



Let the Weak Say I am Strong

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The Sept 11th terrorist attack shows the return of the Lord is near

I had prepared the lesson I was going to share with you today three weeks ago and was looking over it this past Tuesday to re-familiarize myself with it. Then the news reports started coming in about the terrorist attacks and the Lord began prompting me to change my plans to what He had intended me to teach.

The title of this lesson is taken from Joel 3:10, "*let the weak say 'I am strong.'*"

Is this a good thing for the weak to say, 'I am strong.'?

Yes and no, it depends on the context. In the context of Joel 3:10, it is clearly not a good thing and it defines the era we now live in...

I think you'd agree that our world today is different than the one we lived in before September 11th.

How has our world changed since the World Trade Center towers crumbled to the ground?

- The attacks on our nation shakes up our sense of security and will ultimately alter our lives, restricting our freedoms.
- We don't understand all the implications of the attack on America but one thing that the Bible makes clear is that God is in control and not even this tragedy happened without God allowing it to take place.

How do we know that God is in such control that not even bad things happen without His permission?

Those who say that God could not allow such an act of evil have never read the book of Job. The attacks on our nation were certainly inspired by Satan but to say this happened outside God's permissive will is to ignore the Lord's Almighty nature. God is sovereign and there is nothing that happens, good or bad without His permission.

Should we know God's purpose in allowing bad things to happen?

We don't always understand what God's purpose is because we do not have His omniscient perspective...

Isaiah 55:8-9 - For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.

How will bad things work out for Christians?

God allows bad things to happen to serve a higher purpose, but we can trust that whatever He allows to happen will be used in the best interest of His people...

Romans 8:28 - And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

- For example, the holocaust was a terrible time but this served to convince the Jews that they needed a homeland causing them to be re-established as a nation back in the land as was prophesied.
- This is a promise that we can bank on. Even if what God is allowing to happen does not make sense, we can know that it is serving a purpose that will ultimately bless those who love Him.

How may we know the general direction of world events?

While we may not know specifically what purpose the tragic attacks on our nation will serve, God has provided us sufficient information about the general direction that this world is headed in His Word.

How has world politics been shaken in recent years?

It reminds me in many ways of another major world event that God used in my life to lead me to Him. As someone who grew up during the Cold War and served in the Army training to counter the Soviet threat, I had the sense that the bipolar superpower stand-off was the way things would always be. But when the Soviet Union virtually dissolved over night without a shot being fired, it was clear the world we then lived in was very different than the one I had grown up in.

How was the world changed by the demise of the USSR?

The thing about that event that most grabbed my attention was that people were seeing it as a positive development proclaiming that we should "cash in our peace dividends". To me, the development seemed anything but secure because all those conventional and nuclear weapons were still in place in the former Soviet Union and they were in the hands of an increasingly desperate people. It seemed to me that we had just entered the era addressed in 1Thessalonians 5:3...

For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.

Just prior to the demise of the Soviet Union, I had been reading a book on Bible prophecy my Father-in-law had

given me. I had read it to please the old guy so that we'd have something to talk about when I saw him. What had impressed me about the book was its treatment of Bible prophecies as the literal absolute truth from God.

You see I hadn't given God much thought. I was basically an agnostic who called himself a Christian just because my parents raised me in church. For me, being a Christian was a cultural thing. I knew God had to exist because this is obvious from His creation but I didn't think that it was possible to know anything of substance about Him in this life. I considered myself a basically good person and figured that surely God would grade on the curve and I'd make it to heaven because I was not as bad as most people. But I didn't give God much thought because I didn't know where God drew the line on how righteous a person had to be to make it into heaven. I knew there had to be a hell because heaven wouldn't be heaven if all people including someone like Adolf Hitler got to go to the same place.

Something I had certainly not given any thought about was God's Almighty nature. The book on Bible prophecy I had read represented God as powerful enough to write history in advance...

Isaiah 46:9-10 - Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure.'

