



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

A watching world is given a glimpse of the true face of terrorism



The scale of the World Trade Centre attack is much greater than anything we have witnessed in Ulster but is of the same spirit. Will this awaken people to the evil of those who, with full government assistance, have been reaping a rich political harvest from their evil campaign of terror in Northern Ireland?

A sermon preached in Kilskeery Free Presbyterian Church, Lord's Day 16th September, by the minister, Rev. Ivan Foster.

None will feel more for the people of New York and Washington, who have suffered under the atrocious terrorist attacks of Tuesday, 11th past, than the people of Northern Ireland who have suffered repeatedly at the hands of the Roman Catholic terror group, the IRA. In 1987, the IRA exploded a "no-warning" bomb at the war memorial in Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh, just 9 miles from us here in Kilskeery. Twelve Protestants lost their lives, as a result of that attack upon civilians silently commemorating the courage of soldiers in two world wars, at the annual "Poppy-Day" service. In a town of some 25,000 people, that is equivalent to about 5000-6000 murdered in New York! This is but one of many incidents which will spring to mind here in Ulster at this time of America's grief and which will arouse deep sympathy with the bereaved and injured in New York and Washington.

It is believed by some in the media that the thinking in the USA on the matter of Sinn Fein and the IRA will most certainly undergo a change, following the arrests of three Sinn Fein members in Colombia and now the much more serious attack upon New York and Washington. The USA was wrong to differentiate between the IRA and other terrorist organisations, simply because of the strong Irish lobby in political circles there. It would be but right, even if more than a little late, if such a change came about. I have heard US officials describing those who launched Tuesday's attacks as cowardly individuals who creep about in the shadows and who attack from behind and then sneak away again. That describes the IRA very well!!! Leaving the politics of the event to one side, the atrocity has set eternity before millions in a way that mankind has never witnessed before. Millions of people worldwide watched events unfold in New York and Washington. They watched the collapse of the towers, knowing that thousands were trapped inside and were perishing. They watched in horror as some, in order to escape the flames, flung themselves from windows to certain death below. Never in the history of man has such a tragedy been observed by so many. The terrible events have raised some old questions which ever need answering. Inevitably, it is the Lord Who comes in for criticism in the wake of such disaster. Those criticisms need to be addressed.

I. THE LORD IS FAULTED FOR "ALLOWING" SUCH EVENTS.



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

In truth, the Lord does not “allow” such things. None is more active to stop such events than the God of heaven. He has put measures in place which, if heeded, would stop such events. Man is a self-determining being. What he chooses to do, he does so freely. Neither God nor devil imposes their will upon him. But he is a depraved creature with a will ever inclined to sin. He always decides freely, but always decides to sin. It is his predilection to sin that brings wretchedness upon his head. The Saviour displayed great grief of heart at what Jerusalem, in its wickedness and rebellion against God, was bringing upon its head. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Matthew 23:37. Many will have asked “Why did God not stop the terrorists?” The same people would object most strongly if God were to arbitrarily intervene and “stop” them smoking, drinking, carousing and generally defying His holy law! The man or woman who pursues sin, in defiance of God, is but exercising the same freedom that the terrorist exercised when he set out to kill on Tuesday past. Man may deem the consequences to be such as to constitute a difference but, in truth, both are but incidents of man freely defying God’s law and doing what he desires to do. The immediate consequences may be very different but, in essence, the terrorists of September 16th and the common defier of God’s law do not differ in spirit.

Briefly consider the measures that God has put in place to stop and hinder men from following a path that results in such events.

1. God clearly warns man of the consequences of sin. It is sin that brings such tragedies and God would turn men from their sin. God need not do so but in mercy He does. He warns man CLEARLY. God has published a comprehensive definition of sin: *Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law*, 1 John 3:4. Man is without excuse as to what sin is. God has warned REPEATEDLY and FAITHFULLY. *For I earnestly protested unto your fathers in the day that I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, even unto this day, rising early and protesting, saying, Obey my voice*, Jeremiah 11:7. Again, *And the LORD hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising early and sending them; but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear*, Jeremiah 25:4. *Howbeit I sent unto you all my servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, saying, Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate*, Jeremiah 44:4. This God has done throughout the generations, not just in Jeremiah’s day.

2. He has made examples of great sinners. God has put His wrath and judgment on display in order that mankind might know the consequences and the reality of His anger against sin. Sodom and Gomorrah are but one example. *And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly*, 2 Peter 2:6.

