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Viewpoints

Observing events in our modern world from the viewpoint of our ascended Savior.

Handling Cruelty - October 31, 2013

In Christ we can keep cruelty from disrupting our lives.

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It was difficult to watch. But I did, at my friend's insistence. He was showing me a video that had gone viral overseas. It's shot in a mountainous region, at a place with a vertical drop-off of maybe two hundred feet. A local man in his late 20's is standing near the cliff. Between him and the drop-off is a donkey. The man begins to push on the side of the donkey. The donkey keeps standing beside the drop-off. The man pushes some more. "What's he doing?" I asked in puzzlement. "Is he demonstrating how firm-footed a donkey can be?"

"Just keep watching," urged my friend, whose eyes were now moist.

It's obvious that the man pushing the donkey with his arms is also being careful that he doesn't slip and fall over the cliff. This contributes to why the donkey stands unmoved. So the man now sits down and lifts his legs into a kicking position. When he begins to push vigorously on the side of donkey with his feet, I realize that he's actually trying to kill the donkey. The donkey doesn't understand even as the man finally topples the donkey over the cliff. And captured on the sound track are the cheers of the evildoers.

"Why did they do that?" I angrily asked. "For fun," replied my friend.

"No, I mean why do they think this *is fun*?" "Because," replied my friend, "this is how these people live. Our pet dogs and cats here in America live better than how these people treat each other. This is why they kill a donkey for the fun of it."

The cruelty in the video disturbed me. It disrupted the rest of my day as it replayed over and over in my mind. I found relief by turning to Scripture—truths I now share with you.

First, let's realize that America is not fully free from cruelty. Wasn't a man mercilessly shot to death in a store, execution style, just last week? But in a general, it's also true that our pets live better lives than many people of the world. How different, my friend maintains, where people live whose land has been scarred with decades of war and violence. One outgrowth is that cruelty that appalls you and me is entertainment to them. In other words, cruelty is native to this sin-cursed world. So how can we keep it from disrupting our lives?

Jesus taught: "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father" (Matt 10:29). Without speaking the word,

Jesus points to the *compassion* that the Almighty has, even for lowly sparrows. The point of Jesus' comparison, however, is especially comforting. If this is how much the Almighty cares for sparrows, how much more he cares for creatures made in his image, and in whom he originally breathed the breathe of life!

The pinnacle of God's loving care is for us humans, proven in the sending of his Son to take on human flesh and blood. After all, it's this Son of God incarnate who's imparting these truths as he continues: **"And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows"** (Matt 10:30-31). Translation? "I'm here as heaven's compassionate Savior, to pay the price for your sins and to adopt you into God's Forever Family. My priceless blood as the one and only God-man makes you priceless and precious, so don't be afraid."

After seeing the man kill the donkey my anger burned. How I wished that the donkey could have escaped, allowing the momentum of the man's kicking legs to pull him off the cliff. But after a bit, I realized that I was cursing by wishing evil on him. Defending the donkey from cruelty and death is godly, but wishing evil on someone, even a sadistic person, is breakage of the 2nd commandment. **"Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord"** (Rom 12:19).

When Jesus taught, "Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows" he was addressing our fears to face persecution. By extension, Christ's comforting words also apply to our fears that evildoers go unpunished. Not so, promises the Bible, as it further assures us that **"it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"** (Heb 10:31).

Yet, everyone who pushes one of God's commandments over the cliff will be held liable, too. This includes me and you, as well as the purveyor of animal cruelty. But on the cross Jesus carried away the sins of the world. So there's a huge difference between repentant sinners who find forgiveness in the love of Christ (and who manifest this faith by their compassion) and sinners who reject the love of Christ (and who manifest this unbelief by their cruelty).

I'm thankful that Jesus has forgiven my vengeful cursing. This thankfulness also leads me to pray for the souls of those evil men on the cliff, not curse them. At the same time, I also take comfort in knowing that God will avenge all cruelty that animals and humans suffer at the hands of unbelievers. This is how you and I can put such disturbing aspects of life into God's hands, and in peace move on to do God's work... which includes my finishing this *Viewpoints* and then playing with my dogs.

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Blessings to you and your loved ones, Pastor Mike Nitz

