

# LESSONS IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL

JOHN 15:13

We're in a series of messages entitled "Lessons From the Rearview Mirror," and this AM I want to join with all Americans in glancing back on one of the most important days in our national life – *September 11, 2001*. *On that day and in many ways*, our nation and world changed forever. Former Mayor of New York City, Rudy Giuliani, said it best, "September 11 is a unique historical event because it isn't just part of our past, it's part of our present, and part of our future." This morning, I have a few thoughts on the events that transpired on 9/11, and the lessons we should learn... We'll read one verse, John 15:13. Jesus tells His disciples, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."

The September 17, 2001 broadcast of Bill Maher's television show "Politically Incorrect" became the program's undoing. Maher is known for his quick wit, his disdain for all religion, and his often irreverent takes on the social issues of the day. But on September 17 - apparently he went to far... Bill might now agree: "If you live by the tongue, you'll die by the tongue."

Earlier that week President Bush had come out and labeled the terrorists responsible for the bombing of the Twin Towers as "cowards." But Maher and his guest that night disagreed. The show's transcript records Bill's comment, "We have been the cowards, lobbing cruise missiles from 2,000 miles away. That's cowardly. Staying in the airplane when it hits the building, say what you want about it, it's not cowardly." Maher's statement, less than a week following September 11<sup>th</sup>, set off a firestorm of controversy. Despite his apology, advertisers bailed. Some ABC affiliates stopped broadcasting the show. A decline in ratings signaled the end. By June 2002, "Politically Incorrect" had been canceled. But Maher's controversy sparks a question... Who were the real cowards that day, and in the days following? And who were the heroes?

Nineteen terrorists entered our country months in advance to prepare for their assault on innocent citizens and their attempt to shame America. The Islamic Jihadists were heavily funded by the al-Qaeda terror network. After seizing the planes, the hijackers lied to the passengers. In the voice recorder on American Flight 11, you hear Mohamed Atta telling his captives they were going back to the airport. No one would be hurt if they cooperated. Of course, the terrorists turned the jet planes into weapons. Three of the four hijacked planes ended up striking the intended targets. Two planes were flown into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in NYC – ultimately toppling the towers... One plane hit the Pentagon in Washington DC, taking out a section of the building... And one plane crashed in a field in southwestern Pennsylvania killing everyone on board..

Meanwhile on the ground, rescue workers and first responders sprung into action. NYC firefighters, policemen, and port authority officers were able to evacuate scores of people from the Towers before they collapsed. The World watched in horror as the upper floors filled with smoke and intense heat. At least 200 people jumped out of the buildings to their death. Eventually, both towers imploded into a mass of debris and rubble.

For days afterwards NYC emergency personnel, as well as crews from across the country worked non-stop to rescue victims trapped in the rubble. Chaplains and volunteers came to Ground Zero to minister to the workers, victims, and family members still trying to locate their loved ones.

In the end, 2,606 New Yorkers died from the attacks. The NYC fire department lost 341 firefighters and 2 paramedics. The Police department lost 23 officers. The Port Authority lost 37 officers. Eight EMTs also died. In Washington DC, 55 military personnel were killed at the Pentagon. The total September 11 death toll ended up being 2,977 Americans.

And since September 11, 2001 the US Government has never backed down in its promise to protect its citizens and punish the perpetrators of these crimes. Two wars were launched – in Iraq and in Afghanistan – to obliterate al-Qaeda and cripple other terrorist organizations like them. US soldiers have bravely fought the terrorists and their sympathizers – while showing unprecedented compassion toward innocent civilians. I'm not one to thump my chest, wave my flag, boast in my country, and ask God to bless – *while overlooking our faults...* but what American can't be proud of our military? For the most part our sons and daughters have gone into hostile environments and conducted themselves in noble ways! Rather than viewed as "oppressors," we've taken the role of "liberator." We've sought to bring freedom and democracy to oppressed peoples.

So you tell me, *who are the cowards and who are the heroes?* I would suggest – Bill Maher's opinion to the contrary - the Islamic terrorists who snuck into this country, plotted their attacks on innocent civilians, and carried them out in clandestine fashion were indeed cowards. If you have grievances with a country or a people – then an act of bravery would be to work in legitimate ways to address those concerns and help to make this world a better place. To brutally make your point at the expense of innocent lives, is to most civilized people an act of cowardice. Make no mistake about it, on September 11, 2001 the terrorists were the cowards, and the heroes were all the brave people who came to the aide of innocent victims who were in danger, and distress, and confusion.

