

40b, 2015

1. **Jesus threw out the unclean spirits of the man in the synagogue and he cured blindness and he helped the lame to walk: all that is fantastic.**

**But the question arises: Why did that man have unclean spirits in the 1st place?
Why is anyone blind in the 1st place?
Why is anyone lame in the 1st place?**

We can accept that Jesus did wonderful things for these folks, but why is there evil and suffering at all?

In short: why is there an imperfect world, where evil exists, if a perfectly good and loving God is the Creator of that world?

The Churches' answer is: God is the source of the good, but not the source of evil; I'll try to explain this position...

2. **In the beginning, God did create a perfect world.**

But the rebellion of Adam and Eve, either as our first parents OR as symbolic representatives of a rebellious humanity, introduced the possibility of choosing evil over good into this world of ours.

The point of the creation story is to tell us that our world was constituted in an original state of perfection and goodness.

As long as men and women remained in this divine intimacy with God, no one would have to experience any sort of evil which has suffering as a by-product.

But our human rebellion against God introduced the possibility of evil and suffering into God's perfect creation, either through natural causes—such as earthquakes—or through man's inhumanity to his fellow human beings—such as the actions of Hitler.

But in order for God to create a perfect people for this perfect world, God had to allow us to have total freedom so as to be able to choose good or evil, love or hate.

God was not interested in robots, who were programmed to follow his every wish.

Yet for love to exist, there must be the freedom not to love & that's when things got messy.

Love by its very nature has to be chosen because love, if manipulated, is not love at all.

Consequently, God had to allow for the possibility of bad choices so that the greatest of all goods—love—could be freely chosen.

Thus by the tragedy of our human rebellion, that perfect world became a broken world and our lives broken with it.

- 3. And so we might ask: what is an appropriate Christian response to the suffering that our rebellious humanity brought into existence?**

First we have to go back a bit, where the problem of evil was first theologically tackled.

In the Book of Job, written about 500 years before Christ, Job's wife and children are killed and he loses all of his considerable property.

In response, Job chastises God for allowing evil to befall him, a good man.

In response, God says: the thing @ which you complain is bigger/ deeper than you are; and we should always remember this: the problem of evil is bigger, deeper than we are.

Eventually, Job understands that someone who is created cannot always understand the mind of the Creator and ultimately we are to respond to this dilemma by staying connected to God, even when we do not understand His ways.

Eventually Job presents a challenge to our modern age:

In the face of the greatest challenge to faith—undeserved suffering—we must continue to believe in a good and all-loving God. Sadly, I recall a woman I knew years ago who took down the crucifix over her bed once she realized that the cancer would take her life.

Now here is when the question of evil hits home: Why do we knowingly choose to do something that is wrong? Why do we choose evil over good?

Well, to do things that are wrong can bring temporary pleasure:

**We lie so as to avoid punishment; we are rude in order make ourselves feel superior;
We steal so that we can buy more things.**

I learn to rationalize my evil actions because they satisfy my natural desire for enjoyment.

But by doing what I know should not be done, I put myself into a kind of moral contradiction, by choosing evil as if it were a good.

However whenever we do evil, we inevitably become worse human beings, for our actions form our character as we choose a lazy attitude towards life rather than accepting the challenge to always try to do what is right, regardless of the often difficult consequences.

Now going a step further, the real complexity of the question as to why the innocent suffer is not fully addressed until God the Father allowed His Son to suffer on the cross

in order to show us sinners the depth of His love for us and the extent that He was willing to go so as to open eternal life for us.

When I measure my cancer, or my failed marriage, or poor grades against the Son of God dying on the cross so as to bring me closer to the Father, then like Job, I must submit to this divine wisdom.

That doesn't mean that I understand it. Nor does it mean that I will necessarily like it.

Of course, there is still mystery involved, but this at least gives this mystery a context.

And the context is: we may not understand why bad things happen to good people, but the death of Jesus on the cross is the greatest injustice that the world has ever known and our misfortunes, regardless of how bad they are, cannot compare to it...

This mystery is the greatest reversal of fortune in human history—that the Father allowed His innocent Son to suffer for our sins.

And yet to be honest, I don't understand why the Son of God chose this way to reconcile us back with the Father, but all I know is, that He did!

And so in the face of this greatest injustice, we have a choice when suffering comes our way:

We can spend our lives bitterly resenting our crosses;

or we can accept our crosses when they come, recalling that it was the human family's misuse of freedom that brought suffering into the world in the 1st place.

Suffering and death are no longer the total defeat that they would have been without reconciliation with the Father.

And so in whatever ways we understand evil, let us draw our hope from God's victory over it, even if that victory is too obscure for us. Still, let us trust in Jesus, who made quick work of an unclean spirit and who uses our efforts in ways we may not yet understand.

- 4. All very complex, all very heady, and all still very much a mystery;
it will always be bigger, be deeper than our human understanding can comprehend.**

But if you retain nothing else, recall the importance of love in our world and that there can be no love without freedom not to love.

Consequently the question that we must ask ourselves is: by what criterion do we choose to love or not to love those people who inhabit our lives...