

The Las Vegas Massacre in Biblical Perspective
“Three Inevitable Questions and Three Inevitable Responses”
Luke 13:1–5; John 9:1–3
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I felt led by the Spirit to deal with the many questions and comments I have received about the recent Las Vegas mass massacre. One reason I wanted to deal with this is because this is not a one-off event, for there will be other events in a fallen world and there have been ever since the fall into sin in the Garden and there will continue to be. Therefore I want to address how we are to view it from a Christian world and life view and how we are to respond to it from a Christian life style. This is what brought me to want to look at three inevitable questions and three inevitable responses that these questions would demand.

So here we are with a somewhat signal event not that there haven't been these kinds of events in the history of humanity and the history of our own country, but this one is significant in that since the Civil War this is the largest shooting massacre and loss of life on one day since the 1860s. Secondly, that is a statement that has been made in one form or another four times. The first time was the shooting of Sandy Hook. That was exceeded by the shooting at Virginia Tech University and that was exceeded by the shooting that took place in the Orlando, Florida night club Pulse. Now the Las Vegas massacre exceeds that. The trajectory is unmistakable.

The necessity to address the issue is undeniable. So far there are 59 declared dead at this point and 500-plus wounded. This is also on the heels of two other events that it replaces and the only time we can go back post Civil War is some of the game land massacres in the 1920s and 30s when our nation was plunged into a season of depravity. So how should we look at this and how should we deal with it?

It's interesting we say, and rightly so, that we are voting not for a pastor but a president yet at moments like this massacre we all want a president to respond pastorally. This has been the habit all the way back to our first president, George Washington, in moments like this and beyond. Things that have happened during past presidents like 9/11 during George Bush's presidency and events during President Obama's terms, where the presidents make statements and invariably quote scripture during these addresses of these events. I find that interesting that they are quoting Scripture while we are outlawing the handing out of Scripture in schools. Gideons can't come and hand them out to volunteers any longer. Yet that is exactly what we expect them to do.

In fact, if a president quoted anything else even though the professing Christendom in the United States, twelve years ago was at 86 percent, not saying they are Christians but professing ones and a little over a year ago it is now 70 percent. Even with that significant decline of those who would profess to be Christian, we would think that a president who would appeal to any other authority than Scripture, yet the preference is Scripture, as well as analyze and make a succinct message that is consequentially theological, that is what this president did after this massacre. I actually comment his statement and that's not making a political statement for him or any one political party it's just that case with that speech that I commend. I commend the vocabulary he used, the theological categories he used and the Scripture he used, particularly when he went to the Psalms to say our only comfort ultimately in handling the consequences of evil and eradicating evil comes from the Scripture itself.

What other authority are you going to appeal to, Supreme Court decisions, legislative initiatives, or governmental authorities? No, it is right in our history and the present age that one would appeal to Scripture and its categories. In fact, everything that is taking place is revolving around those categories. You will also notice in a moment like this not shocking but obvious inconsistencies and that were in a culture that promotes a secular, progressive world and life view that is permeated by moral relativism.

Recently I was reading accounts of one college professor who says ‘there is one thing I am assured of except for a few strayed, fundamentalist Christians that when I get a student that student will know what is obvious in which there are no moral absolutes, they will embrace moral relativism.’ You can see how that is a jangled angle when the president of our country says this is pure evil. How can you have pure evil with moral relativism? Moral relativism would say there is another reason than evil but this professor’s statement was very clear and he took some shots for it because historically that is not what was done or said.

In fact, it is somewhat refreshing when that is done because historically the reason we don’t say it is that we want to explain it by a ‘syndrome,’ meaning there had to be a genetic deformity for someone to do that or a sociological profile that whoever did it is not ultimately responsible for what they did because with moral relativism you can’t have responsibility. There must have been a contributing factor and he must have been a victim of ‘fill in the blank’ here. Fill in a reason here. It’s interesting that this one of such proportions that I haven’t heard anyone arguing for moral relativism but they are all calling it evil. I guess there are some things that even in our culture that ultimately can’t be explained away and you don’t try to explain away.

