

# Summer Nights @



“Strong Through The Storm”



# Introduction

## THE PLAN/CALENDAR

- June 3<sup>rd</sup> – The Storm
  - Is God Big and Good Enough?
- June 10<sup>th</sup> – The Desert
  - What is Suffering?
- June 17<sup>th</sup> – The Valley
  - Where is God? Can God Bring Me Through?
- June 24<sup>th</sup> – The Darkness
  - How Should We Go Through Suffering?
- July 1<sup>st</sup> – The Garden
  - Does God understand? Does God Care?

## DISCLAIMERS

- I won't make anyone share anything with anyone... and yet, maybe that's what you need to do the most...
- Have some grace for ME
  - No Perfect answers... because evil is evil... it doesn't make sense... that's the point!
  - This class won't fix it
    - Some things can't be undone this side of heaven
    - Understanding a wound or getting a Band-Aid doesn't fix the hole... only time and God can do that.
- Have Grace for Each other – Everyone's in a Different Place
  - Can't compare sufferings
  - Different things will help or be irrelevant to different people
  - This is one thing in theory and a very different thing in practice
- Stick with this...
  - Suffering can destroy a faith... or solidify it

## THE RULES

- Our perspective, as Christians, has to be the truth of the Bible
  - Experience is important, but there needs to be a higher authority/purpose
-

# Is God Big and Good Enough?

## PASSAGE

- MATTHEW 8:23-27 THEN HE GOT INTO THE BOAT AND HIS DISCIPLES FOLLOWED HIM. <sup>24</sup> WITHOUT WARNING, A FURIOUS STORM CAME UP ON THE LAKE, SO THAT THE WAVES SWEEPED OVER THE BOAT. BUT JESUS WAS SLEEPING. <sup>25</sup> THE DISCIPLES WENT AND WOKE HIM, SAYING, "LORD, SAVE US! WE'RE GOING TO DROWN!" <sup>26</sup> HE REPLIED, "YOU OF LITTLE FAITH, WHY ARE YOU SO AFRAID?" THEN HE GOT UP AND REBUKED THE WINDS AND THE WAVES, AND IT WAS COMPLETELY CALM. <sup>27</sup> THE MEN WERE AMAZED AND ASKED, "WHAT KIND OF MAN IS THIS? EVEN THE WINDS AND THE WAVES OBEY HIM!"
  - Jesus was strong enough to calm the storm... but did he not also cause it?
  - Can God keep YOU through the storm?

---

## God's Goodness

### WHAT IS GOODNESS?

- How do you define goodness? – Not so fast!
  - A 'Good' mechanic vs A 'Good' judge vs A 'Good' person
- Attempts at a definition:
  - "a general term of commendation. We describe as good any kind of excellence, including beauty, economic value, practical usefulness, skillfulness – indeed, anything that evokes from us a favorable response. In theology we tend to focus on moral goodness,..." (Frame 233
  - Benevolence: something done for someone else

### GOD'S GOODNESS

- "The goodness of God means that God is the final standard of good, and that all that God is and does is worthy of approval" (Grudem 197)
  - LUKE 18:19 "WHY DO YOU CALL ME GOOD?" JESUS ANSWERED. "NO ONE IS GOOD-- EXCEPT GOD ALONE."

- PSALM 100:5 FOR THE LORD IS GOOD AND HIS LOVE ENDURES FOREVER; HIS FAITHFULNESS CONTINUES THROUGH ALL GENERATIONS.
- God's goodness is related to his love, mercy, patience and grace
  - "God's mercy is his goodness toward those in distress, his grace is his goodness toward those who deserve only punishment, and his patience is his goodness toward those who continue to sin over a period of time." (Grudem 198)
- God created the world Good and he created us Very Good
  - God created the world with an order, with laws, with consequences...
  - "Since the world was made by a good and righteous God, the fabric of the world has a moral order to it. That order is not based on power but on righteousness. Power and self-interest may appear successful in the short run, but they do not ultimately 'work' in a world created by a good and just God. Therefore cruel, selfish power is not only sinful, but stupid. It brings about loneliness, emptiness, and destruction. Faithfulness, integrity, unselfish service, and love are not only right but wise, because they fit the fabric of reality." (Keller 134)

### GOODNESS

- Becomes what God approves of – there is no higher standard (Grudem 197)

## God's Sovereignty

### WHAT IS SOVEREIGNTY?

- Who's flying this plane? Who's in charge?

