

Pastoral Reflections on the Sandy Hook Tragedy

I do not pretend to understand the depth of grief experienced by those who lost loved ones in the Sandy Hook tragedy. Though I have lost very close relatives to death and have four children in Heaven due to miscarriages, these losses are different and the grieving process has been of a different sort.

I have heard and read many words of condolence from the media coverage, and I've received personal correspondence sent, literally, from around the globe. The support for our community has been astounding over these past weeks. Friends from London, South Africa, Croatia, and many other countries are praying for us, and hundreds of emails have brought prayer support, songs, poems, or donations. I have spoken with many and have listened to conversations, but I have not heard a great deal of sound hope based on the unalterable words of Scripture. MANY words from man's limited knowledge have been uttered, but I haven't heard people making much over God's revelation in Scripture. Yet He is the Creator and Sustainer of life. Shouldn't we be making much of what He has said on the subjects of man created in His image and about the living souls that have gone off into eternity in or out of His presence? We need *His* Word on life, death, and eternity.

Again, many words have been spoken to address the physical deaths of loved ones in our community, but there have been few words pertaining to their souls which were made in the image of God. But to address only the material part of man is to give a superficial answer to humans, who consist of body *and soul*. It is to the spiritual issue of this tragedy that we now turn.

God has not left us without a word on how to engage such grief. The Father Himself experienced the most horrific tragedy to ever occur on earth: the torture and murder of His Son by His predetermined plan (Acts 2:23 NASB) to redeem from sin all who would turn to Him. The Father gave His Son (John 3:16) to be bruised for our transgressions (Isaiah 53:5). The worse tragedy *ever*--crucifying the Lord of glory, the sinless One--is, in fact, the greatest gift ever given, as it provides the grounds for man to be reconciled to God. The One who conquered the grave and took the sting out of death (1 Corinthians 15:54-56) is the One who provides a living hope to all who are born again into His family (1 Peter 1:3). Those who have turned from their sin and placed their faith in Christ alone gain an eternal inheritance in heaven. This hope is imperishable, undefiled, and untarnished (1 Peter 1:4).

I believe those young children are in Heaven, as John MacArthur explains in his book *Safe in the Arms of God*. The most important question to be posed is, "Will you join them, by placing your faith in Christ alone?" I'm not talking about relying on your inherent goodness, for that is not how anyone gets to Heaven, not even those children that were just ushered into God's presence. Contrary to what so many people have said about this tragedy, man is not born neutral towards God. Man doesn't even seek Him (Romans 3:10-11). Man's heart is deceitful and desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9). Even our thoughts are evil (Gen 6:5; Matt 5). It's not that we are all as bad as we can be, but everything we do is tainted by sin. Even a lack of loving God perfectly is a transgression of God's holy standard (Deut 6:5). Whether the sin is murder or whether it's gossip, every sin will be judged by God, the judge of all people (Ecclesiastes 3:17).

As we think about this tragedy in Sandy Hook, we must remember it is a picture of what the wicked heart of man is capable of. It is one of many slaughters that man has

wrought throughout human history. Witness Herod's infanticide, of all male children two years old and below when Jesus Christ was born (Matthew 2:16), and there's the first murder to be recorded in the Bible, in which Cain killed Abel (Genesis 4:8). Tragedy and trouble are part of the human experience (Job 5:7; 14:1), and though politicians and the media want to make the issue about gun control, it's not about the guns. Whether man uses a gun, a club, or a spear to murder, he is being used as a tool of Satan, who was a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44). The wicked heart of man is the root issue. There are greater things at work in the world, in which there is a spiritual war in effect (Ephesians 6:12). Though Satan prowls about, seeking to devour man (1 Peter 5:8), man's lust and sin is what brings forth death (James 1:13-15).

The murders in Sandy Hook were about sin. Not about specific sins of individuals, but a matter of sin. It is the byproduct of living in a fallen world (Genesis 3) in which man sinned against His Creator and God cursed His creation (Genesis 3:14ff.) and cast Lucifer down. This event which brought about many deaths is a reminder to us that life is short--but a vapor (James 4:14)--and then comes death, and after that, judgment (Heb 9:27). Are you prepared? Do you have hope that exists in this life and passes beyond into eternity? All of creation and your own conscience testify of God's existence. Have you run to Him for mercy so that you need not fear His judgment and wrath? God's special and tender care was extended to the children of this tragedy because they had not hardened their hearts in sin, but once you are old enough to comprehend the Gospel, you are accountable to respond in faith and obedience. Have you responded in that manner? Christ's atoning work covered their sin. Have you pled with Him to cover yours as well?

I believe the issue has to do with man's response to God, not just the tragedy that faced us. There will be more tragedies in the future, possibly worse and more devastating if history is our teacher: Columbine, Virginia-Tech, or Sandy Hook. We will continue to face tragedies until the Prince of Peace comes and wipes away every tear and does away with death (Revelation 21:4).

Let's learn from the tragedy and be changed. A similar event occurred in Jesus' day. Several people were slaughtered, and Jesus' stark challenge was, "unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:1-5). We are all going to die. Some of us may face untimely deaths, but the question remains, Have you repented of your sin and embraced Christ alone for your salvation? Have you readied yourself for death, an appointment none of us will miss (Hebrews 9:27)?

Such horrendous evil as that experienced at Sandy Hook can only be answered only in the cross of Jesus Christ. He was the innocent One slain for us guilty sinners. Please turn to Him and be saved from your sin. To know Him is to experience life more abundantly (John 10:10), as He conquered our greatest enemy, death itself (1 Corinthians 15:25).

Until death, mourning, and pain are no more,

Soli Deo Gloria,

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*Note: this was written shortly after my hometown experienced the horrible shooting on December 12, 2012.