You understand why people do that, don’t you? In a world and life view that is Darwinian you have a very difficult time calling any act evil and that goes for even acts of violence. Why? One basic virtue in atheistic Darwinian evolution is survival of the fittest. So when someone manifests his ability to be the survivor and be the fittest, how can you call what he does evil? The only way to do that is to be inconsistent and I’m grateful our culture is still inconsistent and will reach for a term like evil. Yet this is amazingly inconsistent because to have evil you have to have absolutes, to have absolutes you have to have ethics, to have ethics you have to have laws, and to have laws you have to have a Law Giver.

What is the law of the land of the United States that governs our nation? It is called the Constitution and we got that Constitution because we had a constitutional congress that framed the law and gave it to us. In other words, you can’t have a law without a law giver. Therefore when atheism looks at issues like this it has to be inconsistent because it must reach for categories that it denies in its world and life view. Yet there are some things that give away the fact that are inconsistent and have to be inconsistent. Why?

It is because there are three questions when something like this occurs that always will be present. I certainly pray that we will never have another instance like this either larger or smaller than this one but until Jesus comes the likelihood is that we will have them. Therefore what are the three questions that are always asked when something like this happens. Let’s start to address them by looking at some passages of Scripture. First let’s look at Luke 13.

Luke 13:1–5 says [1] *There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. [2] And he answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? [3] No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. [4] Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were*

worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? [5] No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

Now let's look at John 9. Here there is a moment when Jesus is performing signs, wonders and miracles that there is a conversation that is established instituted by Jesus. John 9:1–7 says [1] *As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth.* [2] *And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”* [3] *Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.* [4] *We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work.* [5] *As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”* [6] *Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud* [7] *and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent).* So he went and washed and came back seeing. Jesus talks of the works of God and then heals the man. God had allowed this in this man's life for a specific reason that Jesus would do this miracle, show the glory of God and have a teaching opportunity to talk about His power to renew, redeem and restore.

So why do I bring out these two texts? In these two text we see something that is traumatic and not the way it was intended to be. When we see someone blind or crippled or a massacre that is not what was intended from the Creation and there is something wrong here. It is not what was revealed in terms of the will of God from Creation. There is a reason that is there and we want to know that reason when we see those things happening. So when things like a child born with an abnormality, a tragic death, an accident we observe, a massacre such as the one just recently, we immediately go to questions.

There is always three questions when these things happen. Question one is, what happened? We want to know the facts of what happened. Every single time things like this happen there will be a driving desire to ask what happened. If there wasn't a driving desire for this we would have a lot less news channels on TV because this kind of stuff fills the airways 24/7, until they sense people have quit asking the question or it has been answered.

In regards to the recent Las Vegas shooting I have been up to this point enormously impressed with the way the first responders in general and the police in particular have answered that question incessantly asked on behalf of the American population through the news media. They have said 'here is what the facts are, we're not going to speculate' and when they have been asked to speculate they have chosen not to go there. I have not seen as much discipline in something like this, than I have in this moment, in terms of this police force for which I am grateful. Other than one sheriff saying 'it is hard for me to believe he acted alone' all have just stated the facts. So what happened is a question that is always asked in situations like this.

The second question people ask in these kinds of situations is why. We want to know why this happened. A moral relativist desperately wants to give the answer in sociological terms, like it was drugs, social status, political reason or religious reason. This is not a partisan statement on my part because I see this on the left and the right. So when it is said because of evil in the heart which is a fundamental answer and not an exhaustive answer, it is never desired, wanted and usually set aside and why is this. Our Lord has given us our starting point.

In the Word of God there was no violence, no murder, in the Garden in Genesis 1 and 2. In Genesis 3 man fell into sin and the curse of sin was placed on man. Then because of sin, a sin record and a sin nature, the first manifestation recorded of the sin nature is self-centered worship. This was worship that was not acceptable to God. Cain did not worship rightly. That's why I know in my heart worship is a paramount, preeminent issue for God's people. The second was

violence and murder as Cain rose up and took the life of Abel and his deeds were evil. Cain did this because Abel's worship had been accepted by the Lord but Cain's line doesn't stop there for it continues in a progeny by the name of Lamech. Lamech was violent that they even wrote songs about him and part of one is included in the Bible (Genesis 4). Lamech would kill children if he was bothered by them. He would declare himself what we would call today one of the first epic heroes.