I read earlier from John 15:13, where Jesus told His disciples, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." He was speaking of His own death, but His words apply to all acts of sacrifice. The terrorists on 9/11 laid down their lives, but it had nothing to do with love. They believed their god, Allah, would reward their sacrifice with Paradise, and 72 virgins, and everlasting happiness. Their act was a testimony to their hatred for all things Western, and Christian, and Israeli. Think of the word "martyr." A *Muslim martyr* sacrifices his life to kill others. Whereas, a *Christian martyr* sacrifices his life so others will live.

That's what happened when NYC firefighters went into the towers with no regard for their own safety. They were motivated by love for their fellow citizens and fellow human beings. They risked their lives to spare lives. The passengers on United Flight 93 decided to sacrifice their lives to foil the hijackers' plan. These people were so others-centered, to minimize casualties, they waited until the plane was over an unpopulated field before they launched their assault. "Let's Roll" was their courageous battle cry. On September 11 thousands of Americans laid down their lives - in little and big ways - *not to take the life of another person, but to save lives...*

It's not hard to identify the **cowards** and **heroes** on September 11... Cowards try to advance their agenda through force and violence on innocent civilians. Heroes respect a human's right to life and freedom. Due to the death and carnage on 9/11, Ground Zero became an ugly

scar on our nation's canvass - but due to the love and courage we also saw, we now have new meaning to the phrase, "[America the Beautiful!](#)"

Fast forward now 10 years... It's May 2, 2011, shortly after 1:00 AM in Abbottabad, Pakistan, Twenty-four Navy Seals storm a heavily fortified compound. Inside was the mastermind of the September 11 attacks, Osama bin Laden. He'd eluded justice for a decade, *but not on this night...* A firefight ensued and the courageous Seals gunned down America's most wanted criminal. His identity was confirmed. His body was buried in the Persian Gulf. You'd think *justice served... case closed... victory won... But not so fast...* The seeds of Jihad are still being sown in the world today. The enemy we face is not just terrorism. *There's more to the story...*

Understand, though I hate Nazism, I love the German people. I've been to Germany and most of its citizens are ashamed of Hitler's atrocities. I love Southern rednecks. I am one. I like grits, BBQ, and SEC football - but I'm repulsed by the evil ideology of white supremacy. It's diabolical. Here's my point, just because White Supremacists are Southern, and Nazis are German, doesn't mean all Germans and Southerners are evil. The ideology is evil, but don't be make the mistake of guilt-by-association. Today, most Germans abhor Nazism - and most Southerners despise White Supremacy. *And the same is true with Muslims and terrorism.*

There are Muslims in America and all over the world who are good people, and peace-loving toward their fellow man. They despise terrorism. The more moderate Muslims focus on verses in the Quran that promote peace. Here's the problem, many other verses advocate war and violence. The Arabic word "Jihad" means "[struggle.](#)" It appears 41 times in the Quran. It's justification for "[violence](#)" and "[compulsion](#)" - even "[all out war.](#)" And Jihad is a basic tenant of Islam. Verses in the Quran command Muslims to suppress, even kill their enemies. Cultures that take the Quran literally and seriously, are unable to escape this mandate for violence.

Benazir Bhutto is a classic example. While serving as Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mrs. Bhutto was a champion for peace. She was a Muslim who had renounced Jihad. Yet sadly, in 2007, just days before launching a new campaign she was assassinated by the Jihadists she had tried to silence. It's not just terrorism that's the enemy. Jihad fuels terrorism, and Jihad is part of Islam. Wherever the Quran is taught seeds of violence get sown. Here's the bottom line... **[not all religions are created equal.](#)**

On September 17, 2001, just before Bill Maher stuck his foot in his mouth on television, President Bush and a small army of Secret Service Agents traveled to make a speech at the Islamic Center in Washington DC. Ground zero was still smoldering when the President stated, "[The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam... Islam is peace. These terrorists don't represent peace. They represent evil and war... Islam \(is\) a faith that brings comfort \(and solace and peace\) to a billion people around the world.](#)" A year later at the Afghan Embassy in DC, the President reiterated the stance he took after the tragedies of 9/11, "[Islam is a faith that has made brothers and sisters of every race. It's a faith based upon love, not hate...](#)"

