

Why so Much Suffering?

Why, Why, Why? Why is there so much suffering, so much affliction in the world? Why, if you hear many a preacher, many believers say “God is good” and “The Lord is compassionate” are there so many tears? Tears, sorrow at the death of a young child who suffered from an incurable disease. Death and destruction due to earthquakes, famines, tsunamis that struck suddenly and without warning. Suffering, even in the midst of plenty, in hospitals and institutions the world over.

Is it then so as I heard a lecturer say at a university many years ago, “*Either the God you believe in is incompetent or He is a foul beast to allow so much suffering to occur*” ?

We might be in accord with those who suggest that pagans, that is, heathens, and God-haters suffer because they are being punished for their unbelief. We may not dissent from the opinion offered that robbers and murderers will surely end up suffering incarceration and punishment because they chose to live outside of the law.

But then again, why must the righteous and those innocent of crimes and wild living suffer? What is the purpose of it all and how can God allow it?

We must consider these questions in the light of God’s Word. Although those who reject God’s Word as being faithful, infallible even, may have some answers making some sense, yet here we must consider God’s Word to have the definitive answer even to these perplexing questions.

That Word, the Bible shows us that when sin and rebellion entered the world, through the fall of our first parents, Adam and Eve then suffering and

death entered as well and at the same time. In fact this original sin and guilt entered the lives of every human being. So did death, “ *through sin*” says the apostle Paul in Romans 5:12, “ *And so death spread to all men because all sinned...*”

We can't blame God for this either for he had given our first parents, a grave warning, “ *Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for the day you eat of it you shall surely die*” (Genesis 2: 17). But they ate, and they, and we.... died”

A whole lot of suffering, though not all of it, is a direct result of people's breaking God's good commandments. His very good laws which cover our obligations to live lives of peace and thankfulness; to take care as stewards of this creation, and to love Him as well as our neighbor as ourselves.

How much misery and how much suffering results from the jealousy, bitterness, selfishness and anger that is bound up in human hearts. How many disasters are the direct or indirect result of mankind polluting, not just the ground, the rivers and the atmosphere but minds, lives, relationships. “Mankind reaps what one sows” is the saying, and it is true. Paul C. Heubach who wrote a booklet titled The Problem of Human Suffering¹ says,

In this world as we find it there are class hatreds, prejudices, and concepts of society that make men and women slaves to something known as “ they” and they find this “they” an unmerciful tyrant.

Only think of the human suffering and the blight in society caused by addiction to alcohol and the devastating slavery to use of illicit drugs.

¹ in print and available on the Internet

Yes it surely is so, much, very much suffering, is simply our fault. But still the question is there, multiple questions even, “ Why doesn’t God put a stop to it? Why doesn’t he do something about it? Doesn’t he care? Is He deaf and dumb to the tragedies that occur minute by minute”?

It is undeniably so that God is *all powerful* and that by His providence which is “His almighty and ever present power” ²not only those things we consider good come to us from his hand - things like fruitful years, gorgeous sunshine. food and drink, health, riches and long life. But also drought and barren years, sickness, poverty, yes also death.

Then too we must remember that when God allows Satan room to maneuver, which he does, often that evil devil is more than ready to be a monster of a destroyer and deceiver, who only breathes death and destruction.

His purpose is never, as with God , one to chasten someone that the person may be brought closer to the Lord. He would never have those who suffer persevere in prayer and show courage, Christian courage in the face of cancer, heart-disease and the sudden loss of loves ones in an accident. He would do everything in his considerable power to turn move and more people away from God and from Christ.

Yet what do those who resist the devil (in which case he must flee, as the bible says,) and look to Christ see? They see that Son of God who became man suffer the most extreme, loneliness and forsakenness we can imagine. Even that horror of being forsaken by his own Father in those terrible three hours on the cross. Why? That all those who believe in Him would go through the valley of suffering and death and destruction *knowing, believing, and trusting that there is life, even life everlasting.*

² The Heidelberg catechism, Lord’s Day 10, Book of Praise

There is a here and now in which tear-stained and seemingly abandoned Christians, nevertheless can sing and can and do confess with that man Job, in the bible, “ *The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord*”³. This after Job had lost not only his livelihood, his extensive holdings, but his seven sons and three daughters due to a horrible tornado that suddenly killed them all .

There are those who point out that one purpose of suffering may be that we would gain a new and better understanding of *life and healing*. They point out the research stimulated by suffering, in the fields of medicine and industry. Suffering may also make us much more aware that man does not live by bread alone nor that one’s life consists in our possessions. The apostle Paul, for one ,counted everything he had as loss, “ *Mere garbage*” *he says for the sake of knowing Jesus Christ his Lord.* ⁴ Surely a blessed result of suffering among Christians is that they are drawn closer to God.

Many are the testimonies of those who, having faith in Jesus Christ yet speak positively, even triumphantly in the knowledge that their lives are secure in the hands of Jesus Christ. They may be suffering physical pain and emotional agony but will invariably tell you “ *All is well with my soul, that is my life.*” There was Job, sitting on the dump, bereft of those so-called “friends” scraping his terrible sores that had infested his body, with a piece of pottery. But what did he say? “ *I know that my Redeemer lives and at last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has thus been destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God.*”⁵

³ Job 1:21

⁴ Philippians 3: 7, 8

⁵ Job 19: 25, 26

Job's testimony is one of the victories the Holy Spirit is winning today. Even as Christ moves history along, even using wars and disasters, suffering and pain, as he hastens to bring about a final day of judgement, a final reckoning with sin and Satan. Ultimately, to bring about a new earth in which all suffering and pain yes, all sin and shame is gone, completely.

Yet you and I will not see it, and will not rejoice even in trying painful circumstances *unless we believe*. If our eyes are only clouded, obscured by the cataracts of anger, bitterness, and unbelief, we will never, never see the light of day, not now and not then. Now, in the midst of this life, in this broken world. Then, when the comfort and mercy which is the believers' possession comes to its grand culmination.

Meanwhile dear listeners, look to

the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ the Father of mercies, and God of all comfort who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with that comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. ⁶

If you believe in Christ you too can say, "*The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*" ⁷

For His is the glory and the power and the dominion, now and forever, Amen. Till next time may the Lord of Life be with you.

⁶ 2 Corinthians 1: 3, 4

⁷ Romans 8: 18

