

Holocaust Presentation – First Baptist Church

At the outset, it should be noted that although the majority of this message comprises my own research and my own words, some of the content also comes from sources such as the United States Holocaust Museum, and within that, a significant portion from a researcher named, Virginia Barnett.

This past weekend, Jews and professing Christians around the world conducted solemn ceremonies in honor of the six million Jews who perished in the Holocaust. The specific day is called, “Yom HaShoah,” meaning, “Day of Remembrance.” It was the Spanish philosopher and writer, George Santayana, who gave us the famous quote, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

Appropriately, enough, you will find this quote inscribed inside the walls of the Dachau Concentration Camp. I know, because I saw it. And, graphically, enough, the word, Holocaust, comes from the Greek word, “Holokaustos,” which is derived from the Greek word, meaning, “burnt whole.”

Last year, the well-known Holocaust survivor, author and lecturer, Elie Wiesel, passed away. His and my father’s family lived but 50 miles apart from each other in the Transylvania Region, along the Romanian and Hungarian borders. Mr. Wiesel was the only member of his family to survive the infamous Auschwitz death camp. As for my father’s family, at the beginning of the war, there were some 90 London’s. By the end of the war, there were but 5. I might add that my wife is also the child of a Holocaust survivor, with nearly all of her mother’s side of the family in Poland being completely wiped out.

It is sobering to realize that before long, all of the Holocaust survivors will be gone. Even their children are already in their 50’s and 60’s, even entering their 70’s. I’m in my mid-60’s, and perhaps it isn’t too much of a stretch to feel as if I were the end of the line to an ever-shrinking direct link to the Holocaust.

The combination of my age and the times in which we live has given me a sense of urgency as never before. So, for me, this subject is far more than some academic and theological area of interest. It is an issue of life and death from both a physical and spiritual standpoint, not only because I have a personal vested interest as a Jew, but because God has a vested interest, and if God has a vested interest, so too, does the Church.

We hear so much about judgment coming from those who would speak for God. Are there times and instances where Godly men and women are justified in their anger? Yes! But, I think that some well-intentioned folks in the Church take it so beyond Scriptural measure that the unsaved must view us as the angriest people in the world! And worse, that we focus and invoke this judgment upon all sorts of perceived enemies of God and His Church. We have become so loose with this term that we have made it cheap, because of our presuming to exercise authority that belongs to God and not man.

Here’s a Scriptural illustration of this point. “...and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for Him (referring to Jesus). But they did not receive Him, because He was traveling toward Jerusalem. When His disciples James and John saw this,

they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."

But, God tells us what? "That " judgment must first begin," where? "With the Household of God!" Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church?" With respect to the Holocaust, we often hear the haunting and agonizing question from unsaved Jews, "Where was God?" But, rarely do we hear Christians ask the question, "Where was the Church?" For me, it begs the follow up question, "Where will the Church be when such circumstances come knocking on her door once again? This is what I want to focus on this evening---the issue of the Holocaust and the Church.

"Day of Remembrance." Remember what? Well, in ceremonies around the world they will, of course, remember the victims. We will remember the perpetrators, who committed the most heinous of crimes against humanity. But, we virtually never remember another significant player in this catastrophe---not significant in the usual sense of being an active player in an event, but with relatively few exceptions, committed, rather, the "sin of omission"---the Church!

To be fair and for the record, there were Christian leaders inside and outside of Germany who did speak out against the persecution of the Jews and against genocide, but they were a minority in the Christian world. And, why was that? Because, they failed to win significant support from their own Church members. What were these leaders teaching or not teaching their people? This was at the core of this "sin of omission."

Churches throughout Europe were mostly silent while Jews were persecuted, deported and murdered by the Nazis. Churches, especially those in Nazi Germany, sought to act, as institutions tend to do, in their own best interests---narrowly defined, short-sighted interests. The list of "bystanders"---those who declined to challenge the Third Reich in any way---that emerges from any study of the Holocaust is long and depressing. Few organizations, in or outside Nazi Germany, did much to resist Nazism or aid its victims.

Yes! There was an additional 5 million non-Jewish civilians, who were considered, by the Nazi's, for various reasons to be "undesirables" who were also murdered, with each being no less tragic than that of the Jews. But, there was one difference, and that difference was the expressed intention of the total annihilation of an entire people---the Jewish People.

