

THE DAY THAT GOD CRIED

REFLECTIONS ON HURRICANE HARVEY

Synopsis

"God parted the heavens and came down." David records this in his dramatic and glorious psalm of praise for God's deliverance, Psalm 18:9.

Today, we again need the Lord to part the heavens and come down in a mighty movement of the Holy Spirit—a Great Awakening—to deliver us from the evil that is engulfing our society.

This article summarizes my walk with the Lord including insights that lead me to believe that such an Awakening is at hand—if we will humble ourselves and pray and seek His face.

Part 1 Knowing Him

I came to know the Lord on August 27th, 1985 while walking on the beach in Santa Barbara, California. My wife, our son and I lived in Santa Barbara so I could devote my time to writing a book on motivation in the workplace. But the insights I had received from eighteen years in the oil industry dried up, and the decision to leave the business world to fulfill a desire to be a writer and speaker seemed to have been foolhardy.

My mother had been praying for me for the twenty-five years after I turned away from my Christian upbringing in England at the age of fourteen. Now as I knelt on the warm sand of the beach I prayed to the God that my parents had known so well, "Lord, if You are there, please give me a sign!"

As soon as the words passed through my mind, I thought how foolish it was to pray such a prayer. Yet as I opened my eyes two sea lions emerged from the ocean, no more than twenty yards from where I was kneeling, and looked directly at me. To me it was a very big sign!

The subject of my research and writing immediately changed from business motivation to Jesus and the Christian faith, and I learned as much as I could as quickly as I could. Then in February 1986 another unanticipated event occurred that further inspired and focused my life's journey.

This time I had a severe bout of flu and was in bed for a number of days. During the afternoon of February 13th I distinctly heard a voice say, "Chris will you follow Me?" No one else was in the house except my wife and this was a man's voice so I dismissed it as an effect of the flu. However, the next afternoon, I heard the same voice say, "Chris will you follow Me? I need to know." The words were clear and spoken with an authority that demanded an answer, and I replied, "Yes, Lord, I will follow You."

I was still pondering the significance of these last two days when on the afternoon of February the 15th I heard the same voice, who I now identified as Jesus, say, "The Day That God Cried" with the name of a famous movie director added. These last words were so bizarre that I was determined to put the events of the past three days out of my mind, but

that was not to be. The insights stayed with me and also provided a strong impetus to take my new-found faith very seriously, including to learn as much as I could about our nation and, hopefully, gain some insight into the meaning of "The Day That God Cried".

We stayed in Santa Barbara for another eighteen months after this encounter, in which time I tried every way I could think of to become a writer and speaker for our Lord. Despite this every door remained firmly closed. Eventually my wife had had enough and gave me an ultimatum, "Go back to work that provides an income or I am taking our son and leaving you."

When I sought the counsel of an elderly, wise man of God to confirm that I should continue along *my* path, he listened to me very carefully then gave me these simple words of wisdom, "Chris, I believe God has hit you beside the head with a 2x4. Now go home and listen to your wife!"

I immediately knew that was what I needed to do.

I searched for a job back in my area of expertise in the oil industry, and after two months I found a position in a company in Los Angeles. The president of the company asked me to start work the following day, which happened to be two years to the day from when the two sea lions had appeared to me on the beach at Santa Barbara!

I imagined this return to the business world would last only a few years. Nevertheless it gradually became apparent that the Lord wanted me to stay in the "harvest field" of the workplace to be a witness for Him there. As I grew in the Lord, He inspired me from time to time to write short prose about my walk with Him, and these eventually became a book titled *Yes Lord I Will Follow You*. Even so, my journey with Jesus was to have more surprises before the book became a reality.

In 1999 the company I was working for decided to move to Houston, Texas, and the employees were given the option to move or take a severance package. I took this as a clear indication from the Lord that a door would open for me to fulfill my original dream.

We stayed in California and were blessed to be there through our son's graduation from college and his marriage. However, no door opened to enable us to stay longer, and the severance package funds came to an end all too quickly.

