

Jeremiah 2:17

“Did I Do That?”

The news just seems to keep getting worse. There was the shooting at a synagogue in Pennsylvania three weeks ago. Since then two more synagogues have had hate speech spray painted on the walls of their walls. There was a shooting at Butler high school down in Matthews, NC., and just this week there was a shooting at a night club in Thousand Oaks, California. Christians today are better known for what we hate and what we are afraid of than for the good news of Jesus Christ. This nation’s politics; our nation under God, is geared more toward what we should hate and what we should be afraid of. (pause) Why do you suppose this stuff is going on in our country? (pause) Why is all of this happening? (pause) Please think about that for a minute while I run this by you.

Jeremiah was called by God as a young man – very likely a boy, to deliver God’s messages (Jer 1:6-8). Jeremiah was terrified to deliver the messages God had for the people of Judah and the residents of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah had to tell Judah, **“For behold, I am calling all the tribes of the kingdoms of the north, declares the Lord, and they shall come and everyone shall set his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, against all its walls all around and against all the cities of Judah”** (Jer 1:15). The Babylonians came from the north, and laid siege to Jerusalem twice. The first time they stripped Solomon’s temple of all of its gold, and silver. Every piece of inlaid gold, and all of the golden saucers and bowls – all of the instruments of temple worship were taken. It would be like someone coming in here and taking all of the candles, the piano, the offering plates, all of the Bibles, hymnals, the stained glass windows, and the cross off of the wall. When the Babylonians came a second time they destroyed the temple and then pulled up the very stones of the temple’s foundation. That was like someone coming in here, burning the building down to its foundations, and then bringing in the bulldozers to dig up the church’s foundation and filling in the whole with trash. The people of Jerusalem thought they would be protected because they had the temple of the Lord. But the Babylonians came on anyway. The Babylonians even burned the walls of Jerusalem until they were so brittle they were like chalk. Why did God allow this tragedy to fall upon Jerusalem? Why didn’t God come with a mighty hand to protect God’s chosen place to be worshipped? Jeremiah is given the task of delivering God’s answer.

**“Have you not brought this upon yourself, by forsaking the Lord your God, when He lead you in the way”** (Jer 2:17)?

Hey. Let me ask all y’all something. Do any of y’all remember that show from the 1990’s called “Family Matters”? (pause) Do y’all remember the character Steve Urkel? (pause) For those of you who do not remember him, Steve was this really nerdy guy with high water pants, thick glasses and suspenders. He had a funny walk and he was forever making mistakes – saying the wrong thing, and knocking things over. When he would get caught making a mistake, Steve would say, “Did I do that?”

Jeremiah says to the people of Israel, “You have yourselves to blame.” You did this. (pause) As I think back over the last couple of weeks with the shootings and the hate speech I wonder. (pause) As I think about the mid-term elections and the rhetoric used to “inspire” voter turnout I wonder. (pause) I wonder how much of the violence taking place in our country is the result of things we have done to ourselves. It’s kinda like asking the question, “Did we do that?” (long pause)

You may be asking, “How can he be holding us accountable for something that happened in other parts of the country?” “How is it our fault?” (pause) Well. Chew on this. The two great commandments of the Old

Testament are to love God and to love neighbor (Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18). The last command of Jesus Christ is to go make disciples (Matt 28:19). As I think about the news from the last couple of weeks I keep wondering where is the church? (pause) Where are God's hands and feet? (pause) Where were they before the shooting? (pause) Where were they during the shooting? (pause) Where are they now? (pause) Last week I talked about being proactive for the kingdom of God. It is not enough to just be faithful after a tragedy. (pause) Yes. It is important for the hands and feet to show up where there is need, but it is not enough. I wonder how might the Boston marathon have tuned out differently if the church had been so active in the community, or on the college campus that the Tsarnaev brothers could have been saved from their radicalization before the marathon? What if the 9-11 bombers had been reached by the hands and feet of Christ and the whole plot had been stopped before it got off the ground? (pause) Think about it for a minute. (pause) We believe faith can move mountains. Right? (pause) If we believe faith can move mountains is it too much to believe faith can stop tragedies? (pause) Is it too much to believe the boy who vandalized this church and several others could have been saved from himself if the church had been more proactive in his life instead of the victim of his indiscretion?

Someone asked me on their way out from church last week, "How can we be proactive where we are? What can we do?" That is a great question. Thank you for asking. Let's not talk about abstracts. Let's get really concrete. If you are born and raised in Denton raise your hand. (pause) That's great. Thank you. Can y'all point out pretty quickly when you see someone at Bojangles, or Rick's, or the Village if they are not from Denton? (pause) What's your first reaction when you see someone who, "aint from around here"? Do you leave your friends and go up and say, "Hello"? (pause) Do you strike up a conversation? (pause) That's an opportunity.

The elementary school is a block and a half away from where y'all are sitting. What would it look like for 12 or 15 of our retired church members to go over and be a lunch buddy at the elementary school? Andy and Sarah can tell you all about how good it feels to be a lunch buddy, and the benefits it brings into their lives. That's an opportunity. Or maybe, just maybe some of our retired school teachers could volunteer a couple of hours every day to be a part-time teacher assistant over here at the elementary school. That would be a tremendous opportunity.

I have heard a lot of talk lately about how people used to make their children come to church. I've heard a lot of talk about how people just don't come to church the way they used to, and how that's the reason why the church is in the shape it is in. I think you are right. People don't come to church the way they used to. Back then making disciples was like shooting fish in a barrel. Things have changed. Now the church has to work a little harder. If we are to be the hands and feet of Christ we have to go out to where the fish are. When Peter, Andrew, James and John were fishermen they couldn't fish from the shore and make a living. They had to put the boat out into the deep water. The same is true for the church. We cannot sit back in our pretty buildings and blame the world for not coming to us when the commandments to love God, love neighbor and to make disciples are pretty explicit. If the fish won't come to you, go out to where the fish are. Sisters and brothers, look around this room. We have been waiting too long for people to come to us. We can no longer afford to sit in our pews and look at each other asking, "Did we do that? (pause, and point around the room) Yes. My brothers and sisters, Yes. We have done that. When we don't make it a point to seize our opportunities, and reach out to anyone and everyone we miss an opportunity to reach one more for Jesus. When we miss an opportunity for Jesus we create an opportunity for disaster to fall somewhere else – like the synagogue in Pennsylvania, or Butler high school in Matthews, or that night club in California. Maybe we aren't directly responsible for those disasters, but as I look at the empty pews in this room we certainly didn't help. So let me ask ya. (pause) What are you gonna do about it. In the Name of Jesus Christ, Amen