

Thoughts on the Assassination Attempt

My intent today was to continue our Summer Sermon Series, and on the agenda was a message about divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Then an event happened almost two weeks ago that, to my mind, is a perfect example in which the sovereignty of God and human responsibility came together. We think of such things theoretically until an event happens that shows the reality of these issues.

I'm referring, of course, to the attempted assassination of Donald Trump. That was an event in which both divine sovereignty/providence and human responsibility play major roles. That event gives us an opportunity to consider several principles regarding divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

By now, most of us have had time to absorb and think about the shocking news of that assassination attempt. Whatever our feelings about Mr. Trump himself or his political views, we all should agree that violence is not the solution to our political arguments. I was happy to hear that Mr. Trump suffered only minimal injury and was back on his feet quickly. Sadly, others were injured and one man killed in the same incident.

The assassination attempt brings up a few issues that thoughtful Christians ought to consider. The assassination attempt reminds us that...

I. God is sovereign over the affairs of mankind.

Ephesians 1:11 ...*[God] works all things according to the counsel of His will,*

- A. Our entire Summer Sermon Series has been emphasizing this very point. We've talked about God's sovereignty over people, nations, and nature. God is sovereign even over assassination attempts.
- B. When people discuss the fact that this attempt came within an inch of taking Trump's life, they often speak in terms of luck or chance. Even Trump said that he was very lucky. So was it luck, chance, or fate that Trump survived? Was it just bad luck that a man in the audience died?
- C. For the last several weeks, we've been talking about the sovereignty of God over the affairs of mankind.

1. The Bible teaches that events in this world are not merely random, chance incidents. God made the world and rules over it. God is sovereign. God is ruling all things through his providence.
Daniel 4:35 ... [God] does according to His will in the army of heaven And among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand Or say to Him, "What have You done?"
 2. God is providentially overseeing all things for his own purposes, including the evil actions of wicked people.
- D. In the providence of God, the criminal who attempted to murder Mr. Trump failed. His nefarious plan nearly succeeded; another inch or two would have meant certain death for Mr. Trump. But instead of death, Trump suffered only a fairly mild wound.
1. God's providence turned out differently for the man who was killed by the assassin's bullet, Mr. Comperatore. Reports about the man reveal him to have been an outstanding citizen and beloved family man, a hero. His death is a true tragedy, and we mourn his loss.
 2. In the providence of God, the shooter was killed. What he attempted to do to someone else was done to him.
- E. Were these things outside the providence of God? If God's providence spared Trump, could he not have done the same Mr. Comperatore?
1. If we believe that God is in control of such things, then we have to admit that God could have prevented the man's death, but did not. God may allow wicked people to do evil things. God allows the tragic results of evil actions.
 2. We believe that both life and death are in God's hands. As the book of Job tells us, the Lord gives and the Lord takes away. We must recognize God's prerogatives in both life and death.
 3. We recognize that even death has a purpose in the wider plan of God. We will live precisely as long as God intends for us to live, and not a day more or less. It's all within the providence of God.

Some of us will live to a ripe old age and die peacefully. Some of us will die tragically and suddenly. It's all in God's hands.

- F. We trust that God is working all things for his own glory and for the good of his people, through life and through death. It should give us hope and comfort to know that God is not surprised by anything that happens.

Trans: When major events like an assassination attempt happen, we should realize that God is sovereign over the affairs of mankind and that God is working his providential plan in our world today.

- II. People are responsible and accountable for their own actions.

Mt 26:24 The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.

In this passage, Jesus is talking about Judas, and he's a good example of both the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. Judas betrayed Jesus because he wanted to and because he fulfilled prophecy—"as it is written of him." And God will hold him accountable for what he did. Judas faces strict judgment for what he did, even though it was part of God's sovereign plan for him to do it.

- A. Likewise, regarding the assassination attempt, we could say that what the shooter did was within the providential will of God. But woe to the shooter! He faces strict judgment for his actions.
- B. The shooter is entirely responsible for what he did. He may have had mental problems or experienced terrible abuse, but he's still responsible for his actions. He has no excuses for what he did.
- C. Those who were responsible to protect the president also are dealing with the fallout of their failure. Someone failed to prevent this from happening. As usual, those in high positions of leadership are mostly responsible for this failure. The people on the scene were doing what their leaders told them to do. They were following the policies and procedures given to them by the higher government officials.

- D. The head of the Secret Service has resigned. She faced huge criticism and much pressure to step down, and she finally did, because many people saw this failure as her responsibility. I would guess that others were more directly responsible for this failure.
- E. Even the shooter will not escape accountability for his acts. He was not arrested and he will not have to give an account of himself in a court of law. He was killed and thus prevented from dealing with the legal system.

But he will give an account for himself in God's courtroom. If the man was an unbeliever, he went straight to a place of judgment. He faces an eternity of torment as an unforgiven unbeliever, a murderer. For the rest of eternity, he will pay for what he did.

Trans: The principle of human responsibility comes into the foreground when things like this happen. Almost everyone recognizes that people are responsible for what they do or fail to do. We want to find out who is responsible and hold them accountable for their failures.

Christians affirm both divine sovereignty and human moral responsibility. God providentially oversees human events, and we also hold people accountable for what they do.

III. The human heart is utterly depraved.

Rom 3:10f

This shooting highlights two main ideas:

- A. The utter depravity of the human heart
 - 1. Christians believe that the human heart is deeply sinful. The very center of our intellect, emotions, and will is utterly corrupt, twisted, and evil. The assassination attempt was an evil act proceeding from an evil heart. Premeditated murder is inherently, objectively wrong/wicked/evil/depraved. Any sane person would agree that this kind of political violence is wicked.

