

The Death of a Terrorist:

A Biblical View

Website Version

Genesis 9: 1-6

Dr. Richard J. Alberta

Cornerstone Evangelical Presbyterian Church

Sunday May 15, 2011

Text: Genesis 9:1-6 (NIV) ¹ Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. ² The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands. ³ Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. ⁴ "But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. ⁵ And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. ⁶ "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man. ⁷ As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it."

Here we see one of the great moments in Biblical history. One of those times when God did what He rarely does. He spoke audibly to His servant, in this case Noah, and He gave him a direct and clear rule. This rule should not be misunderstood as a prophecy or a prediction. It is not as if God is saying "When a man kills another man...sooner or later someone will kill him!" Rather, God is giving Noah a moral rule. God says to Noah:

⁶ "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man."

Again, this statement is given in the form of a command and it is directly connected to a Divine explanation. God is laying down a rule to be followed that is entirely....and ironically...*pro-life*. God *is* pro-life! And it is because man is made in the image of God that murder of the image-bearer means the murderer must be put to death. Innocent life must be protected! Today we consider the recent death of the world's most wanted terrorist, a man who was responsible for the deaths of thousands of innocent people. But first, let us pray.

By now, nearly everyone has heard the speech given by President Obama on Sunday night May first. He told the nation and the world that U.S. Navy Seals had located Osama bin Laden and killed him at his hideout in Pakistan. The account has been hard to follow but we do know that the man was quickly shot to death and his body removed and buried at sea. Much of the debate that followed is not our concern except that which touches on the issue for us as Christians. Within minutes

of the announcement, the internet and the worldwide media were swamped with opinions on this event, many of them religious in nature.

I heard a Catholic Priest say we had no right to execute anyone especially a man who was not even armed. I heard a Jewish Rabbi say that justice was done however it happened but that celebrations were not in order. I read the comments of Christians who said we are supposed to be merciful and not return wrong for wrong. I read other Christians who said he should have been captured and tried and then executed. I heard others say the very idea of washing his body and giving him an Islamic burial was vulgar and ridiculous. I saw Christians on the internet actually firing opinions off at each as if they were ready to fight over the matter. I saw television commentator Hiraldo Rivera doing high-fives on Fox News and grinning from ear to ear. I heard New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani say “Who cares what happened? Osama bin Laden is in Hell and that’s all that matters.” Interesting. Hardly anyone has a mild opinion on bin Laden’s death. So...let’s look at this event by asking a series of questions. Some of my responses will be necessarily opinion-based because these things are debatable. Sincere and bright Christians can disagree at times as to how to apply the Word of God. But hopefully all of what I say will be rooted in Scripture.

FIRST: IN EFFECT, OSAMA BIN LADEN WAS BASICALLY EXECUTED BY THE NAVY SEALS. WAS THAT WRONG OR SINFUL?

The question suggests that the Navy Seals should have put their lives or the lives of other people in a position of unnecessary risk. Common sense tells us that they were not about to negotiate with a man who has taught others how to be suicide bombers. We all know that they went there to find him and put him to death. Was he guilty? Of course! Did he deserve some kind of “due process?” In other words, did he deserve some kind of mercy? This man who showed no mercy to thousands of innocents? The question answers itself.

Bin laden admitted with glee that he had brought about the death of three thousand Americans on September 11, 2001. He bragged about thousands of other people he had killed over the years. Many of them were Muslims. He killed Jews and he killed Christians and he killed women and children and, as in the case of 9-11 in America, he often killed non-combatants. Bin Laden had no regard for any human life that he did not consider worthy or valuable. He was as guilty as the Devil himself when it came to the sin of murder.

One day, the Lord Jesus Christ said to some who opposed him:

John 8:44 (NIV) ⁴⁴ “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

Osama bin Laden was a liar and a murderer. He loved the sight of his enemies dying. And like all liars and murderers, somewhere in his darkened mind he actually thought he was doing the right thing. After the attacks of 9-11 he said:

“America has been hit by Allah at its most vulnerable point, destroying, thank God, its most prestigious buildings.”

Interesting...America is a long way from perfect but killing innocent non-combatants has always been considered evil and something that should only happen as unintentional killing in warfare. But bin Laden took his comments further. He was doing it for “Allah!” His words remind me of Jesus saying to his followers that a day would come when:

John 16:2 (NIV) ² “They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God.”

Osama bin Laden proved once again that some of the craziest people on Earth are very religious. But the point is that he was guilty and totally darkened. He actually bragged that he had destroyed “prestigious buildings!” That quote shows that he was totally depraved because in his mind it was buildings that had been destroyed. Not innocent people on their way to work or to visit family or whatever. The dead human beings were incidental to Osama bin Laden.

He only valued his own life. So, like all liars and murderers, he was obsessed with hiding. Remember Sadaam Hussein being pulled out of the ground like a wounded rat? Bin Laden was caught in a dingy room from which he may not have even strayed for years...hiding out watching films of himself. His guilt was beyond question and he knew it! His death was well-deserved.

