

THE KEEPER OF THE CITY

Psalm 127:1-5

Intro: This past week was a week beginning with Tuesday morning, September 11, that none of us will ever forget. And with all of the multiplied millions of words that have been spoken since then, none has been able to describe adequately the crushing sorrow that we all feel after the death and destruction that followed the attack upon the World Trade Center buildings, and the Pentagon. Undoubtedly our attackers intended to do more damage than they did, but what they did surpasses anything that any of us thought that we would ever see. And one of the most alarming of comments that have come from people who seem to know what they are talking about, is that we are warned that the attacks may not be over. I trust that in the providence of God they are wrong.

I have asked the Lord to help me to say things today that will give us all some guidance and comfort as we face the days ahead. There are some explanations for what has happened, and there are things that can be done and which must be done if we are not to face greater tragedies in the days ahead. I don't have any wisdom in myself, but I know, and most of you know, where to go to find the answers. I intend to be very simple today because we all need to understand.

I think we have an indication as to where to start if we only see what people do when a tragedy like this takes place. *There is widespread talk about prayer.* Of course, this is not true of everyone, but if you have been listening to your TV this week, you have heard people talk about calling upon God. Our leaders have asked us to have memorial services in which people will be encouraged to pray. And there is little if any objection to such appeals. My son, Dwight, Jr., was telling me that in their church they had a speaker come to what I think was a prayer breakfast, and he mentioned that one significant thing about what has happened this week is that there has been absolutely no talk about the separation of church and state, not even from the ACLU! People who never pray, talk about prayer when there is a disaster. But to whom do they pray? If they would say that they pray to God, what do they know about Him? What makes them think that God will hear them? People just seem to take it for granted that there is a God (although they don't pay any attention to Him unless there is some kind of trouble) – they assume that there is a God, and that He answers prayer. But in most cases they don't know anything else about Him. And that is the reason He has given us a book. And one of the

main purposes of the book which He has given us, is to tell us about Himself.

So let me start with that as my first point:

I. GOD AND HIS BOOK.

Over a period of approximately 15 or 16 hundred years, from Moses to the Apostle John, God directed some 40 writers, most of whom did not know each other personally, to give us the Bible. They wrote as they were led by the Holy Spirit to write, and so amazingly they have given us a total of 66 books, as we call them, in which God has revealed to us many things that we would not know, and could not discover, if He had not revealed them to us. There never has been, and never will be, another book like it. In it God has not only revealed Himself to us, but He has told us about ourselves.

Today I want us to focus our attention upon God.

No man was around when the world was brought into existence, and so God has told us that He was the Creator, and that all He had to do to bring all of creation into existence was to speak the word. We read in Psalm 33 these words:

6 By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.

7 He gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap: he layeth up the depth in storehouses.

8 Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.

9 For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast (Psa. 33:6-9).

And so it did not take Him a long, long time to create the whole universe; He did it in just six twenty-four hour days.

Since He is the Creator, we know that He had to exist before there was a creation. And so we should not be surprised to learn in the Bible that He is both the Creator and eternal. This is what we read in Psalm 90:2,

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.

It is hard for us to comprehend that God is eternal because the world had a beginning, and we had a beginning, and everyone we know had a beginning. But God had no beginning.

More than that as we read the Bible we learn that there are Three Persons in the Godhead – God, the Father; God, the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ; and God, the Holy Spirit. And the Bible teaches us that all Three are equal in their Deity.

Now when God created man, He created him without an evil nature. But it was not long after creation that Adam and Eve did what God told them not to do. At the moment of their disobedience they became sinners, sinners by nature and sinners by choice. And it has been because man is a sinner by nature that human history has been filled with instances of man's sinfulness and all of the evil things that he has done. And last Tuesday the world had another demonstration of how evil, how sinful, man can be. There are all kinds of evil in the world, and this is the kind of a world that we live in – a world of wars, a world of crimes, a world of corruption, a world of sin and death. Our constant battle with disease is one of the consequences of man's sin.

Now the Bible tells us that God is not at all in man's thoughts, which means that we all are inclined to live as though God did not exist, that there is no God. And yet when there is tragedy, we turn to the Lord for help even though we really don't know anything about Him.

What does the Bible, God's book, tell us about Him?

Well, to answer that question as fully as what the Bible tells us about Him, would take many weeks for us to discuss. But let me just focus on a few significant points today that will help us in the present crisis which we face.

Since God created the heavens and the earth we know from that that He is infinitely wise and absolute in His power. And we can see also that God is good. And since he created man in His own image and likeness, we are not surprised to see that the Bible tells us that He is holy, so holy that He has no sin in Him, and He cannot tolerate those who do what is displeasing to Him. This is actually a good definition of sin. It is anything that is displeasing to God.

But as far as our present situation is concerned, let us think for a moment about His power, and for this I take you to the Psalms again, a Psalm which I read last Wednesday morning as I was having my time with the Lord reading His Word and praying. That Psalm, Psalm 99, begins like several Psalm begin, with the simple but comforting statement:

II. “THE LORD REIGNETH” (Psa. 99:1).

Now there has been very little in the way of reference to the Lord this week, and in all that has been spoken over TV I haven’t heard anyone talk about *the sovereignty of God*. That is what the expression means when we read, “the Lord reigneth.” This means that He is always in control, even when men do what those terrorists did this past week. “The Lord reigneth.”

