

## **Sermons 2007**

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# Table of Contents

<b>1. When Bad Things Happen.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Introduction: .....	1
Death comes to all, ready or not. ....	1
The issue is sin .....	2
Time is getting short. ....	3
We need each other.....	4
Conclusion:.....	5



# Chapter 1. When Bad Things Happen

TOPICAL

## Introduction:

I think today I'll just talk a bit, rather than preach. I feel like we should discuss the events of this past week. What can we as Christians learn from them?

I'm talking, of course, about the Virginia Tech murders. This past week a student walked into a dorm room and killed two people. For the next two hours, he apparently plotted his next steps, which included chaining the doors of a classroom building shut so nobody could escape, and then systematically murdering 30 people, including both students and faculty.

That story would be enough to give us cause for discussion, but then I read yesterday about a NASA employee who didn't like his employee review, so he walked into the office of a co-worker and killed him, then killed himself.

At times like this, we are truly questioning our world, and the reality in which we live. Therefore times like this provide ideal opportunities to consider what God is teaching us through such experiences.

Consider a few thoughts - not in any particular order. This is not a structured sermon, rather it is a brain dump - just thoughts about the events of the week.

## Death comes to all, ready or not.

I imagine you expected me to make this point, so I'll get it out of the way quickly.

I wonder how many of those 32 people woke up that morning and said, "I'd better be ready to meet God today." Probably not many. These were young people, not thinking about death.

Anytime something like this occurs it is a reminder to all of us that we are not guaranteed another second of life.

*And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: (Hebrews 9:27)*

*What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave? Selah. (Psalm 89:48)*

Some would say - don't preach about that preacher - it's too morbid! And yet, what possible thing can I talk to you about if we don't recognize this central issue.

If we're not clear on DEATH, then what good does it do to talk about how to live?

If we're not ready for DEATH, what possible success can we have in this world? *For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Mark 8:36)*

Death is the most important thing we will ever face in life! So may I encourage you to get ready for it.

ILLUS - Man I witnessed to in his home - you could sense the presence of the Holy Spirit - he was under deep conviction of sin, and yet when I pressed him for a response, he said, "I'm not ready yet... maybe I'll come to church Sunday and get saved there." WHAT?????

I always want to ask those who are "waiting" - what alternative is there? YOU ARE GOING TO DIE!!! YOU DON'T KNOW WHEN - MAYBE IN THE NEXT 5 MINUTES! WHAT ALTERNATIVE DO YOU HAVE TO CHRISTIANITY?

It is no security to wicked men for one moment, that there are no visible means of death at hand. It is no security to a natural man, that he is now in health, and that he does not see which way he should now immediately go out of the world by any accident, and that there is no visible danger in any respect in his circumstances. The manifold and

## Chapter 1. When Bad Things Happen

continual experience of the world in all ages, shows this is no evidence, that a man is not on the very brink of eternity, and that the next step will not be into another world. The unseen, unthought-of ways and means of persons going suddenly out of the world are innumerable and inconceivable. Unconverted men walk over the pit of hell on a rotten covering, and there are innumerable places in this covering so weak that they will not bear their weight, and these places are not seen. The arrows of death fly unseen at noon-day; the sharpest sight cannot discern them. (Jonathan Edwards, Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God)

Oh - but are you ready for some good news again? For there is some - WONDERFUL NEWS - *For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 6:23)*

*I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. (John 10:10)*

*He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him. (John 3:36)*

Christians NEED NOT FEAR death - *Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints. (Psalm 116:15)*

To the Christian - death is the greatest opportunity for witness - nowhere else is the reality of your faith (or lack thereof) more clearly revealed.

ILLUS - Funeral this past week - Christians laughing and rejoicing, even in their loss.

ILLUS - Aged saints I have known whose faith and anticipation grew more and more as they approached death.

ILLUS - Steven - whose greatest witness was in his death - cf. Acts 7

I pray that I can have such a witness when my death comes - God help me to die well for Thee.

You have an appointment. Are you ready? Have you believed on the Son? Have you received the everlasting life that is ONLY available in Him? Have you dealt with this most pressing of issues before it is too late?

## The issue is sin

Questions abound when things like this happen:

Where was God?  
How could a loving God allow this?  
Why did this happen?  
What can we do to prevent things like this?  
What did those kids do to deserve this?

The plain truth is, we can't blame God for things like this.

READ - *Genesis 3:1-7*

Remember what things were like after God created the world? "Very good" (cf. *And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day. (Genesis 1:31)*)

It was sin that messed up the whole picture in Eden, and it is sin that causes things like what we saw last week in Virginia.

Adam wanted to blame Eve, but God held Adam accountable for his own sin. (cf. *Genesis 3:11,17-19*)

Eve wanted to blame Satan, but God held Eve accountable for her own sin. (cf. *Genesis 3:16*)

And just like our first parents, we are accountable for our own sin - nobody else to blame:

*We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly. (Psalm 106:6)*

*Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (Romans 5:12)*

The world is desperately looking for somebody to blame in this sad event. But the deeper issue here is not who to blame, but what is the cause? And the cause of this event and all events like it, is sin.

ILLUS - We desperately want a cure for the common cold, don't we? But all we have are means of treating the symptoms - and those don't work very well. We dry up the snotty nose a bit, and maybe deaden the sore throat pain a bit, but the cold remains and we have to wait for it to run its course. WOULDNT IT BE GREAT TO HAVE THE CURE?? TO BE ABLE TO DEAL WITH THE REAL PROBLEM RATHER THAN THE SYMPTOMS?

LIKEWISE - If we do not deal with the ultimate problem - SIN, then there is nothing to be gained by dealing with the symptoms of that problem.

The ultimate problem behind every social wrong is SIN.