### GOD'S IN CHARGE

- "The biblical teaching that God is king, supreme ruler, and lawgiver of the entire universe." (Elwell 1131)
  - Psalm 103:19 The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.

- 1 Chronicles 29:11 Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all.
- “God’s omnipotence means that God is able to do all his holy will. The word *omnipotence* is derived from two Latin words, *omni*, ‘all,’ and *potens*, ‘powerful,’ and means ‘all-powerful.’ Whereas God’s freedom referred to the fact that there are no external constraints on God’s decisions, God’s omnipotence has reference to his own power to do what he decides to do.” (Grudem 216)

### WHAT GOD CAN’T/WON’T DO

- God won’t go against his character
  - God can’t lie (Titus 1:2)
  - God can’t deny himself (2 Timothy 2:13)
  - God can’t be tempted with evil (James 1:13)

### ISSUES OF GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY

- All Christians agree that God is completely sovereign... except:
  - when it comes to salvation
  - when it comes to suffering

### THEOLOGICAL TENSION

- God is Good (with a Capital “G”) AND God is Sovereign (Omnipotent, Omnipresent, Omniscient) AND there is evil in the world
- God’s Sovereignty AND Human Responsibility

### GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY AND OUR RESPONSIBILITY

- “God’s plan works *through* our choices, not around or despite them. Our choices have consequences, and we are never forced by God to do anything – we always do what we most want to do. God works out his will perfectly through our willing actions.” (Keller 140)
- “The Bible teaches that God is completely in control of what happens in history and yet he exercises that control in such a way that human beings are responsible for their freely chosen actions and the results of those actions. Human freedom and God’s

direction of historical events are therefore completely compatible.”  
(Keller 140)

---

## Evil

### INTRODUCTION TO EVIL

- Evil is Real (not an illusion)
- Evil is Bad
- Evil doesn't make sense

### CATEGORIES OF EVIL

- Moral Evil – Sin and its consequences
- Natural Evil – Hurricanes and floods and earthquakes and diseases, etc.

### EVIL

- Moral evil seems to come first – Adam and Eve sin, and then the curse...
  - In some ways then Evil is a consequence of our free will
- But then Evil doesn't seem to always be due to sin, or fault, or punishment, or discipline
  - LUKE 13:4-5 OR THOSE EIGHTEEN WHO DIED WHEN THE TOWER IN SILOAM FELL ON THEM-- DO YOU THINK THEY WERE MORE GUILTY THAN ALL THE OTHERS LIVING IN JERUSALEM? <sup>5</sup> I TELL YOU, NO! BUT UNLESS YOU REPENT, YOU TOO WILL ALL PERISH.”
  - And suffering can't be punishment anymore, because Jesus took that for us
- One View is that Evil is the absence of all good
  - Much the same way that darkness is the absence of light

### GOD AND EVIL

- God hates evil
  - PSALM 5:4 YOU ARE NOT A GOD WHO TAKES PLEASURE IN EVIL; WITH YOU THE WICKED CANNOT DWELL.
  - HABAKKUK 1:13 YOUR EYES ARE TOO PURE TO LOOK ON EVIL; YOU CANNOT TOLERATE WRONG. WHY THEN DO YOU TOLERATE THE TREACHEROUS? WHY ARE YOU SILENT WHILE THE WICKED SWALLOW UP THOSE MORE RIGHTEOUS THAN THEMSELVES?