Prior to the Nazi-driven Holocaust, Jews were, historically, either persecuted or martyred for their identification with the Jewish religion and culture or spared from such a fate through religious conversion or total assimilation into the dominant national culture. What set this Holocaust apart was not only in its magnitude, but in the criteria used in defining, "Who is a Jew?" Conversion and assimilation would no longer spare you. Having Jewish blood was all that mattered.

It should also be pointed out that, for the most part, German Jews by the 1930's had become the most secularized and assimilated Jews in Europe. Despite the general effort to publicly diminish or completely forsake their Jewish identity, the Nazi authorities would not allow it. As much as those Jews endeavored to bury their ethnic identity, ultimately, they could not escape it.

Some of you may be familiar with the Biblical account of Balak, the King of Moab, where he summoned one of his own prophets, Balaam, to curse Israel. You'll find details of the account recorded in Numbers 22 and 23. But, in so many words, Balak commands Balaam to curse Israel and before he gets a chance to do just that, God speaks to Him and tells him in no uncertain terms that he cannot do that. He returns to Balak to inform him of what the God of Israel spoke to him. And so, what was the king's response to the prophet? *"Do not curse them at all nor bless them at all!"*

"Does the main point of this story sound remotely familiar to you?" "Does this not sound reminiscent of what occurred not too long ago, when, at the very end of the Obama Administration, our ambassador was instructed to abstain during the UN Security Council's vote to demand Israel cease building new settlements? What were we saying in casting that abstention?"

"We will neither bless you nor curse you," and therefore, absolve ourselves of any responsibility for the consequences." Oh! Really? The truth is, we will either be *"hot or cold."* We will either *"bless or curse"* the Jew, and in return, we will either be *"blessed or cursed."* There will be no middle ground. God will not give us that option.

Prov. 24:11-12 - *"Deliver those who are being taken away to death, and those who are staggering to slaughter, oh hold them back. If you say, "See, we did not know this," does He not consider it who weighs the hearts? And does He not know it who keeps your soul? And will He not render to man according to his work?"*

How reminiscent is that of the empty claims of ignorance by so many German citizens, who witnessed the cattle cars filled with Jews as they headed toward the death camps, and could see and even smell the continuous billowing of smoke coming out from the crematorium chimneys. Even beyond the sights and smells, there were the perpetual rumors of the atrocities being spread far and wide through word of mouth.

Even prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, Adolf Hitler very publicly telegraphed his intentions, to once and for all, deal with the "Jewish Problem." On January 30th, 1939, the sixth anniversary of Adolf Hitler's ascension to the chancellorship of Germany, the Fuhrer delivered a speech to the Reichstag, which was essentially their Parliament, in which he spoke explicitly about the annihilation of European Jewry. Toward the end of what was a more than two-hour speech, Hitler made a threat regarding what would happen to the Jews if they succeeded in dragging Germany into "another" world war:

"Today I will once more be a prophet: If the international Jewish financiers in and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, then the result will not be the Bolshevization of the earth, and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe!"

Long before there was a Nazi Germany, there was a man who deeply deplored Christendom's failure to expel the Jews from his nation. And so, he proceeded to write a book in which he

proposed the following question, "What shall we Christians do with this rejected and condemned people, the Jews?" Here was his solution to this "Jewish Problem":

- "First, to set fire to their synagogues or schools ... This is to be done in honor of our Lord and of Christendom, so that God might see that we are Christians ..."
- "Second, I advise that their houses also be razed and destroyed."
- "Third, I advise that all their prayer books and Talmudic writings, in which such idolatry, lies, cursing, and blasphemy are taught, be taken from them."
- "Fourth, I advise that their rabbis be forbidden to teach henceforth on pain of loss of life and limb ..."
- "Fifth, I advise that safe-conduct on the highways be abolished completely for the Jews. For they have no business in the countryside ..."
- "Sixth, I advise that usury be prohibited to them, and that all cash and treasure of silver and gold be taken from them ..."
- "Seventh, I recommend putting a flail, an ax, a hoe, a spade, a distaff, or a spindle into the hands of young, strong Jews and Jewesses and letting them earn their bread in the sweat of their brow ... But if we are afraid that they might harm us or our wives, children, servants, cattle, etc., ... then let us emulate the common sense of other nations such as France, Spain, Bohemia, etc., ... then eject them forever from the country ..."

