



TEN YEARS LATER

Luke 24:13-35

September 11, 2001—ten years later we struggle for words to describe how we feel. We will never forget that Tuesday morning—the day our nation was changed. I vividly remember.

It was a normal morning. About 6:45 am I pulled out of our driveway on my way to join other people rushing to work, fighting traffic hoping not to be late, wondering if traffic would be any better in the evening.

I was on the way to my office at Scotsdale Baptist Church in El Paso when I heard the first news on the radio.

Regular programs were interrupted with the news that a plane, American flight 11, had crashed into the north tower of the World Trade Center.

I immediately called Luaine and told her to turn the TV on. At the office I turned my television on just in time to see the second plane, United Airlines Flight 175 with 65 people aboard crash into the south tower.

Forever tattooed into our memories, are the images of the burning towers folding in on themselves, taking the lives of office workers, policemen, firemen, rescue workers—all who were inside trying to get out and those trying to get them out.

While all this was going on, American Airline Flight 77 with 64 people on board crashed into the Pentagon. And we heard a mysterious story about a plane crashing nose first at full speed in a farm field in Pennsylvania.

Later we found out that United Airlines Flight 93, was part of the terrorist plot as well. Passengers had fought back against the hijackers and in the struggle the plane with 65 people on board crashed.

In all, more than 3000 people lost their lives in the terrorist attacks. It was one of the worst things that could have happened to the United States. We had hoped never to face war again. We had hoped for peace on earth.

Today we remember an anniversary we didn't want. We really don't know what to do with an anniversary we would rather forget.

Again and again in those first few hours we saw death and destruction played out before our eyes. We watched over and over the slow motion replays.

We set TVs up in the church office so we could keep up with the terrible events, wondering where it would take our country. Office staff and others huddled around the televisions. It was as if we couldn't really believe it was happening.

On that same morning I was scheduled to do a funeral for an ex military man. The burial was at Ft. Bliss National Cemetery. During the service at the cemetery a military vehicle drove up and an Army officer told me to finish and get off the base.

I knew at that moment that life as we knew it would never be the same again. No longer would we be able to easily walk or drive across the border into Mexico. I figured that security across the country would be tightened exponentially, though I had no idea all that meant.

On September 10, we went to sleep in a structured world where nations, militaries and economies exerted order and seemingly supplied safety.

We awoke to explosions, flames and smoke that altered our global landscape and the war on global terrorism began.

For a time immediately following the attacks there was a spontaneous surge of flag-waving patriotism, civic determination and spiritual revival as churches were filled and prayers said.

Much has changed. If you don't think so, fly somewhere, or enter a government building anywhere. We view with suspicion those who dress differently, speak another language, or want to build a mosque in our neighborhood.

Yet little has changed. American's primary concerns are economic—the national debt, jobs, housing prices, the stock market and affordable health care.

Day by day we care about raising and educating our children, going to work, planning for retirement, living in safe communities and driving on safe roads.

So here we are today, 10 years later. What do we do with an anniversary we would rather forget? We turn our hearts to God.

Two thousand years ago when Jesus died the hopes and dreams of His followers died with Him. For those who knew and loved Jesus, His death made no sense at all.

He was a man of God! He lived and taught the love and mercy of God. His teachings were validated by miracles that changed people's lives—blind men saw; lepers were returned to their families, and lame men danced.

How could someone who was so obviously good be treated so badly? When these kinds of things happen, we are left with many questions and not enough answers.

Now what would His followers do? What would happen to them? They had lost their leader and reason for being. This was the subject of a conversation we read about in Luke 24.

A man named Cleopas and a friend were walking to Emmaus, a village about 7 miles from Jerusalem. As they walked and talked they were joined by someone they did not recognize.

This stranger asked them what they were so earnestly talking about. At his question they stopped and, with heads hanging, replied, "Are you the only one living in Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have happened there in these days?" (v. 18).

As they walked, Cleopas and his friend, not recognizing Jesus, began to explain all that had happened.

They told about how Jesus was a prophet—a man whose ministry was empowered by the Spirit of God—who seemed to be destined to change the destiny of God's chosen people.

