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#1336

*Va Tech: Where Was God?*

This past Monday as the immensity of the tragedy in Blacksburg became clearer a Fox News Reporter asked a young Va Tech coed about her feelings. I personally thought it was an insensitive and foolish question to ask someone who's in the middle of such an absolutely traumatic situation.

But this is what she said. "My heart is at my toes." With those poignant and descriptive words I believed that student summed up the feelings of our entire nation.

As we struggled to make sense of the events of April 16, 2007 our hearts couldn't get any lower. Our hearts were at our toes.

We were horrified and shocked at first. Then as we had time to digest some of the facts, our sadness was coupled with a thousand questions.

Who was the shooter? Were there 2 individuals involved in separate shootings? Why was there a time gap of 2 1/2 hours between the events?

Now we know. We know about the individual and we know he was at the post office in between shootings mailing off his twisted video and writings to NBC.

Incidentally, we think things are getting worse but the largest mass school murder in the US actually took place 80 years ago in 1927 when a guy named Andrew Kehoe blew up a school building and killed 45 people and injured 58, mostly grade school children!

Well, in the Virginia case the questions of "who" and "how" have been answered. But there are bigger questions than the details of the shootings that trouble us. There are more fundamental questions that we all have.

How could a human being be capable of such horrendous acts, and where was God when all this was going on?

These are tough questions. This past week I not only prayed for this service but I prayed for other pastors because I knew that this Sunday they were going to be standing before their congregations trying to make some sense of what seems so absolutely senseless.

I don't profess to have all the answers. There are questions that trouble me that are probably the same ones you have.

I wrestle with injustice and human suffering. I don't understand how individuals can seem to be insensitive to the trauma they cause others. I don't understand murders, rapists, child molesters, human trafficking, and a host of other evils.

I don't have every answer. But, what I would like to try to do this morning is take us on an investigative journey to see if the Bible has something to say that will help us process the events at Virginia Tech.

We all have a worldview. It's the lense we look through to evaluate life. This morning we're going to see a Biblical worldview.

### *I. Every Human Tragedy Has Its Root In Humanity's Fall*

People have taken the narratives in the Bible in lots of different ways. Here at FCC we've found that the best way to interpret the Bible is simply let it speak and to take it literally.

When the Bible does speak figuratively it's usually very obvious, so we read it and simply allow the words to have their usual, customary meaning.

**Turn to Genesis 2 pg 4**

**Read vs 8-9 15-18**

**Read 3:6-8**

The Bible clearly tells us that there is a God who made Adam and Eve. He placed them in a luscious garden, provided for all their needs, and only gave them one restriction which they preceded to violate.

The punishment was death. Now you think that's sounds a bit harsh for snitching a piece of fruit. The punishment doesn't seem to fit the crime.

But the crime wasn't centered in the fruit, it was rooted in disobedience to God.

And here's the point. If there's a God who made people He has the right to set the rules. God set the rules and disobedience brought death. That's how serious sin is.

We laugh about sin. Some times we don't think twice about disobeying our Creator. But God lets us know right from the start that as far as He's concerned sin is eternally consequential.

He tells us all this so we'll know how significant sin really is. God hates sin. It's an affront to His holy character. God despises sin. And sin pays death.

Now Adam & Eve didn't drop over dead when they ate the fruit or we wouldn't be here today. But the Bible says they did die. They died spiritually and then ultimately they died physically.

Death is actually separation. Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body and spiritual death is the separation of an individual from God.

If we're going to begin to understand our world it's absolutely essential to grab onto the Biblical worldview tenet that when Adam sinned, he planted the seed that will continue to produce the weeds of murderous people in society.

As the Bible states in Romans 5:12: *Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.*

It's an absolute tragedy that those 32 students and professors had to die the way they did. But the harsh reality is that we're all going to die at some point.

In my 28.5 years of ministry at this church I officiated at 81 funerals. They've been for everybody from grandparents to parents to children.