But some said not even he should have been put to death. Some take a pacifist position that would even disband armies and presumably police forces. Such people live in an imaginary world. Anyone who says force or violence should never be used to combat evil is hopelessly unrealistic. And, I have noticed, they drop that position when a prowler shows up at 3 am and they quickly call the State Police! But such well-meaning folks may even say it was wrong to kill bin Laden. Leading to our next question:

SECOND: DOES THE BIBLE FORBID ALL KILLING? Certainly not. The Sixth Commandment says this:

Exodus 20:13 (NIV) ¹³ “You shall not murder.”

Those who say the Bible forbids any type of killing are simply wrong. This command does not say “You shall not kill.” The word translated here as “murder” is the Hebrew word “rot-sach” and it is used to describe taking innocent life. The word for killing is “hah-rahhg” and can refer to murder but usually means killing

as in slaying animal or even a sacrifice. But God never forbade Israel from putting to death those who deserve it for committing murder. It is simply not true that the Bible forbids capital punishment. Leading us to our next point...

THIRD: DOES THE BIBLE ACTUALLY COMMAND CAPITAL PUNISHMENT FOR MURDERERS?

It clearly does and God even told Moses *why* he was commanding it. Again, we see God saying that we who are made in the image of God must so value human life that we are commanded to punish any who devalue it! Look again at the verse please:

6 “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.”

God is actually holding man responsible for exercising justice against those who violate His command. Why? Because murdering the image-bearer of God is the ultimate act of contempt against God himself! The fact is that God is offended not only for the innocent life lost but for His own Glory! Consider this: God identifies Himself with each human being made in His image. Remember when Jesus said in **Matthew 25:40 (NIV)**:

“I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”

Jesus is saying how we treat our brothers and sisters amounts to how we treat him! In the same way, God is saying that when a murderer thinks so little of an innocent human being as to kill him or her, that murderer is somehow willing to murder God in his heart! God takes murder personally and commands that it be made right! Put it another way. If a bad man harms your child it is wicked...and it also says a lot about what he thinks of you! Thus, God calls for capital punishment.

Now we should note that there are many problems with capital punishment. True. We've all heard of how innocent people have been executed. That is a discussion that lawmakers need to have. Capital punishment should never be applied if there is any doubt about guilt. And we should respect people who say just don't do it because it is too risky. But in the case of a man like bin Laden or Sadaam Hussein, their guilt was clearly established and they got what they deserved. In my view, the Navy Seals were serving God the moment they put bin Laden to death.

FOURTH: WHAT ABOUT BEING PRO-LIFE? We sometimes hear this argument. It goes like this: If you are truly pro-life and oppose abortion, you must also oppose capital punishment to be consistent. I find that argument puzzling. That thinking is very badly confused and muddled. We need to think of it this way: the issue is not being “pro-life” only. God requires that we be Pro-Justice! If we are to protect and defend innocent life, it is perfectly consistent to be against abortion and for capital punishment. It is a pro-justice position to protect innocent life and end the murderer's life. The irony is that so many on the left in America

and the religious liberals in our country are fine with abortion and against capital punishment. They've got it absolutely backwards! They would put the innocent to death and protect the guilty!

God is pro-life and because He is pro-life He insists that murderers be put to death and the innocent be protected. With that in mind, it was a great decision by President Obama to send in the Seals to rid the world of bin Laden. Who knows how many innocent lives will be saved because of his death? We've already read about plans he was developing to kill many innocents to celebrate the anniversary of 9-11. No, the most pro-life thing you can do if a rattlesnake is living under your deck is to find it and kill it. And bin Laden was a moral rattlesnake who needed to be put to death because God is pro-life!

But still...we are not totally at ease with even these truths. As Christians, we process our thoughts thru the lenses of the Word of God and it shows us the Lord Jesus Christ saying this:

Matthew 5:38-39 (NIV) ³⁸ “You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' ³⁹ But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”

So...

FIFTH: SHOULD WE HAVE TURNED THE OTHER CHEEK?

I suggest that these words of the Lord Jesus have absolutely nothing to do with the capture and killing of a murderous terrorist. This command and all of the Sermon on the Mount was given to Christians as instructions for their personal life. Such a teaching had nothing to do with government or public policy. Jesus is not speaking to the state here but rather to us... a regenerated people. True Christianity is an upside down and demanding life choice that calls us as individuals to become more and more like Christ. So, if my friend turns on me and harms me, I do not have any license to hate him or harm him back. In fact, I am to love him as far as I am able and forgive him. But if I am an agent of the state, I have a civil responsibility to carry out the law.

A Christian policeman might not choose to bring charges against a neighbor who stole from him. But if that neighbor stole from someone else and he was on duty, he would indeed bring charges as an agent of the state. The Bible tells us in Romans Chapter Twelve that the authorities were and are created by God and that they have the power of the sword! We read:

Romans 13:1-4 (NIV) ¹ Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. ² Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on

themselves. ³ For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. ⁴ For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.