What I just quoted comes from the infamous book, entitled, "On the Jews and Their Lies." Does anyone know who wrote that book? Martin Luther! Luther's attitude toward the Jews changed over the course of his life. In the early phase of his career—until around 1536—he expressed concern for their plight in Europe and was enthusiastic at the prospect of converting them to Christianity through his religious reforms. Being unsuccessful in that, in his later career, Luther denounced the Jewish people and urged for their harsh persecution and destruction. Sounds just like the anti-Semitic rhetoric that had been spewed forth and acted upon in Nazi Germany, doesn't it?

Sadly and tragically, "The Great Reformer," Martin Luther, for all the good he did, in his later years, as a result of his frustration in converting the Jews, turned on them and became one of the most notorious anti-Semites in history. Luther's solution to the "Jewish Problem" would take root and fester over the next 400 years. Adolf Hitler wrote of his admiration of Martin Luther in "Mein Kampf." It was a ticking time bomb, which would eventually explode into the "Final Solution" to the "Jewish Problem"---The Holocaust.

Long after the end of the war, it is reported that an elderly man, overcome with guilt, felt compelled to give the following account:

I lived in Germany during the Nazi holocaust. I considered myself a Christian. I attended Church since I was a small boy. We had heard the stories of what was happening to the Jews, but like most people today in this country, we tried to distance ourselves from the reality of what was really taking place. What could anyone do to stop it?

"A railroad track ran behind our small church, and each Sunday morning we would hear the whistle from the distance and then the clacking of the wheels moving over the track. We became disturbed when one Sunday we noticed cries coming from the train as it passed by. We grimly realized that the train was carrying Jews. They were like cattle in those cars!

"Week after week that train whistle would blow. We would dread to hear the sound of those old wheels because we knew that the Jews would begin to cry to us as they passed our church. It was so terribly disturbing! We could do nothing to help these poor miserable people, yet their screams tormented us. We knew exactly at what time that whistle would blow, and we decided the only way to keep from being so disturbed by the cries was to start singing our hymns.

By the time the train came rumbling past the church yard, we were singing at the top of our voices. If some of the screams reached our ears, we'd just sing a little louder until we could hear them no more. Years passed and no one talks about it much anymore, but I still hear that train whistle in my sleep. I can still hear them crying out for help. G-d forgive all of us who called ourselves Christians, yet did nothing to intervene."

The lesson to be learned, and which should have been learned, at the terrible price of some 6 million Jews, with over 1 million of them being children, must not be wasted. And, it is always the children that are most vulnerable and who make us the most vulnerable.

The number of children killed by Hitler and his Nazis is not incomprehensible and full statistics for the tragic fate of the children will never be known. Estimates range as high as 1.5 million murdered children during the Holocaust. This figure includes more than 1.2 million Jewish children, tens of thousands of Gypsy children and thousands of institutionalized handicapped children.

Plucked from their homes and stripped of their childhoods, the children had witnessed the murder of parents, siblings, and relatives. They faced starvation, illness and brutal labor, until they were consigned to the gas chambers. The following is one of countless heartbreaking stories:

The sleepy village of Izieu lay overlooking the Rhone River between Lyon and Chambéry in central France. Refugees from Hérault were the first arrivals at the Children's home and their Jewish identity was kept secret by the staff. The children, aged between four and seventeen, felt safe and secure, supervised by seven adults. On the morning of April 6, 1944, as the children all settled down in the dining room to drink hot chocolate, the Nazis led by the Butcher of Lyon Klaus Barbie, raided the Home, throwing the crying and terrified children on to the trucks like sacks of potatoes. The little children were deported to the Nazi death camp Auschwitz and murdered immediately upon arrival. Of the forty-four children kidnapped by the Nazis in Izieu, not a single one survived.

One survivor of Auschwitz revealed during Klaus Barbie's trial what happened to the children: 'I asked myself where were the children who arrived with us? In the camp there wasn't a single child to be seen. Then those who had been there for a while informed us of the reality. 'You see that chimney, the one smoke never stops coming out of .. you smell that odor of burned flesh ...' Beate' and Serge' Klarsfeld, who brought Klaus Barbie to justice in 1983, later wrote: "Forty-

four children deported - no mere statistic, but rather forty-four tragedies which continue to cause us pain ..."

The minutes of German Protestant Synod meetings in 1942 reveal how oblivious the participants were to what was happening in the world around them. While innocent victims throughout Europe were being brutally murdered, Christian leaders were debating what points of doctrine and policy could be proposed and defended. It had become abundantly clear that their failure to respond to the horrid events in Europe in the Thirties and Forties was not due to ignorance; they knew what was happening.