Back about 600 years before Christ came to the earth the mightiest nation on earth was the kingdom of Babylon. And at that time the king of Babylon was King Nebuchadnezzar. He was an exceedingly arrogant, and he took the credit for building that great kingdom, and he said openly that he had done it for his own glory. Well, he did not understand that God was greater than he was, and that is what he needed to learn. So God spoke to him from heaven and said,

31 . . .O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee.

32 And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will (Dan. 4:31b-32).

And then we read this, and it is apparent that it didn’t take the Lord long to do what He said He would do. Then we read the following:

33 The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws.

34 And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation:

35 And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and

he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? (Dan. 4:33-35).

About one hundred years before Daniel, the Lord had spoken to Isaiah the prophet about the nations, all of the nations, and He said this in Isaiah 40:15:

15 Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing.

And then two verses later we read these words:

17 All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity (Isa. 40:17).

So, in comparison with the Lord, all of the nations are as nothing before Him. He is greater, more powerful, than all of the nations of the earth. And the Apostle Paul just following the life of Christ on the earth, in a letter to the church at Ephesus, told them that God is working “all things after the counsel of His own will” (Eph. 1:11). *Thus, there is no incident that can take place on earth that is out of the sovereign control of the Lord.*

Now let me take you to my text in Psalm 127:1 which tells us that the Lord is:

III. THE KEEPER OF THE CITY (Psa. 127:1).

The same truth about the Lord applies to our homes that applies to our cities. But we are thinking about cities just now – not only New York City and Washington, D. C., but also Portland.

Let us think about that word, “keep.” What does it mean? It means *to guard, to protect, to preserve*. It speaks of the absolute safety of a city. There is the idea in the word the idea of hedging a city about on all sides so that an enemy cannot do his evil work from any direction – north, south, east, or west, or even from above. The real watchman for every city is the LORD, Jehovah, the living God, the eternal God, the unchanging God, the sovereign God.

The Lord was not telling Solomon here that he should not have an army, or that which would amount to our police officers today. He was not

saying that we should not have an FBI, or secret servant agents. He was not saying that it is wrong to have a navy, or an air force, or a marine corps, or firemen. But what He was saying that with whatever security people and laws that a city might have, *they had better be trusting the Lord because all of those other precautions will not work without Him.*

The Lord was telling us here that the safety of every city in every generation on the face of the whole world owes its safety and security to the Lord alone. Our nation has not had this trouble before because the Lord has been holding those diabolical terrorists in check.

Well, what happened then? Has the Lord suddenly lost control of things going on on the earth?

No, the Lord never changes. He still has the same omnipotence that He has always had. What then is the difference for us?

Let me call your attention to another very important verse of Scripture. It is Proverbs 16:7:

When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.

What a promise that is for a city, or a nation! But you see that the condition of the promise is, "when a man's ways please the Lord." Or we can extend it to a city, or a nation. To ignore God is to provoke judgment from Him. To disobey Him is to displease Him, and to displease Him is to court His judgment.

The Lord has been amazingly patient with us in our country, but the time comes when his patience has carried any nation as long as He intends to show us mercy. Now I am not going to try to specify particular sins for which we are guilty as a nation, or guilty as individuals. But I know that it behooves us as people, even as the people of the Lord, to confess our sins and to ask the Lord to search our hearts lest there be some way in which we are displeasing Him which has caused Him to withdraw His guarding hand from us as a nation.

But someone might say, "How do we know what is pleasing, and what is displeasing, to the Lord?" And the answer to that question is, "It is all spelled out for us in the Word of God." The writer of Psalm 119, who probably was King David, said, "Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee" (Psa. 119:11).

This is a time when all of us need to be thinking about ourselves and our own relationship with the Lord. We can sin against the Lord by what we do. We can sin against the Lord by what we say. We can sin against the Lord even by what we think. We can sin by ourselves, or we can sin with other people, or we can sin against other people. But all sin is primarily against God. After David had committed the sins of adultery and murder, in confessing his sins to the Lord, he said, “Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight” (Psa. 51:4). When we understand that about every sin, we are beginning to understand how great every sin is before God.

Those of us who know the Lord know, or should know, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). A dear missionary I knew years ago, who has been in heaven many years, used to say about our sins, “Be sure to keep short accounts with God.” And by that he meant that we should be very, very careful about our own sins, and confess them.

Concl: But I am sure that I am right when I say that the majority of people in our country have never experienced the saving grace of God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Many may have heard the facts of the Gospel, that Jesus Christ died to save us from our sins, from the penalty of our sins. But they have never tried to find out how to be saved through Christ. If we have to pay for our own sins, we will be like those terrorists who thought they were earning a ticket to paradise by dying for the mythological person they called Allah, only to realize when life was blown out of them by the blast which they created that they were hopelessly and eternally doomed to the torments of the fires of hell.

The Bible tells us that “all have sinned,” that “there is not a just man upon the earth that doeth good, and sinneth not” (Ecc. 7:20). In fact, it says that “there is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom. 3:10). It also tells us that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23) – not only physical death, but spiritual death, and eternal death – but then it goes on to say that “the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Do you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord? If not, then I hope you know, and we learn this also from the Bible, that Jesus Christ is the only Savior. He died to save sinners from

their sins. And “there is none other Name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”

The only people who died last Tuesday in those terrible attacks upon the World Trade Center and on the Pentagon who were ready to die, were the people who were trusting in Jesus Christ for their salvation. None of us knows when we are going to die. But I think that it was Jim Elliot who died at the hands of the Auca Indians, who said, “Be sure that when it comes your time to die, that’s all that you have to do.” And let us always remember that “except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that built it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.”