

Gospel Answers

The Gospel is the good news of our salvation: that we are no longer condemned by our sin, but forgiven through God's grace. Therefore, the Gospel provides the answer to our greatest need and question. Yet we have many other needs and questions. We desire answers to our pain, loneliness, shame, meaninglessness, and desire for justice. What about these questions? The Gospel is still the answer. It is the vastly better answer to our most fundamental questions and needs.

WEEK ONE

The Gospel provides a better answer to our pain

Message Passage: 2 Corinthians 12:9, John 11:21-44, & Revelation 21:1-4
Small Group Passage: Romans 8:18-25

TEACHING AND VIDEO NOTES

Who here has heard the phrase Jesus is the answer? I couldn't agree more. Jesus is the answer. Jesus is the answer to the world's greatest problem: sin. The Gospel of Jesus Christ answers our greatest need, problem, and question. How can we be made right with God? But well-intentioned Christians often believe the Gospel is the answer to their sin problem, and their sin problem alone. They take the Gospel, and Jesus with it, and put it in a box, probably labeled "religion" or "church," and then put it on a shelf. That is a dangerous mistake. Jesus answers how we can be made right with God. The gospel is the answer to our sin. But wait, there is more! He is the answer to every question.

"What's the question? Jesus is the answer. What's the problem? Jesus is the solution!" [1]

What is the problem in your life today? Jesus is the solution! What question do you have? Jesus is the answer! This is true even if your problem is one of the most difficult problems we face: the problem of pain.

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[1] Jeff Vanderstelt, Gospel Fluency: Speaking the Truths of Jesus into the Everyday Stuff of Life (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 28.

THE QUESTION

The question: If God really loves us, why has he allowed so much suffering? This is what is referred to as the problem of pain. It is often posed as a philosophical dilemma. It is a worthwhile question to answer. But this question becomes so much more significant when it is not hypothetical. When it comes from the reality of our own pain and difficulty. "God, why have you allowed me to suffer?"

Mistakes we make when asking this question

- Some bring this question to God as an accusation. Job did just this after suffering great loss. He demanded a day with God in court so that he could bring his accusation against Him. One day God answered him and reminded him who is God in the relationship.
- Some give up on the question because they believe there is no answer. If there were, surely, we would have found it by now.
- Still others bury this question. They refuse to ask God because they believe others will shame them for asking. They assume God would do the same.

This is a terrible assumption because Scripture shows bold men and women of the faith raising this very question to God, and he answers.

Psalm 10:1 *"Why, LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?"*

Psalm 13:1–2 *"How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart?"*

Psalm 22:1–2 *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*
Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the cries of my anguish?
My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest."

In none of these Psalms does God cut in mid-sentence, lash out, and strike the Psalmist dead. Not once! In fact, these Psalms were placed in Scripture as examples for us. When we are wrestling with pain and difficulty, we can and should take those questions to God. So what is the answer? Why does God allow such terrible things to happen to us, especially if he loves us? A couple of things....

#1 He draws us near to him when we suffer. We are reminded that we desperately need God in the midst of difficulty. This is exactly what the apostle Paul learned after

repeatedly praying to God to remove a “thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:1-10). What was God’s answer?

2 Corinthians 12:9 *But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.*

This is what CS Lewis was referring to in his book The Problem of Pain when he said, “We can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”

#2 We should ask ourselves why we allowed pain to happen. After all, pain and suffering are a consequence of man's actions, specifically the first man, Adam. After Adam and Eve chose rebellion, God punished them with the pain of childbearing (vs 16), the pain of work (vs 17), and the difficulty of all creation being cursed.

Rebuttal: “But God is sovereign over all. He could stop all of this pain and suffering if he wanted to.” You are correct! And he did….

THE GOSPEL ANSWER

This is exactly what Martha, a dear friend of Jesus, asked Him in her moment of pain after her brother had unexpectedly died. She had called for Jesus when he was sick, but he took too long to get to the home. Tragedy had struck, and the loved one had passed.

John 11:21-27 *“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died.* ***22*** *But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”* ***23*** *Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”* ***24*** *Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”* ***25*** *Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;* ***26*** *and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. <u>Do you believe this</u>?”* ***27*** *“Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”*

Martha had the right answer to the question. She claimed to believe. But there is a difference between having the right answer to the question and believing the truth of Jesus Christ so much that it shapes how you respond to despair.

John 11:32 *When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”*

Once again, Jesus did not shun this question. We serve a big God, and he is not afraid of our questions. Even when pain is behind them.