What is God's verdict on this? God says in Genesis 6:5-6, [5] *The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.* [6] *And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.* Why was this done? It was because man under the curse of sin in his evil, if it is unrestrained, will only be evil always and continually. Is man absolutely depraved in all that he does? It is clear he is totally depraved if his thoughts are evil only always and continually but he is not absolutely depraved and that's not due to man restraining his depravity but it is God's common grace, who restrains man's depravity.

At the root are there contributing environmental issues to the choices we make in life? Absolutely. Does a government have a responsibility to consider matters of public policy? Absolutely. The government is a part of God's common grace. What is the purpose of government? We see this in Romans 13 where the government is there to restrain evil. Notice the category here – evil and notice it needs to be restrained. God in His kindness and grace has given government in this age as one of the instruments He would use to restrain evil. But a 'why' ultimately is the reality of evil in the heart.

The third question that is always asked in these situations is how should we respond? We want to respond, we need to respond so how should we respond. This is a needed question that needs to be answered. This leads me to the three inevitable responses. I may sound circular in what I'm about to say but hear me out. Our first inevitable response is to ask questions – these three I've just shared – what happened, why did it happen and how should I respond.

The second inevitable response is because of the presence of God's common grace there will be the response of shock and grief, but there will be some whose shock is not extensive nor is there grief. The Bible says that there comes a time in a culture and in the life of individuals where sin in its repetition produces 'a callousness,' a hardening of the heart (Romans 2). At this point I'm going to be subjective here. It is my opinion that the grief and shock we have seen at this Las Vegas shooting, while I'm grateful to see it, I don't think it is as much as you would have seen 20 years ago. I believe the manufacture of video games in which we play at violence brings a callousness.

Our willingness to go to movies and participate in the name of entertainment in the killing of individuals has an effect. Stop and think about that. How many versions of King Kong have been made? In faithfulness to the book, all these versions of King Kong have in common this figment of an imagination, a dumb animal is on top of one of the largest buildings that has ever existed while swatting planes out of the air and everybody cheers. So a dumb animal is killing people made in the image of God and we cheer. You don't think it's easy to manipulate us through entertainment and turn our world and life view upside down in the process?

Entertainment is the best avenue to do this because if you can get someone emotionally invested in something that is absurd with evil they will likely change and its best done through a comic moment in entertainment. The best way to make something doable is to make it acceptable and the best way to make it acceptable is to make it doable and the best way to make

something doable is to make it thinkable. The best way to make something thinkable is to first make it laughable. Then when you laugh at it, it is not so evil or sinful. This goes for sexual perversion and sexual promiscuity as well. Put it in a sitcom with jokes. In real life, when you say 'cut' then the laughter stops and the reality of broken homes, broken lives and broken bodies set in. Technology also manipulates us.

Subjectively I'm grateful for the shock and grief that I see but the reality is that most of the shock is in a world and life view in which we believe that man holds the key to his own morality and doesn't need the intervention of God where we think 'how can one of us possibly do that.' In reality, if you have a Biblical world and life view ultimately the amazement isn't that one of us did it but more of us aren't doing it. The reason more of us are not doing it is not because more of us are better but the grace of God has restrained us from being as evil as we would be. So most of the shock and grief is from a misinformed world and life view.

I believe that Christians don't respond with the shock and grief we ought to have because we have allowed the culture to invade our world and life view instead of renewing our mind. Our hours are much more devoted to what the world has to say about life than we are to Scriptures, the reading of them or even the preaching and teaching of them. Therefore we ourselves get calloused.

In other words, in a death culture where we are entertained by death, where we celebrate the death culture, where we destroy the lives of 1.5 million children every year that are voiceless and defenseless, where we are pushing beyond passive euthanasia to active euthanasia, where we speak of inconvenient people needing to die, then inevitably it's no longer a game. Inevitably it invades life and it's the way we look at life. Some just want to say that this man's mind just snapped for him to do this and I would say that someone who takes the time to carefully plan something like this like he did, is not someone whose mind snapped. It is a heart that snapped but it was a mind that worked from his heart. So the heart of the problem is the problem with the heart and the thoughts that come from the heart are only always evil continually, unless restrained by common grace or transformed by redeeming grace. So when a believer asks questions we go to a Biblical world and life view to explain, although we will want the facts on the ground, and for the antidote to it. That leads us the third response.