Also the oil industry had almost completely vacated California by the end of the 1990s; therefore, I had to redirect my thoughts to moving to Texas. One phone call to the president of the company I had been working for quickly swung the door wide open for our move. This included a return to my previous job after having enjoyed a nine month paid sabbatical and a bonus as if I had taken the original offer to move with the company. I knew it was only an almighty, gracious and merciful God who could have orchestrated such bounty!

I wasn't happy with this turn of events, and, in my pride, I felt let down by the God who I had now been following for fifteen years. This resulted in me falling into a severe depression that took two years to clear. The depth of this depression can be best understood from this poem that came to me as I started to come out of the darkest days.

TURNING ASIDE

How I disappointed You so badly turning aside at the very end.
How I hardened my heart against You denying You as my friend.
How the pleasure of going my own way became so fleeting in the following days.
How the loss of Your precious presence left a void in many ways.
How I sought to find You again: my heart full of remorse and fears.
How I felt You were gone forever: my purpose, my hopes all left in tears.
How my thoughts descended downward making each moment struggle and strife.
How the darkness coiled about me until to die was better than life.
How You stayed my foolish action by bringing others to my aid.
How the voices of these people turned the tide as they prayed and prayed.
How You slowly revealed my sinfulness—wrong thinking that led to that day.
How You gave me understanding—all You asked was that I had followed Your way.
How You showed the depth of Your love: desiring to lead me on paths anew.
How You showed my need to love You: surrendering all and all to You.

Part 2 Understanding our Nation

Once I came out of this depression, the blessings of being in Houston and back in the Lord's will quickly became apparent. My thoughts again returned to working in the Lord's "harvest field" of the workplace and to seeking a greater understanding of America's Christian heritage. As I grew in the knowledge of the Lord—and an understanding of how far our culture had moved from our Christian foundation—my heart started to grieve for our nation. Then on November 8th, 2006, during an extended time of prayer, this plea came to my mind.

A PLEA FOR GOD'S MERCY

O Lord, I am a sinful man in a sinful nation run by sinful people.
O Lord, even the leaders of Your church too often fall into grievous sin.
O Lord, many of the leaders of this nation too often act with evil intent.
O Lord, how we have forgotten that it is You who has so richly blessed us.

O Lord, our only hope is in You.
O Lord, have mercy on us.

O Lord, may we not lose heart so that Your name can again be honored in this land.
O Lord, may those who know You continually seek a closer walk with You.
O Lord, raise up men and women of God so that Your will can again flourish in this land.

O Lord, hear our cries!
Amen.

Six more productive years in the challenging "harvest field" of a boom time in the oil industry followed before I retired in 2012—almost twenty-seven years after I had met the Lord on the beach at Santa Barbara. By this time, I had published a second book, *Following Jesus in the Details of Life*, a twenty-six week study guide to abiding in Jesus in the challenges of living and working in our largely secular culture. Then a year into my retirement the Lord led me to join a small group of Christians who shared my deep concern for our nation. They had started a group called GodsHub with the vision of participating in a great revival in America by identifying where God was at work in our culture. We soon developed a website and identified hundreds of organizations.

GodsHub provided a wonderful opportunity to learn more about our nation by serving others in identifying where God was at work, and by writing articles for the website about God and America, so that by the time of the midterm elections in November 2016 I had a much clearer picture of how far our nation had moved away from God.

I love God's Word and I try to read through the Bible at least once a year. That November I was reading in Isaiah, and Hezekiah's Prayer recorded in Isaiah 37:16-20 caught my attention. As I meditated on it, I realized the theme applied equally well to America and this prayer immediately came in to my mind.

A CRY FOR OUR NATION

"O Lord Almighty God, You alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Give ear, O Lord, and hear; open Your eyes, O Lord, and see; listen to the words Your enemies use to insult the living God.

"It is true, O Lord, that secular humanists, atheists and others who do not honor Your Name have severely damaged the framework of our society. Even as termites destroy the frame of a house from within, so have they infiltrated the schools, the universities, the courts, the media and the government of our land intent on destroying our Christian heritage.