We need to thank President Bush for his leadership in the days after the attacks. His strength and resolved helped a crippled nation get back on its feet. His attempt to export freedom around the globe is a noble ambition. I also realize the President had to walk a political tightrope - needing to condemn terrorism while not offending Muslim nations we lean on for help. But I've got to say, in his evaluation of Islam, Mr. Bush led us down the wrong track... and a decade later we still haven't made the correction. Most Americans don't understand the sinister

side of Islam. It's not a peace-loving religion that teaches love not hate. That's naïve and false. Let me read you a few passages, and let Islam's "holy book" speak for itself...

The Quran, Surah 9.5, reads, "Fight and slay the pagans (Christians and Jews) wherever you find them, and seize them, and beleaguer them..." Sura 2.216 teaches, "Prescribed for you is fighting, though it is disliked by you. It may well be that you dislike a thing, but it is good for you..." In Sura 5.33, the Jews and Christians are again the subject of the command, "they shall either be executed, or crucified, or have their hands and feet cut off alternately, or be banished from the land."

Avi Lipkin tells the story of a Jihadist raid on a Muslim village in Algeria. The village had cooperated with Algeria's secular government. Men rode into the village, made the wives cook dinner - then after popping hallucinogenic drugs, they raped and killed the women and children. Afterwards, the terrorists retrieved their chainsaws and cut off the arms and legs of their already dead victims. *Where does that kind of barbarism come from? The drugs? The hatred?...* No, remember Surah 5.33... "They shall be executed... or have their hands and feet cut off alternately..." They were making a point to the village. They were fulfilling the Quran. And the victims were fellow Muslims. There are places where the spirit of Jihad is so strong, Muslims not only hate Christians and Jews, but Shite Muslims hate Sunni Muslims... Algeria is 99% Sunni. This was a Sunni on Sunni crime. One group didn't think the other was devoted enough to live.

Let me warn you, even after 9/11 most Americans assume - *if this is a problem* - it exists elsewhere in the world, not on our own soil. *Think again.* In 2007 the Pew Research Center published a study of the beliefs of American Muslims... 5% admitted to having a favorable view of al-Qaeda. More troubling, 27% refused to answer the question. When asked if suicide bombings are ever justified 13% said "yes." Another 9% refused to answer. That means the vast majority of American Muslims denounce terrorism, but apparently thousands of Jihadist sympathizers live in our own country. Remember, the seeds of Jihad are sown wherever the Quran gets taught.

You should know, the God of the Bible - the one true God - is the God of the Hebrew Patriarchs - Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These men were farmers and shepherds. They aided the propagation of God's creation. To the contrary, Islam considers Abraham's illegitimate son, Ishmael, as their Patriarch. God loved Ishmael and blessed him. He sent an Angel to prophesy of his future. Genesis 16:12 puts it, "He shall be a wild man; his hand shall be against every man, and every man's hand against him..." The Angel predicted that Ishmael would be a man of war. Notice, God chose to be associated with men of peace like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob... Mohammed linked his new religion to Ishmael, a man of war. Jihadists commonly refer to Islam as "The Religion of the Sword."

Mohammed started out a caravan owner who did business with the Jews and Christians of Mecca. When they refused to cooperate with him he turned on them. His religion was fueled by revenge and conquest. God chose a Peacenik named Isaac. Mohammed picked a Rambo named Ishmael. Islam was aggressive from the start. Prior to Islam, Arabia was a land of idols. Mohammed picked one - the moon god, or Allah. He was also the god of war. Today, the Muslim symbol is the crescent moon.

Yet at a 2003 press conference, President Bush was asked how his view of the Almighty squared with the God of Islam. He replied, "I believe we worship the same God." Sadly, this view is shared by many Americans. But think it through, if the God of the Bible is a God of peace - and the Islamic god is a god of war - it's impossible for them to be one in the same.

When Jesus came to earth, He told His followers to put down their swords... Remember, the Jewish guard who tried to arrest Jesus, Peter sliced off his ear. Jesus picked it up and reattached it to the man's head. Then He instructed Peter, "put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.." Christian devotion is always voluntary. In contrast to Islam, Christianity advances by *persuasion* not *compulsion*.

