

Why, Suffering?

Hello Dear Listeners.

There is much suffering and there are many tragedies in life. So much and so many in fact, that even many Christians do at times throw up their hands in despair. Like David, in Psalm 31 of the bible, they too cry, “ *My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning.*” They look around and hear of the terror that sends many people on the run. They visit the cancer ward of a local hospital or they talk to some parents at the Ronald McDonald House and they cry “ Why. O God?” “ Why do you allow all this pain, all this torture of so many lives?”

Is it then that God is impotent in the face of tragedy? Is it that he just doesn't care. Is the bible fooling, lying, when it says, God is good and gracious and just? (Psalm 116:5, 145:8) Does He in fact exist or, as I once heard a professor exclaim, “*He is either non-existent, or he is a monster to allow all this misery and this death to occur.*”

We hope, dear listeners during the next four weeks on this program to deal with these questions and the problem of human suffering and death. Yet we will not try to answer these questions on the basis of human reason, but on the basis of God's Word. We'll try to do so every step of the way by looking to Jesus Christ. Yes, to Jesus Christ for outside of Him there is only darkness and confusion, but with him there is life and grace and hope!

Helmut Thielecke, a theologian who was prominent in Germany a generation ago used a helpful example to point out the significance of looking to Jesus Christ in trying to answer the question of why is there suffering in the world.

Dr. Edward P. Myers, a professor and minister of the Gospel in the USA writes that Thielecke once pointed out that a fabric viewed through a magnifying glass is clear in the middle but blurred at the edges. ¹

Yet we know the edges are clear because of what we see in the middle. Life, he said, is like a fabric. There are many edges that are blurred - many events and circumstances we do not understand. But they are to be interpreted by the clarity we see in the centre - the cross of Christ.

¹ Edward P. Myers, “ The Problem of Evil and Human Suffering” The Net, 2014

Indeed It is important then that we focus on Jesus Christ and his sacrifice on Calvary's cross. For why did he suffer even the extreme agony and loneliness of hell on that cross? Why is it that he cried out, " *My God. my God why have you forsaken me?*" during those three hours of darkness that came over the land at that time? (Matthew 27: 46)

It had everything to do with the fact that long, long ago our first parents, Adam and Eve, (and we in them!) rebelled against God and fell for the lies of the devil. With that terrible fall people's nature became thoroughly corrupt. Had he warned our first parents that the day they would eat from that tree of the knowledge of good and evil they would die?

They died, even though they would still live physically for some time. Yet they died spiritually. Because of their sin they invited God's curse to come on the earth. Not only would the ground produce thorns and thistles to make toiling the soil hard for Adam. No, death entered the world, - death and all the grief connected to it! (Romans 5:12). Disease and all kinds of corruption, anger, murder (just think of Cain taking the life of his brother Abel) cancer, heart attacks, terrorism and all the misery you and I can possibly imagine was a direct result of mankind's rebellion against God.

That's the reason why there is pain and suffering, not only for those whose lives are lived in arrogant opposition to God. No, we must think as well of the fact that there is a brokenness of life and a litany of sorrows even in God-fearing families - there are still-born babies, and those who have heart-defects and incurable illnesses when they are still very, very young.

I know, that's a hard, hard pill to swallow for many. Our now sinful human nature wants to wave an angry fist in God's face. Or, as is the case with not a few, people resign themselves to what they call "fate".

Yet Christians, believers in God and His Word, have another answer. They know that Word testifies to *God's amazing grace and mercy*. While mankind has only itself to blame for the suffering and misery in the world what did God do?

On the ruins of paradise, while Satan went slithering away on his belly God not only pronounced his curse ***but His blessing!*** (Genesis 3:15) He promised to send *One* who would come to crush the serpent's head. Though his heel would be bruised, indicating his death on the cross.

Yes God would send His One and Only Son who would suffer the *punishment* for our sin and shame in our place. God's justice would descend on him and he, Jesus Christ would suffer God's curse because of our sins! *That whosoever believes in him would not perish but have eternal life.* (John 3:16). So Christians have confidence knowing this - that although there is pain, and there are tears there *is life for God's faithful people* Life, *abundant life* also for those whose mortal lives end on an operating table or in a holocaust.

Then too it is a great comfort to know that God is not some distant, cold and callous dictator who doesn't care when people suffer. He's not far-removed from our pain. Jesus, God's Son, was betrayed by his closest friends. Falsely accused, he was tried by a jury that had murder on its breath. The prophet Isaiah wrote that long ago he had compassion on His people. We read, "*In all their distress he too was distressed.... Though they had rebelled and "grieved his Holy Spirit."*" (Isaiah 63:9)

No, it isn't so, (as has been suggested by someone like Harold Kushner In his book, When Bad Things Happen to Good People, that God simply can't do anything about our suffering. Believers maintain that God is sovereign also over our suffering. He is in charge. Do Christians also suffer? Yes they do, yet do you remember that man Job? Although he lost his family, his business and his wife suggested he get it over with saying, "*Curse God and die* Job didn't do so (Job 2: 9, 10).

Instead he confessed his faith! Though afterwards, in his distress, he cursed the day of his birth (chapter 3:1), he looked to the centre, as it were, and he saw Jesus from afar. In chapter 19 of his book he said, "*I know that my redeemer lives and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed yet in my flesh I will see God.*"

Job believed that even death could not separate him from the Lord. He trusted that one day he would stand in God's presence. At the resurrection of the dead. The day when the Lord would renew all things.

It is this Lord who sustains his children even in their most severe trials. Even when they have to go through what is called "the valley of the shadow of death". He will be there for them and draw them to Himself.

Do they suffer? God sustains them. Yes he saves them. O, to be sure, if we have hope in Christ only for this life we must agree with Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:19

that “ *we are to be pitied more than all men*”. For then Jesus Christ would be a charlatan and all His promises about eternal life would be a lie!

But No! The Father gave his One and Only Son, who was willing to pay the price as our substitute. Satisfying the justice of God by His suffering and death He is the Answer. Indeed, as he testifies, “ *I am the way and the truth and the life*” (John 14:6).

It is so, that unless you and I truly believe in Him, no amount of rhetoric about suffering, and death and life makes any sense. Therefore heed God’s call. Join the millions who though confronted with poverty, pain, terror and persecution have been able to say, “ *I know that my Redeemer lives*” . He will not only dry your tears but cause you to rejoice, yes rejoice in Him, always (Philippians 4:4).

Amen. Till next time have a wonderful day.