

Title: Is God as Bad as the Atheists Claim?
Text: 1 Samuel 15:1-4
Theme: The merciful justice of “devote to destruction”
Series: 1 Samuel
Prop Stmtnt: God’s command to “devote to destruction” is His merciful justice.

Read Text:

“Enlightened” atheists point to passages like this and claim that the God of the Bible is a moral monster. On the surface it appears to be puzzling. If we are repulsed (and we are) by the wholesale slaughter of people groups like the Armenians, Bosnians, Cambodians, Rwandans, Sudanese, Ukrainians, 1st Nations peoples and Jews, then shouldn’t we be morally repulsed by this command by God to wipe out the Amalekites? Doesn’t this sound like genocide? This is a fair question and we are in good company when we ask God about things that don’t seem to add up.

Abraham did this. Job did this. David did this. Jeremiah did this. Habakkuk did this. Jesus did this. In Job’s case, he basically said that he would like to get in the debate ring with God, put on some gloves and go a few rounds with him because from Job’s perspective, he really believed that he would land a punch or two on God. Certainly, no threat of a knockout, but he thought that he at least had a couple of good jabs. But when God invited Job to do that, Job wisely rethought the challenge and decided that it would be a lot better for him to sit in the corner. No, that was not one of my better ideas! But I would argue that the very fact that God put the book of Job in the Bible is not only to teach us how to lament and sorrow, but to let us know that God is not afraid of hard questions, yet we are reminded that in the end God does not answer to us. God did not make you as a robot. He gave you the capacity to think, to feel, to reason, to love, and to trust. We are right to stop and consider the weight and morality of this command. Now, in order to do so, here are five things to keep in mind.

1. **God and only God is God.**

We answer to God. He is the Creator. We are the creation. He is infinite and we are finite. That is true and so very important to remember. But even though God is God and can do whatever he pleases does not mean that whatever he pleases is in anyway morally random, much less immoral. We have so many personal examples of how people in power abuse that power, so it is so easy for us to view God based on what we experience in this life instead of viewing God as he has revealed himself.

The idea that we, the creation can sit in judgment on the Creator and pronounce his actions as being unjust or immoral is absurd. Therefore, when we approach a subject like this, we do so with a posture of humility and a genuine desire for insight. Based on all that we know about God, there has to be more to this than God being the worst sort of racist and wiping out an

entire people group because he felt like it. Besides, the history of the world has been significantly impacted by the influence of God's Word for the good. The spreading of God's Word has challenged barbarism and has promoted civility and civilization. I know that it is a popular mantra on the part of certain atheists to claim that religion has been the source of most wars, but when you examine the actual history, you realize that the claim is a cheap shot. The fact is, there were many who started wars, who hid behind the veneer of religion (and really bad and false religions at that). They tried to use religion as an excuse to do very unholy things. Genuine Christianity was not the cause of these wars, but the abuse of religion. But you can't fit all of that in a Tweet, so it doesn't get circulated as far. Besides, Twitter has not advanced our ability to have rational thoughts, much less rational, reasonable and enlightening conversations. How many orphanages, homeless shelters, international medical teams for third world countries, adoption agencies, famine relief organizations have been started and funded by atheists? The idea that atheists can sit on a high horse of moral superiority and call the God of the Bible a moral monster is positively preposterous. There is a sense in which, this first point is really enough. God is God, and God said to do this – end of question. And yet, God reveals more about himself so that we have a greater capacity to consider this.

2. We are finite creatures, seeking understanding.

So, how do we approach this? We do so humbly because we are inferior, finite, created beings who because our Creator has made us in his image, we have a capacity for and an internal gyroscope for morality that while imperfect, does nevertheless seek for a sense of justice. In fact, it is our sense of justice that enables us to understand this command as a necessary and just command. At the same time, I recognize that I will never completely understand all the ways of God, but that is not because my moral sensibilities are more advanced than God's but I do not completely understand all the ways of God because they are woefully inferior to God's. An example of that is point 3.

3. Sin is way more serious than what I realize.

As Johnny said last week: this text is unsettling. It is raw. The Bible is raw. Sometimes the camera of Scripture pulls back and doesn't focus on all of the gory details and allows the reader to fill in the blanks. Other times, the lens does not move and we wish it would. But it forces us to face the uncomfortable realities of our world. When it does that, it is not being uncouth. The Spirit of God directed this to be written and did not slip this past the censors of the Father and the Son. The Bible is often rated R, never gratuitously but because sin is serious and we are prone to minimize it. But if we minimize it then we don't know how to handle it.