Perhaps at the heart of those failures was the fact that the Churches, especially in Nazi Germany, sought to act, as institutions tend to do, in their own best interests -- narrowly defined, short-sighted interests. There was little desire on the part of the Churches for self-sacrifice or heroism, and much emphasis on "pragmatic" and "strategic" measures that would supposedly protect these institutions' autonomy in the Third Reich.

That is but a mere sampling out of volumes of accounts of how both the German and American Churches failed, with few exceptions, to help the Jews in their greatest hour of need. A census in May 1939, six years into the Nazi era and incorporating the annexation of mostly Catholic Austria into Germany, indicates that 54% considered themselves Protestant, 40% Catholic, 3.5% self-identified as simply, "believers in God", often described as predominately creationist and deistic, and only 1.5% as non-religious. As for the United States, surveys in recent years have put the average percentage of those defining themselves as non-religious at about 21.5%.

Some have said that education is the answer to solving anti-Semitism. Germany proved that to be a fallacy. It can be argued that pre-WWII Germany was the most sophisticated, educated and cultured society of that time. Many of the greatest intellectuals, educators, authors, philosophers, inventors, engineers, scientists, those of the arts, along with theologians were produced in Germany, some of whom becoming part of the leadership of the Nazi regime. And, it has been said that, in general, these Nazi leaders were model family men. It was not a lack of education. It never has been. It was a heart problem. It was a spiritual problem.

In Jer. Chapter 30, where it makes reference to Israel in the latter days, it says, "*All your lovers have forsaken you, they do not seek you.*" Notice the term, "*lovers*" is used. In a very short time, all nations will prove to have been just that---mere lovers. We can already see nations once friendly to Israel, not merely turning their backs on her, but directly turning on her, and the dominos, what's left of them, are going to continue to fall.

So, if all the nations have forsaken her in the time of her greatest national crisis, who does that leave to be that "*Friend who sticks closer than a brother?*" The Church! Soon, the Church will be the only friend Israel has left on earth. This is the ultimate end-time calling and purpose of the Church. The combination of prophetic Scripture, along with Jewish, Church, and World History convinces me that, in the future, God will be calling the "True" Church to be as a Corrie Ten-Boom family, the Dietrich Bonhoeffer's, the Oskar Schindler's and countless other lesser known and unsung heroes.

I say, the “True Church,” because the issue of Israel and the Jew in the midst of the nations will be the ultimate “litmus test” in revealing the “True Church.” Just as “*not all Israel, is Israel*, it will be revealed that not all the professing church is the “True Church.” A sentimental, romanticized, soulful love for Israel, along with a fascination for all things Jewish, will not be able to withstand what the Church will be called upon to do. It will require something more than planting a tree in Israel. Only a Divine love by the Spirit will be able to withstand the risk and self-sacrifice, perhaps, even the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of the Jews in that day.

I am reminded of one of the most moving and gut-wrenching scenes I have ever witnessed, which came in the final scene of the movie, “Schindler’s List.” That German Gentile, who saved so many, repeatedly bemoans in a self-inflicted torment, “*I could have gotten more out!*” “*I could have gotten more out!*” At the conclusion of that scene we see the Jewish response of overflowing gratitude for what Schindler had done for them. The spokesman from the Jewish survivors attempts to reassure him that he could not have done more. And, in the midst of the anguish of his soul, they surround and embrace him, extending comfort in return for his labors, sacrifices and risks on their behalf. How prophetic is that? Years later, Schindler would be honored by the Jewish people as being formally recognized as a “Righteous Gentile.” Today, you will find his grave located in Jerusalem, the only former Nazi to be granted such an honor.

What if we are faced with the same sort of rejection and disappointment as Martin Luther experienced when things didn’t go as expected and the Jews don’t respond in droves to the gospel of their Messiah? If this “pillar of the faith” who started out with the sincere intention of blessing the Jew, only to wind up cursing the Jew towards the end of his life, is it possible that we are capable of responding in similar fashion? If we don’t see things from God’s perspective, you bet we are!

This should serve as a sober warning to each one of us, that should we fail to “*guard our hearts with all diligence*” and fail to continually “*pay close attention to ourselves and to our teaching*,” there is a potential “Martin Luther” lurking inside each one of us. There is a day soon coming, and in many ways, already is, when being a professing “lover of the Jews” and “lover of Israel,” will no longer be in vogue. It will be increasingly risky and costly.

