

## Let The Bible Speak Series

### The Problem of Suffering

Psa.73:1-14

Today we are going to address one of the questions that many people seek to resolve in their mind. Why do people suffer? If God love us why do we get sick?

An atheist once said to a believer: "If there is a God, how do you account for all the suffering in the world?" The believer replied: "If there is no God, how do you account for it?" That is a real problem isn't it?

Death, pain, suffering of the innocent, sorrow, poverty, disappointments.

These cover the earth. Why?

1. Why does a young child have to be afflicted with leukemia?
2. Why are some children born with birth defects, while others are born perfectly healthy?
3. Why is a young man in the prime of life killed in an automobile accident?
4. Why is a young family man with great responsibility both at home and in the church, suddenly stricken with a terrible illness that forces him to quit work, leaving him an invalid?
5. Why is a young mother suddenly diagnosed with incurable cancer?
6. Why are parents suddenly killed in an air crash, leaving several orphan children?
7. Why in some third-world countries are thousands starving to death? Little children with severe malnutrition, seen with bones protruding through the flesh?

Why? Why?

Notice what David said in Psa. 73 "Truly God is good to Israel, To such as are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the boastful. When I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pangs in their death, But their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride serves as their necklace; Violence covers them like a garment. Their eyes bulge with abundance, They have more than heart could wish, They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression, They speak loftily, They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walks through the earth. Therefore his people return here. And waters of a full cup are brained by them. And they say How does God know? And is there knowledge in the most High? Behold these are the ungodly who are always at ease; They increase in riches. Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain and washed my hands in innocence. For all day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning."

Is this the way you feel? Are you troubled, are you suffering? Have you ever asked why? Today we're going to try and answer some very troubling questions about Why people suffer. But first Here is a song from our singers.

#### I. Sin, Suffering, and Satan.

In a very basic sense sin is the cause of all suffering.  
God made all things good Gen.1:31.

Satan brought sin and suffering into the world. Gen.3:13-19 "And the Lord God said to the woman What is this you have done? The woman said, The serpent deceived me and I ate. So the Lord God said to the serpent Because you have done this you are cursed more than all cattle and more than every beast of the field on your belly you shall go and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel. To the woman he said I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception. In pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you. Then to Adam he said, because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you saying you shall not eat of it: cursed is the ground for your sake, in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground For out of it you were taken for dust you are and to dust you shall return."

There is an idea in the world that suffering may, in some way, be related to a specific sin that one commits. (not a new idea)

Note John 9:1-3 "Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him."

It appears that the disciples reasoned: Physical disability is the result of somebody's special sin. In the case of the blind man it was either his or his parents.

It seemed hardly possible to attribute it to the blind man, since the affliction existed from birth. Was it then the sin of the parents?

This view, expressed by the disciples, is a persistent one, and is held by many today even though the book of Job is a clear refutation of it.

Job was a good man who, was not in anyway responsible for the calamities that befell him.

The idea that sickness and physical disabilities are the result of specific sins, and are penalties administered for this reason, is false.

Jesus points out that neither the man nor his parent's sin caused this man to be born blind. The Lord teaches them that instead of wrestling with the age-old problem of the relationship of sin and suffering they should see in this case the marvelous blessing which the love and grace of God would produce.

## II. What Is God's Will?

Perhaps one of the most mis-used and mis-understood phrases is: "It is God's will."

Some have used it in an attempt to explain all joys and sorrows on earth.

Ex: A young man has to have a leg amputated. "Well, it is just the will of God."

Or a young child runs out in front of a car and is killed. "This is the will of God."

The term needs to be clarified:

A. God's intentional will. God made man and for his good and happiness and then set in order all laws, both physical and spiritual, desiring that his offspring should obey them and be blessed thereby. This is God's intent. He intentionally wants the best for us. In order to insure that, he has given us laws and rules for our own benefit.