Thirdly, we respond personally and corporately with courage and compassion. So why would I say courage? Whether it's in the moments of the event or after the event we respond with courage. Recently the students at Briarwood went to the principal of the school and said 'the homecoming floats are a lot of fun, but they are expensive and our parents end up making them and then they're just gone so why don't we do something else.' Then the students thought of the theme of honoring first responders in the military, EMTs, firemen and policemen so their whole homecoming theme was around that. So when I spoke at homecoming I said 'when a crisis such as this Las Vegas event happens it is perfectly understandable that our initial reaction is to run like crazy but we were honoring the people when that happens, that don't run from they run to.'

I do not believe that believers vocationally or initially should be like the first responder, necessarily but once we assess it, we are responders. We may not be first responders but we are responders. Our first response is the courage to be compassionate. We don't sort through and take a look at the racial, social, demographic, economical, or religious backgrounds of those who have been effected by such an evil act. We see people made in the image of God and our response is compassion, grief, ministry and mercy. This should be personally and corporately our response in a moment like this and even in an unjust shooting of one person. Our personal

response is to move in courage and compassion in ministry. What did God do when Cain murdered Abel? He came down, and gave another child to Adam and Eve, named Seth. He came down for justice at the perpetrator for evil yet even in justice He extended common grace to Cain. That is what we follow.

In the two texts that I read they are also asking the questions. Why is this here? What is the answer to that? In the case of the blind man they immediately want to say he is blind due to sin in his life or his parent's life. Jesus basically tells them he is blind because of a sovereign God so that I would heal him and it would become the occasion for the glory of God. So what about the Galileans whose were used as sacrifices as their blood was mingled with calves and goats? Why did they suffer that way? Who was at fault? Pilot did something that was evil but Jesus told them if they were thinking rightly they weren't really asking why Pilot's evil fell on them but why are you still standing and breathing. To see this isn't for me to wonder why those people didn't repent but it's a call for me to repent, lest I perish under a righteous judgment on the last Day.

What about the 18 who were killed when the pillars fell? What sin did they do for that to happen? Again, when you see something like that, that is not the question you should be asking. The question you ask yourself is 'why am I living?' And if I am living it is a call for me to repent by the grace of God and to put my trust in the Lord. Then after these questions, realizing we have been recipients of God's common grace and redeeming grace in the case of a Christian, then moves us to be gracious which should be our first movement. Therefore we must not become like Job's friends.

I have heard many say that Job's friends were terrible but if you read what they said they said some pretty good stuff but the problem was they were giving answers at the wrong time. That's why Job says in Job 6:26 says *[26] Do you think that you can reprove words, when the speech of a despairing man is wind?* That is also why the Bible tells us to weep with those who weep, to have sorrow for those who are in sorrow and to move into people's lives. When your first response is courageous compassion don't feel like you have to come up with the answers because your presence is more important than anything else. Certainly respond to their needs but seldom in those moments is time for us to pontificate on answers for that time will come. We are to minister at that very point.

Recently I heard a well-known preacher comment on the recent hurricanes, earthquakes, fires and this massacre and he said 'This is because of America's sinfulness.' What do I think about this? Do I believe God brings judgments on nations because of their sinfulness? Absolutely. Do I believe this is the judgment of God? I believe as a nation we are constantly encountering the judgment of sin for when you break God's law it's going to break you. When you embrace a death culture you're going to produce a death culture. Is this the direct judgment of God upon a nation? I don't know. I am not an agent of Divine revelation. I don't know whether its judgment or a wakeup call but I do know that it's a call to me to repent, then to walk with the Lord and be an instrument of the Lord in the lives of those who bore the brunt of a broken world and the evil that is in this world.

If we respond according to our world and life view you can rest assured that the moral relativist will respond according to their world and life view. So an occasion like this would not bring them personally into the life with courageous compassion but this moment becomes an instrument whereby people advance themselves personally or their political agenda. Again, I believe this happens on the right and the left. This is not a moment for the horrific response of 'I told you so' and 'if you would only embrace my ideology then all will be well. This is not a

moment for personal aggrandizement either. This is a moment for the courageous compassion of ministry. So now I'd like to leave you with some takeaways.

