

MH 17



The stories we hear, the pictures we see, the testimonies we listen to are all so gut-wrenching: a civilian aircraft, traveling a recognized route, shot down with all aboard dead. It seems everybody knows a friend who had an acquaintance on board.... What would the Lord have us think of this event??

Hideously evil

This is a horrendous, inexcusable slaughter of innocent people. Folk for their own reasons travelling from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur had no part in the conflict in Ukraine. Equally, fighters in the Ukraine had nothing to do with the passengers on MH 17. But for reasons of their own they shot this civilian plane out of the sky as it flew 33,000 feet above them. Today's technology being what it is, it's simply beyond belief that the rebels did not know that their target was a foreign passenger plane totally disconnected to events on the ground. To shoot it down is hideously evil. This is a horrible and senseless "work of the flesh" (Galatians 5:19-21).

It could have been me

The passengers on this plane were our kind of people: true flesh and blood, caving in to temptations, sinners. The world's Creator had declared that those who sin shall receive temporal and eternal death. I envision the passengers on that plane being comfortably settled into their flight – with nary a thought that their last breath was imminent. But it was. With no warning they were struck so that in brief moments they all appeared before the judgment seat of Him whom they had offended through their sins. Those who took seriously the Way of escape God had earlier revealed –embracing as true the sacrifice of Jesus Christ– received forgiveness of their sins and so were not subjected to eternal death. They experienced in fullest measure the grace of God so that the missile was God's tool-of-choice to bring these children of His to glory. Those who rejected the Way to life received the just sentence their sins deserved; they experienced in fullest measure the wrath of God. It drives home to us that we "know neither the day nor the hour" (Matthew 25:13) when we shall appear before the same judgment seat. How we've responded to this evil slaughter will form part of what we shall need to give account about.

From outrage to love

The international community, especially in those countries from which a number of the passengers hailed, responded to the shooting and the subsequent ill-mannered treatment of the deceased with outrage. I share the outrage. There's even a little something in me that would love to walk into the Ukraine with guns blazing and teach those rebels a good lesson (and maybe the powerbrokers in Moscow too). Before God, however, it will not do to let anger or desires for revenge take root in our hearts. The Lord has not responded to my

transgressions with anger or bitterness, but has instead given up His only Son Jesus to atone for my evil. If the Lord showed His love while we were still enemies (Romans 5:6-10), it surely is for us to do the same. In fact, Jesus gave precisely that command: “Love your enemies..., pray for those who abuse you” (Luke 6:27,28). The root problem amongst the rebels in the Ukraine is that they do not know the love of God in Jesus Christ. They need the gospel as desperately as we need it ourselves – though they don’t know it. So the question becomes whether we are in any way in a position to help bring the gospel of redemption to these people.

I have more neighbors

In my little corner of the world I was far removed from the conflict that has of late embroiled the people of Eastern Ukraine. Other than following the news, I saw no reason to involve myself in that conflict simply because it’s geographically, culturally and historically so endlessly far removed from my life. Suddenly that conflict touched me – for I knew people they murdered. This world in truth is a global village. But that means in turn that my neighbors are at bottom not only those of my own town or province or country; if people in the Ukraine can touch me, I have to admit that somehow they’re my neighbors. Then I cannot continue to live in blissful isolation from them, minding my own business; if I’m to love my neighbor as myself (Matthew 22:39), I need to extend myself beyond my provincial village in order to express genuine care for the neighbors of my global village.

Opportunity for testimony

I don’t rightly know how to do it. But I know it begins with an attitude. I, my friends, my local community are not alone on this planet, but I share it with countless others – all of whom live under the same curse as I do (Genesis 3:16-19). I also know that the Lord God has given me life through Jesus Christ, so that (with all I have) I belong to my Lord and Savior. In fact, in His wisdom the Lord has blessed me materially far beyond what He’s given to countless other people in His world. My wealth and my education and my freedoms are not mine, but are opportunities the Lord has given to me for the benefit of others. Instead, then, of being selfish about my opportunities, I (and we collectively) need to consider how we can assist the neighbors the Lord has so dramatically thrust onto our path. If they can touch us, surely we can touch them! We’ll need to activate our collective imagination to consider how best to do that.

At a minimum this event provides fodder for talking with the locals in our lives, simply because the topic is on everyone’s mind. And the talk needs to include what the root problem is behind all evil in this world, and what the Lord God has done for undeserving sinners in Jesus Christ. As Peter put it: “always be[...] prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15).

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