

## **Making Sense of the Madness**

Acts 19:21-41

### **Introduction**

Why? That's the question our whole country has been asking since a 64 year old multi-millionaire indiscriminately opened fire on a crowd of 22,000, killing 58 people, wounding hundreds more all before taking his own life. Another week in America and once again we've broken a gruesome record, the largest mass murder in our nations history. And, we all have that sinking recognition that we're probably not far from breaking this record again. What would drive a man to snuff out the lives of so many people he never even met. What kind of rage must have raged in his heart and mind?

And we are all shocked, especially since authorities haven't seemed to put their fingers on a motive. We live in a humanistic culture that doesn't have the ability to give us the answers to evil like this. By humanism, I mean the system of thought which denies the deity as an explanation of all things and rather stresses the value, potential, and goodness of mankind.

Humanism teaches that our advances as a race in philosophy, science, education, and technology should lead to the flourishing of the human race. It was once thought that our potential and our advances would lead one day to a world without racism, poverty, war, and genocide. The humanistic worldview teaches that our advances as a race would also eliminate the need for religion.

Boy is Humanism wrong! Despite all of our potential and despite all our advances in science and education, there's more hatred, killing, poverty, and racism than ever. Humanism cannot give us any answer to the problem of evil.

I'm here to argue this morning that the Christian world view is the only view that can give us an answer to the problem of evil and it's the only world view that can give us the solution to evil. In short, the gospel is the only thing that can give us hope.

The Madness, The Underlying Cause, The Solution.

### **#1 The Madness**

In our text, Paul is coming to the end of his three year ministry in Ephesus. You remember from our last message how that many people were converted and were so radically transformed by the gospel that they gathered up to millions of dollars of their idolatrous possessions and burned them. So Christianity was threatening to change so many lives that it was going to have an impact on the economy.

A wealthy man whose idol was money, which he earned from making silver idols, raised a disturbance. The threat of losing his money enraged him and his fellow idol makers. Paul's message was that Christ was the only true and living god, and that man made idols were no gods at all.

This threat caused an uproar in the city. Literally a mob gathers and starts a riot. Look at the madness:

v. 23 says there was no little disturbance

v. 28 says they were enraged

v. 29 says the whole city was filled with confusion

The passage goes on to say that the mob, must have gone looking for Paul but they could only find his friends, Gaius and Aristarcus. They rushed in on them and dragged them into the theater.

Look at v. 32 Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together.

We've seen this frequently over the past few years. There's been no shortage of riots in the towns and streets of our own nation. And usually it starts with a group that has some sort of specific complaint. But it often turns into all sorts of chaos. Sometimes it's so crazy that people destroy, loot, and burn down their own neighborhoods.

But for a moment, let's take a step back here at Ephesus. Why are Demetrius and his friends so angry?

The same message that softened the hearts and opened the eyes of some of the Ephesians, filled others with rage. Think about this. What is the gospel. The gospel is an announcement of good news that Jesus has conquered Satan, sin, and death. And even though we are his enemies, if we will humble ourselves and trust in him, we will be adopted into his family.

Resisting the gospel is like being trapped inside a house fully engulfed with flames and when the fireman comes in, with all his gear to save you, you refuse to be rescued. That is madness! My friends, the gospel comes to us and says you are offered peace with your God, life everlasting, and joy forevermore... All that is Christ's will be yours if you will allow yourself to be rescued from the flames.

But the insanity of sin is that it so twists our minds and our affections so that we prefer the flames of hell to Savior's love.

In The Problem of Pain Lewis writes: "I willingly believe that the damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; that the doors of Hell are locked on the inside."

What is Lewis saying? Lewis is saying that people go to hell go there by their own choice and, once in hell, if you gave them the choice to come out, on the condition that all they had to do would be repent, they would choose to remain in the torments of hell rather than submit to the love and authority of King Jesus.

This is the insanity of sin. This is the madness of being outraged by the gospel of peace.

But is that really biblical? Is it biblical to say that aside from the grace of God, the hearts of men are so hard that they prefer hell to Christ's love? Let's look at # 2.

### **The Underlying Cause**

Humanism says that mankind is basically good and has the potential to solve our own moral problems. But the Bible says that we are fundamentally flawed and we need help outside ourselves to rescue us. To understand the human condition, we have to understand the fruit and root causes. The fruit is what we often see. But the root is the underlying cause. So right now the authorities are trying to discover the reasons why Stephen Paddock fired a machine gun into a group of 22k people. But all they can look for are fruit issues. Maybe he lost his mind? Maybe he was suicidal? Maybe he was radicalized by ISIS?

