

Adult Equip Class – Knowing God Through Suffering and Persecution

Class #2 – What Happened to Our World?

1/28/24

I. Introduction and Review

a. Review from first class: **Purpose of the class** – To know God

b. Two steps in the class

i. **Develop a biblical framework**

1. We need to ensure that we have a solid biblical framework before we encounter the reality of suffering

2. We need to ensure that we are interpreting our circumstances through the revelation of who God is revealed to be in Scripture, not the other way around

ii. **Explore the spiritual experiences that accompany suffering and persecution**

1. This is a very large range

2. The goal is to continue to point to the cross of Jesus Christ so we don't stray into extremes.

c. This morning – We will begin to set more detail to the biblical framework for suffering. We will start with the question, “What happened to our world?” and then begin today to examine suffering on a larger scale, before getting into more personal examples of suffering in weeks to come.

II. What Happened to Our World?

a. We can all look around the world and we can ask anyone on the street if the world is the way it's “supposed” to be, and we would probably get an answer somewhat in line with no. Humanity in general, recognizes that something is not right with the world because of the pain and suffering experienced by humanity. This, of course, is not humanity's

hope. At the beginning of the 20th century, the world was full of utopian hope with all the advancements that were seen. But a couple of world wars and various regional wars later, a pandemic, famines, dictators, and multiple natural disasters over the last 120 years we can see that the hope for utopia did not exactly play out the way people hoped. But why?

b. To answer this question, we must reframe the question that is the title of today's class. This is not our world. We must ask, what happened to the world God created? And to examine that, we must start at the beginning and put our view of what happened in the context of the arc of the whole of Scripture.

c. **The Biblical Narrative of Evil**

i. When we look at the creation account in Genesis 1, (ask the class) what is the theme that is repeated throughout the account? **And God saw that it was good.**

Turn to Genesis 1.

ii. At the end of the sixth day, what do we read? **Genesis 1:31 – And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.**

iii. The creation of the world was good. Romans 1:20 states: "For His invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse." The goodness of God is reflected in the world He created. Humanity knows this as they look at creation. And yet, they know that evil exists. This is because of the sin of our first parents in Genesis chapter 3. God told Adam and Eve that if they ate of the fruit they would die; the serpent said they will not die. They ate, and death entered the world and by implication, suffering and evil. And two chapters later, we move from the refrain

of creation being good to the reminder in the genealogy in Genesis 5 that death is in the world with the now repeated refrain of he died... he died... he died...

- iv. **The end of the Bible brings restoration. Rev 21:3-4 Read aloud**
- v. **But what about in between?** But in between the beginning and end, there is evil and there is suffering and from the larger view of the Bible, those two are linked. Evil is the cause of suffering and because of sin, evil entered the world.
- vi. But the world acknowledges evil, even if they do not acknowledge sin. So here we must be careful. The Bible leaves no space for the world's story line of that eternal struggle between good and evil as two equal, yet opposing forces, where we hope that good wins out and we must be careful to not get pulled into the dark side, and sometimes the evil side became evil because of circumstances they couldn't control so we can have a soft spot for the evil characters. And let's hope at the end of it all we have the correct color of light saber for you Star Wars fans. We need to be careful not to get drawn into the world's storyline. In a roundabout way, those stories are acknowledging that there are none that are perfect. But what is missing is sin, rebellion against God.
- vii. To make sure we are appropriately connecting evil and suffering, we must have the biblical view of evil. **Read Romans 3:10-18 and Eph 2 verse 3.**
- viii. It's helpful here to quote Carson directly: page 43, "At the most basic level, moral evil is to suffering what cause is to effect; yet suffering itself is so tied to the fallen order that it too is rightly thought of as evil, and experienced as such.
- ix. We will go deeper into God's sovereignty in further lessons. As we go through this study, we need to make sure that we keep bouncing back out to focus on what we can ground our hope in. It can be overwhelming to consider evil and

suffering and not turn our eyes back to that which we have hope in. Just as the Bible treats evil and suffering with seriousness, the Bible also assumes as a given the goodness of God. Let's look at a few passages that make this clear.

- x. **1 John 1:5** – And this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.
- xi. **Deut. 32:4** – The Rock! (speaking of God) His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He.
- xii. **Nahum 1:7** – The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knows those who take refuge in Him.

d. Implication

- i. We can't view our world like the world does. Bad things don't happen to good people. Good things happen to undeserving sinners. And as we continue to set the foundation to "stay between the ditches," this is an important item to remember.
- ii. When we view evil through the lens of what the price of sin is in the Biblical narrative, it helps establish the framework we must have as we go through this study. This is related to the prior point. We must ask ourselves honestly, in light of Scripture, what do we deserve and what have we received?

III. A Brief Survey of Broad Categories

- a. Before we consider suffering on a more personal level, it is important to have a brief survey of broad categories of suffering that impact large numbers of people at the same time. We'll look at three today and then two more next Sunday before considering suffering on a more personal level.

b. Social Evils

- i. At the risk of over generalizing, the vast majority of what we could consider social evils have to do with an injustice from one party to another. And so, we are not going to list out social evils, but rather ask how we should view social evils personally and in context of how God has established governments with the role of dealing with social evils.
- ii. **Role of government**
- iii. Because of evils perpetrated in society, God has given governments to check the evil that could be done from one person upon another.
- iv. I want to be careful here because this is not intended to be a dive into the current state of government here in the US or around the world. But whatever one thinks of the state of government, Romans 13:1-5 is true. **(read that aloud)**
- v. Of course, there are examples from the Bible and history that point out that government can be an instrument for good and an instrument for evil. Think of the account of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel stealing Naboth's vineyard, or World War 2.
- vi. So, obedience to government is a qualified obedience; obey when government is good and oppose when it is evil. In either case, the Word of God must be our guide and we must be honest between ourselves and the Lord for conscience' sake. And when we experience societal evils ourselves, and have an expectation for governing authorities to intervene, we still need to have a Scriptural view of the role of government. If we are personally wronged in a way that could be placed in the category of societal evil, we must remember where our ultimate

hope for justice lies if we are in a position of interacting with the government to deliver justice.

vii. The goal of our study is to know God through suffering. (**Implications**) And so, without listing out all the various social evils, what can we take away from this to build on our foundation for when we see or experience societal evil either checked or unchecked by government?