I've done services with a handful of people around a grave side. I've spoken to hundreds crammed in a funeral home or a church.

I've spoken at the funeral of people who led despicable lives. I've spoken at the funeral of people who've led saintly lives.

But there was one common denominator at every service. Somebody was dead. And someday someone will speak at my funeral and yours because we're headed in that direction too.

The Bible says as descendents of Adam we come into this world spiritually dead. Unless we come to God for forgiveness we'll leave this world spiritually dead. But just so no one mistakes the reality of sin, we all physically die.

Think about that last phrase in Romans 5:12, *and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.*

The real catastrophe is the chain reaction of transgression that Adam unleashed on this planet when he sinned in the Garden of Eden.

Not that it's all his fault as if we wouldn't have done the same thing, but until then there was no death, there was no tragedy.

Yet someday God will contain the disastrous presence of sin in the darkness of hell. Every particle of evil will be compressed into the Lake of Fire.

Here's the end of the story. Revelation 21:4-6 *And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.*

*Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts.*

That's going to happen just as surely as the hundreds of things the Bible foretold already have happened.

Here's where it gets real hard for us. We can't expect the "not yet" in the "now." Until that day, there will continue to be shootings and tragedies, and heartache because there will still be evil in the world.

The Bible says, *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* Romans 3:23

Moral evil is the immorality and pain and suffering that comes because we choose as a human race to be selfish, arrogant, uncaring, hateful, and abusive. I don't have an exact figure but I'd guess that 95 percent of the world's suffering results from the sin of ourselves or others.

For example, people look at a famine and wonder where is God, but the world produces enough food for every body to have the food they need every day. It's our own irresponsibility and self-centeredness that prevents people from getting fed.

Think about it. Is there anyone here today who can honestly say that they never caused

anyone else pain and heartache in their life? By thoughtless words or unkind actions?

We all have. We've all contributed to the suffering of others to one degree or another.

Ultimately all human evil is rooted in what happened in Adam. We just follow his example to varying degrees.

But you say, "Ed, that's true that I'm not perfect and I've caused other people heartache but I wouldn't shoot someone. We're talking about a degree of evil that's light years beyond me."

Adam and Eve had a number of children but the first two were a couple of boys named Cain and Abel. Cain was jealous of his brother and killed him.

It didn't take long for that to happen. The history of our world is a history of blood shed and fighting and sometimes those shedding the blood are common people. It happened in Nazi Germany, it happened in the Soviet Union under Stalin, it happened in Cambodia, Rwanda. It's happening on a wholesale scale in Iraq.

No race, culture, or religion has immunity.

Can I explain why one guy would take it upon himself to be executioner of 32 people? I can't.

What I do know is the Bible says, *The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?* Jeremiah 17:9

We live in a world that's out of wack. Sin has distorted things to the degree that when God visited our planet in Jesus Christ people brutally murdered Him.

What's amazing to me isn't that there's evil in our world. What's amazing to me is that God hasn't just incinerated the planet. What's amazing to me is that God is still forgiving all who come to Him by faith.

*I. Every Human Tragedy Has Its Root In Humanity's Fall*

*II. The Very Existence Of Evil Proves The Existence Of God*

All of us wrestle with the question why do the innocent suffer? That's the great philosophical problem of the ages that atheists have been asking theists.

In a series of premises and conclusions, the argument usually runs along these lines:

1. Evil and suffering exist in the world.
2. If God were omnipotent, he would be able to prevent these things.
3. If God were good and loving he would want to prevent them.
4. If there were an omnipotent and good God, then evil would have no place in the world.
5. Therefore, there's no such thing as an omnipotent, good, God.

The conclusion is there would be no evil if there was a God. Evil disproves the existence of God. The evil in our world proves that God can't exist.

Does that really hold true, or is just the opposite true? That line of reasoning seems to make sense until you really think it through.