"Now, O Lord our God, deliver us from their hands so that all kingdoms on earth may know that You alone, O Lord, are God.
Amen."

I saw with growing clarity that our Lord was grieving over America because of how far we have moved from His will and His way. And in my mind I could even picture in some vague way that God was crying over America. But I still had no true understanding of the words "The Day That God Cried" that I had heard over thirty years before. I began to sense, however, that the time was near for God to reveal the meaning to me.

I had learned the painful lesson that God's ways are not our ways and God's time is not our time. Also I had learned that for God's will to become reality required not only the fullness of God's time, but also for us to be in earnest prayer for, "*Your kingdom come, Your will be done in earth as it is in heaven.*" This confluence came about in July 2017 when I sensed the need to earnestly seek a closer walk with God by fasting for five days. I sensed the time was right to know what "The Day That God Cried" meant. By the fourth day of the fast I prayed in anguish, "Lord, let me hear from You, lest the rocks cry out!"

During this fast time I also had waves of doubt and fear come upon me with the accusations: "Chris, you have travelled this foolish path too long. You should have invested your time in accumulating more wealth to provide for your needs;" and, "Chris, God did not say, 'The day that God cried' to you. It was purely your imagination."

God sustained me against this foe, the Accuser, and He provided many insights that confirmed that I needed to stand firm against the lies of Satan. Also the Lord brought victory with a renewed confidence in His Presence and His calling. Consequently, I could continue along His way, and I continued to cry out to Him for insight.

A CRY OF MY HEART

"Open my eyes and mind, O Lord, to what is happening in our nation.

Help me see as You See.

Help me understand.

Reveal to me, O Lord, the meaning of 'The Day That God Cried'."

Part 3 Hurricane Harvey

Before a month had passed it started to rain and it continued to rain. Hurricane Harvey had formed in the Gulf of Mexico and it menaced the Texas coastline for over a week. We received more than thirty-five inches of rain over a five day period where we lived in Katy, a suburb of Houston. Fifteen inches of that rain fell on Sunday, August 27th—thirty-two years to the day from when God revealed Himself to me so dramatically on the beach in Santa Barbara!

The water started to rise in our neighborhood on Saturday, August 26th and kept rising. By Monday the water was halfway up our driveway with the Core of Engineers forecasting that the water would rise another three feet in the flood plain of the now notorious Barker reservoir where our house was located. At 4:00 p.m. we left with our neighbor by boat, and so started an arduous journey through flooding, cleaning, packing, drying and restoring.

In the following months I repeatedly thought that Sunday, August 27th, 2017 must be the "Day That God Cried". I also supposed that this was God's judgment on America. But the more I thought about it the more I realized that this kind of Old Testament interpretation was seriously flawed.

I wrestled before God on the interpretation of these events for twelve more months. Then, providentially, the August 2018 issue of Christianity Today had an article about the 1987 Guadalupe River flood at Comfort, Texas. Ten teenagers from Balch Springs church drowned in that flood as they tried to leave their summer camp. This provided confirmation to me that hurricane Harvey was not God's judgment just as the loss of these young lives could not have been God's judgment.

Also at this one-year anniversary of hurricane Harvey, I prepared to give a sermon at the Eagle's Trace Sunday Worship Service in Houston on the topic of "Reflections on Hurricane Harvey". The preparation took many hours of prayer, reflection and thought in the week prior to the sermon.

During this time, the Holy Spirit revealed to me that **I was indeed meant to see hurricane Harvey as "The Day That God Cried" though not as judgment, rather as a dramatic illustration of the extent of God's grief over America.**

I realized that God is grieving over how far we have strayed from His Word and His will for America, and this has consequences as the Lord states in Jeremiah 18:7-10.

If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.

Also I gained more insight into how God has blessed America from the founding of our nation to now. But, as the Words of Jeremiah show, God is reconsidering the continuation of this good He intended for us because we have turned away from Him in so many ways.

God grieves over His Church where...

