

Finding Hope in Tragedy

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of all mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Introduction:

"I am **heartbroken**. I am **angry**. I am **confused**. I wish I can hug my Borderline family right now. Borderline is home and where I have my fondest memories and build my dearest friendships. I am **horrified** that our home has been **violated**. Praying hard."

This was the Facebook post of a young friend who used to live in Simi Valley and now lives out of the State, and summarizes the response of many following the murder of 12 people and the self inflicted death of the shooter. We went to bed or woke up with this news of a tragedy that left us with questions: *"Where is God in this?" "How could a good God allow such a thing?" "What do we do or how do we process such a senseless act?" "Is there any safe place left in this world?" "Is there any hope in this?"*

Events like these leave us polarized in our responses. Some of us resonate with the fact that we have been there, could have easily been there that night, or have children who go there. Some of us don't know how to feel since these types of events are in news far too often and we have become somewhat callous to them. Some don't want to think about it at all, preferring to block it out and think about something else. *But the reality is this:* this happened in our own backyard, at a place in one of the safest cities around, where good people could go and have safe fun, and the degrees of separation are short, since we all knew someone or know someone who knew someone who was there or who died.

This morning we want to delve into this reality with the ultimate source of truth that we possess, God's Word. God's Word gives us the framework and answers to the most nagging and difficult questions that we have, and though the answers do NOT MEAN it will be easy nor does it merely give pithy platitudes for us to feel better in a moment, we take hope and comfort that God is not distant nor out of control in any of this. I want to share with you this morning what I walked through briefly with our elementary teachers on Thursday morning. We reminded ourselves that our **Biblical Worldview**, or how we think through life with the lens of Scripture, is **big enough to handle the weighty questions of life**, and it is for this reason that we educate our children and everyone here to think Biblically through life, so that in these times we can have **clarity, surety, confidence, and understanding SO THAT we find comfort and hope in the ONLY place it can be: In God through Christ.**

So we walk through this **together**, and though ALL of our questions will not be answered (Deut. 29:29), we can have enough questions answered to walk in hope rather than fear, in trust rather than looking for someone to blame.

God is both Sovereign and Good ---- even in this

The first reality to both wrestle with and rest in is the fact that God is in control of all things, and because He is good, this is comforting news. Not many that I've met have argued that if God exists He is ultimately in charge and in control of all things, but many have had a hard time seeing Him as good during trying times such as this.

God raises p kings and tears down kingdoms (Prov. 21:1; Dan 2:20-21). He opens and closes the womb for life (1 Sam. 1:6). Satan himself has to ask for permission for anything that he does, and even though he has much control over this world, it is only to the extent that God delegates to him (Job1:6-12). In fact, God not only declares the fact that He is in control, He takes credit for all, good and bad, happy and hard:

Psalms 115:3 - "Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases

Isaiah 45:7 - "I form the light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD who does all these things."

Amos 3:6 - "Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid? Does disaster come to a city, unless the LORD has done it?"

Everything that happens in this world happens with the knowledge of God, and nothing happens outside of the parameter of His will. This is good news, because if God were blind or ignorant of something happening, or if there was a cosmic "whoops", or someone snuck something passed Him, He'd be less than sovereign, and we could not ultimately trust Him.

Not only is God sovereign, but He is **GOOD**. He is defined in His nature to being good (Psalm 107:1). It is His goodness that takes not pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 33:11) but is patient that all men would come to know Him and repent (2 Pet. 3:10). It is God's goodness that brings **sunlight and rain** by His common grace to everyone, even the wicked (Matt. 5:45), and His goodness that gives His children good gifts, every perfect gift, from above (James 1:17). God is good, and His attributes of love, mercy, grace, patience, and kindness reveal that we can trust that **He does everything for His glory and our ultimate good**. But these leaves us with questions, or maybe one big question: ***if God is sovereign and good, why do we experience this senseless pain, this present misery?***

Evil & Satanic Influence are Real --- because of the Fall

The answer? This world is broken because of sin. God created this world perfectly, with the purpose that we'd do all things for Him, glorifying Him, from work to marriage to enjoying the good things of creation. He gave us **relationships to enjoy** which pictured His love and relationship with us. But when Adam failed to lead his wife and ate the fruit given to him by his wife, the world was plunged into darkness, wickedness and sin. This meant that we now experience the reality of death, *physically, spiritually, and eternally*. We are no longer born in innocence but born into sin, with our hearts being evil and under judgment:

Jeremiah 17:9 - "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"

Romans 3:10-11 - "both Jews and Greeks are under sin, as it is written, 'None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.'"

Ephesians 2:1-3 - "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience --- among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."

It is in this brokenness that we as humans have been operating ever since. The first recorded deaths in Scripture were murder: one out of anger of a brother, when Cain killed his brother Abel in a field (Gen. 4:6-8) and another out of revenge when Lamech killed a young man (Gen. 4:23-24). Sin resides in all of our hearts and create the capacity for all kinds of sin. **"What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. Your covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask."** (James 4:1-2).

