

Mercy Makes It Possible

Jeremiah 4:23;28

I Timothy 1:12-17

On this day twenty-one years ago, at about 9:00 am, my administrative assistant called me. I lay sick in bed. She said, ***“Turn on your TV,”*** and hung up. I reached for the remote control. The first thing I saw was smoke billowing out of one of the twin towers in Manhattan. I happened to turn on NBC. Matt Lauer and Katie Curic spent a while guessing without much accuracy at what was happening. The first thing they got right was when she reported an airplane had hit the south tower—though she speculated it was a small private aircraft. Then an explosion happened on the north tower. Then the report came in about the strike on the Pentagon. The word terrorism entered the conversation. Ambiguous reports about the fourth airplane hitting the ground in Pennsylvania arrived. I watched for so long I forgot to eat lunch.

When the second twin tower came crumbling down anchors on all the networks reacted similarly. After saying some version of, “Oh! The other one is going down!” they fell silent. After perhaps half a minute of silence, with the image of an incredible cloud of smoke and debris blanketing all of lower Manhattan on screen, Fox News anchor Jon Scott said, “America, say a prayer. Remember, something like 50,000 people work in the World Trade Center. Please ask God to have mercy on their souls.”

Just less than 3,000 people died in the World Trade Center, plus another hundred or so at the Pentagon and in the hijacked airplane its passengers and crew forced down in Pennsylvania. On a 2006 mission trip we took our youth to the memorials in Manhattan and Somerset County. Five years had passed, and these were normal, boisterous young people. But in both places we all went quiet. And stayed quiet. Later we would tell each other we felt an eerie presence, a sense that those souls somehow still inhabited those spaces. The truth of the awful evil in the planning and execution of the attacks became terribly real. In Pennsylvania one of our adult leaders suggested we form a prayer circle before leaving the site. As we started other people asked if they could join our prayers. Before we finished more than fifty people had joined our group of twenty-five or so. People prayed out loud and some wept. May God have mercy on those souls indeed.

We human beings can do incredibly evil things to each other. We fought the Civil War at least in part to end the evil of slavery in the USA. In one day at the battle of Antietam more than 3,650 men died. Another several hundred would eventually succumb to wounds they received in that Maryland field. At Meggido in 609 B.C. an Egyptian army on its way to fight the Babylonians encountered a small army of Israelites whose king, Josiah, would not let them pass through his territory. The Egyptians slaughtered the Israelites and killed their king. They tortured those who lay wounded on the battleground, poking out their eyes and binding them in ropes, then throwing them on bonfires. Another translation for the place name Meggido is Armageddon. The place where the Book of Revelation predicts God will finally put an

end to human evil via the final battle that will usher in the Age of Christ.

I and II Timothy and Titus were likely written by a church leader or leaders a couple of generations after the Apostle Paul died to this life. The letters have two purposes: to guide the emerging churches as they faced administrative challenges, and to combat false teaching.