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When the Lord Removes His Restraints – Man as Beast and the Increase of Evil Among Us

June 9, 2019

Sermon Text: Assorted

Scripture Reading: Romans 1:18-32

It is not our imagination that evil is increasing in our nation, our communities, and in the world. If you read or listen to the news, you know this is true. Homicide. Infanticide. Child sex trafficking. Hatred of God and of His people. Corruption and wickedness in the visible church. All manner of sexual perversion. And an active and intense hatred of all that is good. The division in our country is not merely political between two political parties with different agendas, it is increasingly a division between good and evil, right and wrong, for the Lord or against Him.

In many of the frequent mass homicides in schools, in workplaces, even in churches, *no clear motive for the murderous rampage can be identified*. It is this point that I would like to suggest Scripture's answer to this morning.

On the night of October 1, 2017, Stephen Paddock opened fire on a crowd of concertgoers at the Route 91 Harvest music festival on the Las Vegas Strip in Nevada. He killed 58 people and wounded 422, and the ensuing panic brought the injury total to 851. Paddock, a 64-year-old man from Mesquite, Nevada, fired more than 1,100 rounds of ammunition from his suite on the 32nd floor of the Mandalay Bay Hotel. The shooting occurred between 10:05 and 10:15 p.m. PDT; about an hour later, Paddock was found dead in his room from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. His motive remains undetermined.^[2]

The incident is the deadliest mass shooting committed by an individual in the history of the United States....

On August 3, 2018, Las Vegas Sheriff Joe Lombardo held a press conference on the release of the "LVMPD Criminal Investigative Report of the 1 October Mass Casualty Shooting". He said the 10-month investigation had revealed no evidence of conspiracy or a second gunman, and that the gunman's motive had not been definitely determined. Lombardo said "What we have been able to answer are the questions of who, what, when, where and how... what we have not been able to definitively answer is why Stephen Paddock committed this act."^[110] A report published by the FBI's Behavioral Analysis Unit in January 2019 said that "there was no single or clear motivating factor" for the shooting.^[111]

What we should be surprised at is not that these terrible evils happened, but that they do not happen even more often than they do. When we consider what the Lord says about the heart of fallen man, we see that apart from the Lord's restraint and apart from the Lord making man in His image, providing him with a conscience, imprinting basics of His truth in man's

mind, fallen man is a beast. A vicious, murderous beast who is capable of the most vile and horrid evils. Let me show you:

Dan 4:28-33 All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. (29) At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, (30) and the king answered and said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?" (31) While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, (32) and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will." (33) Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles' feathers, and his nails were like birds' claws.

See it? When the Lord withdraws what we could call "his image" from a man, that man becomes a beast. Is this not

the very thing we are seeing today around us with an increasing frequency? My dog has far more goodness in her.

And there is more. Jude calls the wicked “unreasoning animals” -

Jud 1:10 But these people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively.

And the same from Peter –

2Pe 2:12-16 But these, **like irrational animals, creatures of instinct**, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction, (13) suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you. (14) They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! (15) Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, (16) but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and

restrained the prophet's madness.

In Balaam’s case, a donkey had more of the image of God than Balaam did. Irrational animals. Creatures of instinct.

And listen once again to Romans 1 -

Rom 1:24-32 **Therefore God gave them up** in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, (25) because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (26) **For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions.** For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; (27) and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. (28) And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, **God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.** (29) They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, (30) slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful,

inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, (31) foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. (32) Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

I suggest to you this morning that what we are seeing around us is this very thing: *God giving up people who refuse to honor Him and give Him thanks to their own evil, wicked hearts. "Giving them over" means that the Lord withdraws His restraints, pulls away the light of His truth from them, and lets the fires of their evil rage.*

1Co 15:30-32 Why are we in danger every hour? (31) I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day! (32) What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

Surely Paul is not referring here to lions in the arena, but the wild beast people he had to face in Ephesus:

Act 19:23-32 About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. (24) For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no

little business to the craftsmen. (25) These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, "Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. (26) And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. (27) And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship." (28) When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" (29) So the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's companions in travel. (30) But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him. (31) And even some of the Asiarchs, who were friends of his, sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theater. (32) Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together.

