

You know, Rob, that's my testimony, is that my Lord and Savior has never, ever failed me.

Now, I've failed Him many a time, but He has never failed me.

And just thinking back over the last year,

of Susan and my life and all the answered prayer that he has given us.

It's just been amazing.

And just taking those steps of faith.

And I don't know what you're walking in these days, what shadows, what uncertainties, what poor health, what financial setback, what relationship problems.

I don't know, but I promise you, put every bit of your trust in your Lord and he will not fail you.

Well, this morning, we're continuing the sermon series.

on lies we believe.

And, we said it last week that we have an adversary named Satan, and he's the father of lies, says Jesus.

And he specializes in half-lies, half-truths, where there's a little bit of truth, and then there's the lie.

You know, that's one of the characteristics of cults, right?

Is that there's a little bit of truth, but then the lie.

And so we as Christians have to grow up in the faith and recognize those half-truths, and we have to depend on the narrative of the Word of God and not what we think, not what our friends think, not what the enemy whispers in our ears.

So last week we started this series with lie number one, that we have to earn God's love.

In other words,

The gooder I am, the more God will love me.

It's all wrapped up.

It's performance.

And we talked about what a lie that was and how much that must offend God.

Well, we're going to, in the next few weeks, tackle some of these best-told half-truths, like God

cannot be trusted, God's love drives away His wrath.

He doesn't have any wrath because He's all love.

That's a lie.

God understands that we're just saved sinners.

That's all we are.

We're saved sinners.

That's a lie.

God blesses productivity.

So work harder.

That's a lie.

And plus others.

Today, it's lie #2.

God is an angry judge.

Restated, it's this, that God punishes us when we're bad.

and blesses us when we're good.

And when bad things happen to us in our lives, we must be being punished.

It just makes sense.

And yet it's a half-truth lie.

Does God hold us accountable for sin?

Yeah.

Is the wages of sin death is going to kill something?

Sure.

That's what Scripture says.

But

here's an example.

After 9-11 and the Twin Towers, right, and the Pentagon and the Pennsylvania jet in the farm field and all of that, there's a couple famous TV evangelists who began preaching that those events were God's judgment on New York City and our country because of sin.

Now, we've said, yeah, the wages of sin is death.

Something's going to give.

But does that really mean that God orchestrated those militant Muslims to get drunk the night before and fly those, hijack those planes and fly them into the Twin Towers and the Pentagon and into that Pennsylvania field?

Was it really God's judgment on the gay people of New York City or the prostitutes of Washington, D.C.?

or the gang members?

Is that why God sent militant Muslims to fly planes into buildings for him?

I think there's a bigger answer than that out there.

I don't think that was.

I began to wrestle with this throughout my life with stories that occurred in my life.

One was my first church down in Arkansas, in DeQueen, Arkansas, and Eddie Reed was our Minister of Education and Music.

Great man.

And so I'm like 26, he's like 35, and he gets sick.

Would serve together for, I don't know, three or four years, and he had some intestinal stuff and got sick and went to the hospital.

I'm thinking another gay man and body to clear him up, and he got worse and worse and worse, and it affected his lungs and all that, got worse, and Eddie died.

And I'm thinking, here is a great man of God who's in a ministry, he's young, he was healthy, and he's dead.

And I remember fasting while he was in the hospital.

I mean, I fasted more than one day, just went without food, just God saved Eddie's life.

Surely he died.

And I'm thinking, what's going on?

What kind of a God is this that would allow that?

Or

Did Eddie Reed have some secret sin in his life that I didn't know about?

Fast forward some years, and I'd been a church planter in St.

Louis and got to know Rick Ferguson, Dr.

Rick Ferguson, a great man of God and preacher in DeSoto, Missouri, south of St.

Louis.

Then he went to pastor the famous Riverside Baptist Church in Denver, Colorado, across from Coors Stadium.

And he was doing a great job turning that big church around and doing mission projects, community stuff, being used to God.

And what a sweet man of God and a great preacher and just doing it all.

And he was in the passenger seat of the vehicle his teenage son was driving.

They were pulling their boat.