Let me give you an example. Our western culture is not very good about handling death. When someone dies, it is amazing and grievous (and to many shocking) to see how quickly the body begins to change. Many people do not see that like they used to in previous generations or like a people exposed to the horrors of war. When Paul talks about the bodies of the dead that are

buried as being perishable, dishonorable, weak, natural and of dust. Many don't experience that. We do not prepare the body and bury it near the oak tree out back. We are shielded from this. In fact, in many cases, when a death occurs the grieving are faced with an avalanche of decisions that actually makes them set grieving off to the side. There are too many other things to think about. Where are you going to send the body? Are you going to have a funeral? If so, when, where, how long, who is going to do what? Visitation? Where and how long? Where is the body going to be buried? Do you have a plot, a marker, a vault? What about a casket? What about flowers? What about pictures? Who is going to notify who? And of course, what about food? It is a whirlwind. Making the arrangements, visiting the cemetery, purchasing the casket and grave marker, ordering the flowers, planning the service, and coordinating all the details takes up so much time and attention that the grieving do not have time to grieve. There are too many decisions to make. Over the next several days, family descends, flowers, cards, food and other gifts start pouring in. It is a lot to take in. And through it all, we have almost sanitized our language of the word: death. It is like we can't say it. Besides, we don't want to say it. It is hard to say it, face it and absorb it. And the whirlwind of funeral details can function like a distraction so that we don't. But eventually, the family and friends go back home and get on with their lives. The flowers wilt. The cards are put away. There is a closet full of clothes that are not going to be worn, shoes that will not get walked in and drawers with items that remind you of what was, but not is. You wonder if someone will sit with you in church? You only get one plate out of the cupboard instead of two and you get to always pick what you want to eat and what you want to watch on TV, and it hurts, really deep. The whirlwind of the funeral does not prepare you for the reality of loss. That was a blur. This is a gut-punch, a long grief and it can feel like, no one prepared me for this.

One of the reasons why God's Word is so raw is because God does not gloss over your pain. He does not minimize sin nor the consequences of it. Life, east of Eden is hard and God is kind to help us understand how hard it is, otherwise, we would be tempted to pretend, like we are tempted to do with death. We need to face this. Minimizing sin attempts to pretend that life is not as hard as it really is. God does not minimize sin.

4. **God is just; He has to punish sin.**

Alright, let's start putting this together. I am attempting to answer the question of: How can I believe in a God who would give such a command as this?

Perhaps this all too real situation will put it in perspective. She is a 16-year-old girl who is attending the funeral of a family member. This family member, from the time she was 5 till she was 12, sexually abused her. Now, she is only beginning to realize all that he did to her. But, who does she tell? And what is more, at his funeral, everyone including the minister are talking about what a wonderful man he was. So, who would believe her? She does not want to be the one who "ruins" the family. And yet, he was her nightmare that has never gone away and he died and never had to face the consequences of his evil. What is she supposed to do with this? One of the devastating lessons that she is tempted to believe is that there is no such thing as

justice. She certainly has not experienced it and it doesn't look like he ever will. If there is no such thing as justice then there is no such thing as God, or if there is a God, he is either immoral or impotent and neither are worth trusting in. A passage like this is actually a reason to believe.

Before God said to "devote to destruction" the Amalekites, he said in v.2, "I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt." God's severe response in v.4 is based on two things: 1) What Amalek did and 2) What Amalek continued to do. Amalek attacked the most vulnerable of Israel when she was extremely vulnerable. Israel had just crossed the Red Sea. She was in the desert region of the Sinai Peninsula and was fighting for her life. This was pre-Mt. Sinai. She had never organized into an army, she was tired, and vulnerable and Amalek attacked. According to Deuteronomy 25, Amalek attacked the stragglers at the end of the group. These would have been the young, the old, the sick, and the weary, and Amalek attacked. It was evil. Even though she faced some immediate consequences for that, Amalek never repented and continued to be the enemy of God's people and the enemy of God. In regards to sin, God is very clear. He chooses NOT to remember sin that is confessed and repented of. That is glorious. And He does not forget everything else. That is terrifying to those who assume that God is senile and over time forgets about things. It is also satisfying to those who are tempted to think that people can abuse others and get away with it.

But wait, these Amalekites were not the ones who attacked Israel. Agag did not live then. That was over 400 years ago. True. And if, these Amalekites were people who repented of their sins, and trusted in God, they would never have faced this judgment. However, that was not the case. They were still in defiance to God ("sinners" in v.18) and Agag and his people were still actively carrying on what they were known for (v.33). Amalek did not change. She did not repent and over time she only added to her to sin. God pronounced this judgement even back in Deuteronomy 25, because he knew that Amalekite was not going to change.

