

‘WHY DO GOOD PEOPLE SUFFER?’

Habakkuk 1:2-4; 2:4; 3:17-19

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INTRODUCTION:

1. As Christians, we are forced periodically to ask questions and seek answers regarding the problems of evil and human suffering.
 - a. What drives terrorists to suicide missions killing thousands of innocent people yesterday in New York, Washington, DC, and western Pennsylvania?
 1. We are shocked, saddened, outraged and in disbelief at the horrific series of events we witnessed yesterday.
 2. We grieve over the loss of innocent lives at the hands of evil persons who do not value their lives or the lives of others.
 3. And we ask, why do good people have to suffer when terrorists strike?
 - b. For a moment, let me broaden the questions:
 1. Why are good people wracked by disease and decay of the body?
 2. Do not good people suffer through famines, earthquakes, tidal waves and devastating hurricanes?
 3. Why are there slums and poverty?
 4. Why should there be rioting or shooting in our cities?
 5. Or on a more personal note. Why is my brother still in the hospital facing another surgery after a rather routine surgery on July 17 went terribly wrong?
 6. And you can identify the suffering of your loved ones, and ask why?
 - c. These questions are often asked in other ways:
 - 1) Like the lady who shouted in anger and heartbreak: “We thought God would care for us. We’ve gone to church and Sunday school, paid our tithe, had family devotions and everything ... and now God let my husband get killed. Tell me why!”

2) In another home a lady pointed through her window to a house across the street “see that house?” The man is so wicked and vile we sometimes call the children in to keep them from hearing his outrages. He never goes to church! He makes fun of churches, and preachers, and us. He works in the same place my husband works and my husband got laid off and that man kept his job. Now tell me why we suffer, and he laughs.

2. Habakkuk, the Old Testament prophet, is deeply distressed by the apparent injustice that prevails in the world. He seeks to reconcile the evil of his day to the goodness and the righteous character of God.

a. He was concerned with the suffering of his people.

1) Were they not the chosen of God?

2) They were not nearly so bad as the Chaldeans whom God was using to humiliate or chasten Judah, the children of God.

3) Why would God use a heathen nation to chastise His own people?

4) Would God tolerate the injustice inflicted upon His people?

b. What does Habakkuk conclude that can help us cope with our national tragedy? With personal and family suffering?

I. Serving God does not immune us from pain, suffering, misfortune and the persecution of evil people.

A. Re-read Habakkuk 1:2-4

How long, O Lord, must I call for help,
but you do not listen?

Or cry out to you, “Violence!”
but you do not save?

Why do you make me look at injustice?
Why do you tolerate wrong?

Destruction and violence are before me;
there is strife, and conflict abounds.

Therefore the law is paralyzed,
and justice never prevails.

The wicked hem in the righteous,
so that justice is perverted.

1. Many people who fall sick or experience tragedy, say either openly or to themselves “Why should this happen to me.”

2. There are even people who feel that God has somehow broken His side of the bargain in allowing illness, misfortune or tragedy to come upon them.
 - a. But this was not the attitude of Jesus. He knew the meaning of darkness.
 - b. There were many moments when he was discouraged.
 - c. On one occasion he went far beyond mere discouragement and cried:

“My God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

 - 1) His cry was authentic
 - 2) Jesus fully shared in the human condition

B. Every person will, at some point, try to make sense out of the painful experience or personal tragedy that come to him, his family, his friends, or his nation.

1. “WHY”? Why would God allow these things to happen ... to me, to you, to us, to our country?
2. This is not exclusively a theological question. It is a human question.

C. Why then do good people suffer? ... and God appears to be silent?

1. Only God has the final answer.
2. But there are some rather certain reasons why good people are not immune from suffering.
 - a. God’s people suffer when they break the laws of God.
 - 1) If a good man breaks the law of gravity – he suffers regardless of his state of grace.
 - 2) A person will suffer if he breaks God’s laws about love and forgiveness.

- b. God, in his sovereign will, created an orderly world of cause and effect.
 - 1) Therefore, winds of tornadoes or hurricane force destroys bars as well as churches.
 - 2) Cancer-causing viruses may just likely do their deadly work in the body of a saint as that of a thief.

- c. Suffering does sometimes come because of the freedom with which we were created.
 - 1) freedom to sin,
 - 2) freedom to make mistakes,
 - 3) freedom to err in judgment,
 - 4) freedom to break the law.
 - 5) In fact much of the world's misery is caused by human ignorance, folly, and sin.

- d. And good people suffer because of the **interdependence** of the human race.
 - 1) We are so bound together that
 - * my good helps another and
 - * my evil harms another
 - 2) Examples:
 - automobile / drunk driver
 - workers in NY City and Wash, DC
 - terrorists

D. But you may say:

- 1. Don't we believe ...
 - * that God is personal, all wise, all loving Father?

- * that He loves and cares for us as individuals?
- * that He knows our needs and seeks at all times to help us?
- * that He has a good purpose and destiny for our lives?

2. What then is the ultimate answer to the question of personal and national tragedy, of human suffering and the problem of evil?

I think you know the answer.

II. Radical trust in God alone will enable us to endure and eventually triumph over whatever afflictions may come to us.

- * Hab. 2:4b “The just shall live by his faith ... “

- A. When God told Habakkuk that Babylon would conquer Israel, the prophet felt that this was not just.

1. Without hesitation he asked God why he would allow a heathen and cruel nation to oppress His people.

And yet, Habakkuk concludes his 3 chapters of questions and complaining with these words.

- * Habakkuk 3:17-19

“Though the fig tree does not bud
 And there are no grapes on the vines,
 Though the olive crops fail
 And the fields produce no food
 Though there are no sheep in the pen
 And no cattle in the stalls,
 Yet, I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be
 joyful in God my Savior.”

2. Fairbanks’ translation of these verses:

When God appears silent,
 When there is no apparent evidence that
 God heard or even understands the
 situation,
 When all that I’ve worked for seems lost,

In these moments –

- * I choose to believe radically in a God who is faithful and true.
- * I stake my life that His promises are true – that He will never leave me nor forsake me.
- * I pray “We don’t know what to do, but we are looking to you.”
- * My faith, in these moments, is not based on feelings, but on the conviction that God is sovereign, and will bring good out of every situation in which I find myself.
- * In fact we sometimes have to pray in the spirit of Romans 8:26:

“And in the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”

3. God dealt with Habakkuk patiently until he could see that Babylon was being used by God to discipline Israel and that Babylon itself would also face the judgment of God.

B. The providence of God does not mean that disappointment and trouble will not come.

1. It does mean that NOTHING, NOT EVEN THE GREATEST TRAGEDY, THE BITTEREST PERSECUTION, THE WORST MISFORTUNE, OR DEATH OF THE BODY CAN DO ANY PERMANENT HARM OR SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD !

2. God does indeed “see before” us.

- a. Georgia Harkness tells of one of the greatest Christians she ever knew who was a woman who met every disappointment and trouble that came to her with these words, “There’s always a way provided.”

This confidence is available only through God’s enabling grace:

“Grace alone which God supplies,
Strength unknown he does provide,
Christ in us our cornerstone,
We will go forth in grace alone”.

- b. She understood correctly that God does promise to help her live bravely and usefully in the midst of circumstances that would have crushed many people.

**“His strength is perfect
when our strength is gone.
He’ll carry us
when we can’t carry on.
Raised in His power,
the weak become strong,
His strength is perfect;
His strength is perfect”.**

- c. And, further, her assurance was that the ultimate purposes of God can NEVER be defeated! This lady could truly and deeply sing, “A Mighty Fortress is our God.”
- d. We also can sing convictionally – not on emotion – “Our God Reigns” and “Our God is an Awesome God”. And we **believe** deeply what we sing.
- e. Why? Because this life is temporary – only part of a whole – the extent of which we can only very dimly perceive.
- f. God, through this national tragedy, can give us a glimpse of eternity.
- * We can know that our hearts are right before Him,
- * and that God can and will use us for His glory, and a blessing to others ... when they experience intense suffering and pain.

CONCLUSION

Please reflect on these words, and

Listen prayerfully to the words of one of my favorite songs. The chorus – “His Strength is Perfect”

HIS STRENGTH IS PERFECT

I can do all things
thro' Christ who gives me strength.
But sometimes I wonder
what He can do thro' me.
No great success to show.
no glory on my own.
Yet in my weakness
He is there to let me know –

Chorus: His strength is perfect
when our strength is gone.
He'll carry us
when we can't carry on.
Raised in His power,
the weak become strong,
His strength is perfect;
His strength is perfect.

We can only know
the power that He holds
when we truly see
how deep our weakness goes
His strength in us begins
where ours comes to an end
He hears our humble cry and proves again

Chorus – Repeat twice