The ultimate problem behind every relationship problem is SIN.

The ultimate problem in failed marriages is SIN.

The ultimate problem in ruined lives is SIN.

I recently posted the following quote on the church website:

"Sin has ruined men, ruined women, ruined angels. Sin has occasioned every tear of sorrow, every sigh of grief, every pang of agony. Sin has withered everything that is fair, blasted everything that is good, made bitter everything that is sweet, dried up springs of comfort, rolled far and wide tides of sorrow. Sin has digged every grave, built every coffin, woven every shroud, enlarged every cemetery that the world has ever seen." (Evangelist Robert G. Lee, Heart to Heart).

Now that you're all depressed, may I share some truly good news? *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." (1 John 1:9) "But there is forgiveness with thee..." (Psalm 130:4)*

You don't have to allow sin to take you to the depths that the murderer at VA Tech did. Take it to God - confess it, repent of it, let Him nail it to the cross and forgive it forever!

Sin is the problem, and Jesus is the answer!

## **Time is getting short.**

Have you noticed how many times on our news we hear the words - "the worst in history"?

- Worst college shooting
- Worst massacre in US history
- Katrina - worst storm
- Asian tsunami - worst
- earthquakes - worst
- global warming (fake), but called worst

And have you noticed the number of disaster specials we see these days, preparing us in advance for things like:

- Asteroids wiping out earth
- Tsunamis destroying our coastlines
- Massive earthquakes

## Chapter 1. When Bad Things Happen

- Super volcanoes
- Nuclear holocausts
- Pandemics (big one right now - bird flu)

Satan is preparing the world to believe the coming judgements of God are simple natural phenomena.

We talked about Christ's second coming last week, so I won't belabor it today. But I'm reminded of just how imminent it is.

Jesus taught that when all hell breaks loose here on earth (my words, not His), that we will know the end is near - *So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. (Matthew 24:33)*

He also taught that many would be taken by surprise - *Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. (Matthew 24:40-42)*

Time is getting short - are you ready?

The GOOD NEWS, as we learned last week, is that for the Christian - the one who is trusting Christ - the second coming is WONDERFUL, something to look forward to.

*Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:17-18)*

## We need each other.

I was, to use one of my daughter's favorite words, DISTURBED by the revelation that this guy was a loner. This came out after the fact, as many said he had exhibited all kinds of signs consistent with other mass murderers - such as being a LONER!

ILLUS - This thought disturbs me because I am such. Although I dearly love my wife and couldn't live without her, there is also a part of me that could quite easily live in the mountains somewhere - away from people.

This is a not-uncommon thought process - more so for men than women, and yet we must fight against it, for WE NEED EACH OTHER.

Why is it that the world recognizes that "going it alone" is a problem, but so called Christians don't?

If I were to take a poll this morning, I'm certain that everyone of you could name a person who calls themselves a Christian, but never attends church, and frankly wants nothing to do with church.

But that's not Bible Christianity. Bible Christianity is a GROUP dynamic - we need each other, and God has built the church to fill that need. When we try to go it alone, we are:

1. Out of the will of God - He wants us to be together.
2. Outside God's design for the church - He gifted us to help each other.
3. Unhealthy (just as the world recognized the VA Tech murderer was unhealthy)
4. In danger - hurting yourself.
5. A danger - hurting others.

Consider the "one-anothers" of scripture. We are to:

- LOVE one another
- PRAY FOR one another
- SERVE one another

- EDIFY (build up in the faith) one another
- etc.

All of this vital group dynamic is LOST when we go it alone.

The concept of spirituality as a lone personal quest is hardly new to Christian history. Nevertheless, the development of this pattern into a massive cultural movement is a new development -- and one that is reshaping many churches.

The trend has caught the attention of the BBC. Writing in the BBC News Magazine, Denise Winterman reports:

Births, deaths and marriages. They're the only events that get most people in the UK through church doors these days and even that is too often for some.

But this doesn't stop the majority of us calling ourselves Christian. More than half of British people say they believe in God despite only one in seven actually attending a Christian church service each month, says a new study.

It seems that while people find the church thing a little bit difficult, they are willing to recognise God. There's even a cute catchphrase for this absent majority - believing without belonging.

"Believing without belonging" is indeed a catchphrase, but there is no reason for confidence that the "believing" here has anything to do with biblical Christianity. (Albert Mohler, President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary)

Brother Mohler provides quite a few thoughts in his article on "Believing Without Belonging" and then sums up the article with, "The problems with 'believing without belonging' are many, but the greatest problem may be that some believe this to be compatible with biblical Christianity. It is not."

I cannot emphasize this enough, Brothers and Sisters. I know you are here today, and are thinking "What's he telling ME this for - I AM HERE!" But the fact is, Satan wants nothing more than to keep you out of the body of Christ - and there will come a time or times when you will think about "believing without belonging." DON'T - You need us, and we need you. Don't be a loner.

*And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near. (Hebrews 10:25 NLT)*

## Conclusion:

Well, those are just some thoughts that come to my mind after a tragedy such as we witnessed last week in Virginia. I'm sure there are others you could add.

I challenge you, church, to pray for those who lost children and loved ones in Virginia. They need our prayers today - pray for them.

I challenge you also, church, to pray for yourselves, that you might accept the lessons God has for us, even in tragedies such as these.

1. One such lesson - death comes to us all - ARE YOU READY?
2. Another lesson - the issue is sin - you must forget trying to deal with the symptoms - have you dealt with the problem? Have you dealt with the reality of SIN in your life?
3. Another - time is short. Please don't think you have tomorrow. There is no such promise.
4. Finally - we need each other. Will you determine to not be a loner? I need you. You need me. We all need each other - don't be a loner.

*Chapter 1. When Bad Things Happen*