Another thing to keep in mind. The Amalekites were part of the Canaanites. The Canaanites were wicked. These were not peace-making, docile, quiet, dignified, moral, and refined people. The Canaanites were known for cult prostitution and child-sacrifices. Children, pre-teens were offered to the gods and goddesses by their families to be used by men who would come to the temples to worship these fertility cults. And they would worship them by having their way with these children. Some of them worshipped Molech by offering their children to the god as a burning sacrifice. Think about that the consequences of all of the adult men of a culture doing these sorts of "religious" activities with children and with adult women, who were forced as children to participate. It does not take much imagination to realize what kind of life children would experience in cultures like this. And it got to the point where God said, "enough!" The earth cannot handle more of your sin. I cannot stomach anymore. So, what kind of a God would give this kind of an order? A God who cares about justice and a God who cares to protect others from being destroyed by it. A God who will not forget unrepented sin.

But, what about the children? There are two things to remember: 1) If you knew for sure what Hitler, Stalin, and Pol Pot would grow up to do, would it be tragedy for them to die as children? Not at all! We have no idea of how much evil the Lord protected the earth from by this command. 2) Amalek was one of the nations of this world. Revelation 5.9 speaks of the fact that Christ ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. That means that there were some people from Amalek who were redeemed. Is that because there were a few who became Yahweh worshipers due to the sanctifying influence of the Israelites in the land? Possibly. It could also be because that this act of justice on the nation as a whole was the means by which the children who were too young to knowingly reject God, were called to be the Lord's.

5. Justice now graciously teaches eternal justice.

Why wouldn't Jeffrey Epstein keep up his perversions that he kept getting away with? Why wouldn't Vladimir Putin continue his atrocities that he has always gotten away with? Why wouldn't the family abuser keep doing his thing if he thought that he would always get away with it? What these men and so many others do not want to think about is the fact that hell is real and God condemns to hell people who reject him. People reject God because they do not want to be under his authority. They want to make up their own laws and as long as they appear to get away with it, it reinforces the idea that they want to believe and that is, they can do whatever they want to do. People who think they can live unaccountable to God reveal how much evil the human heart is capable of. I hate war. I study it, but I hate it. But, one of the benefits of this current war is the undisputed fact that the concept of evil is back in circulation in the conversation of the culture. It is hard to face the fact of how evil one human being can be. Initially some were saying that surely Putin is suffering from a disease and his mind isn't right, or he is abusing meds, etc. But, Putin, like so many others, is living as is he is unaccountable for his actions.

Some of you have been a tad shocked that I have publicly prayed for Putin to have a stroke. Yes, I want this evil man to be removed from power, but I do desire that it is done in such a way that he is humbled, and realizes that there is a God that he will face and he is not prepared to meet him. Having a stroke that results in Putin repenting of his sin and turning to Christ would be an act of mercy, because otherwise, if this man lives out his life with the blood of thousands and thousands on his hands, he will face his Creator with no defense, no place to hide and no hope.

Beloved, sin is so serious, that eternity is not long enough for unrepentant sinners to pay for it. Hell is no joke. But God's grace is so amazing that the infinite worth of his Son paid the infinite debt for every person who would trust in Him when Christ offered up his life on the cross.

When I read accounts like this, I think of the deep, yet true rest that it can provide for all of the 16-year-olds who are tempted to think that someone stole their life and got away with it. And it is not just for those who suffer in silence. There are many who have been abused and have had their day in court, and the offender has been sentenced and, in some cases, monetary

restitution has been made. That is all our courts can do. Does it satisfy? Do the abused get their childhood back, their trust healed, their scars mended, their panic attacks taken away, their view of people restored? Are they ever able to live without fearing that someone is going to find out their secrets or hurt them or those they love again? Can they ever live without shame?

This account thunders through the canyons of time that God does not forget the abused. Those who use their power and opportunities to take what does not belong to them will face the Judge of all the earth and the Judge of all the earth does not forget unrepented sin. He will deal with it and one day, the wicked will be no more. Even though we all walk with a limp, we all deal with parts of our lives that are broken and are in the process of being restored, there will be a day when not only will death be no more, but even crying and pain will be gone. No more fear. No more night. No more pain. The Lamb has overcome.

God

Man

Christ

Response

- For those who have been sinned against – you can heal, have a heart that is prepared to forgive and help others.
- For those who have sinned against others – you can be forgiven and change.
- For those who are both – you can be forgiven, be ready to forgive, heal and change
- For all of us – the ground is level at the foot of the cross.