

# Did God Allow the School Shooting That Slaughtered Children?

I am sitting outside of the elementary school in Townville, South Carolina, as I write this. I came to pray with and for a community that is still grieving the loss of one of its youngest. It was just one month ago when a 14-year-old gunman came onto this campus and opened fire on the playground. He struck two students and a teacher before being brought down by a volunteer firefighter. Thankfully the young man never made it inside the school where this tragedy could have been far worse. Unfortunately one of the victims, a 6-year-old boy named Jacob Hall, would later die from the wounds he sustained.

Today, there are still dozens of signs decorating the entrance to the school. Each surrounded by stuffed animals, flowers and balloons. These colorful signs are painted in bright colors and say "Pray For Townville," "Townville Strong" and "We love you Jacob." They stand as a solemn reminder of a tragedy that will forever mark this community.

Townville is a small, quaint, rural and peaceful town that can't even boast of a single stop light. It is the kind of town you drive through and never realize it was there. No one ever imagines events like this happening so close to home, my home. Townville is just 10 minutes down the road from where I grew up.

Small communities like these have no choice but to go through tragedies together. That was certainly evident at the funeral. Fifteen hundred people came to pay their respects. In a fitting tribute to young Jacob, many came dressed as superheroes. Even Batman showed up to deliver the eulogy. It

was a proper and moving farewell. Apparently Jacob, like so many kids his age, loved pretending to be Superman. He often told his mom that he was out saving his city while everyone else slept.

It is possible you haven't heard much about this school shooting. It barely made national news and was quickly buried by the election headlines. Consider what that fact says about the state of things here in America. There was a time this news would dominate the headlines for weeks. Have we truly become so accustomed to these events that they are no longer considered newsworthy by the mainstream media? I fear for a nation that has lost the ability to feel these things deeply and is able to move on so quickly.

Last week I was asked to explain how God could have allowed such a tragedy like this to ever take place. That is a common question that is often asked after these type of events. The truth is, God didn't allow this to take place—we did. Tragedies like these are the inevitable result of decades of moral decay. The bad seeds that have been sown into our schools, and society have produced accordingly.

More specifically, it is the church that has created the vacuum in which such tragedies can take place. The moral decline of our nation, the secularization of our schools and the breakdown of our homes is the consequence of a church that has become painfully silent. The church, by and large, has failed in its role of transforming the communities in which it resides. We have consolidated and isolated ourselves inside the four walls of our pristine sanctuaries and the world around us has paid the price for our absence.

When a tragic event like the one here in South Carolina takes place there are several things we need to do. First is to respond to the immediate need. I am incredibly proud of this community and the way the church has stepped in to administer healing to a town that desperately needed it. However once

we've responded, we also need to recognize and take responsibility for where we failed beforehand.

The church is the vehicle through which Christ has chosen to advance His kingdom here on Earth. We have been commissioned to tread out the ground and subdue the earth through the power of the gospel. The church is called to reproduce disciples that carry hope to every home in your city. In other words, the responsibility for the transformation of your town falls upon your church. When we fail here, we fail our cities!

Let that sink in for a moment. I wonder how many tragedies our towns have experienced because of our failure to transform them? These are just some of the thoughts that are pouring through my mind as I sit outside this school. Right now, I see three places we are failing and must address immediately.

The church must take responsibility and repent for our lack of prayer. Today there is a great call for prayer on behalf of Townville. That is great. However, I wonder how much prayer was offered up ahead of this shooting? How many churches in this town were standing together, united in prayer? It is saddening that it takes such a great tragedy to reveal what has always been a necessity.

The church is called to be the watchmen on the walls of our cities. As such we have the authority to prevent things from entering our towns. However when the church fails to pray, the watchmen step off the wall and the city is left unguarded. It becomes easy prey to the enemy. Who knows what plots and schemes of the enemy might have been shut down before they ever came to fruition if only we had prayed.

Today's church places so much emphasis and resources into creating entertaining, energetic weekend experiences for people while so little attention is paid to the prayer meeting. When was the last time your church prayed for your city? Is it a weekly or daily occurrence? Are there

intercessors lifting up the homes, schools and government leaders? The Bible says that the effective, fervent prayers of the righteous avail much. Are there effective, fervent prayers going up on behalf of your city?

Perhaps our city deserves a humble and heartfelt apology from the church. We have failed to lift up our city as we should. Let us make that mistake no longer.

The church must also take responsibility and repent for failing our homes and marriages. Consider the sobering reality that nearly every school shooting this nation has witnessed in the last two decades has come at the hands of a young man from a broken and hurting home. The stewardship of the family does not rest at the hands of government, but upon the shoulders of the church. We fail our cities when we fail to raise up healthy homes.

What a shame to spend so much energy on building our church house when all around us there are hundreds of homes being decimated. What a shame to spend thousands of dollars inviting people to come into our churches when we have been reluctant to go into theirs. I wonder in this instance, how many missed opportunities there were to reach this family before a spirit of hate and murder could take root in their son? Is it possible that this crisis could have been averted if a neighboring church had shown some genuine concern for this home? Is it possible there are opportunities you're missing right next door to your church? I am certain there are. Let's not continue to make the same mistake!

Finally we must take responsibility and repent for our failure to usher revival into our communities. The answer for America is not political, it is spiritual. We need an awakening, a greater awakening! That revival can come through no other way than the true church of Christ. Our failure to contend for such a move is costly to those around us.

This tragedy in Townville revealed that this city was not as peaceful and serene as it once seemed. It has been a wake-up call to the entire community, prayerfully one that keeps the church alert and vigilant. Truthfully we all need such a wake-up call. There is a far greater need in your city for revival than you realize!

Today many, including myself, are contending for a national awakening. However, let's make this more personal. Perhaps a national awakening is too great for you to believe for, but surely you can believe for your city! Your city is desperately in need of revival! My friend, that responsibility falls to you and your church, and we desperately need you to shoulder this burden and begin to contend to see it come forth for the sake of our homes, marriages and our nation.

Prophetically I see a time coming very soon where pockets of revival begin to break out across this nation. It will come through churches who have united together to take responsibility for seeing their towns ushered into the kingdom of God. You will know this is taking place when you see divorce and crime rates plummet within cities. Jail and prison populations will fall to incredibly low levels. Whole schools will begin each day with a prayer meeting that rivals anything you've seen in a church. Stadiums will not be used solely for sporting events but revival meetings. Bars and strip clubs will shut down. The language you hear around town and the spiritual atmosphere will drastically change.

Can you see it?

Such a move of God will come through no other place, but the church. Until we see such a move, our cities will continue to be open prey for violent, tragic crimes. That my friend is our responsibility.

So today as I sit here, outside of Townville Elementary, I am praying for the students and their families. I am lifting up

the teachers and leaders. I am praying for the community leaders and churches. But I am also asking God to forgive us, the church, for failing in the place we are needed the most, within our communities. God help us.