

Victims and Heroes

R. David Pogge
11 September, 2011

Part 1

As we remember those people who died on September 11, it is important to recognize that some of those people who died were victims, and some were heroes.

The victims went to work, or boarded airplanes, unaware of what was about to happen to them. When they got up that morning, none of them knew that they would not live to eat lunch that day. They weren't putting their lives at risk by performing some dare-devil activity. They weren't committing a crime that could involve a potentially fatal shoot-out with the police. They were just living ordinary lives that suddenly came to an end without warning. They were innocent victims.

Not everyone who died that day was a victim. Some of the people who died went into a burning building to rescue victims. These heroes, unlike the victims, were fully aware of the danger they were facing. Despite the danger, they chose to put themselves in harm's way. They risked their lives that others might live. Some of them lost their lives attempting to save strangers. Others joined the military to protect our nation from similar future attacks upon our lives and liberty. That makes them all heroes by any definition.

Now, ten years later, we think back upon the victims and heroes that died that day. But if all we do is to think sad thoughts about them, then they died in vain. We who remain alive should not only think about them, but should try to understand what really happened to them. There is an important lesson to be learned from this tragedy. The tragedy will be doubled if we don't learn that lesson.

The New York police and firefighters were aware of the danger. They knew they were risking their lives, and chose to risk them. The same can be said of those brave men and women who enlist in our armed forces. They have all decided that it is worth risking their own lives in order to protect many other lives. They hope they will not lose their lives as a result of their brave decisions, but they are willing to sacrifice themselves for the benefit of others. The police and firefighters who responded on September 11 were all heroes by choice, whether they survived or not.

After American Airlines Flight 11 struck the north tower, people in the south tower watched the burning north tower in amazement. Unaware of what was happening, they watched the aftermath of what they thought was an accident. The people in the south tower were ignorant of the danger to them. Little did they know that their tower would collapse before the north tower would.

Why should the people in the south tower worry? What are the odds of two airplanes accidentally striking both towers in the same day? They had no idea that they, too, were in danger. The fire in the adjacent tower was a warning of things to come, but they did not recognize it. They weren't stupid, but they were ignorant of the situation.

The passengers on United Airlines Flight 93 found themselves in a different situation. Some of them had heard on their cell phones that other planes had been hijacked and flown into buildings. Knowing the fate of the other hijacked airplanes, they knew they were going to die

Hope, it is said, springs eternal. We will never know for sure whether or not the passengers on Flight 93 believed they could overpower the hijackers and land the plane safely. The tearful goodbyes said on their cell phones suggest that they knew they would not. They must have known that they would die sooner if they rushed the cockpit. But they did not shirk from doing the right thing, cowering in their seats, trying to

live as long as possible. They knew that time was running out, and used the little time they had as wisely as they could.

Unlike the police and firefighters, the passengers on United 93 had not previously decided to be heroes. They boarded the plane with a reasonable expectation that they would arrive safely at their destination without incident. But, when the hijackers took control of the plane, and they received phone calls from friends and relatives telling them what had happened, they understood their situation.

They could not choose if they were going to live or die; but they could choose if they were going to die victims or heroes. So, some of the passengers on Flight 93 decided that they would make the best use of the little time they had left. They could not save themselves, but they could try to save others. They could try to keep the airplane from hitting the intended target, so that there would be fewer casualties on the ground.

We should not be surprised at their choice. Given the choice between dying as a helpless victim, or dying as a valiant hero, why choose to be a victim?

Those who died as victims were not victims because they lacked courage or intelligence. They were victims because they lacked knowledge. If the passengers on American Airlines Flight 11 had known what the passengers on United 93 knew, no doubt some passengers on Flight 11 would have fought the hijackers and prevented it from striking the north tower. The passengers on Flight 11 did not understand the situation. Had they known what was going to happen, they certainly would have acted differently.

There is no reason to believe that the passengers on United 93 were braver than the passengers on American 11. There is no reason to believe that the passengers on United 93 were smarter than the passengers on American 11. The difference was neither bravery nor intelligence—the difference was knowledge. The passengers on United 93 understood their situation more clearly because they had received more information. Better information leads to better choices.

