



Thru God's Eye: Life in the REAL World

What Went Wrong? The Problem of Evil, and of God

Crossroads, October 9, 2011 - Mark Bickel



TEACHING NOTES

Intro:

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

¹⁵"See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. ¹⁶If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. ¹⁷But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸ I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. ¹⁹I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, ²⁰loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them."

PRAY

- **Last few weeks** – Is there a God? And Who Are we / What is our Purpose?
- Today we turn to an often asked question, that many claim is their reason for not believing in the God of the Bible ... **Why is there Evil / Suffering?**
- **Drexel Survey** – over 400 people asked "If you could ask God one question, what would you ask?" – number one question, with over 30% of people asking it – some form of How could God allow evil or suffering.

1) The Problem of Evil

- **Problem: If all powerful, good God, why is there Evil?**

- In world with Hitler, 9/11, Columbine, Virginia Tech, Terrorist car bombs ... rape, pedophile...
- If God created everything, why did he create evil?
- If God is good and loves us why did he allow Adam and Eve to be tempted / fall into evil?
- If God is all Powerful, why does he not stop evil ... especially when it hurts innocent people?

- **Biblical Answers:**

- **James 1:13-15**

*13 When tempted, **no one should say, "God is tempting me."** For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but **each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.** 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.*

- God not author of evil ... but God did not just create robot world, made angels and men capable of deciding to love God or not, with ability to good and do evil
- This evil not 'created' as evil

- **Revelation 20:10**

*And the devil, who deceived them, **was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur**, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be **tormented day and night for ever and ever.***

- evil also not 'equal force' or 'out of control' – evil as a choice made by beings created by God, subordinate to God, and who will one day be judged by God

- **Genesis 3**

- Adam and Eve given entire world, one tree to not eat from ... they were tempted and choose to turn against God and become gods themselves ... God both allowed that and knew about it, planned for it and had already decided on a solution before time began
- It shows God's love that he did not force our hand but gave us freedom to fail
- Also showed love in not kill, or let eat tree of life ... clothes, cast out and let restart

- **Genesis 6:5-7**

- After Adam rebel ... Cain murder ... Generations of murder ... All evil all the time!
*5 The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and **that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.** 6 The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. 7 So the LORD said, "**I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth**—men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air—for I am grieved that I have made them."*

- **Romans 1**

*18 **The wrath of God is being revealed** from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, 19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them ...*

*21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but **their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened....***

*24 **Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity** for the degrading of their bodies with one another.*

*26 **Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts.** Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. 27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.*

*28 Furthermore, **since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.** 29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; 31 they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32 Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.*

- Part of God giving us freedom to choose right or wrong is also us living with consequences

2) The Problem of Suffering

- **Problem: If God is Sovereign and Loving how can he send floods, earthquakes, famine ...**
 - OK, so God allows us to do turn from him, and then as a consequence gives us over to evil
 - **BUT, what about the suffering he sends on innocent people**
 - Scripture makes it clear **God controls floods**, drought, earthquakes, other 'natural disasters'
 - Even our insurance policies exclude "**acts of God**"
 - But these "acts of God" **kill thousands**, even 10s of thousands ...
 - How can we claim he is sovereign and loving if he commits these kinds of mass killings?

 - Here some pastors will say that **God does it to punish sin** ... so some linked 9/11 to homosexuality in America, others linked Katrina to the loose sexuality of partying of New Orleans, and the earthquake in Haiti to voodoo – these are all God's judgment for sins of the nations
 - Certainly in **OT we do see God judge and wipe out nations**, even take his own people into captivity as punishment for sin
 - But we also see **Abraham pleads for Sodom** that if God could find even 10 righteous He would spare the city. Certainly Haiti, New Orleans, the World Trade Center had more than 10 Christians

- **Biblical Answers:**
 - **Amos 4:6-13**

6 "I gave you **empty stomachs** in every city and lack of bread in every town, **yet you have not returned to me**," declares the LORD.