B. God's permissive will. God controls all things in heaven and earth. Nothing is done without His permission. Man, has the power of choice, a freedom of will.

Without this man would be nothing more than a machine or robot.

Thus, man can choose to violate divine laws, and when he does God permits the consequences.

Was it God's will for Job to suffer? Yes and No. It was not his intentional will. For He did not plan it; but under the circumstances he permitted it.

In order to better understand adversity, and the reason why bad things sometime happen to good people, we may classify adversity and suffering under three headings:

1. Trouble that man brings upon himself
2. Trouble that is brought on us by others, and
3. tribulation which is the chastening of the Father

### III. Trouble Man Brings Upon Himself.

Anytime divine laws are violated, whether physical or spiritual, consequences will come. The violation may be:

1. through deliberate. That is I may deliberately do what I know is wrong. I willfully and knowingly violate or disobey a law of God. It could be a physical law such as defying gravity i.e. I jump off a house. Or it could be a spiritual law, I commit murder. In either case, I willfully do that which violates law.
2. through carelessness, that is, I do not intentionally break such a law, but I carelessly violate it.
3. through ignorance, that is I don't know any better. But

Whatever the reason, any violation of these laws can bring pain and suffering to the individual involved.

#### A. Physical laws were ordained for our good.

The law of gravitation keeps all things in place on the earth.

Suppose a man goes to the top of a tall building and jumps. He will die? Probably so. Why did he die? Because he violated a physical law and paid the penalty for so doing with his life.

Was it the will of God? No, not his intentional will. God did not desire or plan it.

But God did will or decree that (1) man should have freedom of choice and (2) that the law of gravitation would continue to operate.

Thus, it was God's permissive will, that is God permitted it. He allowed it to happen.

Suppose he should temporarily suspend the law of gravity, just to save one life.

Can you imagine how many other lives would be destroyed as a result?

#### B. Through carelessness, divine physical laws may be violated.

Suppose man gets into a car and speeds down the street. He hits another car and several are killed. Is it God's will?

No, not his intentional will. He does not intend that a man carelessly kill.

It is his permissive will because he has instituted the law of force for man's good.

This decrees that when a stronger object is pitted against a weaker object, the weakest object must give way to the force.

What if God suspended the law? We couldn't even drive a nail into a board. It is therefore a mistake to say when someone is killed in such an accident that "it was the will of God." Implying that God wanted it to happen.

C. Divine laws of health regulate man's well-being.

If these laws are violated, either deliberately, carelessly or ignorantly, the consequences will follow.

Because of natural law, God allowed Epaphroditus to become ill Phil. 2:25-28

We understand that we cannot continue to abuse our bodies and neglect our health without increasing the risk of something going wrong.

The man who smokes two packs of cigarettes a day for twenty years and develops lung cancer, faces problems which deserve our sympathy, but he has no grounds for asking, "How could God do this to me?" or "Why did God let this happen?"

The person who weighs considerably more than he should, and whose heart has to pump blood through miles of additional fat cells and clogged arteries will have to pay the price for that additional strain on his system and will have no grounds to complain to God.

God permits us to destroy ourselves, if we choose to do so.

But why cancer? Why blindness and diabetes and kidney failure? Why do things spontaneously go wrong in our bodies without our having caused them through bad health habits?

This is hard to answer because we do not know all the ramifications of inherited physical weaknesses and tendencies. The genetic make up of each of us is directly influenced by our parents and grandparents. The outcome in us may be a disease seen before or never seen before.

We don't always know why one person gets sick and another one does not, we can only assume that there are natural laws at work that we may neither know nor understand.

But one thing is sure. God did not cause it, nor did he intentionally will it. He does not send a specific illness to a specific person.

God does not have a weekly quota of malignant tumors to distribute.

D. Spiritual laws are just as fixed and binding.

As in the physical realm, man reaps what he sows.

Eliphaz stated: "Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same" Job.4:8

The New Testament teaches "Be not deceived, God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the spirit reap life everlasting."

