

Failing To See The Hand Of God Because Have No Fear Of God

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I have as of late been meditating on why the church of today has no influence upon the society in which it exists. Why did the church in former times, 300-400 years ago, why did the church back then have such great favor from God and such power from God? I've come to a conclusion, friends, and I'd like to share that with you this morning. I've been re-reading one of my favorite Puritan's, Thomas Brooks, and he wrote a sermon over 300 pages long on the fire of London of 1666. It is entitled "London's Lamentations: Or a Serious Discourse Concerning That Late Fiery Dispensation That Turned Our Once Renowned City Into a Ruinous Heap." In that sermon, Thomas Brooks gives reasons why he believed London was destroyed by the finger of God in a divine judgment from the Almighty. It's a remarkable sermon and one of the most interesting facts about that epistle is the public proclamation from the House of Parliament issued after the fire. The British Parliament acknowledged that their city was ruined and destroyed because of an offended Creator and that the fire itself was a national judgment from the Almighty.

Allow me to read you that proclamation as it was issued in 1666.

"A visitation do dreadful, that scarce any age or nation hath ever seen or felt the like wherein although the afflicting hand of God fell more immediately upon the inhabitants of this city and the parts adjacent, yet all men ought to look upon it as a judgment upon the whole nation and to humble themselves accordingly."

Listen friends, observe how England of old acknowledged the hand of God in their national judgment which burned up their primary city. When I read that, I began to piece together seasons of the same occurrences in America where pastors of old took notice of national events which destroyed a city and they grew alarmed that an offended Creator could bring such an afflicting judgment upon them they would call their churches to times of solemn assembly where the people of God would gather to fast and pray and exercise humility before God and repentance toward God and seeking his face in favor again. And as I have conducted research on the study of revival through the years, I've stumbled across some remarkable distinctions between the American church of today and the church of America say 400 years ago. We must ask ourselves why was the church once so powerfully and mightily used of God in this country and why is the church so impotent and powerless in our day. Obviously, there are numerous reasons for the

downgrade of the gospel and the declension in the spiritual life of the church but the main distinction between the church of the 17th and 18th centuries of America and the church of our present day is this: pastors in former times recognized the hand of God in the affairs of mankind through divine chastisements upon society and they had a fear of God and it solemnized them. They literally feared the Almighty back in those days to such degree that if an earthquake hit a city like Boston, the pastors would call solemn assemblies, call the congregations to a serious seeking of God in repentance, humiliation and prayer. If a fire destroyed a city, they would do the same and acknowledge it to be the hand of God in his just displeasure with them. They would not fail to see the hand of God in their midst like we fail to see the hand of God in our day, friends.

We attribute all of the natural disasters which befall our nation as merely that, a whim of nature. If we are attacked by terrorists like on 9/11, we attribute it to zealots who hate America and leave it at that. I remember a famous religious leader at the time of 9/11. He issued a statement saying it was the hand of God that brought the Twin Towers down but this man received such abuse from the media and personal attacks, he soon published a retraction of his statement. Pastors today fear man more than God so they are quite unwilling to put their reputations on the line and to say, "God did it because of our sins." So silence is the norm in the church of America today in regard to national judgments upon us from the hand of the Almighty.

Today we fail to see the hand of God in his remedial judgments upon the land but in former times, in wiser times, when the church was a powerful influence upon society, the majority of pastors and people of God recognized the divine displeasure of the Almighty through natural disasters and judgments upon the land. Today if a violent earthquake should destroy an entire city as it did at the turn of the previous century in San Francisco where all the major buildings were reduced to rubble and fire swept through the city in utter destruction, if that happened today and if a pastor stood up and publicly announced it was the finger of God that brought such calamity upon the city because of its great wickedness and sin, that minister would be nationally abused in the media, called a religious fanatic and the entire nation would revolt against such a narrow minded and intolerant hate speech as to suggest that God would destroy a city because of sin, why God isn't even like that anymore, that was the God of the Old Testament. The God of today is just a God of love, at least that's what the church in America has been saying for the last 50 years. Our entire view of God has changed in this country. We've shrunken God down to man-size; he's just a God of love.

