

HOW CAN A GOOD GOD ALLOW SUCH HORRIBLE THINGS TO HAPPEN?

An Apologetics Message • 25 Minutes

Isaiah 43:2 • Romans 8:28 • 2 Corinthians 12:9

Scripture: New King James Version

INTRODUCTION STORY

About 2 minutes

In November of 1873, Chicago lawyer and hymn writer Horatio G. Spafford sent his wife, Anna, and their four daughters ahead of him to Europe. The ship *Ville du Havre* was struck by another vessel in the mid-Atlantic. Anna was pulled from the water. All four daughters drowned.

When the surviving telegram reached Spafford, it read only two words: “Saved alone.” Days later he boarded a ship and sailed over the same stretch of ocean where his children had gone down. Out of that grief he wrote the lines the Church still sings:

*“When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.”*

Spafford did not receive an explanation. He received a Presence. That is the difference between a question that hardens the heart and a question that drives us into the arms of a good God.

INTRODUCTION

About 2 minutes

- This question is not new. Job asked it. David asked it. Habakkuk asked it. Mary and Martha asked it at a grave: “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.” (John 11:21)
- An honest question is not unbelief. Unbelief is walking away from the only One who can hold us when the answer does not come.
- We serve a good God. We live in a fallen world. God will not impose upon free will in this dispensation of grace. And still He gives strength by the power of His presence.
- Today we will not settle every “why.” We will settle the greater question: Who is with us when the “why” remains?

I. WE SERVE A GOOD GOD, BUT WE LIVE IN A FALLEN WORLD

About 6 minutes

The first defense of the faith is not an argument. It is a confession: God is good. The world is not as He made it.

A. The character of God is not on trial

1. His goodness is His nature — not a mood that rises and falls with our circumstances.
“The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works.” — Psalm 145:9
2. If God were not good, the cross would make no sense. He did not stay distant from our pain. He stepped into it. (James 1:17; Matthew 7:11)

B. Suffering entered through the Fall, not through the heart of God

1. Death, violence, and sorrow are intruders. They were not in Eden.
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*“Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men.” — **Romans 5:12***

2. Genesis 3 records the rupture. Romans 8:22 says creation still groans. A fallen world explains the presence of horror without charging it to the character of God.

C. God is not the author of evil — He is the Redeemer of what evil has broken

1. Joseph looked his brothers in the eye after the pit, the slave block, and the prison.
*“You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to save many people alive.” — **Genesis 50:20***
2. The cross is the same pattern. Men meant murder. God meant mercy. (Acts 2:23–24)

II. GOD WILL NOT IMPOSE UPON OUR FREE WILL IN THIS AGE OF GRACE

About 5 minutes

Love that cannot be refused is not love. In this present age, God knocks. He does not kick the door down.

A. Love requires freedom

1. From the beginning God set a choice before mankind: “Choose life.” (Deuteronomy 30:19)
2. The risen Christ still honors the will of man.
*“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in.” — **Revelation 3:20***
3. If God canceled every evil choice the moment it was made, we would be safe — and we would be puppets, not sons.

B. Much of the horror in this world is the fruit of human choice

1. Cain was warned and still chose murder. (Genesis 4:6–8)
2. Pilate, the priests, and the crowd chose Barabbas. Heaven did not stop the vote. (Matthew 27:21–26)
3. Wars, abuse, betrayal, and neglect are not proofs that God is cruel. They are proofs that men are free — and fallen. (Jeremiah 2:19)

C. Grace permits freedom even when freedom wounds

1. He did not stop Adam at the tree. He did not stop Judas at the table. He did not stop the hammer at the cross.
2. That is not indifference. That is the cost of a world in which repentance is still possible.
*“The Lord is... longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” — **2 Peter 3:9***

III. GOD GIVES STRENGTH THROUGH SUFFERING — THE POWER OF HIS PRESENCE

About 7 minutes

God does not always lift us out of the trial. He often does something better. He gets in it with us.

A. He does not always take us out of the fire; He walks in it with us

*“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you... When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned.” — **Isaiah 43:2***

1. David did not deny the valley. He denied that the valley had the last word. “I will fear no evil; for You are with me.” (Psalm 23:4)
2. The Hebrew children were not delivered from the furnace. They were delivered in the furnace. “The form of the fourth is like the Son of God.” (Daniel 3:25)

B. Those who suffered found meaning in relationship, not in explanation

1. Job never received a tidy answer. He received God. “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.” Then: “Now my eye sees You.” (Job 13:15; 42:5)
2. Joseph found the Lord in the pit and the prison before he found Him in the palace. “The Lord was with Joseph.” (Genesis 39:21)
3. Paul begged three times for the thorn to be removed. Heaven sent strength instead of surgery.
“My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” — 2 Corinthians 12:9
4. Jesus was not spared Gethsemane. An angel strengthened Him to drink the cup He was not delivered from. (Luke 22:43–44; Hebrews 5:8)

C. The gift in the trial is not always the answer. It is Him.

1. “The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart.” (Psalm 34:18)
2. His covenant word is presence, not exemption: “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5)
3. Romans 8:28 is not a slogan for easy days. It is a promise that God is still working when nothing looks like it.
“All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” — Romans 8:28

CONCLUSION STORY

About 2 minutes

Nebuchadnezzar heated the furnace seven times hotter. The fire killed the soldiers who threw the three Hebrews in. It could not kill the saints.

When the king looked in, he did not see three men burning. He saw four men walking. The question was no longer, “Why did God allow the furnace?” The greater revelation was, “Who is standing in it with them?” Some of you have been staring at the fire so long you have forgotten to look for the Fourth Man.

CONCLUSION AND CALL TO PRAYER

About 3 minutes

- A good God has not abandoned a fallen world. He entered it — in a manger, on a cross, and now by His Spirit in the middle of your trial.
- He will not violate your will in this dispensation of grace. But He will walk with you if you will open the door.
- Stop putting a sovereign God on the witness stand. Look for His presence in the trial.
- Meaning is not found by solving God. Meaning is found by seeking God.

The altar is not for people who have it figured out. The altar is for people who are done staring at the fire.

- If you are carrying an unanswered “why” — come and meet the Who.
- If you are angry at God — bring the anger to the only One strong enough to hold it.
- If you are in the furnace right now — look up. He is already in there.
- If you have never opened the door to Christ — this is the hour of grace. He still knocks.