Though the West is ignorant of the differences between Christianity and Islam, the Jihadists know. A spokesman for the Muslim Brotherhood puts it, "Allah has made the prophet Muhammad into an epitome for religious warriors since he ordered Muhammad to fight for religion... The Christian is incapable of imitating Jesus regarding war... since Jesus never fought..." That's not exactly true, Jesus fought in a different way. He *conquered hate with love*. He *trumped sin with forgiveness*. He *fought evil with good*.

Christians affirm that man was made in God's image – this has many meanings - not the least of which is He gave us a choice. Humans are self-determinative beings. Not even God violates the free will that He gives us. In a sense this explains sin in the world. For our devotion to be meaningful, we have to possess the freedom to refuse. Even if we say "No" to God, and use His gift of free will against Him... *God still honors our choice*. He wants us to love Him because we want to... **Allah is the bully!**

Trust me, when Islamic clerics speak on Iranian TV, no time is allotted for the opposition's rebuttal. Their *beheading* maybe, but not their *rebuttal*. All this talk of "a peaceful and tolerant Islam" is silly when you think it through. Do you believe you can travel to Saudi Arabia – to Mecca or Medina – stand on a street corner, and preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ? The Saudis are governed by Sharia or Islamic Law - *which has no Bill of Rights or Freedom of Speech*. Try to convert a Muslim to Christianity and you'll lose your head. Islamic countries have blasphemy laws – to speak a word against Islam or its prophet is a capital crime, punishable by death.

Certainly, Christians are appalled when we see Jesus depicted in an irreverent or blasphemous way. *But we don't called for the heretic's head...* We pray for him - show him the truth - treat him with the love of Jesus. Yet when Mohammad gets satirized in a cartoon, a Muslim cleric issues a "Fatwa" on the cartoonist. He orders "a religious hit" – a death sentence.

The next time you watch Muslims gather in the streets of Arab nations, and hear the chant, "Allah Akbar," American reporters will translate it "God is great." But that's not accurate. The correct translation is "God is greater." *Greater than who?* They mean greater than the Jew and Christian God. And trust me, Muslims also believe that Allah is *greater* than Jesus. When you go to the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem you see writing at the edge of the roof. In Arabic it reads, "God does not beget. God is not begotten." It's a direct denial of John 3:16, and a the deity of our Lord. Understand, *wherever Islam rules Christianity ends up outlawed...*

And sadly, the militant tone of Islam extends even to Muslim families. Surah 4.34 in the Quran tells husbands to strike their wives if they become rebellious or disobedient... Often you hear of an "Honor Killing." A Muslim father murders his own child because he disobeyed Islamic law. The UN estimates that each year 5000 girls are killed by their own families. Everywhere you turn in Islam there's a tone of violence. Allah could care less if you love him, he only cares about your complete subjugation.

Here was Muhammad's final words before he died in the arms of his wife... "O Lord, perish the Jews and the Christians... Beware there should be no two faiths in Arabia." In contrast, when Jesus breathed His final words on the cross, He asked His Father to forgive even His enemies. If you know a Muslim show them the love of Jesus. 1 John 4:8 tells us, "God is love." You'll find no such reference in the Quran. The Quran teaches that Allah loves people who love him... He loves *the pure – righteous – patient – the people who fight for his cause*. But you'll never see a verse like Romans 5:8 - "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Only Jesus loved and died for sinners. Jesus alone reveals God's grace.

After the attacks on September 11, 2001, America and President Bush launched the War on Terror – a war that President Obama has continued. Yet I'm afraid that 10 years later we still haven't identified the enemy. We're not fighting a few Radicals. We're under attack from a religious ideology that's believed to some degree or another by one billion people.

And victory won't be won through guns and missiles - but by love and truth, and prayer, and a move of God's Spirit that breaks up strongholds. In fact, that move is already happening all across the Islamic world. In 2001 a Saudi Cleric, Sheikh Al Qatanni, went on Aljazeera with a warning. He claimed, "Every day, 16,000 Muslims convert to Christianity." I'm not sure about his statistics, but from what I read there is a revival of Christianity in Muslim countries. Perhaps the best way for us to combat terrorism and encourage Homeland Security is to promote the Gospel.