Only God can declare "*the end from the beginning*" and this is how He authenticated Himself in the Bible. Almost a third of the Bible is prophecy. Some of the prophecies have already come to pass because they were near-term to authenticate God's prophets as speaking for Him. And some have come to pass because they foretold the Lord Jesus Christ's first advent. But most of the Bible's prophecies are about the Lord's return because it will be in conjunction with God's judgment.

As I contemplated the crumbling of the Soviet Union, it occurred to me that this had to take place for the world to come together under one human government as the Bible said it would just prior to the Lord's return. Revelation 13:7 speaks of a coming world ruler who will have authority "*over every tribe, tongue, and nation.*"

It suddenly occurred to me that if the Bible could help me understand why current events were happening in the world, then I had better pay attention to what it had to say about Jesus Christ. This shook me into realizing my sinful condition before God and that my trusting in being a reasonably good person did not cut it before Him who's standard is perfection. I realized that if I did not believe His Word and open my heart to Jesus at that moment then I was going to hell. It was a no-brainer. I suddenly knew

that Jesus paid the price for my sins and that He was blessing me by enabling me to put my trust in Him and believe God's Word. It was like a light going on in my head. I was born-again. I didn't hear trumpets or have an emotional response at that moment but I knew my life was changed forever and that I would have eternal life.

So how do these terrorist attacks relate to Bible prophecy?

- Certainly it serves to shake up our complacency that we live in a time of "*peace and safety*".
- And as I witnessed people being shaken from their work-a-day routine mesmerized by CNN in the break area this verse came to mind:
Habakkuk 1:5 – "Look among the nations and watch-- be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days which you would not believe, though it were told you."

This terrorist attack is an act of war, how are wars prophetic?

- This attack fits in with the description of time prior to The Lord's return where Jesus said there would be "*wars and rumors of wars*" (Matthew 24:6).
- I believe that the course of end-time events will be a series of world-shaking events like this. Jesus said the events leading up to His return will be "*the beginning of sorrows*" (Matt 24:8). The Greek word translated "sorrows" here refers to birth pangs. As birth pangs, world-shaking events will increase in frequency and severity.

How do these terrorist attacks show that we live in a time of false "*peace and safety*" described in Bible prophecy?

This freshly shaken world we are now in is also similar to the time of "*peace and safety*" in that it serves to bring the world together as one. This escalation of terrorism is not just against the United States, it is an assault on freedom and democracy everywhere, it is an attack on our civilized way of life. The world will come together to combat this new worldwide threat. This too serves to establish the political structure which will turn its authority over to the coming world leader the Bible calls the Antichrist (see Revelation 17:12-13 & 1 John 4:3).

Why does God shake us up?

When God shakes us up, He is executing judgment on us trying to get our attention. God wants us to wake up and respond to Him. There will be many that do respond as a result of this shaking. Some of our great revivals have happened as a result of God shaking us up. Raymond told me about how WWII was a great boon to church attendance. This execution of God's judgment to shake his people into a relationship with Him is a pattern in the

Bible. As God raised up the Chaldeans to shake up Israel, he is raising up terrorists to shake up the United States.

Habakkuk 1:5-6 - Look among the nations and watch-- be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days which you would not believe, though it were told you. For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans, a bitter and hasty nation which marches through the breadth of the earth, to possess dwelling places that are not theirs.

Let's get back to our key verse... the one verse that this attack on America made me think of most was, "let the weak say, 'I am strong'" in Joel 3:10.

How does Joel 3:10 relate to the events leading up to the Lord's return?

This passage is talking about events leading up to the battle of Armageddon which is referred to in Joel as "*the Valley of Jehoshaphat*." The battle of Armageddon is the last event that happens before the Lord returns. The Bible gives many other prophecies about events during the 7-year period of time which culminates in Armageddon. Jesus called the second half of this seven-year period the Great Tribulation (in Matthew 24).

What is the most important sign that we are living in the general time-frame of the Lord's return?

Recent world events are making it clear that the stage is being set for this 7-year period of tribulation to begin. Probably the most important prophecy that has been fulfilled in recent times is the re-establishing of the nation of Israel. The Bible says in many places that God will gather the Jews from among the nations in the general time-frame of Jesus returning. And once established in Eretz Israel, the land of Israel, they would remain there as a nation forever, never to be uprooted again...