Why do people commit senseless, heinous, wicked acts? Because of the sin that resides in all of our hearts. On top of this, Satan operates with delegated authority and is working to blind eyes so that we look *outside ourselves* for problems and solutions (2 Cor. 4:4) and *scheming* against us (Eph. 6:10) to get us to look to blame someone rather than examine ourselves, to operate in fear rather than hope, and to think that we ourselves are good and that evil exists somewhere else. **But if all of this is true, how do we reconcile, how do we take comfort in the reality that evil exists in us, and that people will continue to act out from that brokenness?**

JESUS entered into humanity & can sympathize with us

Herein lies one of the greatest realities that we can cling to. God is sovereign but NOT detached. He is in control overall things, but does not distance Himself from us like some snooty monarch who puts His nose in the air. Yet God could not compromise Himself and act like man. So He did something unparalleled: *His Son Jesus took on humanity to save humanity, becoming the God-Man to breach the divide between us and God.*

This reality has huge implications in our eternal state and hope, but it also resonates with our sorrow now. Jesus took on full humanity, meaning He experienced the same things that we do: hunger, pain, exhaustion, and sorrow. This means that Jesus understands us intimately:

Hebrews 4:15 - For we do not have a high priest who is unable to **sympathize with our weakness**, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."

Jesus entered into humanity and in doing so, entered into the muck and mire of our brokenness. He got His hands dirty in our pain and sorrow. It was at the death of His friend Lazarus that we see one of the most comforting realities: **Jesus wept** (John 11:35). These were not simple tears but an ugly cry. He wept over a death that He could have avoided (he had waited 4 days to visit when he was sick). He was going to raise Lazarus up in a few minutes, meaning He would see His friend again (though Lazarus would have to die again). He wept at the fact that sin had caused death at all! He wept because death separates relationship. He wept because that is exactly what humanity does when we experience the

sting of death. Jesus resonates with us in our sorrow. In fact, He does not run away from it or avoid it, but walks with us through it. Our sorrow is here on this earth *because* we have to deal with the consequences of sin and brokenness, something we will not have to do someday.

JESUS entered into humanity to die as a solution for sin

But Jesus did not enter humanity only to comfort us in our present pain, **He came to rid us of it forever.** We describe what happened in Thousand Oaks as a tragedy, and from our perspective it is. It is where innocent people were killed for no reason other than whatever went on in the mind and heart of one sinful man. It is tragic when someone who does not deserve death receives it. And that is exactly what Jesus did for us.

Isaiah 53:5, 10 - *But He was **pierced** for our transgressions; he was **crushed** for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His **wounds** we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned ----every one---to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all...Yet it was the will of God to **crush** Him; He has put Him to **grief.**"*

2 Corinthians 5:21 - *"For our sake he made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."*

Jesus took on humanity to die for us, to satisfy the wrath and judgment of God against us, so that we could be received back to Him. Jesus is both just and justifier, the only one who could live perfectly and keep the entirety of the law. This is why Jesus had to die on a cross, the place where God treated Him like a sinner, like one of us, pouring out His wrath on His own Son. Sin had to be paid for and God had to pour out His wrath on it. That means we all stand guilty, whether our sin is as overt as a murderer or as a liar, a psychopath or a selfishly driven, prideful working man. The only solution for all is NOT changing government, trying harder, or moving to another part of the country. It is dealing with our sin:

1 John 1:9 - *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

The promise of salvation does not mean that things here will get easier, but they will be hopeful now that they make sense and have purpose behind them. Eternal life starts now, since eternal life is defined by a relationship with God: **"And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."** (John 17:3). It also looks forward to a day when Christ returns, brings peace and justice, and rules over the earth. This is what the new heaven and new earth offer:

Revelation 21:3-5 - *"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. He **will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.**' And He who is seated on the throne said, 'Behold I am making all things new.' Also He said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.'"*

This is the hope we have in Christ....not that we will have some sort of justice and perfection here and now, but that God is preparing us for one to come. We will not experience that until Christ returns, but

we can have the assurance now, and that means we can live with the reality that this world is NOT our home, and can have joy in every and all circumstance.

JESUS calls us to examine ourselves in the midst of tragedy

What do we do now?

We move toward each other and others - we give opportunities to listen, weep, embrace, and help in any way we can, giving people time to process

We pray - for other people, with other people, that God would accomplish His will and that we would turn to trust Him

We point to Christ and the hope we have in Him - This is not pity but powerful, not token but effective. We exercise wisdom and understanding, compassion and love, patience and care in doing this, but we know this is the ultimate and only solution.

This is exactly what Jesus did when people engaged Him with the reality of tragedy in Jesus' day. There were tragic deaths of those from Galilee at the hands of a Roman government official. They were looking for Jesus to engage in the social conversation at the time: down with Rome, down with oppression, and time for change. But Jesus did not get into the social media of the day. Instead He redirected the conversation:

Luke 13:1-5 - *"There were some present at that very time who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And He answered them, 'Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower of Siloam fell and killed them; do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.'"*

Jesus was well aware of tragedy around Him, since there is nothing new. But He did not look to answer the questions people had with something external, like a change in government or law or policy since there is nothing OUTSIDE THAN CAN SOLVE what we need inside of us. So He called for repentance, a turning from sin to Christ, embracing forgiveness of sin in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. That is where our hope comes from and where we can mourn the loss of friends and family and make sense of it all. We have a God who loves and cares for us, was willing to save us while we were sinners, and calls us to follow Him with our whole heart. There are no safe places in this world where sin does not touch, but there is no safer place to be than in the hand of our Savior. So we entrust ourselves to our God who brings comfort through His Son Jesus, and realize that the real tragedy that we face is when we fail to believe in Jesus as our Savior and Lord, leaving us hopeless and in our sin. Today is a day where we weep at the tragedy around us but have hope to solve the one inside us.