

"Where were you when the world stopped turnin' That September day?"

John 6:24-35 & Ephesians 4:1-16

August 5, 2018

Franklin Delano Roosevelt described December 7, 1941 as the "... day that would live in infamy." I think that those words could have been used to describe another day - September 11, 2001. 9/11! Alan Jackson in 2002, wrote and sang the song *Where were you (when the world stopped turnin')*. Here are some of the lyrics, I won't be singing them:

*Where were you when the world stopped turnin'
That September day?
...Did you stand there in shock at the sight of that black smoke
Risin' against that blue sky?*

*Where were you when the world stopped turnin'
That September day?
Teachin' a class full of innocent children
Or drivin' down some cold interstate?*

*... Did you call up your mother and tell her you love her?
Did you dust off that Bible at home?*

*Where were you when the world stopped turnin'
That September day?
... Did you go to a church and hold hands with some strangers
Stand in line to give your own blood?*

*Did you just stay home and cling tight to your family
Thank God you had somebody to love?*

Refrain

*I'm just a singer of simple songs
... But I know Jesus and I talk to God
And I remember this from when I was young
Faith, hope, and love are some good things He gave us
And the greatest is love*

Many people on September 11 (9/11) thought that the world as we know it was about to collapse.

For the Jewish people of Jesus' day, they thought their world had already collapsed. They were no longer masters of their own fate. The Romans had taken control of the country and the people were looking for something, they were looking for some hope.

The people who had been fed by Jesus on the mountain followed him all the way to Capernaum. At first, we are impressed by the spiritual eagerness they demonstrate, they want to be close to Jesus.

But Jesus discerns their true motive and calls it like he sees it. They are not there for a blessing (signs of God's presence), they are there for a jackpot (they want to be fed, just like on the mountain).

I read a story about a rabbi who died in England. His obituary told of his life, how when he was a young boy, he and his family were prisoners in a Nazi death camp. In the camp, the prisoners were given just barely enough food to survive - some grain, a bit of stale bread, and a few grams of lard each week. Despite their harsh environment, this boy's family continued to observe the Sabbath. Somehow managing to scrounge up a piece of candle and a little food each week, they said the Sabbath prayers and pronounced the Sabbath blessings.

One week, however, there was no candle. So, when the evening came and the Sabbath was at hand, the boy's father took some of their precious lard and molded it around a bit of string. Lighting this makeshift candle, he began to lead his family in the prayers and blessings.

His son was enraged. When the prayers were done, he confronted his father. "How could you do that? How could you waste what little lard we have to make a candle? It's the only food we have."

His father answered, "Son, without food we can live for several days. Without hope, we cannot live an hour."

Jesus said to the people he had fed on the mountain, "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life."

*Where were you when the world stopped turnin'
That September day?*

I know some of you remember where you were, you have told me. I have also heard stories of people, in Florida, going onto the roof of their building and watching to see when and where the next attack would occur.

If you realized that the world as you have known it was on the brink of collapse, what would you do? Would you go up on the roof of your building? If some hostile foreign power sought to obliterate all that you hold dear, how would you respond?

In the last half of the 1st century, the people living along the eastern shores of the Mediterranean had been subjugated by the Roman Empire and they were asking themselves some of these same questions. These questions were being asked by everyone, but especially those people who had embraced that new religious faith that we know as "Christianity". If you were not a Roman citizen, persecution was part of the cultural situation.

The writer of Ephesians writes to the new Christians in Ephesus and is urging them to hold onto their new faith. This letter contains some very specific instructions about how Christians are to behave when faced with the demands of a troubled world. In the first three chapters of Ephesians, the author sets forth specific understandings of the benefits offered by Christ to both Gentiles and Jews.

And then at the beginning of chapter 4, the author calls Christians to humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love, maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. After all, it is one body and one Spirit and one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. Furthermore, God has bestowed certain gifts upon the people: some are apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers. Christians must grow up, set aside all petty or trivial concerns, and live in the world as people redeemed by Christ.

The people, from Ephesus, who had embraced Jesus, were threatened by Roman persecution. This letter offered a vision of Christian faith that could withstand the dangers peculiar to their time and place - it was meant to carry them through to new life.

Leaning on faith, sounds so simple, so straightforward. But God knows how complicated and uneasy the path of discipleship can become. It doesn't matter if Christians are seeking to live amid the daily death and destruction of the Second World War; or Christians facing persecution and martyrdom in the late first century; or Christians living with the realities and assumptions that have followed 9/11 - that date that will be remembered, just as December 7 is remembered. In such circumstances, we find the author of Ephesians reminding us of what we should already know: that each and every one of us are to be equipped for active ministry, active spiritual service, active discipleship through our knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

If you realized that the world as you have known it was on the brink of collapse, what would you do? This question is not posed idly. In a world whose financial structures are so completely dependent upon one another, whose economies can falter on the basis of fear of the unknown, we need to have something, someone to fall back on: One who has triumphed over the world: "He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe" (Eph 4:10).

*Where were you when the world stopped turnin'
That September day? Amen.*