John 11:33-35 *When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.* ***34*** *"Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied.* ***35*** *Jesus wept.*

The shortest verse in Scripture speaks powerfully to Jesus' nature. How does Jesus respond to our tears? He weeps with us. You see, God is not numb to our pain. We have a Savior who empathizes with our difficulty (Heb 4:15). But Jesus did more than weep

John 11:38-44 *Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance.* ***39*** *"Take away the stone," he said.*
"But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." ***40*** *Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"* ***41*** *So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me.* ***42*** *I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."* ***43*** *When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"* ***44*** *The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."*

In an instant, Mary and Martha's pain was gone. It was replaced by a level of pure Joy that words could not describe. Their brother was gone, and here he was again. Now you may say, " What does that have to do with my pain?" "Their question was answered, but the mind still remains." True! Once again, **"What's the question? Jesus is the answer. What's the problem? The Gospel is the solution!**" [2]

That gravestone that was rolled away was not the only one that Jesus saw rolled away. A short time later, Jesus would be betrayed, tried, convicted of false charges, beaten, crucified, and killed. In doing so, he would take the punishment that we deserve. He would die the death that was the wages of our sin. In doing so, he would provide the answer to the brokenness, sin, and PAIN that had entered into the world in Genesis 3.

We ask God, "What is he going to do about pain?" as if we are waiting for a future answer. We are looking in the wrong direction. Through the cross, Jesus has already given us the answer. The Gospel is the answer to our question about pain.

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[2] Jeff Vanderstelt, *Gospel Fluency: Speaking the Truths of Jesus into the Everyday Stuff of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 28.

Rebuttal: "But I still have problems! I still have pain in my life." Yes, you do. But the good news is that Jesus did not give us a temporary answer to our temporary pain. He gave us an eternal answer.

Rev 21:1-4 *Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.* ***2*** *I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.* ***3*** *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.* ***4*** *'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

This blessed truth awaits all who have believed in Jesus. Through the cross, Jesus has provided an answer to our pain. It is the Gospel. So when we talk with those who are hurting, we can hug them and listen. Both are good things. But may we see even more opportunity to give them the hope of Jesus.

Transition to small group: The Gospel is the answer to our question about pain and difficulty. But there is a difference between knowing the Gospel is the answer and living as if the Gospel is the answer. How do we go about living as if the Gospel is the ultimate answer to our pain and difficulty?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What difference does it make to know that God isn't afraid of our questions—even the ones that come from pain?

2. Jesus wept even though He knew Lazarus was about to be raised. What does that tell us about how Jesus views our pain?

3. Has there ever been a time when you asked God why he allowed pain and difficulty to happen in your life, or someone you loved?

   Leader Note: This is a very vulnerable question. Because of this, I recommend making this question optional rather than going to each person expecting an answer from everyone. We want to encourage vulnerability. But that does not mean that we will be forcing vulnerability.

Read: Romans 8:18-25

4. Vs. 21, Our present sufferings are now worth comparing to the Glory we will share one day with Jesus. But this does not mean we should bury or ignore our present sufferings. They are real. What pain or difficulties, big or small, do you need to take to Jesus in prayer?

   Leader Note: We can easily say all of them in response to this question. That answer is not wrong. But we should be specific here. If we aren't specific about the difficulty we need to take to Jesus, we can make this question hypothetical. But our problems and difficulties are not hypothetical. They are quite real. So what specific problem do you need to take to Jesus in prayer?

5. Vs. 23, We are awaiting our adoption to sonship. Specifically, we are waiting for the culmination of our adoption. We are already adopted Children of God if we have believed in Jesus (Gal 4:4-7). But someday soon we will get to be with our Savior Jesus in glory, with no more pain or suffering. We are waiting for that aspect of our adoption. How does our future with Jesus shape how we view and respond to pain and difficulties?

6. Vs. 24-25, “Who hopes for what they already have?” Paul means our hope lies in the future: Christ's second coming and our heavenly home. As believers in Jesus Christ, we have this hope as an anchor for our soul (Heb 6:19). Those who have not yet believed in Christ do not have it (1 Thess 4:13). How, then, should our hope-filled response to pain differ from the world's?

7. What would it look like to share the Gospel with someone who is experiencing pain and difficulty? How can we show them that Jesus is the answer to their question about pain?

8. How can we remind one another of the hope of the Gospel when we have questions about the difficulty in our own lives?

PRAYER TIME

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