1. If God doesn't exist then absolute moral values of good and evil don't exist. If there is no God and we're chance products of naturalistic mechanisms then there is no standard of right and wrong.

Right and wrong would be what ever anyone wanted it to be. Suddenly the Nazis or Pol Pot could be completely justified in what they did.

2. But evil does exist. We all know that. We know that inherently.
3. Therefore objective values exist and some things are fundamentally bad.
4. Therefore God exists!

The atheist describes events like the holocaust as being evil.

But the only reason we know good and evil is because there's a God who sets the standards.

The question isn't, why is there evil. The question is, why is there good?

Why do we love our children, appreciate art and music, why do we get angry at injustice inflicted on innocent victims? Why are we horrified at the slaughter of little Amish schoolgirls? Where does all that come from?

When we ask questions like "Why do bad things happen to good people?" we're presupposing that there's a standard of good and bad.

The atheist doesn't have an answer to the issue of evil and suffering in our world so his questions are really meaningless. He has no answer and he can't give hope.

If there is no God who sets value on life by creating it in His image than who's to say that Cho Seung-Hui was wrong in what he did?

We know instinctively that he was wrong because we're not just chance products of impersonal forces. We're made in the image of God and each life has value.

Christianity explains our moral outrage and our desire for justice.

Last weeks' edition of Newsweek featured a debate on the existence of God between Rick Warren and Sam Harris.

Rick Warren is Senior Pastor of Saddleback Church, one of the largest churches in the country. Sam Harris is an outspoken atheist and author of the New York Times bestsellers, *The End of Faith* and *Letter to a Christian Nation*.

Harris had written in one of his books, "Without death, the influence of faith-based-religion would be unthinkable." In response Warren said this: "Because we were made in God's image, we were going to last forever. That means I'm going to spend a lot more time on that side of eternity than this side. If I did not believe that there is a judgment, if I believed that Hitler would actually get away with everything he did, that would be a reason for great despair."

"The fact is, I do believe there will be a judgment day. God is not just a God of love. He is a God of justice."

- I. Every Human Tragedy Has Its Root In Humanity's Fall*
- II. The Very Existence Of Evil Proves The Existence Of God*
- III. God Is Alive And Well And At Work In Our World*

So where was God when the Virginia Tech shootings took place? That's a legitimate question?

It's one I've been asked before. Where was God on 911? Where was God while my child lay dieing?

The Biblical answer is clear. **Turn with me to Psalm 139 pg 554**

**Read vs 7-10**

*"Do not I fill heaven and earth?" says the Lord. Jeremiah 23:24*

Proverbs 15:3 *The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Keeping watch on the evil and the good.*

God is here. He's what the theologians call "omnipresent," which means everywhere at once.

That means that God didn't abandon the campus of Virginia Tech on April 16 between 7:00 and 10:00 AM.

He was there. So why didn't he stop this guy?

Let's go back to the very beginning of all things to try to answer that question.

The Bible says there's a loving, all powerful God. If that's true, just what were God's options before He created everything?

1. Create nothing
2. Create only automatons, no free choice
3. Create free will to choose right or wrong, to love or not to love

Love can't be coerced to be true love. There is no love possible in options 1 & 2. It's only possible in #3 because love requires loving enough to give the freedom to reject the love.

How do we know which creation option is best?

The first 1 annihilates us. We know we exist, so God created something. Along with that, we have freedom to choose so He didn't go with option 2.

God created us with an ability to choose. We can use our hand to feed a homeless person or we can use our hand to fire a weapon. That's our choice.

God in His sovereignty allows people to make choices whether they're right or wrong. Remember, true love demands the ability to choose.

None of us would want to live without that freedom to make choices but when somebody else exercises their freedom of choice in a destructive way, then suddenly it's God's fault. We want to blame God.

I don't know the specifics of all the reasons for the shootings. We can psychoanalyze the shooter. We can watch his video and read his rantings. That's going to go on in the media and in the law enforcement community.

