

The Timeless Voice: America, and God, in times of pain

Commentary by Greg Baker

The past few months have been difficult for America. From hurricanes to forest fires to a tragic shooting in Las Vegas, our nation is going through painful trials. It is a cold, hard reminder that this world is perishing. It is decaying. From our bodies (2 Corinthians 4:16) to the planet itself, our world is dying (1 John 2:17).

We are witnessing continually the consequences of the Fall, sin, and death. We are witnessing how they are not only destroying us, but our planet as well. As each day passes, sin does more and more damage to creation.

“For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God” – Romans 8:20-21

This reality has left the world puzzled, and many have turned to government for help. Now, government does have a job to do – it is God’s institution of justice. And government must work to protect people from wrongdoing in the world.

But government can only establish laws and punish lawbreakers; it cannot deal with the heart of the lawbreaker or the internal suffering of man. In other words, it cannot solve the real problem. For that, the world needs the Church.

Just as government must seek justice, the Church must speak the Truth to where the real problem is: people’s hearts (“The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick;

Who can understand it?" Jeremiah 17:9). The difficult truth is that man apart from God is prone to all nature of evil desires. Greed, lust, pride, selfishness, envy, coveting, and more lurk in all of our hearts (Galatians 5:19-21). Left unchecked, and in the proper circumstances, these things can lead us to do the most awful things. That is what we witnessed in Vegas.

Therefore, the Church must proclaim God's plan for redemption, a plan in place from the moment sin entered the world. Yes, sin has separated us from a holy God, but He has a plan to redeem people back to Him. He has a plan to save us from ourselves, our sin, and from this perishing world.

The world needs the Church to warn that we can never achieve this redemption on our own, no matter how hard we try. The Church needs to help the world see that it is not only the infamous criminals that fall short, but every single one of us has fallen short (Romans 3:23).

The Church must share with the world that God has an answer for all of this, and that answer comes from His Son. God took the punishment that every one of us deserves and put it on His Son, who did what we can never do – live a perfect, holy life – and therefore deserved no punishment ("God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" 2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus took the wrath, the justice, by paying for our sins on the Cross.

The world needs the Church to share the message that this is available for all people. Anyone who repents and believes in Christ has eternal life. Not because of anything they have done, but because of what Jesus has done. The debt has been paid (Romans 10:9-11).

Ultimately, our suffering world needs the Church to paint the picture of restoration. First, that when a person comes to know Christ, that person is born again, a new creation (2

Corinthians 5:17). But that is just the beginning of the restoration process. For someday there will be a new heaven and a new earth, and we will have new bodies, and sin and suffering will be no more. People need to hear this hope.

Yet they will likely ask why that day is not today. Why does God permit this suffering world to continue?

Thus the Church must speak of God's patient mercy toward us all. We must understand that in order to create a new creation, God has to destroy the current creation. And He is not ready to do that yet because many have yet to Christ as their Lord and Savior. Our temporary suffering, as great as it may be, pales in comparison to the eternal suffering of those who reject Him. So God is patiently giving us time before judging creation.

You and I must take advantage of this time of patience. The world must know God wants all people to come to the knowledge of Him, so He waits.

"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance"
– 2 Peter 3:9

Yes, there is much government can do to protect us from pain. Government, along with the Church, must commend the good done amidst all these tragedies. People risked their lives by charging into bullets to save strangers and people have given millions of dollars and thousands of volunteer hours in natural disaster regions. Despite our sin, people still bear the image of God, and we must celebrate when they embrace that image. Government and the Church must work together to meet people's needs amidst these natural disasters, and government must work to find ways to prevent future tragedies like Las Vegas.

In the end, however, this world is perishing, and God will someday call all of these things into judgement. The Church must speak to Truth of the gospel in this world, while we are still in this time of patience. For ultimate hope is not found in this earth – neither in our good deeds nor in our government – it is found in the earth to come, and God desires all people join Him in it, and so must we.

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