Ezekiel 37:21-25 – ²¹ Then say to them, "Thus says the Lord GOD: "Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; ²² and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again. ²³ They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. Then they shall be My people, and I will be their God. ²⁴ David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them. ²⁵ Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children's children, forever; and My servant David shall be their prince forever.

While the passage in Joel talks specifically about the Great Tribulation. We can see a foreshadowing of the attitude that the terrorists had which will draw the enemies of God together at Armageddon...

Joel 3:9-14 – ⁹ Proclaim this among the nations:

"Prepare for war! Wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. ¹⁰ Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, 'I am strong.'" ¹¹ Assemble and come, all you nations, and gather together all around. Cause Your mighty ones to go down there, O LORD. ¹² "Let the nations be awakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. ¹³ Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; for the winepress is full, the vats overflow-- for their wickedness is great." ¹⁴ Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.

What will the attitude be of those that will be gathered together to oppose God at the Battle of Armageddon?

The context of Joel 3 makes it clear that those who say "*I am strong*" are those who are gathering to do battle against God. They are finding their strength in themselves and not in God.

How do we have real strength

The attitude in Joel 3:10 should be contrasted with the Christian attitude expressed by the Apostle Paul when he was coming to terms with his "*thorn in the flesh...*"

2 Corinthians 12:10 - Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

What does beating plowshares and pruning hooks into swords and spears mean?

I have the sense that we have passed out of the era where people proclaim "*peace and safety*" and are now in a new era where "*the weak say I am strong*." This passage describes terrorism. Note that in this era the weak will turn plowshares into swords, or in today's terms, they will take peaceful tools of productivity and turn them into weapons. This is what these weak, deceived people have done turning a passenger airliner into a guided missile. And they will think they have power because of this.

What future event do Christians look forward to that will be another major shaking of the world?

There is another great shaking that the world will experience prior to the Lord's coming that the church looks forward to: the rapture or resurrection of the saints:

1 Corinthians 15:51-53 - Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed-- in

a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. (see also 1Thessalonians 4:13-18)

When will the rapture occur?

The "Left Behind" novel series addresses what could happen in the wake of millions of born-again Christians vanishing off the face of the earth. You can be sure the world will be shaken. We don't know when the Lord will call His church out of the world. He said, "*Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming*" (Matthew 24:42). From a prophetic standpoint, there is nothing that has to happen before the rapture of the church, this event may be the next major shaking in the history of the world. Certainly we know that the sequence of end-time events will be very rapid when they begin to unfold because, "*The end of it shall be with a flood*" (Daniel 9:26).

What will be the ultimate shaking of the world?

All these shakings of our world are but foreshadows of the final shaking of the world which God will do...

Haggai 2:6-7 - For thus says the LORD of hosts: "Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory," says the LORD of hosts.

This shaking that Haggai talks about refers to God pouring out His righteous wrath on the world as we know it which has been corrupted by sin. The Lord will recreate both heaven and earth...

2 Peter 3:10 - But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. (see also Revelation 21:1)

Will Christians be shaken at this ultimate shaking of the world?

God will shake all of creation. There is nothing in this world that will not be shaken. But those who have trusted in Jesus Christ, God's provision for salvation, can not be shaken...

Hebrews 12:25-29 - See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven." Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since

we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.

What is the best way to deal with this new age of terror against America?

While the era where "*the weak say I am strong.*" is a scary period for the world, Christians can take comfort in knowing that God is still in control. And as we see events taking place that show the Lord's return as being near, this should cause us to draw near to Him and get on with doing what He has called us to do.

What if you don't draw any comfort from this concept that God is in control?

Maybe you don't feel any comfort from knowing that God is in control. If this is the case, you should see this as God calling you into a relationship with Him so that He can bless you with His comfort. I would encourage you to let Jesus into your life immediately before it is too late...

2 Corinthians 6:2 - Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

How can you be saved?

Jesus has already done everything necessary for you to have eternal life by paying the price for your sin. All that needs to be done is receive Him into your life.

Acts 2:21 - whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.