- God uses all things to fulfill his purposes and even uses evil for his glory and our good
  - Nevertheless, God never does evil, and is never to be blamed for evil
    - Luke 22:22<sup>22</sup> The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him.”
  - God often directs evil by the actions of moral free humans (I.e. Joseph (GENESIS 50:20 YOU INTENDED TO HARM ME, BUT GOD INTENDED IT FOR GOOD TO ACCOMPLISH WHAT IS NOW BEING DONE, THE SAVING OF MANY LIVES.))
    - God rightfully blames and judges moral creatures for the evil they do
- We Do Evil
  - ROMANS 1:18 THE WRATH OF GOD IS BEING REVEALED FROM HEAVEN AGAINST ALL THE GODLESSNESS AND WICKEDNESS OF MEN WHO SUPPRESS THE TRUTH BY THEIR WICKEDNESS,
  - ROMANS 6:23 FOR THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH, BUT THE GIFT OF GOD IS ETERNAL LIFE IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD.
- Evil is real, not an illusion, and we should never do evil, for it will always harm us and others
  - “In thinking about God using evil to fulfill his purposes, we should remember that there are things that are right for God to do but wrong for us to do” (Grudem 329)

#### WHAT IS THE PROBLEM OF EVIL?

- *So, how can there be evil in the world if God be all-powerful, all-loving, and just?*
- The Logical Problem of Evil
  - If God is omnipotent is omnipotent, he is able to prevent evil.
  - If God is good, he wants to prevent evil.
  - But evil exists.
  - Conclusion: either God is not omnipotent, or he is not good. (Frame 282)
- The Emotional Problem of Evil
  - Why, Lord?
  -



# Theodicy

## WHAT IS A THEODICY?

- An attempt to justify (*dikē*) the ways of God (*theos*)

## DIFFERENT THEODICIES

- Irenaeus of Lyons - the only way that we can grow towards God is as we experience good and evil in order for us to have a truly informed decision to choose good. Evil is simply a necessary prerequisite for spiritual growth and development.
  - “The soul-making theodicy hopefully forces us to examine our assumptions. Is the highest good that we become comfortable and trouble-free or that we become spiritually and morally great?” ... “It is hard to imagine the development of virtues such as courage, humility, self-control, and faithfulness if every good deed was immediately rewarded and every bad deed immediately punished.” (Keller 90)
  - Weaknesses
    - The weakness of this view is that it seems to lend a dignity to evil (McGrath 292-293)
    - “Pain and evil do not appear in any way to be distributed according to soul-making need.” (Keller 90)
    - And what about the death of infants?
- Augustine of Hippo - “Augustine’s fundamental insight here is that evil is a direct consequence of the misuse of human freedom. God created humanity with the freedom to choose good or evil. Sadly, humanity chose evil; as a result, the world is contaminated by evil.” (McGrath 293)
  - Sounds good because we like to think of freedom as the ultimate good
  - Weaknesses
    - Only solves moral evil, doesn’t help with natural evil
    - But as Augustine saw, the weakness is, ‘where did evil come from for us to choose it? (McGrath 293) - Could God really not create good creatures who couldn’t do evil?’

- Especially since: “IF God has a free will yet is not capable of doing wrong – why could not other beings also be likewise constituted?” (Keller 92)
  - Especially again since that starts to sound a lot like heaven...
- Some Others...
  - Natural Law Theodicy – “The natural evils that hurt so much are the by-products of something that brings us even greater good.” (Keller 94)
    - Gravity is needed, but that all allows us to fall, but for the greater good, God allows gravity –even with its consequences
  - Punishment Theodicy – Original sin was so bad that all suffering is continued punishment for that original sin
  - Still More
    - No such thing as evil – It’s an illusion
    - God’s just not good
    - God’s just not sovereign

