

## Facing Terror and Tragedy

*He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. (Rev 21:4 NIV)*

The UK has had a hard month. Terrorist attacks with many killed and then an horrific fire destroying a tower block with many lost. One of the most natural and common responses has been to wonder how we can live in such a broken world, with such tragedy and terror in it. The singer Katy Perry captured this after the Manchester bombing when she wrote:

'Praying for everyone at @arianagrande's show... Broken hearted for the families tonight. Broken hearted for Ari. Broken hearted for the state of this world.'

We must pray for those who have lost loved ones, for the emergency and security services and for our leaders. We must pray for our broken world.

If we're Christians, we've always known it's broken, because that's what sin did to the world. Our experience in the UK in the last few weeks is a particularly raw, violent and painful experience of that brokenness. Each day, perhaps mostly in much smaller and less significant ways, we experience that brokenness, as we deal with sickness, grief, sadness, pain and the like.

There are lots of ways to respond as a Christian to this brokenness. The problem of evil is well studied! There's lots in Scripture we could turn to. For me, Revelation 21:4 continues to help give me perspective. In particular it gives me a perspective of hope. Without hope we can end up shaking our fist at the world, fate, or God, but it doesn't change anything. With hope we can keep going knowing that change is coming.

As a Christian my hope rests in a God who cares. This verse reminds us of that tender care when it says that it is God who will wipe the tears away. My hope also rests in a God who can and will change the broken world back into a perfect world - a world where there won't be terror attacks and tragic fires and a world where death has been defeated. It's that kind of hope that can keep you going, whether through huge tragedies like we've seen these last few weeks, or through the very many personal tragedies that we all face.

It's not just a hope for a perfect world though. Revelation 21 also contains hope for justice, which is something we have seen the clamour for recently too. In v.8 we read:

*But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars--they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death." (Rev 21:8 NIV)*

We can sometimes think that people escape justice, but the truth is that ultimately no-one will escape God's justice. The fiery lake of burning sulphur is a common picture of God's destructive, ongoing punishment, which we would often call hell. It's a description found especially in Revelation.

However, Revelation 21:8 does leave us with an uncomfortable question doesn't it? As so often in the Bible, the things that we think of as gross evils are put next to things that we know full well we are guilty of too. (How many of us could honestly say we haven't committed any of the sins in that list?) If this is the standard then we're all in trouble. That reminds me that, while I'm horrified at what I've seen happening around the UK over the last month, I'm infected by the same broken

sinfulness as those who have been responsible, even if it hasn't broken out in such extreme or tragic ways.

How do we resolve this problem of the perfect world in Revelation 21:4, with the justice we all face in v.8. It sounds like it's going to be a perfect, but rather empty world! Well, as always for the Christian, we need to return to faith in Jesus. In v.7 we find the people who are contrasted with the evil in v.8:

*Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.  
(Rev 21:7 NIV)*

In particular, this is the contrast between the "victorious" (not the good or perfect notice!) and "the cowardly, the unbelieving." Revelation is written to persecuted Christians and churches and the "victorious" are those who hold onto their faith in Jesus, perhaps even to the point of dying for their faith, unlike those who are cowards and turn from believing. We don't get to go to the perfect world because we're perfect (we're not!). We get to go to the perfect world because we keep going believing in Jesus, who was perfect and gave us his sinless perfection when he took our sin on himself on the cross.

So when we see terror and tragedies, if we're Christians, we have hope of a world where they will no longer exist. We have hope of justice, which will remove the evil. And we also have a challenge, to keep going following Jesus. It seems to me there is an obvious further challenge. We need to tell people about the hope we have, so they can have it too!