Just as Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego represent a type of corporate Israel, as they were cast into the “*fiery furnace*,” will that “*fourth man*,” which I believe can also be applied to representing the Body of Christ, be willing to enter that “*fiery furnace*” with them? Remember what Thomas said with the best of intentions in response to Jesus foretelling what would befall Him in Jerusalem? “*Let us also go, so that we may die with Him.*” Well, we know how that turned out. As Jesus was being arrested, Thomas, along with the rest of the disciples severed himself from that commitment about as quickly as Peter severed that poor slave’s ear.

Only hours before, Peter had said to Jesus, “*Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away.*” Jesus said to him, “*Truly I say to you that this very night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.*” Peter said to Him, “*Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You.*” *All the disciples said the same thing too.*”

Could Peter have envisioned betraying His Lord, fleeing and denying any association with Him in that moment of truth? Could King David have envisioned himself committing adultery,

conspiring to commit murder, and then lying about it? But, having said all that, although, a Jew myself, I have no confidence that short of the grace of God I would even be willing to lay down my life for my own Jewish kinsmen. Empty boasting in a yet to be confronted experience, which amounts to nothing more than a type of phony spiritual “machismo,” will most likely, not end well.

In the final analysis, how much of a difference might the Church have made had she made a more concerted effort to raise a greater public alarm and mobilize in more practical ways to save as many Jews as possible? Considering all of the major obstacles involved, maybe not significantly. But, the real issue is as Jesus said, *“Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes.”*

In Matt. 25, where Jesus foretells of the judgment, we see a direct correlation between how the nations or the Gentiles treated His Jewish brethren during their times of greatest need, and resulting in how they were ultimately judged. It’s not that loving the Jew somehow earns us a ticket to heaven. But, it does bear witness to the authenticity of our love for God.

It’s why Jesus could say, *“to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.”* And, by the same token, *“As you did it not to the least of these brothers of Mine, you did it not to Me.”* In other words, we show our love for Christ in the way in which we tangibly demonstrate that love to His Jewish brethren.

2500 years ago, a Moabitess named Ruth made this remarkable statement to a Jewess named Naomi, a statement which the Jew will need to hear and see demonstrated by the Church in that day when the Jew will need her the most. *“For where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and you’re God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the Lord do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me.”* Ruth got it! And, God saw fit to record the story of this, otherwise, simple woman in the Bible for all time. Why? So, that the Church of the future would also, “Get it!

Mordecai had this sobering counsel for Esther when her people were faced with annihilation, and the Church would do well to take it to heart. *“Do not imagine that you in the king's palace can escape any more than all the Jews. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?”*

So, what does this mean for the Church? Just as the full identity of Jesus was revealed to the Roman centurion as He hung before him on the Cross, so too, will Jesus be revealed to the Jew as they see the Church willing to endure the Cross for the sake of His brethren. It is for this very reason that the Church must be made aware and prepare for the days ahead when Israel and the Jew scattered abroad will need her the most.

It’s been said that the best thing you can do for a future spouse, even before you know who that might be, is to become strong in your faith. Likewise, the best thing the Church can do for the Jewish People in preparation for the difficult times that are yet to come when they will need her

the most, is to become corporately strong in the faith, and functioning as God originally intended, “*that she might serve the purposes of God in her generation.*”

If the Church isn't what she's supposed to be in the present, she will have a very difficult time in being what she will be required to be in the future. The Scriptures tell us that prior to Christ's return, it will be the most perilous time in World History, and especially for Jews and Christians, alike. But, they also tell us, that, for the Church, it will be the time of her greatest glory and ministry leading to the salvation of the Jewish People, that remnant of Israel, called according to the promise of the Everlasting Covenant.

We see the theological mandate encapsulated in Romans Chapter 11. I use the term, “encapsulated,” because this one chapter truly represents the sum total of Scripture concerning God's Everlasting Covenant with Israel and what God intends that to mean for the Church, in theology, attitude, practice and overall responsibility. In Israel's welfare, is the Church's welfare, with their destinies inextricably linked, that apart from the remnant of Israel, the Church should not be made perfect.

The issue of Israel is the issue of the Church and the issue of Israel is the issue of the nations. To be the corporate Body of Israel's Messiah, willing to lay her life down for the sake of His brethren's redemption, is the ultimate calling and purpose of the Church at the end of this age. Jesus said, “*Salvation is of the Jews*” and He is calling upon the Church to return the favor.

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