Despite being better informed, the passengers on Flight 93 did not have perfect knowledge of the hijackers' plan. They did not know if they were 1 mile, or 100 miles, from the hijackers' target. They did not know exactly how long they had left to live, but they knew it wasn't long. They also knew they would probably die sooner if they rushed the cockpit; but they did not shirk from doing the right thing, cowering in their seats, trying to live as long as possible. They knew that time was running out, and used the little time they had as wisely as they could.

We don't know exactly when we are going to die, but it is unquestionably true that we have exactly one less day to live than we had 24 hours ago. Like the passengers on Flight 93, we cannot choose not to die. We will all die. Our only choice is how to spend the time we have left.

Sadly, most of us are victims-in-waiting. We don't want to think about death. We don't want to face reality. If we are as ignorant of our fate as the passengers on Flight 11 were, we won't make heroic decisions, and die as helpless victims.

We don't have to be ignorant. We can make ourselves aware of the world around us. We can study current events and try to understand our true situation. Once we understand the situation, we can make heroic decisions. We don't need to die as helpless victims. We can use whatever time we have left heroically.

It is vitally important to recognize our situation clearly.

On days like September 11, it is natural for us to ask spiritual questions. Is there a God? Does He have a plan for the human race? Has He revealed that plan through His prophets?

Many of us believe that current events are unfolding exactly as God said they would just before Jesus' second coming. We aren't smarter than other people; we just have more knowledge than other people

because we have read God's word and watched prophecies being fulfilled. Smart people on American Airlines Flight 11 no doubt looked out their window and wondered why the plane was flying so low over New York City, straight toward the World Trade Center. If they had read the messages the terrorists had sent to each other, they would have understood their situation and acted differently. It's not a question of mental intelligence; it's a question of military intelligence. All the computing power in the world is of no value without correct data to process.

Those of us who have read the Biblical end-time prophecies have a better understanding of our true situation. Better information leads to better choices.

After this song, we will talk about those prophecies, compare them to current events, and draw some conclusions.

[Music: "Find Us Faithful", Dave and Sue Pogge]]

Part 2

In the first segment we compared the victims on American Airlines Flight 11 with the heroes on United Airlines Flight 93. The passengers on Flight 93 weren't braver than the passengers on Flight 11. They weren't smarter. The only difference was situational awareness. The passengers on United 93 learned from cell phone calls from their friends and relatives what had happened to the other hijacked flights. This information gave them a better grasp of their situation, which affected their response.

The spiritual lesson we want to draw from this is that accurately knowing our situation will result in making wiser decisions. Many people are as oblivious to their spiritual situation as the passengers on Flight 11 were.

The situation to which we refer is the fact that we are living in the last days. For some people this is as hard to believe. Well, it was hard for the passengers on Flight 11 to believe that the hijackers were going to fly their airplane into the World Trade Center. It would have been just as hard for the passengers on United 93 to believe they were on a kamikaze mission had they not known what happened to the other hijacked airplanes.

It is important to realize that we are living in the last days because the Bible says there will be terrible tribulation just before Jesus returns. If Christians don't recognize the fulfillment of prophecy, they may get confused and think that God has lost control, and lose their faith. The Bible predicts terrible delusions will occur in the last days. It is important for Christians to be on the lookout for these delusions so they aren't deceived.

A common mistake many people make is to try to guess how prophecy will be fulfilled. This is dangerous because prophecy is often fulfilled in some way other than we expect. This is the mistake the Jewish leaders made when Jesus began his earthly ministry. They expected the Messiah to kick the Romans out of the Holy Land. When Jesus did not fulfill their expectations of the Messiah, they failed to recognize him.

There is danger in predicting how the last day prophecies will be fulfilled. If they are fulfilled in a way other than how we expect them to be fulfilled, we will not recognize the fulfillment.

God has not given us prophecy in order to predict or change the future. In John 13:19 Jesus said,

"I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am He."

Although we can't gaze into the future and predict how prophecies will be fulfilled, we can look back and clearly see what prophecies have already been perfectly fulfilled. Prophecy is given to us to confirm that what has happened in the past was not an accident. God was in control of the situation.