I can't answer the why's and I don't know that anybody else will be able to with any certainty.

But I do know where God was. He was right where He was on 911 and Columbine and the Amish schoolhouse shootings. He was right where He was when His innocent, perfect, pure, holy, beloved Son was taken by wicked hands and crucified.

That's what I know with certainty.

I know that *God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* Romans 5:8.

I know that God didn't stay separate from our pain. This is very personal with Him.

He created us and has every right to annihilate every one of us. Instead He came into our world of sin and hurt. He stepped into it as Jesus Christ.

He allowed His created ones to nail Him to a wooden cross and savagely murder Him. He did all of that in order to bear our sins. He did all of that to bring about our forgiveness.

### **Turn to II Corinthians 5 pg 1028**

To me this is the most astounding verse in the Bible. Talk about having some "why" questions?

### **Read vs 21**

Think about it. If He died because the wages of sin is death, if He became sin for us at the cross, then at the cross He experienced the awfulness of every sin that's ever been committed including last Monday's murders.

Can I explain why He didn't stop the carnage? No. Do I know that He put Himself into the depth of our heartache and grief? Absolutely.

If our God would do that then He can be trusted.

If our God would suffer for the very things which perplex us and bring us such agony we can have confidence in Him even if we can't grab a hold of all the whys and wherefores.

Why doesn't God just erase all the pain now since he suffers with compassion for His creation?

The truth is simply that we don't know just what God is up to. We can hazard some guesses. C. S. Lewis wrote that suffering is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world.

But let's say we can't give an answer to the question, Why is evil allowed?

We need to remember that naturalism and secularism don't have an answer either.

What, then? Where does that leave us?

It leaves us with this fact; Christianity alone offers hope. Even in the worst of situations, the person who has received the grace of God in salvation has the hope of a future in which death has no place.

This isn't hope as in cross-your-fingers hope, like, I sure hope the game doesn't get rained out this weekend.

In the New Testament, hope is presented as the assurance of the future. It's a noun, not a verb. We don't hope, we have a hope. We have the hope of that life which has no room for death by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

*The Bible says, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you. 1 Peter 1:3-4*

Jesus Christ proved that He had broken the hold of death through His own death on the cross by breaking free from the tomb and appearing alive to hundreds of people. Because He rose and conquered death, we who trust in Him will too.

Hope is a fundamental ingredient of Christianity. Faith enables us to say "yes" today to what we know we should do. Hope enables us to say "yes" to the future, because it rests in the hands of the God Who loves us.

One of the great "hope" verses in Scripture is in Romans 15:13. It says, *Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

This is God's desire for us, to live in the sure hope that our future is secure in Him.

I've traveled many miles by air since 911. Every time I get on a flight I think about those

passengers who boarded those planes on September 11.

I think about the fact that they had no idea that that would be their last day alive. They were planning for life. They were going on vacation, traveling to business meetings, heading off to see family.

They were planning for life, but that day brought death instead.

Last October, 5 Amish school girls were planning for life. Charles Carl Roberts took their lives instead.

That's the way it was for 32 individuals on the campus of Virginia Tech last Monday. They were planning for life. Most of them were in their teens or 20's. They were bright. They were full of life. They were moving toward a goal.

They were carrying out their plan for life and in an instant their life was cut short.

If there's a overriding message in all of these tragedies it's that none of us have any guarantees. None of the people on the planes, none of the school girls, none of the students and professors at Virginia tech could have imagined in their wildest dreams that they'd die the way they did.

They were thinking life. My prayer is that they were prepared for death.

How about you today? Are you prepared for the day when you'll step from this life into eternity?

The Bible says there's a heaven. The Bible says there's a hell. And the Bible says that Jesus is the only way of salvation.

Jesus said something which no one else could ever say. He said, *I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.*

And then He asked the most important question that any of us will ever answer. *Do you believe this?*

**VIDEO: Proof Igniter Media Group**