I will never forget sitting years ago in a large church where the pastor was the darling of his denomination and he made this remark: he said that when you come across a passage in the Bible where it says we are to fear God, that means only reverence him, not fear him like you would be afraid of him. He said that only in the Old Testament times did God require people to fear him like that but now God was just a God of love and he said when you come across a verse in the Bible that says fear God, that means only to reverence him and not fear him. At the time, I believed the old boy as he was preaching because he was famous and I didn't know any better back then but since that time, I've looked it up in the Greek and the primary meaning of that New Testament word "fear" is "fear him," and

that's our trouble today, friends, we do not have any fear of God in the church or in the land so we can sin as much as we want to and not worry about it. But listen to these passages from the word of God on fearing God. Isaiah 8:13 states, "Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread." Listen to what Jesus had to say about fearing God. He declared in Matthew 10:28, "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Listen friends, to dear old Peter in his first epistle. He sure isn't talking about reverencing God in this verse but having a good old-fashioned fear of the Almighty. Listen to his warning, 1 Peter 1:17, "And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear."

Listen friends, let's be honest with ourselves: our main problem today in this country is we do not fear God anymore and we in the church have shrunken God down to our size and put him on our level. We don't fear him either; he's just our pal. And the church of America today has no power, has no influence upon the society in which it exists. It is a powerless church because it does not fear the God of the Bible and humble itself when the God of the Bible brings divine chastisements upon her and the land. We are a proud people today; pride is the number one sin of the church in America today, pride and arrogance. On top of that, the church in America decided long ago to get rid of the only resource it had in regard to power with God and that was the weekly prayer meeting. The church in America decided they could get more done on money and man-power than with God and Holy Ghost power so they kicked out the weekly prayer meeting and when that happened, friends, the church was like an automobile that ran out of gas and it has been stalled out ever since.

In her current condition, the church cannot recognize the hand of God in the affairs of man. She doesn't fear God and she fails to see the hand of God in divine displeasure upon the society in which she exists. When a serial killing happens and people are gunned down, it's just the result of a loner who was maladjusted. When a tornado rips through a town leaving death in its wake, it's just Mother Nature acting up because of global warming. But pastors of former days, even societies of former days, lived in the fear of the Almighty and recognized these disasters as the hand of God in judgment against them and it drove them to their knees in humility, repentance and prayer.

My message today, friends, is entitled "Failing To See The Hand Of God Because We Have No Fear Of God" and my text is 1 Peter 1:17. I want to read you today some examples of which I speak. It may seem foreign to us today to even think on these terms because we'd be seen as religious fanatics or mad-men ourselves to say God can act today and destroy a city like he did by sending fire upon Sodom and Gomorrah. Why, the God of today would never do such an intolerant thing as that. That's what we believe but we are dead wrong, friends, dead wrong. Our thinking is all wrong today and our view of God is all wrong today and if we do not humble ourselves before the Almighty and fast and pray and turn from our wicked ways there is no hope for us. God will destroy America, you can count on that, friends. The same God who brought a flood upon the earth in Noah's day destroying all of mankind save eight individuals is the same God of

the Bible as in those days. The same God who rained fire and brimstone out of heaven upon the wicked inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah destroying them all save Lot and his two daughters is the same God of today even if the church in America won't recognize him as such. Listen friends, God will punish sin, you can count on that.

I want to take the time to read you public records of our nation's history in times of previous natural disasters which occurred several hundred years ago. The first is a publication printed in Boston in 1755 regarding sermons preached around Boston by ministers of the day after it was shook by a violent earthquake. Listen to this publication, friends, from our nation in 1755: "Earthquakes, the work of God and tokens of his just displeasure being a discourse on that subject wherein it is given a particular description of this awful event of Providence. And among other things is offer'd a brief account of the natural, instrumental, or secondary causes of these operations in the hands of God. After which, our thoughts are led up to Him, as having the highest and principal agency in this stupendous work," by Thomas Prince, one of the pastors of the South Church in Boston, made public at this time on occasion of the late dreadful earthquake which happened on the 18th of November, 1755. The text of the sermon was Psalm 18:7, "Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth."