They were going to Windermere.

for a family vacation, his wife and other kids were in the car behind them, and the teenage son lost control, went off the road, and Rick Ferguson was killed.

And I'm thinking, he is one of the best men of God that I've ever met in my life.

Humble, but used by God, and he's gone.

Again, God, what are you doing?

What kind of a God are you?

Or,

little lie from the enemy.

Was somehow Rick involved in something he shouldn't have been involved in, and this is God punishing him?

Those thoughts hit, right?

These are natural thoughts.

And I don't think any of that was the truth.

But it causes us to have to live in a tension, right?

Where we can't explain why things happen.

Well, we're going to look at 2 stories today, so open up your

Word of God or turn yours on.

Story #1 is from Luke 13, Luke 13, 1-5.

And here's the statement or the question.

Don't bad things happen to bad people?

Isn't that the way it works?

Well, let me give you some background to this so that when we read the story, it's going to make way more sense.

So Jesus is asked by his disciples about two terrible events.

one caused by the procurator Pilate and the other by a natural disaster.

And so that's what the question is going to be about.

I like what the commentator Warren Wiersbe wrote about this.

Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, did not get along with the Jews because he was insensitive to their religious convictions.

For example, he brought the official Roman signs and placards

the ensigns into Jerusalem and hung them up, which infuriated the Jews.

They thought it was idolatry.

And they resented having Caesar's image in the holy city.

So Pilate threatened to kill the protesters, but they would have gone to their death.

They didn't stop.

They didn't relent.

So he relented and moved them to Caesarea.

But the atrocity that we're going to read about in Luke 13

may have taken place when Pilate appropriated money from the temple treasury to help finance an aqueduct that he was building.

So a large crowd of angry Jews gathered in protest, and Pilate had soldiers dress up in civilian clothing, and they went in and among the crowd, and with hidden daggers, killed people.

killed a number of innocent and unarmed Jews.

And this only added to the Jews' hatred of Pilate.

So since Jesus was in the context of today's message, of story, he was heading up to Jerusalem, it's like he couldn't win.

Because if he ignored this whole situation,

the Jews would think that he is just siding with the Roman government.

And if he spoke out against it, then the Jews, out of jealousy for Jesus, would go to the Roman government and say, Look, He's speaking against you.

Jesus couldn't win.

So our Lord moved this whole issue to a higher level and avoided politics completely.

Instead of discussing Pilate's sins, He dealt with the sins of the people questioning Him.

And he really answered the question with another question.

So let's read it.

Luke 13, beginning in verse 1.

Now there was some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.

Jesus answered, Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?

I tell you, no.

Let's listen to Jesus.

He says, No.

But unless you repent, you too will all perish.

Or those 18, different account here, different instance now, not a personal wicked attack, but kind of a natural disaster.

Or those 18 who died when the tower of Siloam fell on them, do you think they were more guilty than all the others

living in Jerusalem, I tell you no.

But unless you repent, you too will all perish.

So 2 instances here, one of an evil man and one of a, what we might call a natural disaster.

And in its place you could put a tornado or maybe contracting a disease.

I heard not too many years ago about a man just walking down a sidewalk and at that exact moment,

a large tree branch broke off, fell, and killed him.

So there's lots of contextual stories you can put in here for yourself.

But you see what Jesus was doing.

He's refuting the common thought that bad things only happen to bad people.

That's a false narrative.

That the Jews had believed for centuries

They believed it in part from reading scripture, Old Testament scriptures that is, and just assuming that precepts and principles always held true in every circumstance.

Like when you read the book of Proverbs about how to be blessed.

Those are all completely true.

But you can carry out those principles and those precepts about how to deal with money,

how to live uprightly, how to live according to God's word and still have something bad happen to

you.

And the Jews could not put those two things together.

They couldn't live in that tension.

Some people today cannot.

Maybe you can't.

I don't know.

And so they had to explain it away.

And we'll talk about that more.

We got to go back to the nature of God, yes, and the doctrines of God, like the sovereignty of God.

The sovereignty of God.

that basically says that God rules.

He's a sovereign king.

He rules the universe.

He rules existence.

And everything happens only under his sovereign rule, with his permission.