One, do not despise the asking of these three questions. We must ask these three questions. These three questions are all moral ultimately. Even the moral relativist will go to our categories in their inconsistencies. We cannot help but ask these questions because we are made in the image of God. I can assure you that if a tree fell on 25 wildebeests in Africa and killed them the others around that were not killed are not going to ask 'what happened' or why. They are animals that we're supposed to care for because we're made in the image of God but because we're made in the image of God we can't help but ask these questions. It is because we know morally and theologically that this isn't right and the only way to set what is wrong right is the grace of God. Again, the government is there to restrain evil but it cannot redeem evil people or transform evil. So what would be an appropriate restraint? Public policy is on the table but not initially for initially is responding to the people. Even the most professed atheist at moments like this will reveal the fact they are made in the image of God by their inconsistencies.

I have found it interesting that while there have been people that have criticized the statement that this was an evil act, there is no one that has tried to excuse the perpetrator sociologically, demographically, economically or pharmaceutically. I also find it interesting that they have been trying to do that. The basic thing in all these massacres is that they have been profiled and the profile seems to be young men, in despair, discouraged and disconnected are the ones lashing out and it's our fault. This man was 64 years old and I wish I could call that young. Secondly, he was not disconnected because he was a multi-millionaire. Thirdly, he had no shortage of resources. Are there contributing factors that may have been in his decision? Yes, but the notion that these things are explained demographically and socially are ultimately a fool's errand. The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. There is only one answer to the heart, ultimately, and that is the common grace of God that restrains and the redeeming grace of God that transforms.

The second takeaway is that there is a time to speak and a time to be silent and in our response initially that seldom is it a time to speak. It is primarily the time for silence, ministry and deeds. Ultimately there will be the opportunity to talk with people who are the casualties of an event like this or of any other tragedy in our world. While I would ask you not to fall into the current mantra of 'our prayers are with you' I would ask that you make prayer your response as well as your presence but our prayers are not just with these people for we are praying for them in intercessory prayer. Our prayers are to God and for them. So we pray and grieve with those who grieve and there is a time for policy in which we will respond to as well, but in moments like this, it is the time for ministry of the personal touch of embrace, availability and deeds of compassion.

The third takeaway is to realize that evil is a reality. There is a thing called depravity and its answer is the grace of God. One of the most interesting dynamics in all of this is that we are in a culture that is working by policy and by intention to vacuum out of the culture the free exercise of religion in general and Christianity in particular. Interestingly, they are removing from the culture the only thing that present restrains evil in common grace and transforms evil doers in redeeming grace. It is truly a case of cutting off our own nose despite our face.

That is why our founding fathers wanted that free practice of religion. The government did not authorize the religion but it protected the free exercise in the public square because they knew that was the most important for liberty under law. Therefore our great need is whether the culture welcomes us or not, whether the government protects the first amendment or not, we will

bring the Gospel of grace in word and deed so that we can see sin restrained as we practice our freedom of religion, no matter what the cost.

We do this not only because we love the Lord but because we love our neighbor no matter who they are. For the evil doer here is the Gospel for it will transform you and the culture of death can become a culture of life. For the casualties of the evil doer, we are God's instrument in their life to counteract the consequences of evil with deeds of grace and a message of hope that while the world is in rebellion against God, there is a Savior who has sent His Son in the world to save us from our sins. Then He sends us into the world as the ambassadors of His glorious Gospel. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. I would not want to treat this event in any clinical matter although it allows us to fully embrace a world and life view that is informed from the Word of God – the reality of God, sin, redemption, judgment and of changed lives, so Father as we attempt to learn in a moment like this it's because we want to be Your instruments in moments like this so that men and women are brought to Christ and they repent so they will not perish. We want to see the love of God in Christ that is unvarnished on the day of Christ to be unveiled in this day for Christ. So allow us to do the Gospel deeds and then allow us, O God, in the right way, with the right words, in the right reasons not only to embrace in those things that restrain evil but to bring that message that overcomes evil for where sin abounds grace does much more abound. Use us to proclaim the Gospel of grace, to speak the Gospel words that bring men and women to faith in Christ and brings the rule of King Jesus throughout the land with the weapons of the Spirit and with the Gospel of grace for I pray it in Jesus' Name, Amen.