Yet this morning at Ground Zero, NYC Mayor Bloomberg is hosting a Memorial Service to remember *the lives lost* and *the sacrifices made* on that fateful day 10 years ago. Yet conspicuously absent among his invitees are religious leaders – *no chaplains, no pastors, no Christian leaders*. Perhaps he's concerned about equal representation. Commentators have suggested the Mayor didn't want to invite a Muslim Imam so he eliminated all clergy. I'm not sure that's a valid explanation, especially since NYC is familiar with interfaith services. They've done them before.

No, here's what I think... I believe Mayor Bloomberg, as well as, millions of Americans all across this country, have forgotten what's really at stake. We've left out the spiritual component – *the God factor*. We've forgotten the realities we saw so clearly on 9/11... *life is fragile... our time is brief... eternity is what matters... this material world isn't our primary concern...* Rudy Washington, Deputy Mayor at the time of the attacks, responded to the "no clergy" policy, by saying, "I feel like America has lost its way."

I remember the Sunday after 9/11... this church was packed. In fact, churches all across our nation were filled to the brim with people seeking spiritual answers to what had happened... *It was a spiritual awakening...* In a nation *battered* physically, something *beautiful* was rising spiritually.

Sanity even returned to our institutions. Americans seemed to realize our Constitution protects *freedom of religion* – not *freedom from religion*. I remember a prayer service held on the steps of our nation's Capital, by the members of Congress. *Where did that go? We need that back!* Overnight this nation was broken, humble... We had a hunger for God... Sadly, that lasted just a few weeks. Two months later the crowds had gone, as fast as they'd come. Again, we forgot the importance of our faith.

Here's what I think is behind Mayor Bloomberg's slight... He just doesn't get it. He doesn't understand the significance of spiritual truths, and godly concerns. The Mayor is content to hold *a secular observance on a religious battleground*. Like many Americans today he's dense to the issues at play. I don't know the Mayor personally, but if he's like many Americans religion plays a minor, negligible role in his daily life, and he may just assume that's the case for most people. Well, it wasn't on 9/11. What happened that day – and in the days afterward - was deeply religious. Trust me, the culprits of the 9/11 attacks were religiously motivated. The rescuers and first responders were praying and seeking God's help. For a few weeks, all America turned to God. Even when baseball came back we sung "[God Bless America](#)" during the seventh inning stretch.

As I said earlier all religions are not equal. There is a right and wrong way - a true and false way. In America – *Christian, Jew, Muslim, Buddhist, even Atheist* - has the right to worship as he pleases. But only Christianity would allow us to draw that conclusion. It wouldn't happen under Islam. I'll defend a Muslim's right to worship Allah, but I'll pray for Him and try to love Him to Jesus - for it's Jesus *Who loves Him*, and died to save Him.

Religious tolerance and liberty wouldn't exist, if our country had been founded on "[The Religion of the Sword](#)." It exists as a direct result of our Christian heritage. *We enjoy freedom to worship for all religions* because our founding fathers were *influenced by a single religion called Christianity!* And this is where pluralism cripples us. We can acknowledge the virtues and contributions of Christianity without denying everyone else's freedoms.

Realize principles like "[all men are created equal](#)" - "[government of the people, by the people, for the people](#)" - "[freedom of speech](#)" - "[freedom of religion](#)" - "[individual rights](#)" - "[inalienable rights endowed by our Creator](#)." These aren't concepts brought to you by Islam, or Buddha, or the Dali Lama. Our Christian legacy is what makes our country strong and free.

Here's the prevailing question for our nation on this 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, "[Is it possible for us to remain "America the Beautiful" without the underpinnings of Christianity? Can America be great without a living faith?](#)" One of the lessons we all should learn from 9/11 is that **what a person believes really does matter**. Faith isn't trivial. On that fateful day Islamic faith took 3000 lives. Christian faith showed courage and love - and found renewed hope. It does matter *what we believe*. There is a right and wrong.

On today's anniversary of September 11, let's pray for our country... Let's pray for the families of the victims of 9/11. Nothing will bring their loved ones back. But we can pray for God's strength to help them carry on. Let's pray for Muslims – those we know personally – and for Muslims around the world. Pray that they'll be exposed to the love of our Lord. And let's pray for ourselves... that God will stir up a revival in our hearts. That we'll be hungry for Him again... and humble ourselves before Him...

In my mind, two pictures emerge from September 11, 2001... For a moment we were [America the Battered](#)... for a moment we were [America the Beautiful](#)... I wonder, *in the future which one will we be?*