For Demetrius and his friends the fruit issues were that their wealth was being threatened. But what underlying cause? What is the engineering of a heart that loves evil even when joy and life is presented to it.

Well, the Bible is very clear about the problem of evil in our world.

Outside of God's grace, we love darkness rather than life.

John 3:19-20 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

Psalms 14:2-3 The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. 3 They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

Do you realize what this means? It means that the shocking thing is not that a man executed 58 people. We should be surprised that every hour of every day 58 people aren't killed. Do you understand that if it wasn't for the fact that God was restraining the evil in the hearts of men how much worse our world would be?

Right now I can hear some of you asking, because sometimes I feel this way too, – are we really that bad? Is the human heart really that messed up?

One reason we struggle to believe the Bible's teaching is because you and I are products of our humanistic culture. So even if you've grown up in Church we believe that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." But we have a very superficial concept of the gravity of sin and what it means to fall short of God's glory. We think of sin as a minor inconvenience in our life, sort of like a speed bump. When in reality sin is like a 1000 ft deep sink hole that will swallow you alive. We think of sin like it's a minor scratch when in reality it's more like leprosy.

You and I will never understand the magnitude of God's grace until we understand the magnitude of our sin. And we'll never understand the magnitude of our sin until we understand the weight of God's holiness.

Probably the biggest reason the gospel seems to have very little power to actually transform the lives of people is the because the gospel that is often preached is a superficial gospel that really doesn't address the deep truths of the Bible.

Psalms 5:4-5 For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you. 5 The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers.

Of course, some people stay very far away from God by their wickedness. But others stay very far away from him by their goodness. Sometimes instead of dealing with their sin, people will mask their sin with their goodness. Religion itself is often used to keep from actually dealing with it. Instead of admitting our fallenness we go to church, we say prayers, we give money, and we think that things we do are enough to make God look away from our sins, but in reality nothing you and I could ever do could pay the penalty for what we've done.

We need to come to grips with the fact that, apart from grace, there is unlimited potential for evil in the human heart. Within the human heart is the potential for a universe of evil The heart is like an acorn. Within a single acorn is the potential for an entire universe of oak trees. If an acorn is planted and becomes an oak tree, it could produce a million acorns which could produce a million oak trees which each could produce another million acorns and so on. Can you see the problem of evil in the human heart?

The madness is that we love darkness more than light..

That leads us to # 3...

### **The Solution**

If the Bible is brutally honest about our condition, it is also heart warming in its offer of a solution.

Last Sunday Stephen Paddock rented a hotel room high up above a mass of humanity and in an act of unjust vengeance he slaughtered dozens of innocent people. It's almost like he made himself a god and took a position high up over the people and pronounced judgement over them and unleashed chaos.

How different from the true and living God, our Savior, Jesus Christ, was high up over us, but instead of pronouncing judgement over us from his high and lofty position,  
he came down

He entered into the chaos of our broken humanity, he stood between us and every blow of justice that his people deserved landed on him. He absorbed every one.

John 3:17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

I want to invite you today to come to the cross of Jesus, maybe for you it is the thousandth time. Or maybe today is the very first time. The cross is the one place where you can see the gravity of your sin and the greatness of God's love for you in Christ.

The Cross and Criticism, Dr. Alfred J. Poirier – “In response to my sin, the cross has criticized and judged me more intensely, deeply, pervasively, and truly than anyone else ever could... The cross of Christ reminds me that the Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me. And because of this, God has thoroughly and forever accepted me in Christ.”

Friends, God is in the business of saving sinners. And this gives us great hope.

We have great hope because

1. In this dark world God is reaching people with hard hearts under the control of Satan
2. God can use you and I to show the love of Christ to hurting and despondent people around us
3. God is in control and not one bullet flies through the air except God is in control of its destination.

My friends, last Sunday night 58 souls passed into eternity. Of those 58 souls some entered into their eternal rest with Christ, others passed into an eternity separated from the love of God.

We're already seeing and will continue to see great acts of kindness, heroism, and love. In the days ahead we'll no doubt hear many more. Perhaps God in his kindness would use this tragedy to bring many people to his Son, Jesus.

4. We have such a great hope that if you or I find ourselves in the midst of bullets raining down, with great confidence we can not only face the possibility of death, but in that moment you and I could show the love of Christ, not for ourselves but for people around us.