

I have read about the study released by Harvard Medical School the other day. It estimated that 2,266 veterans under age 65 have died in 2008 alone, due to the lack of healthcare insurance. It was pretty hard for me to swallow that number. But I did not hear any protest or panic in the American public or media. It was like a blip in the radar. It was there, and then it was gone. I can only say that no one was really interested in the poor guys who return from the war all broken up.

So I decided to do a quick check on the internet: how many soldiers have died in Iraq and Afghanistan, since the war had begun in March 19, 2003? According to Washington Post, as of September 8, 2009, 4,326 soldiers in Iraq, and 804 soldiers in Afghanistan have died. That is a total of 5,130 lives lost. But who is counting? We are now more concerned about jobs, housing, and overall economy than dead soldiers, aren't we?

Since I was on a roll, I wanted to know how many Americans have died in 9/11. The numbers do not agree exactly, but it appears that the number is in the vicinity of 2,740 lives. The total number of people who lost lives had been estimated at 3,497, not counting the 19 terrorists who murdered them.

Then I remembered how scared the whole country was, then, and how the entire country was in the panic mode. Many stupid things was said and done, in reaction to 9/11. Many good people lost their faculty of judgment, and rushed to unfounded conclusions. And based on these unfounded conclusions, we have witnessed our country going to war with Iraq.

A great terror struck the hearts of Americans back then, but no one seems to bat an eye by the news of so many dead and dying soldiers today. Something is just not right about this.

Then I wondered how those Iraqis, Pakistanis, and Afghanis

are coping with the daily bombings. I could not even imagine what our country would look like, if a fraction of those bombings happened on our soil. Lucky is the word that comes up.

People behave like a herd of stampeding animals, when they are struck by terror. Then there are those who find such an occasion a good opportunity to fulfill their imaginations, and lead the mass to the further destruction and chaos, while making huge profits for themselves and their friends. There is a thin line between being patriotic and being greedy under the revered banner: the war efforts.

In times as such, the mass look for a leader who would save the nation, and many appear saying, "I am he!" The history may or may not judge their action; but God surely will.

A similar, if not more grisly, event took place in 70 AD in Jerusalem. The Jewish nation revolted against the occupying

Roman Empire, and the revolt was ruthlessly suppressed. The Roman Empire completely destroyed the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, for it stood a symbol of the Soul of the Jewish nation: they wanted make sure to break the spirit of the vanquished.

Interestingly, all three synoptic Gospels report on this event through the narration by Jesus himself. The scholars do not seem to buy that Jesus actually predicted it nearly 40 years before the event. The scholars intimate that the account was put in the mouth of Jesus by the writers, meaning that it was doubtful Jesus had ever said such a thing.

The scholars base their estimation of the dating of the Gospels precisely on this piece of information: some of them think the earliest Gospel, Mark, was written shortly after 70 AD. Certain group of scholars seems to have an aversion to any traces of mystery, and want to eliminate any reference to "super-human" ability of Jesus. They do not

believe Jesus predicted the future event.

I beg to differ, and, without insisting on the superhuman ability of Jesus, I believe Jesus was quite capable of foreseeing his country's political future under the Roman rule, given the instability of the time and the brutal way Roman Empire suppressed any resistance. Sometimes, it is not that difficult to predict what might happen a couple of decades later, based on the decision we make now.

Even a church member, who was not even a financial expert, predicted to me in 2004 that there would be a great housing market collapse very soon. That was why he was renting a house. Everyone at his work thought he was an idiot, he told me. He planned to buy one, when the bubble burst. I think he would have bought one or two by now. And there were people who predicted the financial woe, when Proposition 13 was passed in 1978. And California does have a serious budget problem

now, some 30 years later, education system has been suffering, since.

If we understand the human nature to an adequate degree, we would agree that just about every thing we see today is the consequence of the decisions we have made in the past. That is true today, and that was true in Jesus' time. That was certainly true in September 2001. And the decisions we make today will surely influence the outcome 10, 20 years from now, if not prior. The images from Abu Ghraib and the stories of Guantanamo will mean something to the generations of Muslims around the world, and one may predict that it would not foster friendship in 10 or 20 years.

What Jesus told his disciples was a terrifying thing. The Temple was the symbol of the Jewish nation. It was the incarnation of the Hebrew Soul. Now Jesus predicted that not one stone of it would be left standing on top of another. It must have been such a shocking thing to hear.

We Americans may have difficulty grasping the magnitude of the impact the Hebrew race suffered, because we never had the symbol of the American Spirit in the similar magnitude. Our nation is made up of diverse races and cultures, and our history as a nation is relatively short. We did not have enough time to build something by which everyone's spirit had been defined and united. The temple had united the national and religious identity of a people for 10 centuries. We just do not have an institution that old.

Although we do not have such a spiritual symbol as the Hebrew people did, we may have shared a terror that might have come close to what the Jews had in 70 AD. The terror of the destruction of the temple might have struck a similar chord to what a large number of Americans experienced, when 9/11 took place in 2001. The symbol of American dream, the symbol of prosperity and capitalist power was knocked down. And that was precisely the reason why the

terrorists chose it as the target: to break the American spirit. Judging by the outcome, they succeeded to a certain degree.

So Jesus issues to the panicking and scared disciples the heads up. There will be a lot of people who claim to be the savior, and people will hear wars and spread many rumors of wars. There will be natural disasters, there will be famines. But do not be led astray, Jesus says.

When you think about it, we have been going through the similar situations. There was the 9/11 attack, followed by natural disasters such as hurricanes, and the economic collapse. We have not only heard of wars, but have been engaged in two. There have been many who appeared to claim that they were the ones who could save the nation from the terrorists and the faltering economy.

Jesus obviously knew how the mass would behave, when such a terror strike his homeland. We also know how the mass behaved

on our own soil. So, what Jesus prescribed to his disciples still has the relevant force even today: Beware that no one leads you astray.

In order not to be led astray, we need to have something in the center of our being. Those who relied on their portfolios would be left forlorn, when their investments became wiped out. Those who rely on their properties would be lost in the wilderness, when their houses were blown away in the hurricane, or foreclosed in the burst housing bubble. In order not to be led astray, we need to have something in the center of our soul. What is it that we need at the center of our beings?

Those are the things not made with hands, and those are the things unseen. What could they be?

What sustains us through the disasters is our spirits firmly grounded on the faith in God. It is our spirits that supply strength to our morale. It is our spirits

that provide inspiration to one another. It is our spirits that is firmly grounded in the faith in God that energize our body and inspire our soul. If we have that faith in the center of our being, then no one can lead us astray, no matter what happens.

In times of peace and prosperity, our faith in God is not so much challenged. In times of peace and prosperity, people become reliant on things that are made with hands. Our faith in God is challenged in times of trial and temptation. If our faith is grounded on things made with hands, we are left with nothing, when they disappear. What truly sustains us is not something made with hands, but something unseen, not made with hands. It stays with us and sustains us through deep valleys and mountain tops of life.

If we have this, no one will lead us astray, no matter what war, what disaster, what famine may come. May you have this in the center of your being now and ever.