#### THE GOOD AND BAD OF THEODICIES

- The Good
  - Help us understand, and maybe even appreciate God more
  - Help us in defending the faith
- The Bad
  - “Alvin Plantinga himself wrote: ‘I must say that most attempts to explain *why* God permits evil – *theodicies*, as we call them – strike me as tepid, shallow and ultimately frivolous.’ And we can add to these warnings the book of Job itself. Surely one of the messages, as we will see, is that it is both futile and inappropriate to assume that any human mind could comprehend all the reasons God might have for any instance of pain and sorrow, let alone for all evil.” (Keller 95)
- More
  - Many conclude that not being able to answer these issues well is an issue for Christians: that you can disprove God
  - But in reality it often has the reverse effect:

- “Lewis recognized that modern objections to God are based on a sense of fair play and justice. People, we believe, ought not to suffer, be excluded, die of hunger or oppression. But the evolutionary mechanism of natural selection depends on death, destruction, and violence of the strong against the weak – these things are all perfectly natural. On what basis, then, does the atheist judge the natural world to be horribly wrong, unfair, and unjust?” (Reason For God 26)

---

## The ‘Problem’ of Evil (And the Problem of Pleasure)

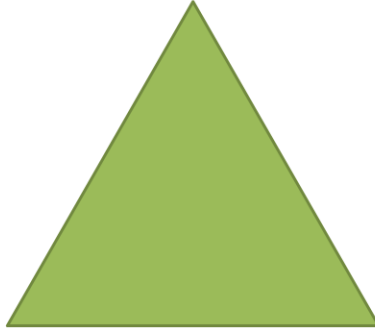
### THE PROBLEM OF EVIL (REVISITED)

- ROMANS 9:19-21 ONE OF YOU WILL SAY TO ME: “THEN WHY DOES GOD STILL BLAME US? FOR WHO RESISTS HIS WILL?” <sup>20</sup> BUT WHO ARE YOU, O MAN, TO TALK BACK TO GOD? “SHALL WHAT IS FORMED SAY TO HIM WHO FORMED IT, ‘WHY DID YOU MAKE ME LIKE THIS?’” <sup>21</sup> DOES NOT THE POTTER HAVE THE RIGHT TO MAKE OUT OF THE SAME LUMP OF CLAY SOME POTTERY FOR NOBLE PURPOSES AND SOME FOR COMMON USE?
- “To ‘author’ evil is to do it. But in saying that God is related to the world as an author to a story, we actually provide a way of seeing that God is *not* to be blamed for the sin of his creatures.” (Frame 300)

## Defenses against the Problem of Evil

(Frame 301)

Normative Defense: God Sets the Standards  
*(Human beings have no right to bring accusations against God)*



Situational Defense: Greater Good  
*(God will always bring good out of evil)*

Existential Defense: a New Heart  
*(God will comfort us so that our hearts are fully assured of the justice and rightness of his actions)*

### THE PROBLEM OF PLEASURE *(Lots from Sproul 3)*

- The Problem of Pleasure: Why Good things Happen to Bad People  
– John Gerstner
- The premise that the title exposes: The Problem of evil presupposes that WE ARE good. We assume we're owed pleasure instead of pain.
  - Except we aren't good
  - Luke 13:1-5 is a good example of a disaster, and Jesus says, no, they aren't worse sinners, it's that NONE of you deserve goodness.
- Before we can answer the question, 'why would God allow suffering', we need to remember our relationship with God. You can ask the question, but you can't frame it as an accusation. (Sproul3 – 7:10ish)
  - Humans are rebels
  - WE are dust and rebellion – Sproul3 9:40
    - “We need to come to understand that we're so sinful friends: we're not just rebels against his regime. But we're against the all powerful Lord of

All Things. If we had it in our power, we would topple him from his throne and we would kill him. How do we know that? Because we did. That's what we are." (Sproul3 9:45ish)

- "Why do bad things happen to good people?... That happened only once... and he volunteered (Sproul3 ☺ end)