Did you hear that, friends? Ministers in former days of our once great nation recognized natural events as divine judgments upon the land. They were humbled by them, terrified by them and it drove them to their knees in solemn assemblies where through repentance and prayer, they sought the face of God in humility and supplication on behalf of their land and nation. How many pastors do you know today that do the same? This is the great divide between the church of those days and the church in our day, friends.

Allow me to read you another public discourse when the fear of God was still in the heart and hearth of this young country. The following sermon was preached by Joseph Sewall, a minister of Boston who, by the way, was elected President of Harvard though he declined the position because his congregation refused to let him go. Listen to this public discourse which was printed in 1727: "Repentance: The sure way to escape destruction: Two sermons on Jeremiah 18:7-8," preached December 21st on a public fast occasioned by the earthquake the night after the Lord's Day, October 29th and on the Lord's Day, December 24, 1727 by Joseph Sewall, Pastor in Boston. Another sermon by Gilbert Tennent who was mightily used of God during the Great Awakening has the title: "A Solemn Warning to the Secure World from the God of Terrible Majesty."

Listen friends, pastors and preachers back then when this nation was still young knew the Almighty, they feared the Almighty. They referred to him as a God of terrible majesty or they called him the Great God. Today, we have shrunken him down to our size where he's just a loving friend and no more. Listen to this: even the President of the United States in former days recognized the hand of God and feared him. Listen to this public notice published in 1798 in the city of Philadelphia: "A discourse delivered in the First Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia on Wednesday, May 9th, 1798 recommended by the

President of the United States to be observed as a day of fasting, humiliation and prayer throughout the United States of America.”

That, friends, is the great distinction between America of former days and America of our day. The nation of America not only does not fear God today, rather it blatantly sins in the sight of God and then shakes her angry fist in the face of God, daring him to do anything about it. This once was a God-fearing nation, now it's a God-hating nation and soon it will surely be destroyed and that without remedy. Until the church in America recognizes the hand of the Almighty in his remedial judgments upon us, it will blindly rebel against the most High through arrogance and pride. But if the people of God would humble themselves and see the hand of God against them through his loving remedial judgments which intend to draw his people back to him, then the church of America could lead this wicked nation back to God, to the God of the Bible through repentance and prayer. A national spiritual awakening could be the result where untold millions could be swept into the kingdom of God. But if the church continues to bury her head in the sand, if she continues in her silence and continues in her mad rush to expand her already bulging campus and if she fails to acknowledge the hand of God in natural disasters as a judgment of divine displeasure against a sinning nation and church and if she fails to exercise repentance and turn back to the God of the Bible in humility, fastings, supplications and prayer, then I fear there is no hope for America, friends, for the fate of this nation lies not in the White House nor the courthouse nor the schoolhouse but in the church house. The Lord pitieth them that fear him. He stands against the proud and arrogant who sin recklessly against him. Heaven help us all.

Let me pray: *Great God, you are the Ancient of Days. I beseech thee, O Most High, to hear my prayer. Forgive this land for its abominations. Forgive this land for its great sins. Heavenly King, forgive us for calling evil good and good evil. Forgive us, Great God, as the people of God who have backed away from you. We have turned aside from following you and have hewn out our own cisterns rather than serving the Lord Jesus Christ who is the fountain of living waters. Forgive us, Great God, for diluting your gospel of your Son to make it more palatable to sinful man. Forgive us, King of Heaven, for fearing man more than we fear you. Send us, I pray, the grace of repentance so we as a church can turn back to thee. Forgive us for our willful pride. Great God, in your mercy send this nation a national awakening as you have done in former times for your great glory. Hear us, Great Jehovah, for it is through thy precious Son's blood, the Lord Jesus Christ, that I pray for you to hear this prayer and have mercy upon us before it's too late. Amen.*