

Should We Rejoice Over Bin Laden's Death?

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In the early hours of May 2, 2011 (late Sunday night in the USA), a team of Navy Seals working in a covert operation killed Osama Bin Laden, the mastermind of the 9/11 tragedy. Following the news of Bin Laden's death, thousands of Americans gathered in the streets of New York, Washington D.C., and elsewhere to celebrate the death of the one who murdered over 3000 Americans almost 10 years before.

What exactly should our response as Christians be to such news? Should we join in with millions of other Americans in rejoicing over the death of this extremely wicked man? After all, he could easily have been called the most evil person on the planet. Few outside of the Muslim world would disagree with such a statement. He deserved to die. He received his due reward. He got his just desserts. Justice has been served. These are statements that we have heard time and again as we've watched the news coverage of Bin Laden's death. But again, the question remains. Should Christians rejoice over Osama Bin Laden's death?

In the hours immediately following the breaking of the story, it was interesting to note the battle of Bible verses on Facebook between many of my Christian friends. It seems there are conflicting views on how we should react, and each side quotes various Bible verses to support their case.

For instance, those who said we should NOT rejoice and celebrate quoted Matt. 5:43-48 where Jesus says to love our enemies and do good for them.

Another passage used was Ezek. 18:23 which says, "*Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?*" says the Lord God, *'and not that he should turn from his ways and live?'*"

Proverbs 24:17-18 says, "*Do not rejoice when your enemy falls. And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles; Lest the LORD see it, and it displease Him, And He turn away His wrath from him.*"

And then there were others who said we are justified in rejoicing in Bin Laden's death. Passages that were used included Revelation 18:20 where John says about the destruction of Rome (Babylon), "*Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!*" And in 19:1-6, a great multitude in heaven rejoiced at the demise of Rome, praising God for his judgment upon "the great harlot".

In 2 Samuel 22, David sings a song to the LORD after he defeats his enemies. Included are sentiments such as this: "*I have pursued my enemies and destroyed them; Neither did I turn back again till they were destroyed. And I have destroyed them and wounded them, So that they could not rise; They have fallen under my feet*" (vs. 38-39).

In many of David's psalms, he employs imprecatory language. That is, he calls for God to destroy the wicked. Take Psalm 69:22-28 as an example. "*Let their table become a snare before them, And their well-being a trap. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see; And make their loins shake continually. Pour out Your indignation upon them, And let Your wrathful anger take hold of them. Let their dwelling place be desolate; Let no one live in their tents. For they persecute the ones You have struck, And talk of the grief of those You have wounded. Add iniquity to their iniquity, And let them not come into Your righteousness. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, And not be written with the righteous.*"

So who's right? Is the Bible contradictory? Can we rejoice at the death of the wicked? I think both sides have valid points and that both are right in a way. No, the Bible is not contradictory. And to the last question, I answer both yes and no.

What makes it right or wrong is our attitude. Yes, we can be very glad that God's justice has been served. No, we cannot have an attitude of revenge for what Bin Laden did to us Americans. Yes, we rejoice that an evil man is no longer allowed to continue his evil ways. But we should be sad that a soul was lost to Satan.

While I am glad that Bin Laden is no longer a threat, I cannot bring myself to be jubilant and celebrate in the street as thousands of Americans did. The rejoicing over the destruction of evil (such as in Rev. 18 and 19) is a rejoicing in the triumph of God over evil. It's a rejoicing in God protecting his people and in his will being done. It's a rejoicing in the defeat of Satan.

Yes, it's difficult to harmonize all these passages in the Bible. Love our enemies or ask God to destroy them? I believe it can be both. Our part is to love them, pray for them, and do good for them. However, if they show no signs of repentance, then we can be justified in asking God to judge them. And we can rejoice when God triumphs over Satan. But let's also remember that God's justice will be meted out on us.

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye” (Matt. 7:1-5).