

Why the Charleston Tragedy Happened

“Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died” (John 11:21).

Sometimes God’s ways are hard to fathom. When Martha sent word to Jesus that her brother was sick, Jesus remained silent and still. And her brother died. When Jesus did show up four days later, Martha told Him He was too late to make a difference.

Why does God seem silent and still when our world collapses and the worst happens? In any city, but especially in a city where no building is allowed to be higher than a church steeple, why did He allow Dylann Roof to enter the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, SC, knowing what the demonically deranged guy was planning to do? Why did He not protect the pastor and eight other church members on June 17 as they met for prayer and Bible study? “Lord, if You had been here ...” Was God not there that night? Was He asleep? Did He not care? Was He just neglectful? Why did He allow this to happen? Why didn’t He prevent it? *Why?*

In response to my “why” questions, He gave me the same answer He gave to Martha. He used the tragedy in her life to give a message to the world for all time that He is indeed the Resurrection and the Life. His answer? *“Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?”* (John 11:40). Then Jesus raised her brother from the dead! Martha did indeed see His glory!

But I responded with another question ... How will You be glorified through this horrific tragedy? And this is what He seemed to whisper to my heart: At a time of racial tension, polarization, and even increased hatred, could it be God is giving Emanuel AME Church, as well as other Christians, an

opportunity to preach a sermon to the entire nation and even to the watching world? And what's the title to the sermon? "Love your enemies ... and pray for those who ... persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).

Could it be that God is wanting the world to see that Christians, regardless of race or creed, respond to hate crimes in a very different way than others have responded in Baltimore or Ferguson or elsewhere? When Jesus Himself was subjected to the most vile hate crime in history, He set the example for us when He prayed, "Father, forgive them."

With tears on my face, on bended knee, I pray for grace to do the same.

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