

Remembering God's Heart After a Terrorist Attack

"O Lord, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph?" (Ps. 94:3).

Early Sunday morning our nation faced an unprecedented act of terror. Forty-nine people were gunned down at an LGBT nightclub in Orlando, Florida, with dozens more injured, in the deadliest mass shooting in American history. Before being killed by police, the gunman called 911 to pledge allegiance to ISIS.

My heart cannot help but cry, *How long?* How long, O Lord, will we hear reports of mass slaughter in our schools, churches, nightclubs, restaurants, college campuses? As a teacher, I remember attending training sessions where we were taught protocol in the event of a mass shooting. I remember teaching my sweet, wide-eyed, 11-year-old students exactly what to do in case of a "lockdown." And when we practiced, I could not help but think, *What kind of world are we living in?*

It's always my natural tendency to respond to terrorism with terror. I cannot understand it, contain it or control it. I cannot protect my loved ones from it. The evil is so massive, I wrestle to frame it theologically. Where does this big, ugly puzzle piece "fit" in my understanding of God?

As I spent time with God this morning, I arrived at the conclusion that *terrorism gives us a glimpse into the exact opposite nature of God*. Therein lies our hope. In the wake of tragedy, our truest comfort comes from fixing our eyes on God Himself. The Bible presents multiple attributes of God that stand in stark contrast to the evils of terrorism. Let's look at three of them.

The God of Justice

The only thing more terrifying than terrorism is waging war with the Almighty Himself. Hebrews 10:30-31 says:

“For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine,’ says the Lord, ‘I will repay.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

Terrorism is not just an attack on ideology, race, sexual orientation or politics. It is an attack on the living God who created mankind in His own beautiful image. Like Satan, terrorism cries, “I will make myself like the Most High” (Is. 14:14).

It presumes the right to take life. But the Bible says we should not fear those who can kill the body, but rather we ought to fear the Creator who alone can destroy both body *and* soul (Matt. 10:28). Listen to the way the prophet Isaiah phrases it:

“Sanctify the Lord of Hosts Himself, and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread. He shall become a sanctuary, but a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, and a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (Is. 8:13-14).

Fearing God alone is a sign of reverence and worship. It acknowledges that He is mightier than any foe. When we tremble at His holiness, we will tremble at nothing else. He will become our sanctuary.

The God of Compassion

God’s compassionate love for humanity is another attribute that directly opposes the callous brutality of hate crimes. Repeatedly throughout the Gospels we see Jesus express deep

emotion—when He weeps for Lazarus (John 11), when His heart goes out to the widow who has lost her only son (Luke 7:11-15), when He speaks to Jerusalem with maternal longing (Matt. 23:37), when He is overcome with compassion for the crowds who are like sheep without a Shepherd (Matt. 9:35-38).

We worship a God who *feels* with us and for us! Ultimately, we see the perfect union of God's justice and compassion through His death on the cross. In His holiness He demanded a penalty for sin, and in His mercy He paid the penalty Himself. May we *never* question God's character in the face of evil!

May we not make remarks like, "How could a just God allow this?" God has eternally proven that He is both just and merciful. Like Hannah, who poured out her soul to God in great anguish and grief (1 Sam. 1:12-16), we can honestly pour out our emotions to our heavenly Father! But let us do so with reverence, recognizing that if He removed His grace from our lives for even an instant, we would be ruined.

The God of Restoration

While the injustice and heartlessness of terrorism are sobering, its most alarming attribute is its ability to destroy. It devastates generations in seconds. It writes history. But in Isaiah 43:16-17, God reminds us that He, too, has the ability to devastate generations and write history:

"Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea and a path in the mighty waters, who brings forth the chariot and horse, the army and the mighty men (they shall lie down together, they shall not rise; they are extinguished, they are quenched like a wick)."

Do you recognize what event God is describing through the prophet Isaiah? It's the parting of the Red Sea, when God delivered Israel and destroyed Egypt's entire army. Unlike the destruction of terrorism, which is always rooted in evil, when

God brings destruction it is for the purpose of justice and redemption. Listen to the very next verses:

“Do not remember the former things nor consider the things of old. See, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; shall you not be aware of it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.” (Is. 43:18-19).

Just as God has the ability to judge evil and destroy it, He has the ability to *restore* what has been devastated. He brings hope and revival to the wastelands of our lives. Prophetically speaking of Jesus, Isaiah later went on to write:

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me [Jesus] to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound ... to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit (Is. 61:1-3).

This is our God! Supremely strong, flawlessly pure, relentlessly loving. Surely, as the Psalmist once wrote, we can “trust in Him at all times; you people, pour out your heart before Him; God is a shelter for us. Selah” (Ps. 62:8).

As we wrestle with this unconscionable act of violence, let’s anchor ourselves in the God of justice, the God of compassion, and the God of restoration. To any dear readers who have lost loved ones in Orlando, there are no words to express our sorrow. We love you, we mourn with you, and as a body of believers, we pray for you. {eo}

*Reprinted from Revive Our Hearts: True Woman. A student pastor’s wife and mom to three little girls, **Jeanne Harrison** blogs about finding contentment in the lot God has given us—be*

it beautiful, painful, or at times downright disgusting!
Recently she published her first book, Loving My Lot: A Young
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