and their feelings than in the voice of God into their spirit. These verses in Hebrews tell us that the only things that will survive the shaking and remain will be those things that emanate out of the voice of God in Jesus Christ (the One who is speaking) to them personally. It further concludes that all else will be burned up, "For our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29).

There is a Harvest Coming

God is dealing with the lukewarm church even as He is dealing with the heathen. Many will come, and they will be coming to you who have learned to hear and obey the voice of the Lord. The days ahead will be astonishing. Even now, the harvest has increased to a trickle, but soon it will be a flood. People will run to those who have learned to come into the presence of God (called the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God in the Bible) and remain there, unaffected by the terror around them. Believers who have learned to stay in the shelter of His wing in the secret place of Psalms 91:1, the place of dining at the Master's table (Revelation 3:20-21) will be safe islands that people will swim to, as they learn to abandon those things in which they have securely trusted instead of God – things which are now suddenly and frighteningly adrift.

Psalm 23 speaks to our hearts during these times, as our Shepherd leads us to the place of still waters where we can hear His voice, and where He restores our soul:

Psalm 23:1-6

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

May God bless you and keep you in the cleft of the Rock, Jesus Christ, as you walk in the power of His love and revelation to you. Noah saved himself and his family because He learned to listen. Abraham became the father of many nations because

he listened. Moses broke the bondage of Egypt because he listened. Are you listening?

May your personal fellowship with your first love increase, and your confidence in His voice and your obedience to it grow with each passing day. I love you with all my heart. But far greater, so does He.

In Praise to the One from Whom all blessings flow,

Paul Norcross

How can you come to know God? It will only be through asking Jesus Christ to come into your heart. Scripture declares that He is the way, the truth, and the life, and that no man comes to the Father except through Him. If you have not yet asked Him into your heart by confessing Him as your Lord, and believing that God raised Him from the dead, why not do so now?

For further study materials concerning how to hear the voice of the Lord clearly, please see our bookstore at www.KingdomFaithMinistries.Org . Here are some that are used in over 25 nations as curriculum at over 80 Bible colleges and courses to expand the reader's capacity to hear what God is speaking to them...

