

GOING DEEPER STUDY NOTES (August 21, 2022)

FOR PERSONAL OR GROUP STUDY

There may be no greater question people have about Christian faith, no bigger problem they have to believing in God, than that raised by the passage this morning, “why do bad things happen?” More specifically, if God exists, and if God cares about us, and if God has the power to prevent bad things, why doesn’t He? It’s understandable when bad things happen to people who are evil, mean, abusive, vile. They deserve what they get. But why do bad things happen to decent and good people, people I care about, to me?

This is a tough question, an important question, one that should not be dismissed or ignored. If we take those we meet seriously, we need to take this question seriously too. Let’s admit right off that there is no easy, simple, obvious, answer.

Christian faith affirms that 1) God absolutely loves us (the Bible is full of this assurance, and full of examples of this too), 2) God has absolute power and control (the Bible asserts this truth from the first page to the last), 3) bad things happen (the Bible is brutally honest about this ... ask Job, ask David, ask Joseph, ask Hannah or Mary).

So, what do we do? How should we respond to this real and difficult question?

Let’s begin by seeing how Jesus responded when informed of the tragic deaths of those who had been sacrificing to God (Pilate killed them). Jesus added to that the unfortunate deaths of those who had a tower fall on them. He addressed the question of why bad things happen, but not in a way that would satisfy many. He didn’t pretend bad things don’t happen. He didn’t offer three simple reasons why bad things happen. He didn’t because the problem is complex, and the answer is too. Ultimately the only answer that holds up is Jesus Himself.

And so, we continue to live with the tension. We proclaim the goodness and power of God, and we live with trouble and pain. In the face of horrible things that happen, we point to, keep our focus on, hold on to, Jesus.

When Towers Fall and Blood is Spilled (Luke 13:1-5)

“^{13:1} There were some present at that very time who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ² And He answered them, ‘Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? ³ No I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

⁴ Or those eighteen on whom the tower of Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? ⁵ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. What was the tragedy that those with Jesus brought up?
2. What additional tragedy did Jesus add?
3. What warning did Jesus add to both tragic situations?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. What does it mean to repent?
5. Why would Jesus ask, twice, “do you think they were worse?”

WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO YOU?

6. How did Jesus’ answer to both tragedies challenge the common beliefs about why people suffered? Do those common beliefs still exist today? How would most of those you know, those who are not Christian, answer the question, “why do bad things happen?”
7. As you observe the world around you what is the root cause of the suffering you see/read about/hear about?
8. What, if any, is the purpose or role of suffering and pain?
9. How would you respond to someone who asked you, “how can a good and loving God allow people to suffer?”
10. When you are in the midst of suffering what do you do? Who do you seek help from? Who do you talk to? How does it affect your relationship with God?

As you spend time praying remember that prayer is meant to be the most natural, easy, and empowering, part of your day. Prayer is talking to God and hearing Him talk to you. In your prayers thank God that He will not leave you when you suffer. Ask God to give you the strength to endure suffering, and the compassion to help others when they are suffering. Ask God to give you the right words to say (or the wisdom to know when you should not speak) when you are with others who are suffering. God will help you because He loves you.

Notes: _____

Resources you may find helpful:

A Grace Disguised (book) by Jerry Sittser

A Grief Observed (book) by C.S. Lewis

Reasons for God (book) by Timothy Keller (see the chapter on pain)