We must never confuse our personal calling to turn the other cheek with the society's responsibility to enforce the law and protect the innocent. In other words, if a man wants to harm me I might not fight back unless I was protecting my life. But if he wants to harm my wife or child, I might kill him. Because of bin Laden's sins, it would have been sinful to turn the other cheek. The Navy Seals did exactly what God required!

Having said all of those things, permit me to share my heart on another related matter. When I heard the news of bin Laden's death, I was surprised. I suppose I had thought that they had stopped looking for him or that he might be dead already. But he was not and they found him and they killed him. I felt...satisfied. He deserved it and now he could not harm anyone else. But...here is a question:

SIXTH: WERE ALL OF THE CELEBRATIONS APPROPRIATE? AS CHRISTIANS, SHOULD WE HAVE JOINED IN DOING HIGH FIVES AND RUNNING ABOUT IN FLAGS AND LAUGHING AND CHANTING?

I understand. For many people it was a moment of catharsis...a personal venting! Perhaps a celebration of justice long overdue. But nonetheless, I was disappointed as a Christian. I mean....remember those bracelets that everyone liked about five years ago...that said "WWJD?" "What would Jesus do?" That came to mind. Somehow....I can't see the Lord Jesus Christ cheering and hugging and shouting on TV or at Ground Zero. I'm not condemning anyone who celebrated and I'm not saying they were wrong. I simply did not feel like having a party but rather just giving a sigh of relief.

Why? Jesus showed us that the proper attitude for the Christian is an ongoing attitude...of grief. Jesus showed us that as his people who would have the Holy Spirit within them, we are to be those who mourn! Remember he said:

Matthew 5:4-6 (NIV) ⁴ "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵ Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

That event...even the word picture of Navy Seals breaking in upon the man should provoke grief in us that we live in a world so far removed from Godliness...that such things have to happen. The man was killed but who goes to the prison and has a party when a murderer gets the electric chair? Strange people who do not get it that God is grieved and that the need to kill Osama bin laden reminds us all the more that our world is desperate for Christ and his return!

I was really stunned that so many people acted like they just won the Super Bowl! Even Osama bin Laden began life as a child loved by his mother and while we do not feel sorry for him...we feel sorry for the world! And in God's eyes....even Osama bin Laden was a candidate for forgiveness and Heaven and maybe...just maybe...God gave the man ten years to repent and come to Christ. There is no indication that he did so and yes...if he did not come to Christ...he is now suffering as only those suffer who slip away from their earthly bodies...and are suddenly terrified to see the Divine Judge of the universe staring down at them.

I prayed about that part of the event...the celebrations. For the most part, it seemed a younger crowd that visibly celebrated. Some older folks too but many young people. I listened closely to what some of them said and what they wrote and I discovered something troubling. My sense was that most of them were celebrating because bin Laden “didn’t get away with it!” Their relief was that he got what he deserved and did not outlive justice. But that's interesting because many of those who celebrated seem to not believe...in Divine justice. It never occurred to me that bin Laden would not get justice because I know God and His coming Day of Judgment and that no one actually ever gets away with anything. Thus, as a Christian, I was pleased that bin Laden could not harm anyone else ever...not that he didn’t get away with it.

The death of an evil man should not give us joy and pleasure but relief. Even God makes that point thru the Prophet Ezekiel when He spoke to Israel:

Ezekiel 33:11 (NIV) ¹¹ Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?'

This may offend some of you but it is on my heart. When I saw the laughing and celebrating, all I could picture were those sickening scenes when many in Muslim lands were celebrating in the streets when the Twin Towers came tumbling down on 9-11. How grotesque and wicked to treat the death of innocents as a game. Some will say “Yes but bin Laden was evil so we celebrated.” But that was my point. This event gave us a chance to show the world the difference between a culture steeped in the Judaeo-Christian tradition of seeing life as sacred and the radical Muslim tradition of seeing life as expendable. I could not help but think that American celebrations did nothing to exalt the Christ that many of us follow. I think the world should have seen us with relief and grief at what sin has done to God’s creation. Just my thoughts.

Well...we have not even touched on the question of Hell. Former Mayor Giuliani said bin Laden is in Hell so that’s it. The Bible teaches Hell. I believe in Hell. Although some modern Christians are trying to argue it does not exist. But if he is in Hell, now what? Has he been judged? What does the Bible say about Hell? And is he in the same Hell as say...my Uncle Harry who was a terrific and nice guy who never hurt anyone...but who died an atheist who denied Christ? Would God send Uncle Harry to the same Hell as a mass murderer or a terrorist? You know

the questions. Is Hell even just? Would a merciful God really consign human beings to endless conscious torment?

There are many views on these things and we need to address them...but we're out of time. Next week... "What Does the Bible Really Teach About Hell?" Let us pray.