

Teaching for August 8, 2007

Where Do We Go From Here?

Last Wednesday morning we sent out our PTM e-mail newsletter with the title, "Do You Hear the Warning?" The message was essentially that *God is giving us warning to turn back to Him in repentance for our lack of holiness*. That evening during rush hour, the I-35W bridge collapsed, resulting in the devastating loss of life and a major transportation artery in our city and state.

We certainly do not claim that the e-mail was a prophetic warning of the events that occurred later that day, but it does cause us to reflect on whether the Lord might have something to say to us through this tragedy.

When a disaster of this magnitude takes place, there is an initial period of shock and response. Part of the shock is simply trying to come to grips with the reality that such a devastating thing could have happened in our city. We don't expect to see continuous CNN coverage about a landmark so well known to all of us. It is hard to grasp that any of us on a given day could have been a victim of the bridge tragedy.

After the shock of the reality comes the response. As we witnessed, the immediate action of first responders on the scene saved lives and inspired stories of hope. A lesser-covered story was the response of prayer. Many people from across the country have contacted us to let us know that they are lifting the Twin Cities up in prayer. It is a humbling blessing to know that others are connected to us in heart and spirit as they pray for us.

In addition to the assurances of prayer, we received many responses from people offering interpretations of the incident. Many have wondered if there is a greater spiritual significance to the bridge collapse, as often things in the natural realm have a spiritual counterpart. If so, we need to pause and ask what the Lord might be saying to us through this.

Without "over-spiritualizing," perhaps there are some very direct lessons for us to learn. We may not understand fully right away what the Lord is speaking, but we need to listen to each other over time. Perhaps a picture will emerge as we put together pieces from a variety of sources. We should not neglect intentionally seeking the Lord for His perspective.

Lessons for the Immediate

In the immediate sense, this is certainly a reminder of how fragile our lives are at any moment in time. Many people testified to believing they were going to die in the moment their cars plunged toward the river. We cannot wait until tomorrow or a more convenient time to "get our houses in order." The Lord can use wake-up calls to jar us from our dullness to the needs of our hearts. As American Christians, we have been lulled into complacency about critical spiritual issues of the day. We have lost the sharp edge that Paul writes about in Colossians 4:2: "Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart" (NLT).

In a recent poll from the Barna Group, George Barna concluded their survey with this description of Christians today: "Many of the same people who claim that their faith is very important to them and that they are absolutely committed to Christianity also *say that they face no spiritual challenges in life*. Many other adults are only vaguely aware of such challenges, and do not put much energy into addressing them," explained the researcher. "Americans focus on what they consider to be the most important matters; faith maturity is not one of them. The dominant spiritual change that we have seen—Americans becoming less engaged in matters of faith—helps to explain the surging secularization of our culture." (To read the report, click here for the Barna website:

<http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdateNarrow&BarnaUpdateID=276>)

The immediate response of prayer, initial impressions, and sharing of insights will continue for a while. Then, as is usual with such events, we will begin to settle back into our usual routines and lifestyles. Many people will express the desire to “get back to normal.” It feels safer for us to re-establish old patterns and continue our lives as before. But we need to guard against simply returning to normal! After the wake-up call of 9/11, some say the Church in America was impacted for just 60 days. Then it was “back to business as usual.” It was back to the Church’s definition of “normal.”

Heed the Warnings!

Could it be that we have been given another wake-up call? If so, God softened the blow out of His mercy. More people should have died given the conditions, and there is no question that the children on the bus were protected by God’s hand! Is it possible that God in His mercy is calling us to Himself before a tragedy of greater magnitude envelops us? Are we heeding the warnings? Or are we allowing our routines, programs, and agendas to put the warnings on a shelf for a response at a later time? Is it time for us to prayerfully, biblically, and deliberately—both individually and corporately—fall to our knees before the Lord of Mercy and ask Him to show us the error of our ways?

Believers in Jesus Christ need to come together to hear from the Lord—and then repent and seek His face as His children. An interesting statement made by the National Transportation Safety Board Chairman Mark Rosenker indirectly speaks to this need. He shared some telling words regarding the cooperation that he saw among national, state, and local officials. He commented that they all worked together so well because they had “a common goal.”

How we long to hear that same things spoken about the Church today! We are the ones who should have a common, clear, and devoted goal. Yet the Church today is as fragmented as it has ever been in its history. As more tragedies come our way, may we as the Church be prepared to respond with one heart, one mind, and one goal—to honor and glorify the name of Jesus Christ in every word and every action!