

# The Challenge to the Secular

## Chapter 3

Walking with God through Pain and Suffering, Tim  
Keller

# Overview

- In the first four chapters of Walking with God through Pain and Suffering, Keller gives us background material to help us comprehend how different cultures handle pain and suffering
- This background material is helpful to:
  1. See the advantages Christianity provides over other cultural views in handling suffering
  2. Enable us to reach out in time of tragedy with empathy, understanding and compassion to those who do not share our faith in Christ

# Review – Chapter 1

- In the first chapter of Walking with God through Pain and suffering, Keller gives us background material to better understand how different cultures handle pain and suffering
- Keller points out how Western culture's approach is very different from other, more traditional cultures
- Traditional cultures view life as inevitably filled with suffering that has the purpose of punishment, testing or opportunity
- Western culture sees suffering as an accident without any meaning or purpose at all – it is to be avoided as interfering with the individual's happiness

# Review – Chapter 2

- In Chapter 2 Keller shows how the Western view of pain and suffering developed from Greek philosophy through the medieval period and to the modern era
- The Greeks believed that philosophy could help people deal with suffering by realizing that they needed to submit to fate and not love the world too much (stoicism)
- The medieval period introduced the Christian hope of resurrection as overcoming pain and suffering
- The modern era diminishes Christianity's hope by seeing God as remote and promoting science and reason as offering cures to pain and suffering (secularism)

# Chapter 3 – The Failure of Secularism

In Chapter 3 Keller takes a closer look at Western secularism from the standpoint of how it has failed to bring comfort to those who are struggling to come to grips with grief caused by pain and suffering.

# Secularism

- The philosophy and ideology of secularism (secular humanism) is a *nontheistic* belief system that upholds the prime importance of rationality, human freedom, and scientific method.
- Man's search for individual happiness and personal fulfillment is the sum and highest order of his existence
- Secularism has its roots in the Enlightenment

# The Enlightenment

- The Enlightenment was a philosophical, intellectual and cultural movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It stressed reason, logic, criticism and freedom of thought over dogma, blind faith and superstition.
- Leading Enlightenment figures included Renee Descartes, John Locke, Immanuel Kant, David Hume and Jean-Jacques Rousseau

# Gods of the Enlightenment

Truth unveiled by Philosophy and Reason





# Legacy of the Enlightenment

The legacy of the Enlightenment has been of enormous consequence for the modern world. The general decline of the church, the growth of political and economic liberalism, the belief in progress, and the development of reason and science as the source of all knowledge are among its fruits.

# Invictus

Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate:  
I am the captain of my soul.

William Ernest Henley



**Satan is disguised as an angel of light**

**2 Cor. 11:14**

# True Source of Secular Humanism

- Secular humanism finds its true source in Satan the father of lies.
- Satan's sin was pride in seeking to set his throne on high and to make himself like God, Isa. 14:12-14
- Man, too, has sought to make himself like God, Gen. 3:5, through worshipping reason and science as the source of all knowledge.
- Our modern western culture has two primary criteria – individual freedom and personal happiness.

**“If God is dead, all is permitted”**

The Brothers Karamazov, Fyodor Dostoyevsky

# Benefits of Secularism in Addressing Pain and Suffering

- Atheists claim that they are free from the problem of why a good God allows evil to occur
- Atheists claim such freedom allows them to work to care for the victims of tragedy and change things so that it doesn't happen again
- Atheists argue that reason alone provides the greatest comfort to victims – “**The dead do not suffer**”, Jacoby, Blessings of Atheism
- Do you see any weaknesses in their perceived benefits of elevating reason over a religious framework?

# Weaknesses of Secularism in Addressing Pain and Suffering

- In times of tragedy people are much more likely to seek spiritual comfort than rational answers
- The hope of resurrection and new life is much more comforting to the parent of a slain child than are rational arguments that the dead do not suffer!
- Testimonies from the survivors of those who suffered through great tragedies such as the Newtown shootings, 9/11 or Nazi death camps show that people seek spiritual comfort to help them through their grief
- To borrow from C.S. Lewis people seek the Lion who will lead them out of the winter of their despair

# The Failure of the Secular

- Human reason reduces pain and suffering to victimization, but suffering is often caused by failures of the sufferers themselves such as a drug addict dying of an overdose
- The causes of pain and suffering are incredibly complex and human reason alone cannot eliminate pain and suffering from people's lives
- Secularism can only offer happiness through this world – if you don't have it in this life, you are without hope



# The Failure of the Secular

- In their inmost being people crave a life that has more meaning than instant gratification and personal happiness. Without belief in a transcendent God all that an individual has is the emptiness of self indulgence.
- Secularism sees pain and suffering as unhappiness that needs to be avoided at all cost.
- Christianity sees pain and suffering as having been caused by our turning away from God but resulting in the coming of Jesus Christ to provide forgiveness, reconciliation and new life
- To the Christian death is the beginning of true existence and not the end.

# Christ Came to Suffer

Keller says that suffering should not surprise the true Christian because:

“For reasons past our finding out, even Christ did not bring salvation and grace to us apart from infinite suffering on the cross. As he loved us enough to face the suffering with patience and courage, so we must learn to trust in him enough to do the same. And as his weakness and suffering, thus faced, led to resurrection power, so can ours.”

p. 80