1. many Christians separate life into the "sacred" on Sunday and the "secular" from Monday to Saturday;
2. many Christians are lukewarm in their walk with Jesus holding on to their favorite sins rather than surrendering all to Jesus;
3. there is little difference between Christians and the population at large on major issues such as abortion and divorce;
4. some pastors, ministers and priests go into the ministry as a career not as a calling;
5. liberal seminaries and Bible colleges train new pastors to deviate from God's Word;
6. many priests have sexually abused young girls and boys;
7. many pastors and ministers have given in to sinful lusts;
8. a multitude of denominations and sects compete for followers rather than being "one" as He called us to be.

God grieves over our culture where...

9. over 60 million babies have been aborted since Roe v. Wade;
10. the media in all its forms is saturated with sensuality and sexuality;
11. pornography has grown to a 10 billion dollar industry;
12. close to 50% marriages end in divorce;
13. marriage and gender are being redefined in ways that are contrary to His Word;
14. racial division is lingering;
15. an anti-God worldview is promoted in many universities, colleges and law schools, and this is even progressing to K-12 schools;
16. there is a steady decline in belief in Him especially among the younger generations.

God grieves over our government where...

17. "Natural law" (His law) has been denied by the Supreme Court with the Truth of God replaced by man's shifting desires;

18. the Supreme Court has restricted prayer and Bible reading in schools and public institutions, and has caused the Ten Commandments to be removed from almost all public places;
19. freedom of religion (guaranteed in the First Amendment) is being replaced by freedom from religion;
20. some states are persecuting Christians for living out their beliefs in God's definition of marriage and gender.

Part 4 Prayer Awakening

In the June 2017 edition of Decision magazine, Franklin Graham noted, *"I believe that the Lord has given us a brief window of opportunity in this nation to turn our hearts back to Him. Throughout our history, we have seen seasons of great revival in the church that have tremendously influenced our communities, schools and government. If we repent of our sins and call on His Name that can happen once again."*

Franklin Graham's article reminded me of a trip my wife and I made to England in May of 2015 to visit relatives and friends. During the trip, we also visited my home town of Gloucester; in particular, the Old Bell Inn on Southgate Street, and the location of where my parents had a "mom and pop" grocery store some quarter of a mile further south on the same street.

My parents owned the grocery store for about five years from the time I left home in 1964 to attend the University of London, so the house above the store was my home for the Christmas and summer breaks from college. During these periods at home, I would often walk to the center of town and pass the Old Bell Inn not realizing its significance to the calling I would receive from the Lord in February 1986.

The Old Bell Inn was constructed in the seventeenth century for the Mayor of Gloucester and was purchased by Thomas and Elizabeth Whitefield during their honeymoon in Gloucester in the early 1700s. They had a large family with their fifth son, George, born in 1714.

George Whitefield grew up to become a great orator and one of the leaders of the Great Awakening in America in the mid 1700s prior to the War of Independence.

The Awakening breathed new life into the church and had a substantial impact on the society at large; thus preparing a strong, godly foundation for the coming War of Independence from Great Britain and the formation of a new form of government.

The Founders of our nation had differing religious beliefs and political perspectives, but they all shared a Biblical worldview. For example:

George Washington, the first president of the United States, said in his farewell speech to Congress, *"Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens."*¹

He was followed by John Adams who wrote, *“Our Constitution is designed only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate for any other.”*²

Our third president, Thomas Jefferson—who was also the principle author of The Declaration of Independence—wrote, *“And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the gift of God? That they are not to be violated but with his wrath? Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep for ever....”*³

One of the most colorful figures of that time was Benjamin Franklin, a founding father and statesman. He spoke these words at the Constitutional Convention when it was at an impasse over the representation of the states. *“I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth that God governs in the affairs of men.... We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings, that 'except the Lord build the House they labor in vain that build it.' I firmly believe this; and I also believe that without his concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better, than the Builders of Babel....”*⁴

The Bible had a strong influence on the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. For example, God is mentioned four times, in four different ways, in the Declaration of Independence. Also the concept of the separation of powers between the three branches of government (Judicial, Legislative and Executive) originated from Isaiah 33:22, *“For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; it is he who will save us.”*