And so yes, he allows evil to happen.

And yes, you cannot always understand his ways.

I mean, it's Isaiah 55.

My thoughts are not your thoughts, right?

nor my ways, your ways, declares the Lord.

He is sovereign.

It's also bringing in the providence of God.

The providence of God is just that theological truth that everything happens according to God's will.



Now, you might not like that.

I don't.

That God has a permissive will where He allows evil things to take place.

Now, we know also He has a perfect will, yes,

And that perfect will is good.

Jesus doesn't want people to be, kids to be run over by buses, of course.

That's not God's perfect will.

He doesn't want you and I to derail our lives with a sinful choice.

But God allows that to happen.

And yet it's all under His

permissive will.

And it's under His providence.

And the doctrine of providence of God, and this is hard, is that God can even use evil.

He's not evil.

He's not the author of evil.

But He can even use evil people or evil circumstances to carry out His will.

How do we wrestle through that?

But it's time for a theology check.

and to ask yourself, can I believe that God is 100% good and live in the tension of I don't understand why this is happening to Him or to me?

Am I willing to live in that tension and still love Him, still believe He's 100% good?

Well, story #2 is who sinned?

And it's from John 9.

So turn over to John 9, verses 1 through 11.

Again, let me set this up a little bit with some commentary.

About the only thing a blind person could do in Jesus' day was beg.

There's no social security.

And that's what this man was doing when Jesus passed by.

And the thing that's crazy about these gospel stories about Jesus healing this person or raising this person from the dead is people died every day.

And we only read about three people that Jesus raised from the dead.

Beggars were everywhere.

We don't read about Jesus healing them all of their blindness or their lameness.

And it's interesting, the thing, to think, how did Jesus decide who he was going to heal or not heal?

the theological answer, I think, is that he was in such tune with his Heavenly Father, and it was all about bringing glory to the Heavenly Father, that guided his decision.

Well, let's read about a time when Jesus did choose to heal.

Now, it was on the Sabbath day that this happened, so that's strike one against Jesus right there, right?

According to the religious rules.

And

The disciples didn't look at the man as an object of mercy, but rather as a subject for theological discussion, right?

He wasn't a man, he's an object lesson.

Oh, let's look at the story.

John 9, beginning in verse 1.

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth.

His disciples asked him, Rabbi, who sinned?

This man or his parents, that he was born blind.

Neither this man nor his parents sinned, said Jesus, but this happened so that the work of God

might be displayed in his life.

As long as it is day, we must do the work of Him who sent me.

Man, I love that.

I love that.

What's your job?

It's to do the work of God.

It's Ephesians 2.10, that from the very beginning, God designed good works that you should walk in them.

and that God is always at work and our job is to join him.

Night is coming when no one can work.

While I'm in the world, I am the light of the world.

Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes.

Go, he told him.

Wash in the pool of Siloam.

So the man went and washed and came home seeing.

Now verse 8, his neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, isn't

Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?

Some claimed that he was.

Others said, no, he only looks like him.

But he himself insisted, I am the man.

That was his personal testimony.

How then were your eyes open?

They demanded.

He replied, the man they called Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes.

He told me to go to Siloam and wash.

So I went and washed, and then I could see.

Now we got to have a timeout here, right?

We'll get back to the message and all that.

If I get fired up about this, I think we have a slide for this.

I was blind, but now I see it's the testimony of everyone who has truly encountered Jesus Christ.

Not the pretenders, not just the churchgoers, but someone who's encountered the living Christ who has received Him and His Spirit now lives in them.

That's their testimony.

I was blind, but now I see.

I was listening to some Christian radio the other day.

I don't listen to just Christian radio, but I was, and a contemporary Christian singer was doing a modern take on Amazing Grace, right?

Famous hymn.

And he was explaining that it was written by a guy who had a kind of a scary experience on a ship and that he turned to Christ and God changed his life.

And like he was blind, but now he sees.

And I'm thinking, yeah, that's partly true, but he didn't mention any other details, right?

That John Newton was a notorious slave ship captain.

And he went from having his career hauling hundreds of slaves from Africa to England or America to totally renouncing that, turning his life over to Christ and becoming a preacher.

