

Let Us Bow Before Him

If we are to see the church strengthened and the nation healed, we must learn how to approach the throne of God in humble, reverent worship.

America is in a time of crisis. During the last several decades, more and more people have turned away from God, no longer wanting to hear what He has to say about their lives and circumstances. The result has been a frightening moral decline that threatens to destroy our country from the inside out.

Since the September 11 terrorist attacks, however, many ears have begun to open again. Fearful and uncertain about the future, many people are more willing than ever to listen to what God, through His church, has to say about the evil that has befallen our nation.

What a profound opportunity we have to see this nation turn back to God and to bring in a great harvest of souls! If we will cooperate with Him, God will turn the present evil to good and use it for His glory.

The key will be not how the depraved world responds to the crisis but how the church of Jesus Christ responds. What will we do with the opportunity God has placed before us?

SPEAKING FOR GOD Many people today are searching for God. They want to hear the voice of God, and they are looking to us to tell them what God is saying.

How do we dare speak for the God of all creation? How do we speak for the One who said, "Let there be..." and there was? The One whose voice is so strong, He literally sustains this world by the power of His word?

The thought of speaking for God should scare us to death—death to ourselves, death to our own agendas, and death to our own ideas and concepts and religion. God forbid that flesh should enter in when it's time to speak the words of God! Yet so often we say things without much prayer or thought, supposedly speaking for Him.

The Bible tells us, "Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen, rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.

"As a dream comes when there are many cares, so the speech of a fool when there are many stand in awe of God" (Eccl. 5:1-7, NIV).

By nightfall on September 11, religious commentators from all over the world were already speaking for God. Some of the words that were spoken may have been on target; others may not have been.

Certainly, in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy, there was a need for Christians to provide comfort in the midst of overwhelming devastation. But many were quick instead to utter the "opinions" of God. Was it time to speak His words? Where was the time spent standing in awe before Him first?

GETTING IT RIGHT The world is listening to us right now as never before. That's why we must be careful to watch what we say.

Remember, Job's friends were quick to speak in his anguish; they had many noble things to say about his situation. Yet God ended that chapter of Job's life by declaring that the words those friends had spoken weren't right. As good and religious as their speeches sounded, they weren't the words of God.

Can preachers and teachers who have been right about God's words in the past suddenly be wrong when an urgent matter arises? I believe they can.

When King David told the prophet Nathan that he wanted to build a temple for God, Nathan thought the idea sounded good. Surely a house built in God's name would honor the Lord! And up to that point, Nathan had always been right; he had always accurately spoken the oracles of God. So he told David, "'Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the Lord is with you'" (2 Sam. 7:3).

That night, however, God came to Nathan and told him that David was not supposed to build the temple; David's son, Solomon, would be the builder in the next generation. Nathan had to go back to David and retract the words he had spoken too quickly.

Just because any of us has been right in the past doesn't mean we are right now. Before we jump to a conclusion about what God would say in a given situation, we must first stand in awe of Him. We must let our words be few.

After all, God is in the heavens; we are here on Earth. We don't always know or understand how God is going to accomplish His perfect will. What makes sense and seems right to us now may not be right at all.

When Jesus was being taken away to be tried and crucified—and ultimately raised from the dead, completing the good work that was given to Him by the Father—Peter reacted by doing what he thought was right. In the urgency of the moment, he drew his sword and cut off a soldier's ear. But Jesus rebuked him for it.

You and I need to be careful not to do what Peter did. Yes, now is the time for believers to draw their swords of the Spirit and rise to face the challenge before us. But the question is, how will we use those swords?

Will we use them to cut off the ears of our hearers? Will we use them with meanness, speaking condemnation to such a degree that those who are dying to hear have their ears cut off instead?

To avoid such a mistake, we must not draw our swords until we have first stood in awe and listened for what it is that God wants to say in this hour. That should be our first response in any urgent matter: to stand in awe, be silent and listen.

