

A DAY OF REMEMBRANCE

Exodus 12:1-14

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson
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IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

"The blood shall be a sign for you. When I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you. This shall be a day of remembrance."

On the morning of September 11, 2001 four airliners passed over the land; passed over thousands of unwary men, women, and children, four angels of death. Plague-laden envelopes entered into the halls of Congress. We gather today to worship on the Sunday before the commemoration of a ghastly parody of the ancient Passover event. This is a day of remembrance.

The blood is a sign for us. We remember the blood - the blood of airplane pilots whose ^{by knives} death reenacted the sacrifice of Passover lambs - the blood of secretaries, businessmen and women, military and federal workers, firefighters and medical technicians, moms and dad, friends and neighbors. We remember the blood we've seen over the last year on the lintels and doorposts of caves in Afghanistan, nightclubs in Tel Aviv, and refugee homes in Jenin. What shall the blood be a sign of?

Will the blood be a sign of death - the death of Osama Bin Laden and the Al Qaeda terrorist network, or the death of America? Will the blood be a sign of fear - fear falling on our enemies when they hear the whistle of guided missiles, or fear falling on us when our first born sons and daughters march off to war? Will the blood be a sign of failure - the failure of terror or the failure of a free and open society? Or will the blood be a sign of vengeance - vengeance against the Great Satan, America, as some ~~Muslims~~ call us, or vengeance against the Evil Empire of Iraq?

Our nation is currently involved in a momentous debate as to whether we should strike Iraq and overthrow the dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein. There's widespread disagreement, even among our President's closest advisors as to whether we should strike. However, Democrats and Republicans agree that Hussein (in the words of a Philadelphia Inquirer editorial) is "a bloody-handed tyrant." If we attack will we *shatter* terrorism like a hammer striking a clay pot, or will we *scatter* terrorism through the world like when we blow on a dandelion and watch the seeds scatter?

What is the blood a sign of? Our Old Testament helps me interpret the sign of the blood of September 11. Moses instructs God's people how to prepare for the commemoration of the most momentous event experienced up till that time by the nation of Israel. The children of Israel had migrated to Egypt during a famine at Joseph's invitation. After the death of Joseph, Israel became enslaved to a new Pharaoh who had not heard of Joseph. God eventually heard the cries of his enslaved people and raised up Moses to lead them to freedom. God sent plagues to motivate Pharaoh to release his slaves. But Pharaoh refused to let God's people go thus putting at risk all the first born of Egypt.

Only blood sprinkled on the lintels and doorposts of their houses spared the firstborn Israelites. The blood was a sign of the covenant God made with his people. God promised to pass over all the houses marked by blood so that the plague wouldn't destroy their firstborn sons. No ~~one~~ children need die ~~ne~~ither Egyptian or Israelite. Having marked their doors with the blood of a lamb, God's people roasted the slaughtered lamb for a meal, prepared for immediate departure, and hurriedly ate as they awaited liberation. This Passover meal became a perpetual ordinance reminding each new generation of what happened that night.

For over 3000 years generations of Jews relive their history, experiencing first hand the meaning of the story. That is what it means to have a "day of remembrance." Remembrance is a way of reenacting an event and, in so doing, become personally involve. That's why we're here today. This shall be a day of remembrance.

When we remember the stockbrokers and window-washers who worked together so valiantly and helped each other escape, we'll remember their courage. When we remember the firefighters who rushed upstairs when everyone else was racing down, we'll remember the risks they took. When we remember the police officers who performed their duties until the towers came down on top of them, we'll remember their unselfish regard for the safety of others. When we remember the thousands of workers who could not escape the buildings, we'll remember and grieve over the shedding of innocent blood. When we remember the citizens who rushed to the scene and did what they could to help, we'll remember and thank them for their unselfish commitment. When we remember the people who donated blood, we'll remember with gratitude their gift of life. The blood shall a sign to us of life, not death.

~~Hopefully,~~ We'll also remember Jesus Christ. The blood is a sign to us of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. The blood reminds us of how God shed his blood for the rebellious world he created through his Word. The blood reminds us of how God became a Palestinian Jew who fell victim to state terrorism. **HOW GOD DEALS WITH TERRORISM.**

Often poets, artists, and musicians help us remember better and more passionately than we would otherwise. Bruce Springsteen's latest album, *The Rising*, pays tribute to the victims and heroes of nine eleven. Springsteen has always found his heroes in everyday events and little people like the firefighters and policemen of 9/11. I've listen over and over to his new album and really like it. Springsteen captures (as one reviewer puts it) two nearly opposite feelings of

most Americans after September 11: on the one hand, deep grief for the lives lost; on the other, belief that we'll "rise up." All the songs are tinged with despair, but there's something else — something akin to faith: faith that we can join together and struggle through difficult times, that we can "rise up." As Springsteen puts it, "The verses are the blues, the chorus is the gospel."

One haunting song, *World's Apart*, tells the story of two lovers, one Christian, one Muslim, who remain world's apart because of the events of September 11.

*Where the distant oceans sing, and rise to the plain
In this dry and troubled country, your beauty remains
Down from the mountain roads where the highway rolls to dark
'Neath Allah's blessed rain, we remain worlds apart.*

But the song ends on a note of hope. Springsteen sings,

*We'll let blood build a bridge, over mountains draped in stars
I'll meet you on the ridge, between these worlds apart
We've got this moment now to live, then it's all just dust and dark
Let love give what it gives
~~Let's let love give what it gives.~~*

The ridge where the world's enemies meet is the ridge on Mount Calvary and the blood that builds the bridge is the blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. *Love unites the world torn apart*
Love is what it will take for the blood to become a sign of life - a love that bleeds. "The blood shall be a sign for you. When I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy. This shall be a day of remembrance."