Not Belonging To This World [1]

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On 15 March, a gunman shot and killed 50 people (and injured numerous others) at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand.

In the following days, I listened to Muslim friends and acquaintances talk about the shooting with shock, hurt, and anger. And why should they not have been? Not only is a mosque supposed to be a place of safety, sanctuary and sanctity, but many of the victims were foreigners who found community and camaraderie at mosque. They were gathered for prayer, and had not harmed other people. This was a brutal and inhumane act which deserved to be condemned, and for people to rally together in the hope of future peace.

I listened to my Muslim friends and colleagues in silence. I was sad. Sad, because of the calculated hatred which drives people to mass shootings. Sad, because there were now brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, children, friends who mourn their loved ones, and need to grapple with the pain and uncertainty that comes with that. Sad, because there are people who will carry lifelong trauma, who will never be able to hear fireworks go off again without being reminded of that terrible day. Sad, because the safety and security of a peaceful community and country had been brutally violated. Sad, because words of condolences could not take any of these away.

Sad, because Easter was coming.

In 2016, 75 Christians were killed over Easter in a bomb blast in Lahore, Pakistan [2]. In 2017, bombers killed 45 Coptic Christians in Egypt [3] who were celebrating Palm Sunday (which is a celebration leading up to Easter). A month later, 28 people were killed in a shooting on a bus [4] carrying Coptic Christians. At the end of that year, nine people were killed in an attach on Coptic Christians [5] in a church shooting. Attacks on Christians in their places of worship are not uncommon, particularly over big festivals, and particularly in countries where Christianity has not historically been the dominant religion. All we could do was pray, and wait and see.

On this past Easter Sunday, "at least" 290 people were killed in coordinated attacks on Christians across Sri Lanka [6], while 24 people were injured [7] in halfhearted, but no less intentional, attack in Germany.

A few months ago, an acquaintance (not a Muslim) on social media told me that they don't care about Christian persecution; that it is right that Christianity is the most persecuted religion (because it is the largest religion in the world), and that they *might* start caring about Christians when 1.5 billion of us have been killed (not explicitly stated, but implied).

Do not be discouraged or disheartened by such an attitude. "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first." (John 15:18). Persecution (real or perceived) does not give Christians a licence

for self-pity, hate, or retaliation. Our commission to love and encourage each other remains, as well as to be light to the world, loving and sacrificing for it without receiving anything in return.

> One of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are arrayed in the white robes, who are they, and where did they come from?"
> I told him, "My lord, you know."
> He said to me, "These are those who came out of the great suffering. They washed their robes, and made them white in the Lamb's blood. Therefore they are before the throne of God, they serve him day and night in his temple. He who sits on the throne will spread his tabernacle over them. They will never be hungry or thirsty any more. The sun won't beat on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the middle of the throne shepherds them and leads them to springs of life-giving waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."
>
> Revelation 7:13–17

When the righteous cry out for justice, God answers:

> But don't forget this one thing, beloved, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some count slowness; but he is patient with us, not wishing that anyone should perish, but that all should come to repentance.
>
> 2 Peter 3:8–9

How is it possible to repent after having done such a horrible thing as killing innocent people?

> In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.
>
> 1 John 4:10

Pray for the repentance and deliverance of attackers.

May those who have lost loved ones, Muslim or Christian, be comforted, and may there be healing.

Pray for the repentance and deliverance of attackers, and those who witness within the martyrs a joy which transcends this world, and is nestled in the bosom of God the Father, and His Son Jesus the Messiah, the light of the world. "Well done, good and faithful servants..."

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