

PK's Perspectives ... Where is God?

Las Vegas: 59 dead; 520 wounded. Many people have, are, or will ask, “Where is God in all of this?” Perhaps you’re asking this question; perhaps someone is asking you. This is a hard question to answer.

The first thing we must do in the aftermath of this sort of horror is to make sure that we do not take the name of God in vain. After a natural disaster or an act of terror, one will always find someone, often claiming the mantle of Christianity, opining about how this moment was God’s judgment on an individual or a city or a nation for some specified sin. Jesus told us specifically not to do this, after his disciples asked whether a man’s blindness was the result of his or his parents’ sin. Jesus said no to both (Jn. 9:1-12). Those self-appointed prophets who would blame the victims for what befalls them are just that, self-appointed. We should listen to Jesus and to his apostles, not to them. Those killed in a terror attack or in a tsunami or in an epidemic are not more sinful than all of the rest of us.

We live in a fallen world, where awful, incomprehensible things happen. When an obvious and egregious injustice such as this one is done, we should stand where God does and see this as real evil, not as an illusion of evil. This means that our response to such should not be some sort of Stoic resignation but instead a lament with those around us who are hurting.

Christians sometimes suppose that our non-Christian friends and neighbors want to hear a detailed explanation, to justify God in light of such horror. The Bible doesn’t give us easy answers. The Word of God instead speaks of the “mystery of iniquity” (2 Thess. 2:7). When tragedy fell upon Job, an ancient follower of God, and he asked why such happened to him, God did not fully answer him. God instead spoke of his own power and his own presence. That’s exactly what we should do.

We do not know why God does not intervene and stop some tragedies when he does stop others. What we do know, though, is that God stands against evil and violence. We know that God is present for those who are hurting. And we know that God will ultimately call all evil to a halt, in the ushering in of his kingdom. We know that God is, in the words of the hymn, both “merciful and mighty.”

When my wife and I were going through a difficult time, years ago, a friend stopped by, a respected theologian who spoke often and well of God’s sovereign providence. I expected him to speak to us of how God was working in this tragedy we were facing. He didn’t. He cried with us. He sat with us. He prayed with us. And as he left, he turned and said, “Russell, I don’t know why God permitted this to happen to you, but I know this: Jesus loves you, and Jesus is alive and present right now in your life.” I’ve never forgotten those words.

Our neighbors do not need us to provide easy answers to what is, on this side of eternity, unexplainable. What they need, though, is a reminder from us that life is not the meaningless chaos it seems to be. There is a loving Presence at work in the universe. They need for us to weep and hurt with them, as Jesus did at the grave of his friend. In short, they need us to be a people of the cross, a people whose God is not distant and blank but a God who instead loved the world enough to send his Son to bear in his own body the full measure of the curse of evil. In the cross, we see evil and horror. We also see that God is there. And in the empty tomb, we see that death does not get the last word. *(written by Russell Moore, President of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the SBC)*
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