His words and his miracles—no one had ever seen anything like this before. Everyone was sure that He was the One—the Messiah sent from God to save Israel.

Then, Cleopas and his friend said one of the saddest phrases in the entire Bible: "But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel" (v. 21).

There's pathos in those words? They had hoped that Jesus was the Messiah—but they don't hope anymore. They had hoped that he would be the one to restore Israel—but they don't hope anymore.

They had hoped that He would be the one to lead them out from Roman occupation—but they don't hope anymore. They had hoped that he would be the one to save the world—but they don't hope anymore.

Does this sound familiar to you? We had hoped that terrorists would never attack on American soil. We had hoped—that the cancer wouldn't come back—We had hoped that our marriage wouldn't fail—we had hoped that our kids would not do drugs.

But these things do happen, even to us. What do we do? How do we live? We can learn from what Jesus did in response to Cleopas and his friend. He turned their hearts back to God.

Beginning with the books of Moses—Genesis, Exodus and all the rest—and going right on to the prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, and on through to the end of the Scriptures

Jesus explained that there is a plan—a plan that includes suffering, but a plan of redemption and healing. It was all there in the Scriptures.

Jesus explained how the Messiah would come; how the Messiah would live; how the Messiah would die; and, how the Messiah would live again. It was all there, written down in Scripture. Didn't Cleopas and his friend believe the Scriptures?

As we strain for meaning and context—and for our lives in this time—we, too, turn to the old promises, the same Scriptures that Jesus did.

Despite our wishes that 9/11 had not happened, we live in a world where bad things happen. People we love die. Marriages break up. Young people lose their way—often facing the consequences of their decisions for the rest of their lives.

We had hoped that our nation would never be attacked again. Like the travelers on the road to Emmaus, we had hoped, but September 11 changed all of that.

The Bible tells it like it is—it doesn't pull any punches. We live in a hard and difficult world in a hard and difficult time.

Jesus also reminds us of spiritual realities that are always true:

Trust God--True salvation lies with God. In spite of America's vast military power, and in spite of being one of the wealthiest countries in the world...

The attack on the Twin Towers, symbols of economic stability, and the Pentagon, the seat of our armed strength, showed us that neither one could withstand the onslaught of evil.

Psalms 46:1 - 2 (NIV) 1God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.
2Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,

God suffers with us. We must remind ourselves that Jesus, who was fully divine, was also fully human. He took on human flesh and identifies completely with us.

He feels every pain and understands all our fears. When terror strikes, as it did 10 years ago, and uncertainty dominates, He understands. He grieves with us.

Love defeats fear. If we wish to live without fear, we must love even those who wish to do us harm. We must not look at everyone who we think looks like a terrorist as a terrorist themselves.

1 John 4:18 (NIV) There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear...

Extremists of any religion do not represent the beliefs of millions who wear the same religious label. Love not hate is our weapon of choice in a war of fear.

The same powers that tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden—the same powers that have sought from the beginning of time to destroy humanity, were working on September 11.

Jesus reminded Cleopas and his friend that God the Father had always warned believers of trouble and suffering we would endure in this world.

Yet Jesus also reminded them, and us, of the promise of salvation and hope. Yes, the Bible does tell of things that will happen—nations will rise against nations, kings and kingdoms will rise and fall. But through it all God will be working to bring about the fulfillment of every promise He has ever given.

So what do we do? For one thing, we keep on living. We keep on the walk of life. Sometimes there is nothing else to do but keep putting one foot in front of the other.

We get angry, we grieve and weep, we pray, and then we get on with the things of life. That's what Jesus and His friends did—they ate dinner. It was while Jesus was breaking the bread and praying that Cleopas and friend recognized Him.

It was then they remembered the promise that Jesus would always be with them—no matter what, Jesus would be there. He had promised, and He was. Jesus is our hope. Jesus is our assurance.

What should you do when these bad things happen? Open your Bible and read. Listen to the words of the prophets and of Jesus himself. Read the promises and trust them. And keep on keeping on. Jesus is with you even in the worst of times.