3. He has erected barriers to stop man in his sin. Conscience within and afflictions without serve to remind us whenever we defy God. But how many give any heed to such warning notices of the danger they embrace, when they follow the path of sin? *But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear*, Zechariah 7:11. Do not these words graphically describe the reaction of men to the warnings of God by His Word, His troubling of the sinner’s conscience and the afflicting of the sinner through sickness or trouble? *Then they cried out with a loud voice, and*



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, Acts 7:57. This was the reaction of the crowd of people unwilling to hear of the sin they had committed in crucifying the Lord Jesus Christ. Stopping their ears against the warnings of a man of God, they rushed on him and murdered him, in order to be rid of the voice of God's warning. If man refuses to heed God's warnings and rushes on headlong down the path of danger, who is to blame for the disasters that ensue? Certainly not God.

II. THE JUSTICE OF GOD IN PERMITTING SUCH EVENTS IS QUESTIONED.

"What have I done to deserve such?" is a common cry when trouble strikes. Such terrible events as those witnessed on Tuesday past, are not a matter of injustice to the victims but of mercy granted to the living. *If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?* Psalm 130:3. If God were to call us all to account, which of us in ourselves would merit acquittal?

The following statements may seem strange and unkind, but they are nevertheless true.

- There is not one who dies in what are termed "tragedies" but deserves to!
- There is not one who escapes while others perish who deserves to!
- There is not one person in this meeting tonight, including the preacher, but deserves to die under the judgment of God! In truth, everything man does deserves instant judgment. *Why? But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away*, Isaiah 64:6. Our very best is polluted and worthy of damnation. *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord*, Romans 3:23 and 6:23. All of us have so lived and acted as to deserve damnation long ago. But God in His longsuffering has stayed the hand of judgment and permitted us to live and enjoy the opportunities of seeking mercy and salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ.
- There was nothing especially deserving of death in those poor people who died in New York and Washington. They were no more deserving than are we all tonight. Heed the words we read in our service tonight. They were the words of Christ and very relevant to our circumstances. *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*, Luke 13:1-5. All of us are worthy of death and we can escape only by repenting and turning to Christ for mercy and forgiveness.

III. MEN CONFUSE THE WRATH OF MEN WITH THE JUDGMENT OF GOD.

These were no direct acts of God's judgment on men. Doubtless, there was the secret outworking of God's providence in the lives of all those involved, the secret of which we will never know until that day when all things will be revealed. But I think we may say of this



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

terrible event that it was not a direct act of God, such as those acts which the world will yet see take place, examples of which are prophesied in Revelation chapter 16. The great day of God's wrath will not be followed by the response amongst men that this attack has prompted. When God acts in judgment men will quietly acquiesce. *Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God,* Romans 3:19. Please read John 8:3-11 and Matt 22:1-12 to see examples of how silent is guilty man before the perfect justice of God.

Leaders have said that they will respond to the terrorist attacks and exact a revenge. Man will not be able to respond to God's judgment. They will be overwhelmed by a sense of their own guilt and brought to silent acknowledgment and consent.

Finally,

IV. UNLIKE THE TERRORISTS, GOD GIVES CLEAR WARNING OF HIS JUDGMENT AND PROVIDES DELIVERANCE FROM IT

1. It is the purpose of the terrorist to terrorise but not so the Lord. How long the men behind this attack planned and schemed we may only guess. They were moved by a bitter hatred of the USA. God has no such feelings toward men. *Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?* Ezekiel 33:11. What was said to ancient Israel is said today to the world, for has not God demonstrated His love for the world in sending the message of His mercy through His Son, to all men? *And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature,* Mark 16:15. God's purpose in Christ is the salvation of sinners.

2. The terrorists died in order to kill others, not so the Lord. *For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures,* 1 Corinthians 15:3. How different, how converse is the action of Christ to that of the terrorist! *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life,* John 3:16. *For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us,* Romans 5:6-8.

3. The terrorist's success is calculated in how many he kills, not so the Lord. God delights in the sinner living. Heaven will bear clear testimony to that glorious fact. *After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen. And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are*



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, Revelation 7:9-17. A great multitude will everlastingly bear witness to the boundless mercy and love of God toward sinful man. That love was displayed at the cross when Christ died in order to save sinners who were sentenced to die for their sins. There is life and salvation awaiting all who come to Christ in repentance.

One of the most horrific incidents in the shocking events of Tuesday past was watching as poor people, demented by the heat and flames behind them, hurled themselves into space in order to escape those flames. Of course, there was no escape for them in such action. But tonight, there is escape from everlasting hell for you if you but take one step, the step of faith, and come to Christ. *Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near, Isaiah. 55:6.*