Beasts you see. Man in his sin, absent the Spirit of God, is a beast and if not

for the restraining influence of God's Spirit on mankind, the beast would be loosed. History is filled with just such events. People ask when learning about the Holocaust for instance, "how could human beings do such things to other human beings?" The answer is, the ones doing it are not even human beings anymore. They are beasts.

Gen 6:11-12 Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. (12) And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.

The Image of God

Man is actually an animal physically. The body of a human being shares all kinds of similarities to the bodies of the higher animals, as the proponents of evolution are quick to point out. We conclude that these similarities are not due to some random process over billions of years, but to the fact that One Creator created them all.

And yet man is not a beast. He is not even the highest of the animals. He is unique – he has self-awareness, he speaks a language, he knows that there is a Creator, he can be blessed or tormented by his conscience, he is aware of what is right and what is wrong because the Lord has put a

fundamental knowledge of His law in man. And man is a religious being. Monkeys do not build shrines and temples. Man does.

Rom 2:15 They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them

What accounts for all of this? The Bible's answer is called the "imago dei." The image of God.

Gen 1:26-27 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." (27) So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Gen 9:5-6 And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. (6) "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.

Apart from this image of God in man, man is a beast – and worse than a beast because of his sin. A grizzly bear or a great white shark will kill you, but not out of a murderous jealous hateful rage. They kill to defend their young or to obtain food – and sometimes human beings are that food! But man as beast, absent the restraint of God’s Spirit, would and has slaughtered millions and millions and millions of men, women, and children in the most horrific ways for no other reason than that of Cain when he killed Abel:

1Jn 3:12 We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.

So, why did Stephen Paddock kill scores and wound hundreds in Las Vegas? There is no apparent, obvious reason to be found, yet he did it. Why? Because Stephen Paddock was a beast, unrestrained by God’s Spirit, doing what he did simply because he wanted to kill. And his kind are on the increase as the Lord withdraws his restraints on a society that has long rejected Him.

We Should be Very Thankful

As we consider all of this, those of us who know the Lord should be moved

to great thankfulness. Sin had made us beasts.

Eph 2:1-3 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins (2) in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— (3) among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

And worse than beasts really. Animals do not hate their creator. Fallen man does. But the Lord in His mercy chose to save us. He chose to make us brand new creations, even in mind and heart and conscience.

Heb 10:19-22 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, (20) by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, (21) and since we have a great priest over the house of God, (22) let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, **with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience** and our bodies washed with pure water.

Before we knew Christ, while we were still slaves to sin and walking in evil,

we loved things that we are now ashamed of:

Rom 6:20-21 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. (21) But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.

All of us who know Christ are ashamed of things we used to think of and do. But Christ has washed us clean and he has made our conscience to be what it was always intended to be – something within us that approves of what Christ approves of and which hates what He hates. So that we are human beings once again, made in the image of God, doing what He has created us to do.

Man Should be Soberly Warned

Finally, there is very sobering warning in all this for those who continue to reject Christ. Listen to Paul once again:

Rom 1:21-25 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (22) Claiming to be wise, they became fools, (23) and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images

resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. (24) Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, (25) because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

I have watched this process of the Lord departing from people over the years until they become something unrecognizable. You don't maintain if you persist in refusing to honor the Lord and give Him thanks. If you choose to walk in sin, to reject Christ, to love the world and hate God's Word, creating idols for your own worship, then you can be assured that you will progressively morph into a beast. I have seen people walking in evil who 20 or 30 years before would have been shocked at the idea they would ever live such a life. They become beasts, and worse than beasts as the Lord withdraws His presence from them.

Rom 1:28-32 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. (29) They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder,

strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, (30) slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, (31) foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. (32) Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.