



**Lessons Learned at
Columbine High School:
Is Anyone Listening**

By Keith Greer

On April 20, 1999, the nation's eyes turned to Columbine High School, in the small suburban town of Littleton, Colorado and the worst-ever mass murder in a high school. At Columbine, this day began as an ordinary school day. There were no signs of impending trouble to worry students, faculty, or parents who expected to be back with their children at the end of the day. People were going about their everyday activities. But this day turned out to be far from ordinary. Two Columbine students (known to be part of the Trench Coat Mafia) dressed in black trench coats and came to school to finish their plan of death and destruction. That morning, one of the two young men put a message--"this will be my last day on earth"--on his computer.

One of the students coming out of the school met Dylan Kliebold and Eric Harris on their way in. The student asked why they had not been in class earlier in the day. One of the young men responded that it didn't matter anymore. He told the student that he liked him, and that he should leave the school while he still could. Over the next one and one-half hours, the two young men engaged in a premeditated shooting spree that ended when they turned their guns on themselves. Before taking their own lives, they ended the lives of twelve students and one teacher and wounded many others. Many lives changed forever. Even those who survived will carry the scars for the rest of their lives.

Carrying two shotguns, an assault rifle, and a handgun, they entered the school and began shooting at random. According to some accounts, one boy put his gun to the head of a student and asked if he was ready to die. He then aimed the gun at two bystanders and shot them at point-blank range. Another witness told of seeing one boy put a gun to a young girl's head and asking her if she believed in God. When she answered "yes," he shot her in the head, killing her instantly. In addition to the guns, they had planted numerous homemade pipe bombs in the school. Some were on timers. Others went off, sending objects flying through the air. The largest bomb was in the cafeteria. Authorities have said that if that bomb had gone off, it would have blown the

roof off the cafeteria and perhaps have killed more people than were killed in the Oklahoma City bombing. Around 60 bombs were set off during the killing spree. Because of the bombs, it was more than 30 hours before the bodies of the victims could be removed. Many more bombs were found after the bodies were removed.

Thanks to our worldwide communication network, in a short time, we were able to turn on our TVs and witness the mayhem first hand. We saw SWAT teams, policemen, paramedics, wounded students, and worried parents. News teams swarmed to interview anyone who saw anything. As in all of these cases, the "experts" soon arrived to explain and answer all the "why" questions. And the finger-pointing began. "We need more gun control laws." "SWAT teams need to be more prepared for these types of situations." "How could the school take such a lazy attitude toward the kids in this 'Trench Coat Mafia'." "How could the parents not know that their kids were making pipe bombs? Dressing in black trench coats?" While all of this is food for thought, no one who is now alive, can really tell us why these two young men determined to turn the guns on their classmates and themselves. Questions will remain, but can we learn some valuable lessons from this terrible tragedy?

Our actions can hurt innocent people. When these two boys took their own lives, and the lives of their fellow students, the innocent died with the guilty. Look at the parents who must now live their lives without their children. Think of the deep pain the parents of the gunmen must feel. They must live with that truth for the rest of their lives. "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." {Matthew 5:44,45} Man is a free moral agent. His choices are not always good for all concerned. At times, this life is very unfair. This is one reason I have no desire to be in the world forever. I'm focusing on a place--not on this earth, but in heaven--where senseless murders do not occur.

Our actions have consequences. These two young boys may have believed that by turning the guns on themselves, they escaped the consequences of their actions. Temporary, earthly consequences, yes. However, they woke up in the Hadean realm to learn that they had not escaped God's judgment. Now they understand the truth about

spiritual consequences and eternal separation from God. Read Luke 16:19-31. Any punishment they might have received here would have been nothing compared to falling into the hands of the true and Living God! "For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord. And again, The Lord will judge His people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." {Hebrews 10:30,31} The results of disobedience are the same for the young as for the old. "Even as I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same." {Job 4:8} "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life." {Galatians 6:7,8}

The course is not determined by the gun in the hand, but by the heart of the man. Jesus taught this great truth while he was on earth. "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." {Matthew 15:18,19} What needs to change is what is in men's hearts. One does not commit murder until after he hates in his heart. "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he." {Proverbs 23:7} The terrible murders these two young boys committed on this day resulted from hate they harbored in their hearts. Long ago, Solomon said "from the heart comes the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23). We hear much regarding more education on guns, anger, and violence. Maybe, what we need more is hearts educated in God's ways, rather than in the world's ways.

Life is uncertain. The 13 people who died on that fateful April day did not realize it was to be the last day of their lives--the last goodbye, the last breakfast. Before the shooting, they were laughing, reading, or maybe eating. In a few moments, they were on the "other side." Read Hebrews 9:27. Life is so fragile and fleeting (James 4:14,15). Death is a sad reminder of the temporal nature of our existence. Death comes at the most unexpected time. We do not know when, why, or where we may leave this life. It behooves us to be prepared to meet God.

This is one reason why people should not put off obeying the gospel or making their lives right with God, if they are unfaithful. "For He says, In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation, I have helped you. Behold, now is the accepted

time; behold, now is the day of salvation." {2 Corinthians 6:2} Sadly, the rich man of Luke 12 forgot to keep his spiritual needs in proper focus. "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." {Luke 12:20,21} We ought to live each day as if it were our last. For truly, one day it will be!

In time of great crisis, people turn to God. What happened after the shooting in Columbine? People talked about God. Talk-show participants discussed why prayer has been banned from the schools. Many schools allowed the students to offer prayer for the victims and their families. Did you hear any ACLU members crying that the atheists' civil rights had been violated? During his news conference, President Clinton asked for a moment of prayer on behalf of the families. Clergy from many different faiths asked for "spiritual renewal" in our country. Yes, when we have great tragedies, we turn our attention to the God of heaven. We seek His counsel to answer all our "why" questions. Now, time has passed. The cry for prayers in the schools has again been silenced. People are back to living their everyday lives, and the Littleton killings are "on the back burner." Until it happens again. Then the cycle will begin again. When will this country learn that it needs God ALL THE TIME, not just during times of devastation and despair. "Righteousness exalts a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people." {Proverbs 14:34} We need to ask ourselves why these killings continue to happen. Why are our children so prone to violent acts of terror? Why do they choose killing over living? Surely, we need to take a good hard look at their morals. Do we respect God's ways? Honesty compels me to answer in the negative. How can we expect any different results when we choose the world's ways over God's ways?

Lastly, we need to look at American homes. What shape are our homes in? Nearly one of every two marriages ends in divorce. More than ever before, people live together without benefit of marriage. There are well over one million abortions per year. A high percentage of high-school students have sex, with more than one partner, before they graduate. Young people receive condoms, birth control pills, and abortion counseling without their parents' consent. Many children are raising themselves. The number of "latch key children" (those who come home to empty houses because both parents work) is at an all-time high. Idle time is the devil's workshop. How could the parents of these two young men not know about the bomb-making going on in their garages? Did

they ever screen or check what their sons were viewing on the internet? Did they listen to the lyrics of their music? Did they notice their kids' friends? Over and over, during the Littleton aftermath, we heard the statement, "I can't believe these boys did this. No one expected it." Could it be that there were signs, but they went unnoticed? Let us get back to the Bible and God's ways before it's too late for our nation!