

The Parish of Wellow

Searching Issues

Why does God allow suffering?

Passage, Sermon Notes and Questions

Please feel free to take these sermon notes home with you and you may wish to find some time during next week to consider the questions below.

1. Sermon Passage

Job 1:6-22

6 One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them.

7 The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it."

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.

John 9:1-3

1 As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth.

2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

3 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.

2. Sermon Notes

2.1 Introduction

- Tragedy can strike our lives so quickly and without warning. It is often after a tragedy has struck and we are either suffering the consequences personally or we aware of others doing so that we ask the question: Why does a loving God allow such suffering to occur?
- This is the number one question surveys tell us that people would like to ask God. It's the number one intellectual reason for rejecting the existence of a loving God. It's a question that deserves an answer.
- People often say that God causes suffering to happen but The Bible roundly rejects this: Lamentations 3:33 'God does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.'

2.2 The Disciples ask Jesus the 'why' question

- In the first century, most people believed that all suffering was the result of sin. So the disciples ask Jesus, "Who sinned in this case, this blind man or his parents?" "Tell us, Jesus," they beg, "why was this man born blind?" (John 9:2)
- Jesus does not give his disciples a simple answer to the 'why' problem of suffering.

- Jesus never answers “why” this man was blind in the first place, but he does focus on what good could come from the experience by saying, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. (John 9:3).

2.3 Three possible answers that can be given to why does God allow suffering?

- The Theological Answer
- The Disciples Answer
- the Unknown Answer

2.3.1 The Theological Answer

- When Adam and Eve rebelled against God, sin entered the world.
- Most but not all of the suffering we experience is due to bad decisions on our own part.
- It’s not fair therefore to lay our bad decisions at God’s feet and blame him for them.
- Our choices will always have consequences.
- For example if we look at the history of war what we will find is that the suffering caused by innumerable wars is as a result of our own selfishness, pride and greed.
- Theologically therefore suffering happens because God’s perfect design has been trampled on by sin, as a result of our free will choices.

2.3.2 The Disciples Answer

- Most of the time we get along surprisingly well in our lives. But all of us have experienced those tough times , those times when we are brought to our knees. Those times when we yell at God in anger. Those times when we feel like giving up on the church. Those times when our comfort zones are no where to be found.
- The Bible tells us again and again what these times represent:
 - In 2 Corinthians Chapter 1 verse 4 The Apostle Paul tells us that: Jesus comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others.
 - 1 Peter 1:7 Peter says that these trials are only to test our faith, to show that it is pure and strong.
 - Romans Chapter 8 verse 18 the Apostle Paul says, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”
 - The Bible therefore seems to suggest that our suffering helps us to identify and help others who are suffering. We find it easier to care for people dealing with grief when we’ve lost a loved one. We find it easier to identify with a person suffering from a particular disease or health condition when we’ve gone through something similar. We find it easier to help someone struggling with faith when we too have a had a similar journey.

2.3.3 The Unknown Answer

- Some suffering seemingly has no rhyme or reason. It’s not caused by another person’s sin or our own. We’re not perfected in our faith by it. It’s just tragic and no explanation will do. The category doesn’t fit neatly into any box.
- In the story of Job, God allows Job to lose all his family and his possessions in a tornado, but Job remains committed to God though it all.
- A short time later, God allows Job to suffer from a horrible disease of oozing sores. It was so bad that Job was disfigured and his friends didn’t recognize him. Job remains committed to God, but he starts asking a question: Why?
- In fact, most of the book of Job is a dialogue between Job and his friends who are quite convinced that he’s done something to deserve his tragedies and the suffering that’s befallen him.
- Finally, God interrupts and tells Job’s friends that they’re wrong. Job hadn’t sinned. Interestingly, God never answers the “Why?” question for us. For 42 chapters, we hold our breath waiting, but the answer to the question “Why?” never comes.
- Job’s story demonstrates that there is not always going to be an answer to our suffering - at least not in this life. When we stand by people who are undergoing suffering we need to beware of offering them pat answers.

3. Questions to consider back at home

3.1 If God is not the cause of suffering who or what is?

3.2 What does Jesus mean when he says that the blind man was blind ‘so that the work of God might be displayed in his life’ :John 9:3.

3.3 Do you agree with the apostle Paul when he says in 2 Corinthians 1:4 ‘Jesus comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others?’

3.4 Do you agree with Peter in 1 Peter 1:7 when he states that our suffering is allowed by God ‘to test our faith?’

3.5 Do you agree with the apostle Paul when he says in Romans 8:18 “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us?”

3.6 A friend tragically loses her husband to a sudden heart attack. Over coffee she says ‘why Benjamin, why me, why the girls, what have we done wrong. I simply cannot believe in a God of love after this.’ How would you respond?

If you would like to discuss these questions further please feel free to call me on 01761 432293