A HOLY FEAR We need to return to a holy fear of the Lord and a reverence for His Word! Remember how the people of Israel responded when Ezra read out loud the books of the Law? Nehemiah 8 tells us that as he opened the Scriptures, all the people stood up. Ezra praised the Lord, and all the people lifted their hands, cried “Amen!” and bowed down and worshiped.

I believe God is calling His church to fall on her face before Him again—not once, not just in this immediate crisis, but until the kingdom comes. It’s time for us to put our faces to the ground in our congregations, in our homes and in our prayer closets. I’m not talking about a physical posture only; I’m talking about an attitude of the heart that demonstrates both humility and awe.

Many leaders have quoted 2 Chronicles 7:14 in recent months: “‘If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.’” What this Scripture tells us is that if we experience a lack of healing in our nation, it’s not because unredeemed people are sinning. It’s because Christians aren’t bowing.

Healing and revival can come only as we, the church, bow down before Jesus and confess Him as Lord. We must do this long before we see Him face to face.

The truth is, if we say all the right things but have the wrong heart, God will not do battle for us. First Peter 5:5 says, "'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'" If we take our swords and speak the truth with pride and arrogance, God will oppose us, and our words will have no effect. If He sees our humility, however, He will raise up His mighty arm on our behalf. His grace and sufficiency will be with us and with the words we speak.

GOD ROCKED THE HOUSE Acts 4 tells the story of Peter and John being opposed by the religious rulers of the day strictly because they were servants of Jesus. The rulers initially released the two apostles after warning them "not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:18).

Peter and John went back to the church and reported everything that the chief priests and elders had told them. When the believers heard the news, they did not draw their swords; instead, they raised their voices together in powerful prayer:

"'Sovereign made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of Your servant, our father David: "Why do the nations rage and the people plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against His Anointed One."

"'Indeed, Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed. They did what Your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable Your servants to speak Your word with great boldness. Stretch out Your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of Your holy servant Jesus'" (Acts 4:24-30).

After they prayed, the Bible says, "the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy

Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly" (v. 31).

Do you want God to rock your house, your church, your nation, the way He rocked that first-century meeting place? Do you want Him to fill you with the Holy Spirit so you can speak His word with boldness? I know I do! The key is this: Before we speak—before we draw our swords—we must take time to stand in awe.

And it's important that we do that together. Acts 4:24 says the believers "raised their voices together in prayer to God." The Greek word translated together is actually a compound word meaning "same" and "mind" or "passion." From the beginning the church was birthed from among a very diverse people, and we are still diverse today.

We are never going to agree on all things. We have different gifts. But we have the same Lord.

If we are willing to come together with one mind and one passion—the passion to see God glorified and salvation multiplied—then God will rock the house. If we come together as a church in this nation across all denominational, ethnic and racial barriers; if we choose to humble ourselves before God and be unified in His name; if we cry out together with like passion; then He will be glorified, and salvation will be multiplied. His Spirit will fill us, and each one of us will boldly speak His word.

A GREAT OUTPOURING Acts 2:17-18 tells us that the greatest outpouring of the Holy Spirit of all time will be characterized by the bold proclamation of God's Word. Neighbor to neighbor, friend to friend, parent to child, believers will not hesitate to tell others about Jesus. They will live with the Word of God fresh upon their tongues and burning in their hearts.

In that day, they will stand in awe. They will listen. They will bow down. Only then will they draw the sword.

Our nation is in crisis, and people are open to hearing what God has to say to them in the midst of their confusion and fear. We need an outpouring of the Holy Spirit so that you and I can speak the word of God to them—the word that is right for this critical hour; the word that will cut to their hearts, not cut off their ears.

As Christians, we have a lot to say that the world needs to hear. People need to know that God is sovereign and Jesus is Lord—now more than ever.

But let's determine not to speak too quickly. Before we draw the sword, let us first stand in awe.

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