---

## Conclusions

### THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD REVISITED

- What if God is absolutely sovereign... even over suffering...
  - Could God be big enough that his plan encompasses EVEN evil... and while it's evil and random from our LIMITED perspective, it can be even good from his perspective.
    - Example: I punish one of my kids for doing something wrong. From their perspective they experienced EVIL and suffering. From MY perspective, something GOOD happened to them to train them towards adulthood or that saved them
  - "In spite of all of the foregoing statements, we have to come to the point where we confess that we do not understand how it is that God can ordain that we carry out evil deeds and yet hold us accountable for them and not be blamed himself" (Grudem 330)
- "God is not ashamed of His role in history, but proud of it." (Sproul 8)
  - ISAIAH 45:1-7 "THIS IS WHAT THE LORD SAYS TO HIS ANOINTED, TO CYRUS, WHOSE RIGHT HAND I TAKE HOLD OF TO SUBDUE NATIONS BEFORE HIM AND TO STRIP KINGS OF THEIR ARMOR, TO OPEN DOORS BEFORE HIM SO THAT GATES WILL NOT BE SHUT: <sup>2</sup> I WILL GO BEFORE YOU AND WILL LEVEL THE MOUNTAINS; I WILL BREAK DOWN GATES OF BRONZE AND CUT THROUGH BARS OF IRON. <sup>3</sup> I WILL GIVE YOU THE TREASURES OF DARKNESS, RICHES STORED IN SECRET PLACES, SO THAT YOU MAY KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD, THE GOD OF ISRAEL, WHO SUMMONS YOU BY NAME.

<sup>4</sup> FOR THE SAKE OF JACOB MY SERVANT, OF ISRAEL MY CHOSEN, I SUMMON YOU BY NAME AND BESTOW ON YOU A TITLE OF HONOR, THOUGH YOU DO NOT ACKNOWLEDGE ME. <sup>5</sup> I AM THE LORD, AND THERE IS NO OTHER; APART FROM ME THERE IS NO GOD. I WILL STRENGTHEN YOU, THOUGH YOU HAVE NOT ACKNOWLEDGED ME, <sup>6</sup> SO THAT FROM THE RISING OF THE SUN TO THE PLACE OF ITS SETTING MEN MAY KNOW THERE IS NONE BESIDES ME. I AM THE LORD, AND THERE IS NO OTHER. <sup>7</sup> I FORM THE LIGHT AND CREATE DARKNESS, I BRING PROSPERITY AND CREATE DISASTER; I, THE LORD, DO ALL THESE THINGS.

- What's the Alternative?
  - God ISN'T sovereign – Frightening...
    - He's not in control?
    - It's all random/fate?

*“Nothing in all the vast universe can come to pass otherwise than God has eternally purposed. Here is a foundation of faith. Here is a resting place for the intellect. Here is an anchor for the soul, both sure and steadfast. It is not blind fate, unbridled evil, man or Devil, but the Lord Almighty who is ruling the world, ruling it according to His own good pleasure and for His own eternal glory – A. W. Pink” – (Sproul 7)*

#### THE GOODNESS OF GOD REVISITED

- Jesus loves me, this I know...
- What's the Alternative?
  - God ISN'T Good
    - Though how do you even know what 'good' is?
    - Why do you think you deserve what is 'good'?

*ROMANS 8:38-39 FOR I AM CONVINCED THAT NEITHER DEATH NOR LIFE, NEITHER ANGELS NOR DEMONS, NEITHER THE PRESENT NOR THE FUTURE, NOR ANY POWERS, <sup>39</sup> NEITHER HEIGHT NOR DEPTH, NOR ANYTHING ELSE IN ALL CREATION, WILL BE ABLE TO SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD.*





Trinity Presbyterian Church  
1452 W. Southlake Blvd.  
Southlake, TX 76092  
817.442.8983  
<http://www.trinitysouthlake.org>