

A Basket of Figs

May, 1999

Dedicated to the idea that the decree makes the difference. Jeremiah 24:2,3

The Day They Prayed in School

Yes, it was in public school in 1999 in the state of Colorado. No, it was not an authorized prayer meeting. It was far more urgent than that. They were praying all over the school, but especially in the cafeteria and in the library. No, they were not saying grace for their meals, nor were they reading their Bibles and praying in the library; nor was the praying confined to unauthorized Bible clubs. It was not the regular praying that devout students have always done in their own souls. It was widespread, and included both students and teachers. Outside the school, parents were praying. We were all praying, even sixty miles south in Colorado Springs.

For a generation now, courts, lawyers, civil rights groups, and legislatures have opposed praying in school. In a new and innovative interpretation of the basic documents of our American republic twentieth-century Americans decided that school was no fit place for prayers, and zealous and over-zealous teachers and administrators have enforced the ban vigorously. God was not to be acknowledged, nor His Name mentioned. We sold His glory for feel-good emotions of tolerance and broad-mindedness.

It is a funny thing about God, however. He is not so easily ignored. There are many ways that He comes to get our attention. He speaks gently in the Gospel and calls men to the faith and love of Jesus Christ. He speaks gently and urgently in the preaching ministry of the church. Faithful ministers have been calling us to faith and repentance for many years now, but their voices have been ignored, often mocked.

The Voice of God

God speaks with a more strident voice in the forces of nature, in the hurricane, in the

tornado, in fire and flood. He speaks in pestilence. His Horsemen ride forth across the earth, and terrible is the voice of God in His servants. There are gentle angels that comfort and protect those who will be heirs of salvation, but there are other, more terrible angels like the one who slew the firstborn in Egypt. For God is gracious and tender to men. He knows the destructiveness and horror of sin and folly, and speaks with many voices to call us to repentance and faith. Sometimes He may even deliver men into the power of the devil for a time, that their souls might be saved. (I Cor. 5:5).

For you see, God is not non-violent. “He spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth *person*, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned *them* with an overthrow, making *them* an example unto those that after should live ungodly; And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed *his* righteous soul from day to day with *their* unlawful deeds;) The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished...” (II Pet. 2:5-9) Earthly events are often examples of heavenly things.

Sometimes He speaks in a way to show us the folly of our way. He gives us the fruit of our doings (Prov. 1) “Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone,” was the sober decree in the days of Hosea (Hos. 4:17). Sometimes God says, “You want to pretend that there are no values, that all lifestyles are O.K., that all religions are equal, that there are no absolute values to which men are obliged to conform, then I will let you see the result of that. But in that day you will pray!”

Remembering Mercy

But even in wrath, God remembers mercy. What wonderful testimonies of faith and godliness were seen that horrible day in the Columbine High School! And what mercy, in that God allowed the horror to go only to His limits, not the limits dreamed of by the devil. Only a warning—a terrible warning of what might have been if the propane bombs had gone off and the evil scheme had been carried to its conclusion. Will the horror become greater if we do not repent?

The waters of God’s judgment are restrained by the sands of His patience. He is not

like a spoiled child or an intemperate ruler who allows his sense of wrong to scatter everything before him. No, God speaks over and over. He speaks gently in the breezes and the birds and the sunsets. He speaks in the storms and the tempests. But if we do not hear; if we do not repent; if we do not turn from unbelief and injustice, He comes with a stronger voice, for He “has his way in the whirlwind” (Nahum 1). The whirlwind comes at His command, and accomplishes all that He wills.

We have seen our children corrupted with drugs, and we did not repent. We have seen our children corrupted by sexual immorality and promiscuous lifestyles, and we did not repent. Although most of us carry the covenant sign of Christian baptism, we have refused to walk in the old paths, the old ways, trying to fashion Christ into a more comfortable image. Little by little God has removed the restraints that once protected our children from the fiends of idolatry, drug addition, drunkenness, sodomy, and other devils from hell. For spiritual judgments are the most terrible judgments of all. “God gave them over...” are the terrible words of Romans 1. But we have not repented. When sin becomes the judgment for sin, where shall we hide?

The Dark Angels

As terrible as those dark angels were, there are others arising now from the bottomless pit. The older demons of theological and moral relativity are being swept aside by the dark angels of a new absolutism, the absolutism of guns and bombs, and things more dark and terrible.

Where shall we hide? Shall we find shelter in our families, torn apart by adultery, divorce, and other wickedness? Shall we go to our churches to be entertained by the dance, frivolous ditties, and accommodating theologies? Shall we hide in the integrity of civil government, which from the right side of the mouth orders the bombing of the be-jeebers out of sovereign nations, while from the other side piously instructs our children to find peaceful solutions to problems? Will we find moral absolutes in lies, fornication, and political expediency? Will we find shelter in education? No! for the dark angels are coming even for our children.