2. The prophet Jeremiah tells us that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” No doubt, former President Trump is a very divisive and disruptive character, and many people truly hate him; but who would stoop to the level of murder? Attempted murder reveals the depths of human depravity.
3. If there is one lesson that the Bible teaches most emphatically, it is that the human heart is utterly sinful. Wicked people do evil things because they are, at the very core of their being, desperately wicked.

And that truth leads us to another critical principle:

B. The reality of objective moral standards

1. Almost anyone can see that attempting to murder someone is evil and, on the other hand, protecting someone from harm is good. The assassination attempt shows the stark contrast between good and evil. The shooter was doing evil and the SS agents were doing good.
2. Where do we get these categories—good and evil? Why do most humans believe that murder is evil and protecting others is good? We have that inner sense because we are all made in the image of God and have the law of God written on our hearts. We know the difference between good and evil because God created us in his image and with a conscience.
3. What’s amazing and very concerning is that some people expressed their disappointment that the shooter missed. In other words, they wish that Trump had died. They think the world would be a better place if the attempted murder had succeeded. They are in favor of political violence if it benefits them.

Of course, the media have portrayed Trump as equivalent to Adolf Hitler, and they’ve claimed that the man is an existential threat to democracy, so it’s no wonder that many people want him dead.

No matter how much we disagree with a politician, we should not hate him or wish him to be killed. Jesus teaches us to love our enemies and pray for those we disagree with.

4. What we think about good and evil is a reflection about what we think about God and about ourselves. If there is no God, then all actions are permissible, even murder. But if the true and living God of the Bible exists, then every creature made in God's image knows the difference between good and evil. God holds us accountable for doing good and for avoiding evil.
5. If naturalistic evolution is true, then human life has no particular value. In fact, good and evil do not really exist. Absolute moral standards are not real, so it would be impossible to say that killing an innocent person is evil. But if God exists, then moral categories are true. It's wrong to murder anyone. It's good to protect others from harm. We can say that because God says that. God prohibits murder and promotes brotherly love and compassion toward others, even toward others we disagree with.
6. Almost everything we think about such issues boils down to theology. What we think about God dictates our understanding of the world and everything in it. Our view of God dictates our views of morality. What we think about God influences what we think about everything else.

Trans: So the attempted assassination gives us an opportunity to reflect on our moral commitments. No matter what we think about Trump, we can affirm moral standards of good and evil. Morality matters, and it's ridiculous to deny it.

It's very sad to see the moral standards of our nation falling lower and lower all the time. It's sad to see people wishing the shooter had hit his target. But that's the kind of world we live in, and hatred is a reflection of the unregenerate human heart. We should never stoop to that level.

IV. Prepare for the reality of death.

Human life is exceedingly fragile. Mere inches separate life from death. Trump very narrowly escaped assassination. Likewise, we face all kinds of things that could easily take our lives. If an accident or disease does not take our lives, old age eventually will. We are mortal; the mortality rate is 100%.

A. Mr. Trump's life or death depended on a slight movement of his head. Had he not shifted his head like he did when he did, he would certainly have died. This event is a vivid illustration of the fragility of human life and the nearness of death.

B. Jesus used a similar example to highlight how vulnerable we are to sudden death.

Luke 13:1–5 [Someone told Jesus] about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2 And Jesus answered and said to them, “Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? 3 I tell you, no; 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 sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”

C. Do you suppose that Corey Comparatore was a worse sinner than Donald Trump? Almost certainly not. The question is not, “Who was the worse sinner.” The question is, “What will happen to you if you die?”

D. Mr. Comparatore had no clue that his life would end that day. I hope he was ready.

E. When we hear of people dying suddenly or unexpectedly, our response should be repentance. That is, we should make sure that we are ready if death should overtake us unexpectedly.

F. I don't know if you've come close to death before, but a near-death experience tends to focus one's mind on what could have been. When others die unexpectedly, it serves as a warning about what could happen to us. Anyone of us could die unexpectedly and suddenly; some of us will. Death comes slowly for some, quickly for others.

- G. The key question in facing the inevitability of death is, are you prepared? If you were to die today, would you go to heaven?
- H. The only way to secure a reservation in heaven is to repent of your sins the trust in Jesus for forgiveness and eternal life.
- It's highly unlikely that an assassin will take our lives, but something will, so be prepared. It will probably happen many years from now, but it could happen later today.
- I. The correct response to sudden death or to a near-death experience is to repent. I hope that Mr. Trump has thought about his eternal destiny in light of his near-death experience. I hope he has repented of his sins.
- Make sure you are ready for eternity. The only way to do that is to repent of sin and to trust in Jesus.

The national events that we've observed over the last couple of weeks give us many profound ideas to think about—the sovereignty of God, the responsibility of man, human depravity, moral absolutes, and the inevitability of death. The Christian worldview helps us understand these profound ideas and to respond to them appropriately.

One of the most important lesson to learn from the last few weeks in the life of our nation is that we need to pray. We should pray that God would preserve our nation from the evil intentions of wicked people. We should pray for the upcoming election, that good and decent people would be voted into office. We should pray that our leaders would make good and godly decisions. We should pray that we would be able to live a quiet and peaceful life.

But for the grace of God, Mr. Trump might be dead right now. He missed death by about an inch. Maybe next time, the shooter won't miss. Or maybe it will be a heart attack or stroke that takes his life. Whatever the cause of death, we know that it's going to overtake him eventually. Death will overtake us all eventually. And the most important thing is that we are ready when that happens. The only hope we have for eternal life after death is Jesus Christ. If your faith is in him, you'll be ready when your time comes.