This godly foundation of our nation was continued for well over a century and was confirmed in various ways. For instance, the inscription, “In God We Trust” was added to all coins in 1865 based on the words of Psalm 20:7, *“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.”* Thus, by honoring God in our nation, the words of Psalm 33:12 became a reality, *“Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.”*

At the start of the last century secular thinking started to gain ground over a Biblical worldview in many parts of our culture: especially in higher education, law, government and the media. This reached a powerful turning point in 1947 when the Supreme Court completely reversed the meaning of religious liberty in the First Amendment of the Constitution.⁵ They did this by misinterpreting the wording of a letter that Thomas Jefferson had sent to the Danbury Baptists Association in 1802 which referred to *“a wall of separation between church and state”*. As a result “Free exercise of religion” became “Freedom from religion”.

This secular influence has continued to permeate our society resulting in a series of ungodly decisions by the Supreme Court; for example, organized school prayer was outlawed in 1962; organized school Bible reading was outlawed in 1963; abortion was legalized in 1973; display of the Ten Commandments in most public places was outlawed in 1980; same-sex marriage was legalized in 2015.

We have been given this *“brief window of opportunity”* that Franklin Graham wrote about by God's mercy and the ballot box, where people who love our nation and the principles of its foundation woke up to what was happening in America. God's mercy is not without limit, however, and what has been gained by the ballot box can just as easily be lost by the

ballot box. Therefore, as Franklin Graham and many other Christian leaders note, we, God's people, need to repent in the same way God called His people to repent three thousand years ago as recorded in 2 Chronicles 7:14.

"If my people, who are called by my name (that is to say, we who are called Christians), will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

We who are Christians need to earnestly seek the Lord in prayer and fasting so that we can see ourselves as God sees us; so that we can see the full extent of our sins as defined by God's Word not as defined by our culture; so that we can repent of our sins. Then God will hear from heaven, forgive our sins and heal us individually.

Likewise each denomination and church in America needs to examine itself in light of God's Word to see their doctrine as God sees their doctrine; so that they can repent of errors. Then God will hear from heaven, forgive the sins of His Church, and heal His Church to restore its credibility.

Then as we individually, and God's Church collectively, turn from our wicked ways we will become a much brighter light in our nation, and God's Truth will once more prevail to draw unbelievers to Jesus Christ and the message of the Gospel.

The key is prayer: to seek Him; to know His living Presence; to intercede for our nation.

First, we (especially the Greatest Generation, who were born before 1945, and the Baby Boom Generation, who were born between 1946 and 1964) need to recognize and confess that we bear part of the responsibility for this degradation of our culture. By not allowing the One Almighty True God to live in us and work through us as He desires, we have allowed the forces of darkness to take over many parts of our culture.

Second, we need to recognize that the movement away from God has now progressed so far that we cannot in our own strength prevail in turning our nation back to God. As in the time of the First Great Awakening, we desperately need a revival of the Church that leads to a revival of our culture.

Third, we need to recognize that God looks to the heart of the problem to correct the root cause. For example, turning the nation back to God is not a question of preferring one political party over another, or altering the balance of the Supreme Court, or electing a particular President. Rather, God wants us, His followers, to turn wholeheartedly back to Him.

Fourth, we need to pray for our local, state and national leaders, just as Paul instructed Timothy to pray for all those in authority.

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, inter-cession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior (1 Timothy 2:1-3).

Every Great Awakening in America has been preceded by fervent prayer, leading to repentance and an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. And that sequence is still true today.

God is waiting; God is grieving; God will come in power *if* we will turn back to Him and His Truth.

Then God will bless America once again.

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Notes:

1. George Washington, Farewell Address to Congress, 1796.
2. John Adams message to the Officers of the First Brigade of the Third Division of the Militia of Massachusetts, October 11, 1798.
3. Thomas Jefferson notes on the State of Virginia, first published 1781.
4. Benjamin Franklin Constitution Convention address, June 1787.
5. Everson v. Board of Education, 330 U.S. 1 (1947).