“But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee: Cursed *shalt* thou *be* in the city, and cursed *shalt* thou *be* in the field. Cursed *shall be* thy basket

and thy store. Cursed *shall be* the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy land, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Cursed *shalt thou be* when thou comest in, and cursed *shalt thou be* when thou goest out.” (Deut. 28:15-20)

Will we take refuge in our heroes and heroines? Shall we take direction from Howard Stern, Jane Fonda, Rosanne Barr, and Bart Simpson? Where shall we hide? Shall we take refuge in gun control, when our most vital weapons have been given to Chinese communists? Where will we hide when those black angels arise out of the pit and fire rains on our cities?

God Does Make a Difference Between People

God does make a difference between people, and He knows how to deliver His people, and to bring judgment upon the ungodly. He has discernment and judgment, even if we do not. His wisdom is not affected by our folly. Nor is He unrighteous because we are rebellious.

We can pretend, and hug our delusions. We can live in the world of our dreams, walking in the light of our own sparks (Isaiah 50:11). We can pretend that there is no absolute religious truth. We can pretend and become so bland that no conviction will cross our lips that will be unpleasant to anyone. We can pretend to be moral ciphers. We can pretend to be more loving and gracious than Jesus Himself, and call that Christian which He rejects. We can pretend that God has said nothing on morals. But God will not go away because He is inconvenient and makes us feel uncomfortable. He remains a consuming fire when all of our fire is extinguished in pathetic whimpers. He remains true even though all of us become liars.

He Made the Eye

“Understand, ye brutish among the people: and ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see? He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? he that teacheth man knowledge, *shall not he know?*” Psalm 94:9,10

Will the day come when we all will pray, just as they prayed at Columbine? Will such prayers be raised from our cities and from the halls of power? Will we pray at the point of a gun? Or in the presence of some more dark and terrible angel?

“And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” (Rev. 6:15-17).

Men will pray. Thank God for those at Columbine who prayed to God through His Son Jesus Christ and did not try to hide from God. Thank God for those who died, confessing their faith. “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints,” the Scripture tells us. If this terrible day brings the rest of us to repentance and faith in Christ, they will not have died in vain.

BOTH GOOD AND EVIL

The Patience of Job

“What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips.” –Job 2:9

Why do bad things happen? The humanist thinks he has the Christian over a barrel when he asks that question. The trap is phrased something like this:

Do you believe that God is good?

Do you believe that God is all-powerful?

Do you believe that God is able to keep bad things from happening?

When the Christian answers “yes” to these questions, the humanist springs the trap: If God is all powerful, and good, why does He let things happen that are horrid.

A Humanist Solution

At this point, Christians who are infected with humanism try a feeble response that something like this. “But God wants us to love Him freely. Therefore, He has given

us free will, so that we can love Him freely. He therefore lets us do what we want, hoping that we will love Him freely, letting us fall into sin if we want to. Our sin is our own.”

There are several things wrong with this answer, or answers like it, and they are listed in no particular order of importance:

1. The answer is unbiblical, as we see from our text above.
2. The answer is small comfort to those who have experienced what appears to be senseless tragedies. For instance, it is small comfort to a mother whose baby has been killed by a drunk driver to tell her that God allowed the drunk to do it. “Why didn’t God save my baby?” is the only question that is in her mind. Neither will the answer bring relief to a tormented kid in school whose life is unbearable by the cruelty and sadistic treatment he receives from his classmates.
3. The answer comes from practical atheism, and declares God to be dead in the events that matter most to us.

Job had lost everything. His flocks were stolen, his servants murdered, his children had been slain. If he had been a modern humanist, he would have cursed his “luck,” or cursed those who acted in “free will.” He did neither. When his wife advised him to curse God and die, he refused to sin with his lips but traced both good things and bad things up to their true source, the will and power of God.

Quibbling Doesn’t Help

How do we escape the dilemma that evil brings to a moral universe. The answer cannot be in “free will.” The idea of such freedom eventually assaults the very attributes and being of God himself. Some have done this unashamedly. Could God prevent evil? In order to avoid answering the question “yes,” they resort to claiming that God does not know the future, or that He willingly limits Himself, or that He is learning along with the human race, or that He is not the source of all power and being. All of these “solutions” attack the very doctrine of God in Scripture, the Creator of all, and place Him in our time and space, making the Incarnation vain and unnecessary.

