

Theme: The evil and suffering seen throughout creation are the real consequences of human sin, but our Good, Sovereign God will overcome them through Christ to bring eternal blessing and joy to all who love Him.

## I. Intro - April 4, 1968 - MLK Assassination

- A. Moral evil - MLK assassination
  - 1. April 4, 1968, Memphis Tennessee
  - 2. In act of horrible evil, he is assassinated
  - 3. He had done so much good - why die like this?
  - 4. How does one explain moral evils like this?
- B. Suffering (natural evil) - pain, disease, and death
  - 1. Last week - funeral for a friend who died of ALS
  - 2. She had served so many her whole life
  - 3. Love Jesus and others - why this seemingly senseless pain and suffering and early death?
- C. Perhaps the most difficult question of all - if God is Sovereign and good, how do we explain evil and suffering
  - 1. The problem of evil is the most powerful objection to traditional theism. ~ Richard Swinburne, Oxford Companion to Philosophy
  - 2. If a good God made the world, why has it gone wrong? ~ C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity
- D. This has plagued thinkers for years - how can I answer it in 45 minutes? In fact, the problem of evil is beyond our explanations
- E. It is also more intensely personal - we all suffer and experience evil - more than philosophy is needed!

## II. What Christians Believe About Evil and Suffering

- A. The basic facts about evil and suffering in Scripture
  - 1. Evil and suffering are pervasive - seen at all times and places; no part of creation is immune
  - 2. Evil and suffering are real - not just a state of mind
  - 3. Evil and suffering are the results of human sin - this is not the original state of creation
  - 4. God is both Sovereign and Good. We can not escape this difficulty by reducing His Sovereignty (He can't stop evil) or by saying He is not good.
  - 5. God will overcome evil and suffering through Christ and His work on the cross
  - 6. God will redeem and restore all of the sufferings of those who love Him
- B. The evil and suffering seen throughout creation are the real consequences of human sin, but our Good, Sovereign God will overcome them through Christ to bring eternal blessing and joy to all who love Him.

## III. The Question of Evil

- A. "God is responsible for suffering. He must not be good." For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be liberated from its **bondage to decay** and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> We know that the whole creation has been **groaning as in the pains of childbirth** right up to the present time. Romans 8:20–22
  - 1. Speaks of evil & suffering throughout all of creation

2. Allusions back to Genesis 3 - the fall and the curse  
To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children..."<sup>17</sup> "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life."<sup>18</sup> It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field."<sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."  
Genesis 3:16–19

- a. Pain in childbirth; futility; death and decay
- b. The entire range of human suffering is because of the fall

B. "Then God must be limited in His power, or else He would have prevented evil"

To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. Genesis 3:17

1. God made humans with free will - the ability to obey or disobey His commands
2. Adam chose to disobey (as do we all), and this led to the curse of evil and suffering
3. Free will is inherent in our being the image of God
4. In making creatures in His image, there was the inescapable possibility of sin, evil and suffering  
"All that is given to a creature with free will must be two-edged, not by the nature of the giver or of the gift, but by the nature of the recipient." - CS Lewis

5. Free will is what opens the possibility of evil and suffering, but it is also what opens the possibility of love, blessing, and joy

Why, then, did God give them free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having. ~ C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

C. "Then God will not be able to overcome evil and sin."

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.<sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope<sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. Romans 8:19–21

1. The whole creation is waiting for liberation day!
2. God will judge sin and evil, and reverse the effects of the fall, spreading blessing far as the curse is found!
3. God has allowed the effects of our sin and the curse to run its course, but He is still in Sovereign control, and He has promised that He will one day judge and eradicate sin.
4. The death and resurrection of Christ is the guarantee that God will finally judge and overcome all sin