And in London, I have stood in his very, very tall pulpit, you know how they were back then, looking down, and he wrote the words to amazing grace.

I once was lost, but now I'm found was blind, but now I see.

And that is the testimony of any true believer, that your life has been turned up, down, and some of the things you valued before, you don't value as much now.

Some of your favorite sins aren't your favorites anymore.

And the things that you couldn't see spiritually, now you have the Holy Spirit, so you can see them, and the Word has become alive to you.

Let me encourage you.

to share your testimony, your story, with your friends, neighbors, associates.

Ask for divine appointments, divine opportunities, and then share history, his story, with those around you.

And I wonder if anyone's here today, and maybe you're a regular, maybe you're a member, I don't know, and you'd say, That's really never happened to me.

Oh, I believe in Jesus.

But I have not been changed from the inside out where my values are turned upside down and I can see things spiritually now that I couldn't see before.

Do you have a loving, living, personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ?

And if you don't, man, now's the time to just call out to Him.

He's praying for you, as I already said.

Respond and say, Yeah, Jesus, I need a Savior in my life.

And more than that, I need a leader.

I want to become alive.

Well, let's get back to the story, back to the text.

So we read after verse 11 then about this fact that Jesus did this miracle and healed him.

We know that part of what was going here is that there's always going to be physical illness.

Ever since the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden and sin entered the world, that first act of disobedience

Paradise was lost, sin was ushered in, and death with it, and that is...

all true.

But notice the half-truth, the false narrative.

In Jesus' day, the rabbis taught that illness was caused by sin.

Either the sin of the person who was suffering, or it could have been the sin of the parents.

Now, this man was born blind.

Yes, that's what we read.

So obviously, it had to be the sin of his parents.

But no, the rabbis had an out.

They taught that even a baby could sin in the womb.

Now fast forward in time.

There are religions that teach about reincarnation, right?

Eastern religions.

And it's a similar thing.

That if you're born lame, you're born with a deformed hand or foot or you're born blind, that's karma.

It says that you sinned in your previous life.

Now you're paying the price.

There's even a religion

in an ancient religion that taught that blindness, for example, was caused by a person murdering their mother in a previous life.

I mean, it gets crazy.

And yet, we fall into that half-truth, don't we, that, man, that person must ascend in some way.

Or surely a good God would not allow that to happen to them.

But Jesus emphatically denied the false narrative of the rabbis.

And so he states,

Neither this man nor his parents sinned.

Now, that doesn't mean they were perfect and never committed a sin in their life.

He's talking about the context of the blindness.

It wasn't because of them.

Then he said that the real reason was basically what we said, the sovereignty of God, that God could be glorified in this man's life.

So then what did Jesus do?

He neutered the false narrative by healing this man.

And He placed God's seal of approval on Him by giving Him His sight.

So Jesus squelched the notion that we get what we deserve.

That's the universal principle of life.

We get what we deserve.

See, God is not in the business of balancing some cosmic checkbook.

What did Jesus say in the Sermon on the Mount?

That God makes the sun rise on the evil and the good.

He sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

So what is Jesus saying here?

That terrible things sometimes happen to wonderful people, and really wonderful things happen to really bad, terrible people.

and you're not going to be able to figure it out.

And that's Habakkuk's crying in the Old Testament.

God, how can you, how dare you use evil Assyrians and Babylonians, these evil people to bring judgment to us?

How can you do that?

You've got to wrestle through it.

St.

Augustine, or maybe you call him Augustine of Hippo, in 4th century AD, he wrestled through this.

Listen to what he wrote about this.

I'm going to read it.

We do not know why God's judgment makes a good man poor and a wicked man rich, nor why the wicked man enjoys the best of health while the man of religion wastes away in illness.

Even then, it is not consistent.

Good men also have good fortune, and evil men find evil fortunes.

So though we do not know by what judgment these things are carried out or permitted by God, in whom is the highest virtue and the highest wisdom and the highest justice, and in whom there is no weakness, nor rashness, nor unfairness, it is nonetheless beneficial for us to learn not to regard as important, not to regard as important,

the good or evil fortunes which we see shared by good and evil persons alike.