There is no power but of God, and in Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). He gives life and breath to all living things. (Acts 17:25) Men cannot even

curse the Lord without using the breath that God gave them. They cannot lift their hands to do an evil thing without the energy that God gives them. Neither can they digest their food or receive warmth from the sun. Every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of Lights (James 1).

God's Gifts Offered to Baal.

In fact, men have nothing even to offer to a false god. Israel had to use the corn and wine that God had given them in order to prepare a sacrifice for Baal (Hos. 2:8). The devil has nothing of his own; he even has to borrow from God's truth in order to deceive, transforming himself into an angel of light (II Cor. 1:14). If he followed his own rebellious principles, his kingdom would not last (Matt. 12:25). Even the intelligence of the devil and his strength and power are given and sustained by God.

For this reason, Christians are commanded to give thanks to God for "every thing." "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." (I Thess. 5:18) We are to trace every thing that happens up to our Heavenly Father, for without His will, no thing can take place on the earth.

Why does this not make God the author of sin? How could Job say that God had taken away his flocks and herds, when his herds were stolen, and his servants murdered? Because Job knew that God is both good in all His ways, and upright in all His deeds, and brings all things to pass after the counsel of His Own will (Eph. 1).

Both Good and Evil in a Single Act

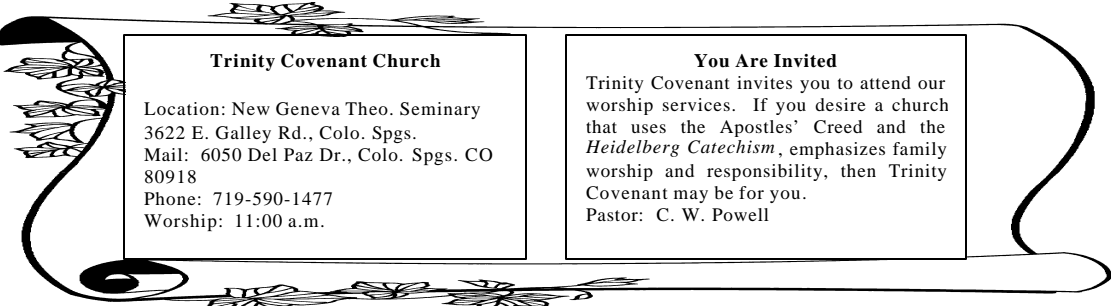
Job had learned that there is a difference between the act and the evil of the act. He knew that every creature of God is good (I Tim. 4:4), for all has come from the hand of God. Even in the monstrous act of the crucifixion of Christ, Pilate and Herod and the people intended it for evil, but God intended it for good. (See also Genesis 50:20) The Cross of Jesus Christ is both the horror of the world, and the glory of God. It is the horror of the world because wicked hands of men laid their hands on the Son of God and sacrificed Him to their pride, ambition, and hatred. It is the glory of God for nowhere in history is the love of God for his people more wonderfully displayed than in that Cross, where His soul was made a sacrifice for sin (Isaiah 53), so that all who believe might have eternal life.

Dealing with God

Those who do not see that all things come to them from the hand of God, even if through the agency of the devil, will not be able to cope with the evil that arises. Why pray to God if the evil event is only from the devil, and there is no good in it from God? Why give thanks for all things, if some of those things are from the devil only. Why not be bitter against evil people, if their actions are not designed by God for our good? Why not define your Christianity by your reaction against evil and wickedness, instead of by faith in Jesus Christ? How can the peace of God rule our hearts and minds (Col. 3:15 and Phil. 4:6,7) if all things are not designed by God for the good of those called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

We must conduct our spiritual business with God: Hebrews 4:13 “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” Very often disasters come for the very purpose of calling us to faith and trust in the God who made us, away from the sin that will destroy us. They may have nothing to do with transgressions of the individuals involved. On the contrary, in the midst of tragedy, great expressions of Christian love and faith may come forth, as there was at Columbine. Jesus explained it to us in Luke 13:1-5, that disasters often come, not because of particular sins on the part of the victims, but as a call to repentance to those who are left behind.

We will send *A Basket of Figs* free of charge to anyone who requests it. We will be glad to send it to your friends and relatives. It is our desire that these little papers be used of the Lord to bear witness of the truth as it is in Christ. Our only request is that they be read: you do not even have to agree with everything! Unless otherwise indicated, all articles are written by Pastor Powell, and they may be freely duplicated as long as duly credited. We do not solicit funds, nor will we give or sell our mailing list to anyone.



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Worship: 11:00 a.m.

You Are Invited

Trinity Covenant invites you to attend our worship services. If you desire a church that uses the Apostles' Creed and the *Heidelberg Catechism*, emphasizes family worship and responsibility, then Trinity Covenant may be for you.
Pastor: C. W. Powell