7 "I also **withheld rain from you** when the harvest was still three months away. I sent rain on one town, but withheld it from another. One field had rain; another had none and dried up. **8** People staggered from town to town for water but did not get enough to drink, **yet you have not returned to me**," declares the LORD.

9 "Many times **I struck your gardens and vineyards**, I struck them with blight and mildew. Locusts devoured your fig and olive trees, **yet you have not returned to me**," declares the LORD.

10 "I sent **plagues among you** as I did to Egypt. I killed your young men with the sword, along with your captured horses. I filled your nostrils with the stench of your camps, **yet you have not returned to me**," declares the LORD.

11 "I **overthrew some of you** as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. You were like a burning stick snatched from the fire, **yet you have not returned to me**," declares the LORD.

12 "Therefore this is what I will do to you, Israel, and because I will do this to you, **prepare to meet your God, O Israel.**"

13 He who forms the mountains, creates the wind, and reveals his thoughts to man, he who turns dawn to darkness, and treads the high places of the earth— the LORD God Almighty is his name.

 - **Luke 13:1-5**

1 Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. **2** Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? **3** I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. **4** Or **those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?** **5** I tell you, **no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.**"

 - Not to punish specific sin
 - But to call us back to himself

- **Habakkuk 3: 16-19**

*Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us. 17 **Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, 18 yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.***

19 The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.

- **Romans 1:18-19**

¹⁸For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

3) Why Me?

- **Problem: Why did God choose to send me this particular suffering**

- Parents divorced, Mom get's cancer, Spouse dies, Child has crippling disease, Job and Finances crash
- Not just theoretical theology ... very personal
- Can not worship God who would do this to me!

- **Biblical Answers:**

- **Job 1 & 2**

*8 Then the LORD said to Satan, "**Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.**"*

9 "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. 10 "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. 11 But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face."

12 The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger."

Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

*13 One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, 14 a messenger came to Job and said, "The **oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing** nearby, 15 and the Sabeans attacked and carried them off. **They put the servants to the sword**, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"*

*16 While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The **fire of God fell from the sky** and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"*

*17 While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on **your camels and carried them off**. They put the **servants to the sword**, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"*

*18 While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, "**Your sons and daughters** were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, 19 when suddenly a **mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead**, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"*

20 At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship 21 and said:

“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.”

22 In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing. ...

7 So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. 8 Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes.

9 His wife said to him, “Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!”

10 He replied, “You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?”

In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.

- *Reader told: Not to punish sin, but show righteousness*
- *People in story do not know this ... so go on a hunt for sin*
- *Easy to make our own assumptions ... God often not reveal reasons*
- *In the end - God show more of Himself*

○ **2 Corinthians 12:7-10**

*⁷So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, **a thorn was given me in the flesh**, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. ⁹But he said to me, **“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”** Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

4) The REAL Problem

- **Real Problem: How can a just and Holy God do any good to us?**

- God would be right and just to let evil run rampant and allow life to be a living hell
- God would be right and just to send constant disasters and punishment, even throw entire planet into Hell today
- And when it comes to you, your right - life is not fair, if life were fair we would each stand before God today and receive our fair and just judgment in full!
- Mercy, Grace and Love of God shown in any restraint of evil and allowance of good, in any day of sun and happiness, in allowing us to live and have time to turn to him

- **Real Answers: (come back in 2 weeks!)**

- It is not a “Problem of Evil” but a “Problem of Good” – how can a just and holy God somehow still love us who have rebelled and turned against Him?
- We will look at how various religions and the Scriptures answer this in 2 weeks.

Conclusions and Applications

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Pray

Recommended Reading:

When God Interrupts: Finding New Life Through Unwanted Change by M. Craig Barnes

When God Weeps: Why Our Sufferings Matter to the Almighty by Joni Eareckson Tada and Steven Estes

Why Does It Have To Hurt? The Meaning of Christian Suffering by Dan G. McCartney

NEXT WEEK: Community Dinner

In TWO WEEKS: What About Religion? Can it Meet Our Most Basic Needs?