

## GOD IS: IN TRAGEDY TOO

Where was God this past Sunday? It was the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church around the world. No one expected a massacre in Sutherland Springs, TX, USA to send 26 worshipers to heaven. The spectre of universal Christian persecution reared its gruesome goal. Three points:

**1- Evil runs rampant.** Einstein observed how the world is dangerous because of people who do nothing about evil. If you're not trusting God, the news might make you afraid to go out. NV concert? NY bike path? TX church? You may not be safe anywhere, even rural Iowa. But if your life is all about your "safe space" you're on the wrong planet. The reality of evil is precisely one of the most powerful reasons to not only believe that God exists, but to put all your trust in Him. Anti-God materialists have no cogent explanation for evil. It's a much bigger problem for the atheist than the theist. Mocking cries about "prayer didn't help them in Texas" mask the utter incapacity and stark vulnerability of the unbeliever's pseudo-intellectual excuses. They can only futilely demand everyone else change their behavior to march lock-step with them. The Christian points to the heart of the problem of complicity of mankind in evil, and the ultimate triumph of good, because of Jesus. Not dualistic balancing good and evil as part of an eternal dance of the cosmos. But the Biblical truth, written down by God, that He IS and He is our only hope.

**2- God controls everything.** Theology seems great when you're in an inspirational worship service, strengthened by the living and written Word of God. We've spent several weeks marveling at awesome attributes of our creator and redeemer. But where's the thrill of theology, amidst tragedy, in church? This is precisely when you need good theology. When emotions overtake, you need an anchor in the storm. If your faith is only in good circumstances you soon find you need an un-changing Savior regardless of your situation. When you don't know what's happening, your only hope is to know Him who does. Think back to the Scriptures we've reviewed: God is ever-present. All-knowing. All-powerful. Sovereign. Eternal. Un-changing. Gracious. Loving. Righteous Judge. And more. That's why all that is evil hates God. Evil tries to twist the truth. But this only serves to magnify the greatness of God all the more. He is all that is light, and darkness can never overcome Him. We don't fully comprehend why God allows evil, but we can trust Him in the midst of it. Jesus told His followers, "*I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you*" and "*they will also persecute you*" and "*I have said these things that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*" Acts 14:22 records how after Paul was stoned and presumed dead, he and his fellow believers were "*strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.*" Paul wrote "*put on the whole armor of God*" and Romans 8 "*nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" Do you really believe this?

**3- What's your response?** In 2 Kings 6 the enemy was determined to silence Elisha the prophet, and surrounded his city with horses, chariots and a great army. The next morning his servant was alarmed but Elisha was calm. He said "*Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.*" Then Elisha prayed and said, "*O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see.*" So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" - the heavenly army of God. You may be a concealed-carry permit holder. Your church may have armed security. But ultimately your trust is in God. As the psalmist says, He alone is your shield and refuge and strength. Isaiah 54:17 says "*no weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed, and you shall refute every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD and their vindication from Me, declares the LORD.*" In Him, no matter what, life or death, you are "*more than conquerors.*" Do you really trust in the Lord Jesus Christ?

Worldwide, more than 100 million Christian believers are at risk every day, simply for the name of Jesus. That He is worth dying for, as well as living for, strikes terror in evil people intent on suppressing God's truth. It is first a spiritual battle, "*making war on the saints.*" Americans now see firsthand what believers around the world long have known: Persecution only makes true Christians stronger, and bolder, and more effective than ever before. Because God IS. He reigns. Nothing will stop His truth! And nothing is more powerful than His abiding sovereign presence with those who trust in Jesus!