Gal.6:7-8

The argument of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar was that sin brings suffering.

God rebuked them and required them to repent of their teachings. Why?

They misapplied the principle. They reasoned: "Job, your adversity is proof that you have sown sin."

They were using it to teach that one who sows spiritual iniquity will reap physical calamity. THIS IS FALSE REASONING.

It was this same concept that led the disciples to question who sinned in John 9. The man

born blind or his parents.

The scriptures teach that the man who sows sin will reap corruption, spiritual corruption. Part in this life, but mostly in the life to come.

But even in this life man brings much sorrow upon himself by a violation of spiritual laws:

1. mis-use of tongue---embroiled in constant turmoil and strife.
2. heart full of envy, hatred, unforgiveness--spend many wretched days and anguish of spirit brought on himself.
3. murder, lying, immorality etc.

#### V. Trouble Brought On By Others

Much adversity, both of body and spirit, comes not from one's own conduct but from the actions of others.

Children may perish with starvation because of indolent parents or physical injury at the hands of brutal parents.

The innocent often suffer because of the guilty.

A criminal takes a mans life, leaving his wife and children to suffer years of loneliness and deprevation.

God can't stop us from doing wrong, without taking away our freedom, that makes us human. As human beings we can cheat, hurt, rob etc.

This explains the Holocaust, i.e. the death of millions of innocent people at the hands of Hitler. When people ask "where was God in Auschwitz?"

Ans: God did not cause it. It was caused by human beings choosing to be cruel to their fellow man.

Envy took the life of Abel, if he had not been righteous, Cain probably would not have wanted to kill him.

If Joseph had not been better than his brethren they would have felt no need to do away with him.

If Job had not been godly, Satan would have felt no urge to challenge him to a duel and attempt to destroy him.

Bad things happen to good people, because of other's sins.

#### VI. The Chastening of the Lord.

Heb.12:5-6 "...My son do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him, For whom the Lord loves He chastens. and scourges every son whom He receives." (a quotation of Prov.3:11-12)

The writer quotes this proverb as proof that the burdens which the suffering saints were then being called upon to bear were acutally proofs of God's love. and not evidences of his indifference.

We learn: (a) God chastens his children; (b) this chastening has, as its object, our welfare, and it ought not to be lightly regarded; (c) it is one of the many evidences of God's love for us.

#### A. How does God chasten us?

Does he send sorrow, suffering and bitter trial upon those whom he loves?

Is he the author of the evil which often befalls us on our way? Surely not.

Evil is not of God, it is of the devil.

Just as our parents disciplined and corrected us, so God is said to chasten or discipline his children.

When we fail and are disobedient, God allows the natural and necessary consequences of violations of his laws, whether in the natural or spiritual realms, to come upon us.

God is often said to do things, which in effect he actually only allows or permits.

An example is Pharaoh in Ex.4:21. "...but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go." The King's heart was hardened when God made demands on him which Pharaoh, because of his rebellious heart, was unwilling to accede to, the fault being his.

In such situations God wants us to see in these experiences the hand of divine wisdom, and the importance of avoiding those actions which must lead to such.

If we are wise enough to see in the trials of life the importance of faithful obedience, then these trials are used of God as chastening instruments to bring us up to the divine standard.

It is in this way that we suffer chastisement in this life.

The chastening of the Lord has a three fold design:

1. that of correcting our faults
2. strengthening our faith, and
3. promoting our eternal welfare.

Our response is four-fold:

1. The child of God must not despise it v.5
2. He must not faint under the impact of it
3. He must submit to it v.9, saying at all times and under all circumstances, "O Lord, thy will, not mine, be done."
4. He must be exercised thereby v. 11 meaning that we must cooperate with the divine purpose and strive for the deepening and strengthening of our faith under chastening circumstances.

May we ever realize that when bad things happen to us, God is not to be blamed, nor rejected.