D. "I simply do not believe in God or the Christian explanation regarding evil."

1. This actually puts one in a worse place to deal with the problem of evil and suffering!

2. If there is no God, but only the material universe, then concepts such as good and evil are meaningless - and all behaviors are equally valid "Without God all things are permitted." — Fyodor Dostoyevsky
3. In such a material universe we are caught in natural selection, and what we decry as evil is simply the strong overcoming the weak. Thus no one could even speak of good and evil, or complain about the "problem of evil."
4. This is the logical outcome of Enlightenment rationalism which finds its terminus in existentialism "if God does not exist "there can no longer be any possibility of an a priori good existing, since there is no perfect and infinite consciousness to think it. It is nowhere written that 'the good exists', that one must be honest and not lie, since we are precise now on the plane where there are only human beings. Dostoyevsky once wrote 'If God does not exist, everything is permitted', and that for existentialism is the starting point... We have neither behind us nor before us a luminous realm of values nor any means of justification or excuse." Jean-Paul Sartre, Existentialism Is A Humanism
5. Beyond all doubt, the question of evil and suffering is difficult for Christians. There are things we simply can not explain. But for the atheist, the question is not difficult, it is impossible and devoid of all hope.

#### IV. Applying the Word

- A. Do I have hope in the face of evil and suffering?
  1. Apart from the Good, Sovereign God, there is no hope in the face of evil and suffering.

2. But God does not let evil have the last word - He gives us hope that a world without evil and suffering is coming!

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us... <sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. Romans 8:18, 24–25

- a. At present evil & suffering are great - Paul knew this!
- b. But there is a new world coming - and it will be glorious beyond compare or description
- c. This hope can sustain us in the face of suffering

- B. Do I know God will work all things for my good?
 

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28

1. There is much evil & suffering - but God will overcome
2. There is much evil & suffering - but God will work good for us through it
3. Does this knowledge sustain me when evil and suffering comes my way?

Dear reader, are you looking forward to poverty? Fear not; the divine Spirit can give you, in your want, a greater plenty than the rich have in their abundance. You know not what joys may be stored up for you in the cottage around which grace will plant the roses of content. Are you conscious of a growing failure of your bodily powers? Do you expect to suffer long nights of languishing and days of pain? O be not sad! That bed may become a

throne to you. You little know how every pang that shoots through your body may be a refining fire to consume your dross—a beam of glory to light up the secret parts of your soul. Are the eyes growing dim? Jesus will be your light. Do the ears fail you? Jesus' name will be your soul's best music, and his person your dear delight. Socrates used to say, "Philosophers can be happy without music;" and Christians can be happier than philosophers when all outward causes of rejoicing are withdrawn. In thee, my God, my heart shall triumph, come what may of ills without! By thy power, O blessed Spirit, my heart shall be exceeding glad, though all things should fail me here below." - C.H. Spurgeon

#### C. Do I know God is with me in my suffering?

1. God is not distant in our suffering - He walks with us
2. Christ has borne our evil and suffering, and conquered for us. He was forsaken that we might never be; He bore the curse, that we might bear the blessing; He suffered alone so that we would always have the Presence of God. This is the sure anchor for our soul when facing evil and suffering  
In Jesus, God has come to share our pain. God is no absent academic who writes a book on the problem of pain. He has got involved. He has allowed pain at its most severe to strike him. We worship a suffering God: that is the best answer to the problem of undeserved suffering. ~ Michael Green, The Message of Matthew
3. In the face of evil and suffering, we often feel alone, and as if God does not understand. But Jesus has faced ultimate evil and suffering - and walks with us in our struggles

#### D. The Table of Presence

1. Here we remember Christ's suffering for us - and His victory for us as well
2. Here we receive God's Presence in our trials, knowing He will work everything for our good

#### The Question of Evil

Romans 8:18-25

April 15, 2018

Communion

Hebrews 13:20-21

Teaching keywords: Apologetics; suffering; fall and curse; salvation and deliverance

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep,<sup>21</sup> equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Hebrews 13:20–21

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.<sup>19</sup> The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.<sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope<sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.<sup>22</sup> We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.<sup>23</sup> Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.<sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has?<sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. Romans 8:18–25