Consider just a few of the prophecies about the coming of the Messiah. Three apparently contradictory prophecies said he would be born in Bethlehem, come from Egypt, and be a Galilean. Before Jesus' birth it would have been impossible to guess how all three could be fulfilled. Looking back, we can see that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, was taken to Egypt as an infant to escape Herod, but later returned from Egypt and grew up in Galilee. That's one of the reasons why we believe that Jesus is the predicted Messiah.

Students of Bible prophecy know that nearly all of the historical prophecies have been perfectly, and unquestionably, fulfilled. There are just a few prophecies dealing with last day events that still have not yet been fulfilled. This tells us that since nearly all of the prophetic history has been fulfilled, we must be just about to enter the tribulation of the last days.

We will not make the mistake of trying to predict what will trigger that tribulation, or guess exactly what that tribulation will be like. What we will do is to know exactly what the prophecies say and watch for them to be fulfilled. For example, Daniel 11:40-45 says,

“At the time of the end the king of the South will engage him in battle, and the king of the North will storm out against him with chariots and cavalry and a great fleet of ships. He will invade many countries and sweep through them like a flood. He will also invade the Beautiful Land. Many countries will fall, but Edom, Moab and the leaders of Ammon will be delivered from his hand. He will extend his power over many countries; Egypt will not escape. He will gain control of the treasures of gold and silver and all the riches of Egypt, with the Libyans and Nubians in submission. But reports from the east and the north will alarm him, and he will set out in a great rage to destroy and annihilate many. He will pitch his royal tents between the seas at the beautiful holy mountain. Yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him.”

It is tempting to expect Al-Qaeda, Hamas, or the Muslim Brotherhood to gain control of North Africa and attempt to invade the Middle East based on this prophecy. That could very well be how this prophecy will be fulfilled; but we might be surprised. There might be another way in which it is fulfilled. We will have to wait and see. But, if the Muslim Brotherhood does gain control of Egypt, Libya, and Nubia (modern Sudan) and unsuccessfully attempts to get control of Edom, Moab, and Ammon (the geographical area where the modern nation of Israel is), it should get our attention because it is the last thing Daniel says will happen before Jesus returns.

Even if the fulfillment of this prophecy won't happen until the distant future, long after we are dead, it doesn't change the fact that judgment day is coming.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus primary message was a last-days judgment message. Matthew tells us in chapter 4 of his Gospel,

When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. ... From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”

Mark 1:14-15 confirms this.

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”

We invite you to read through the gospels and pay special attention to the parables Jesus told. Count the number of them that warned of the coming judgment. Then you will realize why Matthew and Mark summarized Jesus’ message this way.

The Gospel, the “good news,” is that Jesus is coming back to judge the Earth. In Revelation, chapter 14, verses 6 and 7, Jesus sends an angel to proclaim the eternal Gospel to all who live on Earth. It’s the timeless, universal Gospel.

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.”

The Gospel is that the hour of judgment has come, and we should worship the creator in response.

Paul gives a similar description of “his gospel,” which is no different from Jesus’ gospel, in Romans 2, verses 6 through 16.

God “will give to each person according to what he has done.” To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism.

All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.

(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.) This will take place on the day when God will judge men’s secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

Let’s bring this back to our September 11 observance. The police and firefighters understood the situation and had the courage to do what needed to be done. The passengers on United 93 who thwarted the hijackers understood the situation and had the courage to do what needed to be done. Other brave individuals understood the threat to our nation and joined the military. No doubt many of the innocent victims on the other airplanes and office workers in the World Trade Center WOULD have had the same courage IF they had only known what was really happening.

We are living in a similar situation. There is a coming tribulation. If we are grounded in the prophecies we will recognize things are unfolding just as God said they would. We will know the outcome. That will

give us the courage to live through the tribulation. The prophecies will give us the knowledge we will need to keep from being deceived.

There is also a coming judgment. People who know that make courageous decisions about how to live their lives. They accept Jesus as their savior, live according to God's law, and will be saved. People who don't know what is coming will be just as tragically surprised as the people in the World Trade Center were.

We hope you will recognize the signs of the times and act accordingly. Accept Jesus as your savior before it is too late, and urge your friends, neighbors, and relatives to do the same.

[Music: "Are You Ready for Jesus to Come?", Kimmie and JoAn Witzel]