

The Risk of Restoration: Five Years After 9/11

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"The only thing we have to fear is fear itself -- nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance." -- Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1933

Few days of significance are remembered by their calendar date and for those that are, many have quickly forgotten why. From July 4 to November 22 to the more recent September 11, we're often paralyzed by the events of these historic experiences, but because of how they affect us emotionally, we involuntarily let go of the sorrow over the years because of how deeply it can affect our day to day.

Most of you were in a position of sheer awe in 2001 when planes began crashing in the northeast. Just as many were in similar shock in 1963 when a Dallas announcement pointed to Lyndon Johnson as the 36th president of the United States. But how many people today move past November 22 and don't even know that it came and went? How many people are buying Christmas presents on December 7 and wouldn't know that it signified our entry into World War II because of the attack on Pearl Harbor?

We forget because it stops being significant. The War in Iraq, the impending immigration issues, the rising cost of housing, and the price of gasoline cause us to set aside any remembrance of September 11th unless we're stirred to consider such things. Is it any wonder that Israel could so easily "forget" their God just months and years after He had done all that He done for them?

Level upon level, line upon line, stair upon stair, men had worked for years to build the Twin Towers. Each piece came crumbling down, but the questions of Ground Zero have been around now for several years... should we rebuild or should we memorialize the foundation? Obviously that debate has formally been ended (to the disappointment of some and the pleasure of others), but some have presently stated that New York City has yet to regain its heart... to regain its spirit.

Could it be that making the ground of sacrifice into a memorial says to terror, "We cannot mend what you rip apart?" For in building a memorial instead of rebuilding the very thing that was destroyed, are we not essentially saying that we fold? That we bow our hats to the sacrifice and do not have the principles of sound mind to get back up ourselves?

Men give up many years of their lives building whatever it is in their day to day that they build (a building, a project of research, a service of commitment) and when that is stripped away, he has a tendency to feel as though starting over will require time that is no longer guaranteed as though the time before had been. Going at it a second time seems more vanity and pride than the formerly innocent development.

Indeed, many of us are sad to see our football teams fall short of championships, our tennis players fall short of a score, or our basketball teams fall short of the playoffs, sports gives us an illusion that we idolize, but do not emulate. How do we know? Because year after year, the same teams that we saw lose in the previous season begin training camp, begin preseason, and begin playing again. Here in the real world, we don't operate that way in the face of true defeat. We get knocked down and we're inclined to stay down. Perhaps if nothing else, while we're down, we'll move laterally toward another goal instead of getting back up to try again at the same goal.

Many of you have endured tremendous hardships in the grace movement. Many of you have seen friendships crumble and ministries break to their core. A great many more have watched loved ones tear each other apart within the church.

Over the past few years, the greatest hardship I've faced has not been within the grace movement itself, but within the hardened, embittered hearts of individuals who serve it. Those who are so deeply broken by the experiences they've faced that they generally prefer to see the majority as their enemy... even when their enemy is more often in a mirror. When we see these issues within groups that rightly divide, what is our option? I believe they're the same as those that faced New York City five years ago today.

Restoration or Remembrance

Several of you reading might be inclined to think that I'm suggesting a contradiction of ideals. Didn't I just talk about how quickly we forget the dates that once mattered in this country? Or how callous our hearts become because of the emotions that certain experiences bring to the forefront? Why then, would I suggest that remembrance is counter to restoration?

Remembrance has to do with the actual "length of time over which a memory extends." When we're affected, scarred, or tortured by a negative experience, whether personal or visual, the number of years to which we attribute remembrance will follow suit. The restoration isn't a failure to remember, it's a choice to no longer extend the time of remembrance solely for memory's sake. But here's the problem we face both with September 11th and our present grace movement.

There is a gap between remembrance and restoration.

This is the gap that most of us are in with September 11th as well as the grace movement. With September 11, 2006, it's likely that many of you didn't see the day coming and perhaps even saw this article and thought, "Oh yeah, it's September 11." Remembrance and restoration are both choices of the conscious mind. What happens in the gap between is unconscious.

Is it that we let go? Is it that we get tired of the sad memories?

It's that we forget why any of it mattered. And as the significance fades, why then would we think that anything needs to be restored? Why restore something that doesn't matter anymore?

How many of you have seen your church split in the past 20 years? For those who experienced one more than 5 years ago, how often have you called someone on the other "side" of the split? You do realize you have a choice, right? What stops you from inviting that individual to your home for a meal on Saturday night? What stops you from re-engaging them in the Word of God on matters that both of you will have studied afresh during the interim years? You know what gets in the way?

Yes, you could say it's pride. You could say it's stubbornness. You could say a vast number of things. But in keeping with the context of this presentation, there's only one thing...

The choice between remembrance and restoration.

When you think of these people on the "other side" or even those (as some might say) in the "other camp," do you look at them with remembrance of things that broke? With remembrance of angry conversations? With remembrance of slamming doors? What do you remember?

And more importantly, when will you stop choosing to remember and start choosing to use the memory for the integrity of restoration?

Lyndon Johnson is quoted as saying:

"If two men agree on everything, you may be sure that one of them is doing the thinking."

We're so quick to view everyone who disagrees with our study or our immediate belief as a fool and yet, Johnson's words are so relevant. If two men are in full agreement, then one is the leader and the other is the follower. For in absolute and full agreement on all subjects, both men cannot be using their minds independent of one another.

Why then, is restoration so difficult?

Because restoration isn't difficult. It's just a choice that we're not trained to make. We're trained to stay seated if we're pushed down. We're taught to take a different path if the one we're on is blocked.

We're not encouraged to stand up when someone knocks us down. If we stay down, then we have less risk of being knocked down again. If we get up, our risk becomes greater. And if we do stand up, it's usually an instinctive reaction that says "fight back!" That's not, I assure you, the standing up that I'm talking about.

We've all been knocked down. We've all been on our own ground zero. The question today is, in the memorial of September 11th, are you in a state of constant remembrance of things gone wrong or are you one who offers the occasional memorial so as to fuel a life of restoration and purpose?

Today is September 11, 2006.

Take a moment to remember...

Stand up.

Make a phone call.

Fire up the grill.

Take the risk of restoration.

"Therefore if any man [be] in Christ, [he is] a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things [are] of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;" II Corinthians 5:17-18