1. Remember, the Bible is very realistic about suffering the state inflicts, and suffering the state protects us from. We should not think any human is exempt from pain from that source.
2. Humankind is fallen, the behavior of governments reflects that.
3. There is no utopia here on earth that we can hope for. Our hope is in Jesus Christ coming again and the new heavens and new earth.
4. God's sovereignty must be considered, which we do more later. He stands behind the state and yet holds it to account when it acts wickedly.

c. **Poverty**

- i. There are many types of poverty both self-inflicted and brought on by circumstances outside of a person's control. We will not take the time to go through those types but here I want to consider some **considerations from Scripture** to build on our foundation to know God in the midst of suffering.
- ii. What should we ask for? **Prov 30:8** - "...Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is my portion, lest I be full and deny Thee and say, "Who is the Lord?" Or lest I be in want and steal, and profane the name of my God."

1. We live a very materialistic society, and it can be very easy to scroll social media and become covetous, discouraged, and take our eyes off our provider. We should have this prayer be ours and remember that God provides for and knows our needs before we ask for it.
 2. That is not to minimize anyone who is or has experienced poverty. But rather an attitude to cultivate as part of the foundation we are seeking to build as we consider how we might know God through suffering.
- iii. When we see poverty, our first response should be compassion and material support as we are able.
1. **Deut 15:11** – For the poor will never cease to be in the land; therefore, I command you saying, “You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land.”
 2. **Prov 17:5** – He who mocks the poor reproaches His Maker; He who rejoices at calamity will not go unpunished.
- iv. If you are blessed with much, be careful how you use both your wealth and your influence.
1. **Is. 5:8** – Woe to those who add house to house and join field to field until there is no more room, so that you have to live alone in the midst of the land!
 2. **Prov. 29:7** – The righteous is concerned for the rights of the poor, The wicked does not understand such concern.
 3. **Prov. 31:9** – Open your mouth, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the afflicted and needy.

v. Establish the habit of working hard as unto the Lord to prevent poverty as much as is in our control.

1. **Prov 13:4** – The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the soul of the diligent is made fat.
2. **Prov 14:23** – In all labor there is profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.
3. **Prov 10:4** – Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.
4. If we are to know God in the midst of suffering and set the foundation to prepare for when suffering comes, we must have the attitude towards work that reflects our God who worked for six days in creation and rested on the seventh. Ease is a particular temptation for our society. Let's be aware of how that impacts our own lives, so we are preparing ourselves if poverty comes to us unexpectedly.

vi. There are many other things we can consider under this topic of poverty, but before we move to the final broad topic, let's look at one more passage that helps set the foundation for preparing for, or dealing with poverty. Again, I don't want to minimize the experience of those who have or are in poverty, but anxiety is something that can accompany poverty, so let's turn to the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:25-34. **(Turn and read aloud)**

d. Natural Disasters

- i. Briefly to close, what should we do when we hear about or experience natural disasters ourselves. Again, just saying these out loud is not some sort of cure-all

for those who have gone through this. The intent here is to emphasize how we should set our minds as we prepare for these things.

- ii. **Matt 24:7b-8** - (Jesus here is talking about signs of the end times) "...and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs."
- iii. Although painful and sad, these things should not surprise us. But we should not have *laisse faire* attitude about them either. We do not want to ignore or have our love for fellow humanity grow cold. We do have a greater danger of becoming numb to such things because of the speed and volume at which we can consume news today. These are things that we can only examine within our own hearts. And we should be careful to do so unless we become cold to the suffering of others and then when suffering comes to us, we are broken.

IV. Conclusion

- a. As we close this morning, let's turn to Luke 13. What can we learn from Jesus, to train our minds to have a solid foundation when thinking about suffering on a larger scale?
- b. **Let's read vss 1-5**
- c. There are three main lessons:
 - i. Jesus assumes that all death, one way or another, is a result of sin.
 - ii. Tragedy does not immediately mean that those suffering are deserving due to increased wickedness. It is God's mercy that anyone is alive, and we need to be careful of moral superiority.
 - iii. Jesus twice, in verse 3 and 5, calls his hearers to repentance. He does not explore the mysteries of God, but views suffering as incentives to call to repentance. We are going to explore this more next week, but I want to end on

that note. To have a firm foundation built before we experience suffering and to endure suffering, we must turn to Jesus Christ in faith and repentance. The cross is where Jesus suffered for our sake, to bear our sins and the wrath of God, so that by faith in Him, we would not experience the ultimate suffering of the wrath of God upon us for our sins. If you have not turned to Christ in faith and repentance, I would urge you to do so today. For today is the day of salvation, and not one of us knows when our opportunity for repentance will run out. And if you have placed your faith in Christ, I pray that this would be an opportunity to continue to place your eyes on Him to gain strength. We don't know when, in God's providence, we will experience suffering. Let us follow the example of Jesus who, as Hebrews says, "In the days of His flesh, offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered."