

Recall the previous lesson dealing with the sobering reality of sin which entered into the world when Adam and Eve disobeyed in the garden of Eden. In response to our first parents' sin, God issued a righteous curse upon mankind and the world, a curse that included a sentence to struggle and death. Many years later, King Solomon expressed his grief over the sad state of the cursed world in Ecclesiastes. Verses 12-14 in chapter one give a good summary of his frustration: **"I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after the wind."** Solomon continues to lament the fact that death, disaster, and corruption seem to ruin everything in life, making it hard to see the point and meaning of anything.

You might not have ever thought or felt like Solomon here, but you will to some degree at some point in your life. Additionally, many people in your life have felt the sorrowful weight of God's curse, and they will feel it again. Often we share these feelings with Solomon when someone close to us dies or when there is a natural disaster. When some people see the great suffering and painful tragedies that plague our world, they sometimes question God and grow bitter towards him. When disaster strikes, the serious question comes, "If God is good, all-knowing, and all-powerful, then why is their evil in the world?" How can God be good if he knows there is evil in the world and has the ability to stop it, but seems to do nothing about it? These are tough questions. Yet, God knows all about them, and knows their answers and the anguish that raises them. In fact, these questions are asked by many people throughout the Bible, showing that God does not shy away from tough questions, but is quite big enough to handle them all.

Let us begin to see how the Bible explains why there is evil in the world one step at a time. First, it is very clear that evil entered into the world when Adam and Eve sinned. They disobeyed God and all of their children ever since have followed their footsteps, increasing the extent of evil in the world. As a result of sin, mankind suffers and dies because God cursed us for our sin. Our suffering, struggles, and sickness are effects of our sin. Natural disasters and anything else relating to the curse on the earth are evidences of God's punishment on us for our sin. To some degree, evil in the world is punishment from God on our sin—sin which you and I

continue to produce. Yet, the sorrow and weariness we feel on the earth is also meant to drive us to seek rest from him who is enthroned in heaven. The pain that we feel should cause us to seek God, knowing that he is our only hope in this world. Placing your hands on a bed of white-hot coals will inflict you with searing pain and suffering. Yet, feeling this pain is good if it keeps us from ever doing it again since sticking your hands in coals will burn off your hand. Likewise, feeling grief in this world should motivate us to set our hearts on God, which is the greatest thing we could ever do and keeps us from loving the world too much, which is dangerous for us.

So, we have part of the Bible's answer for why there is death and disaster in the world: punishment for sin. Yet, the Bible is very clear, especially with the case of Job, that our individual troubles might not be direct punishment for a specific sin. There are some pure, good people who suffer daily, and that suffering is not connected to a specific sin they committed and are hiding. The full punishment for our sin was either paid on the cross by our Savior Jesus Christ, or it will be paid forever individually in the lake of fire. God's final, just punishment is coming. Thanks be to God for Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come!

Going back to the garden with Adam and Eve, why did God even allow them to sin? Why did he make the forbidden tree? Why was it part of his sovereign plan that they would fall into sin, causing the curse to come upon the world? These hard questions lead some erroneously to doubt God's goodness since he allowed evil into this world. But the Scriptures are quite clear that although the existence of evil is included in his divine plan, God is never the one doing the evil itself. He does not make anyone do evil against their own will. We sin because we want to do sin, not because we are made to do it.

Paul addresses the question of why God allows evil in a rather shocking way in Romans 9:20-23: **“But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory.”** Basically, Paul is saying that God has the right to make the world in whatever way he deems good and right because he is God, the Creator. We are merely his creatures and have no right to question what he is doing or to think that we know better.

In this passage, we are smacked with the sublime truth that God is God and we are not. God has the full freedom to give more suffering to some rather than others. That is painful, but true. It is in his divine right to allow evil to exist. These things do not remove God's goodness. God is still good even if we do not fully understand what is going on or why he does what he does. Remember, we are his finite creatures whose minds cannot compare to his infinite understanding. He has wisdom, goodness, and power that are far higher than our own. He rules over the sea and the stars, and makes the leaves turn their colors beautifully as they die. He does things we cannot begin to do or begin to imagine how they are done. It is the same with the trouble we experience in this life. He is working in a multitude of unseen ways that are actually bringing about greater good, even through tragic death. He is working all things for good for those who love him. God will not let evil win. He will triumph visibly in the end and eradicate all sin and death.

Lastly, as Paul states in the Romans passage, God's mercy and justice is magnified in allowing evil to exist. We would not know God's great anger and perfect justice like we do now if there was not evil for him to destroy. Additionally, we see how great God's love and mercy is towards us in him saving us from our sin. We would know about God's love if we had not sinned, but we would not know it to the degree that we do now. We would not know his forgiveness if we had not sinned. These things do not excuse our sins by any means, but it does show how God works greater good even through horrible evil.

This life that God has given us is wracked with evil and sorrow, but we can entrust all things to him who perfectly and supremely good, wise, and powerful forever.