I think there's wisdom there.

It's like Job 13:15.

Job says, Though He slay me, yet I will, fill in the blank, yet I will trust Him.

Jesus, Abba Father, not my will, but Thy will be done.

God's goodness is not something you get to decide on.

It is part of His attributes.

It's part of His character, plain and simple.

You can't change that.

You can't alter it.

Circumstances, can't change that.

So start with the doctrine of God.

And one of those is that He is good.

Second Chronicles 7.3, His love, He is good, His love endures forever.

Psalm 34.8, Taste and see that the Lord is, what?

Good.

All the time.



He loves you, He's not out to get you, He's for you, not against you.

One illustration I was thinking about is that of a police officer.

I didn't know about you,

But when I'm driving my car down the road and I see a highway patrolman or a police officer, I'm sure my heart rate increases a little bit.

I just get antsy.

And I might be going below the speed limit or on it or five miles over it.

just happens.

It happens.

Because I associate them, even though I know they're great men and women,

I associate it with judgment, with finding out about how somehow I'm breaking the law, that I'm going to get in trouble, that something bad's going to happen to me.

I'll have to pay a fine.

Something will happen.

That's how I, that they're judging me.

Anybody else like that or is it just me, right?

And yet I know some police officers, the best people.

Mark Elbert, Corey,

Brian Mercer.

Brian Mercer is a police officer.

Now let me ask you a question.

He's married to Nicole.

Do you suppose when Brian Mercer comes home from his cruise, from being on the beat, right?

And he walks in the door and he's wearing his uniform, he's still got his belt on and all that stuff, and he walks in the house that when Nicole sees him, do you suppose that

Her heart rate goes up out of fear, like, what have I done wrong?

He's going to get me.

He's going to judge me.

I'm going to have to pay for it.

Something's happening.

No.

Why?

She has a personal relationship with Him, a love relationship with Him.

She doesn't see Him as a judge, but her is her loving husband.

It's all about the relationship.

If you have a love relationship with your Heavenly Father through Christ,

You don't have to think of him as an angry judge.

You don't have to think of him as a police officer.

You can go and sit on his lap spiritually and call him Abba, Daddy.

He's for you, not against you.

My testimony is this, that because

I have a personal relationship with my Heavenly Father through Christ, and I spend time with Him every single day.

It's a love relationship.

It's not a fear the judge relationship.

Now, do I fear God?

Yeah, that's beginning of wisdom, right?

I better reverence my God and know He's God I'm not.

But it's a love relationship, and it changes everything.

I don't have to earn His love.

I don't have to deserve it.

I can't.

and I don't have to fear Him, just waiting to put His thumb down on me when I mess up.

And so you have to start living in the tension, yes, of a good God who allows a bad thing of a cursed, fallen world to impact your life, and you're not going to be able to figure it out this side of heaven, but you're going to have to choose, do I still believe that God is good, and will I come to Him as a little child?

Well,

Last illustration.

You guys know the story of the prodigal son, right?

Of course, Luke 15, the most famous story that Jesus told in the whole New Testament.

The prodigal son, well, you know, really, it's not so much about the son, and you've heard this before, it's about the prodigal father.

Because prodigal means this, recklessly extravagant.

That's what the father was.

And you know the story.

I want my inheritance now.

Give it to me.

In other words, I wish you were dead.

Goes off to a foreign country, wastes it on wine and women and everything else, loose living, squanders it, is feeding the pigs.

I can go back.

Maybe my dad will hire me back as a hired servant.

And he heads back.

And before he gets home, his dad is already there on the front porch waiting.

And who runs?

The dad runs.

The father runs.

And he embraces his son.

And he says, kill that fattened calf.

We're going to have a party.

Put the robe on him, the ring of sonship and the sandals on his feet, for my son was lost, but now he's found.

He was dead, but now he's alive.

It was all about the reckless love, extravagant love of the Father.

Church, that's who your Father is.

That's why Jesus told that story.

It wasn't about the Son, it was about the Father.

That is your Heavenly Father.

You can trust Him, no matter what happens.