

DESIGNED REASON #1 FOR EVIL AND SUFFERING—THE REVEALING OF GOD’S GLORY

INTRO

In our current Sunday morning series, we are searching God’s Word to Biblically answer the question “Why Does a good, All-Powerful and All-Knowing God, allow evil and suffering in the world?”

Two weeks ago, we looked at the **reality** of Evil and Suffering and noted that it is not only demonstrated in the world—it is also declared in God’s Word! God is aware of the question—so much so that He saw fit to have several of His prophets ask various forms of the question and recorded them for us in the Bible.

Habakkuk: “O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save! Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance?” (Hab 1:2-3a; see also Job 19:7-8; Psalm 13:1-2; 80:4; Jeremiah 12:4; Revelation 6:10)

Not only is there the reality of evil and suffering, God gives us reasons as to why. In a nutshell, the declared reason is the **fall of man**—man’s sin in the garden of Eden brought the consequences of a cursed earth and corruptness—evilness—into the heart of man.

Natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, and tornadoes are a result of a sin-cursed earth—not God’s original design.

Cancer, disease, and death also came into the world as a consequence of man’s sin—not God’s design. And the evilness of mankind—seen every day on the evening news—or all day if we carry a phone with news feeds—came as a result of man’s sin—not God’s design.

But we **still** insist on asking the wrong question. Instead of us saying, ‘Look at what *our* sin did to the world!’ we say, “Why doesn’t God do something to stop all this evil?”

In spite of the fall of man and the subsequent consequences of that sin, God is still in control. He is still Sovereign, He is still on the throne, and can still bring good out of evil. This morning I want us to consider that very thing—how God can use evil and suffering for good—and use it to bring praise to Himself. Notice the verses from John 11 on the inside cover of your bulletin. Lazarus was sick and died from this sickness, but Jesus brought him back to life and thus demonstrated God’s glory.

How does evil and suffering demonstrate God’s glory? Why should God **be praised** in spite of His allowance of what we consider evil and suffering? Before we look at the answer to those questions, I think it is important that we understand what is meant by God’s glory and what it means to glorify God.

1. The Definition of the Glory of God

Defining the *Glory of God* is a lot like defining beauty—we know what it is when we see it, but it is hard to put into words. The glory of God is the summation of the attributes that makes God, God, and puts Him in a class by Himself.

John Piper defines it like this: “The infinite beauty and greatness of God’s manifold perfections.” In an effort to keep it simple, I’m defining it like this—“the endless greatness of God’s perfectness.” John 11:40 “Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?” (See also Exodus 24:17; Psalm 19:1; Isaiah 6:1-3)

2. *God's Rightful Desire to be Glorified*

To **glorify God** means to praise Him; to ascribe greatness to Him because of the endless greatness of His perfectness. Psalm 29:2 reminds us to “Give unto the Lord **the glory** due unto His name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.” **John 11:4** Sickness (and death) of Lazarus was for the purpose of ascribing greatness to Jesus

A. We were created to glorify God (Isaiah 43:7, 21)

B. God deserves to be glorified because of who He is (Isaiah 43:11, 13, 15)

C. God does not share His glory (Isaiah 42:8; 48:11)

Why does God desire to be glorified? Why does He want to be praised? Is His self-esteem low? Does He have a fragile ego? God desires to be praised because He deserves to be praised. He is in a class by Himself; His greatness and perfectness have no equal! If we ascribe anyone or anything more greatness than Him, we are promoting falsehood—we are praising a lie—so His holiness and truthfulness requires that we direct our praise to the One who deserves it.

So how does evil and suffering reveal the endless greatness of God's perfectness? How or why can we praise God in the midst of evil and suffering? That worked in the case of Jesus bringing Lazarus back from the dead, but God does not always do the miraculous. In fact, often times He does not. I don't think I'm exaggerating to say that for every **one** person you know who was healed from cancer, there are 9 that weren't. How does **that** display the “endless greatness of His perfectness?”

3. *The Demonstration that Evil and Suffering Brings Glory to God*

A. The courage given to the saved brings glory to God

In Acts 6, verses 8-10, we meet Stephen for the first time.

--Stephen was one of the first deacons

--He was honest, full of the Holy Spirit, and a man of wisdom (v 3, 5)

--He was full of faith and power (v 8) and performed “wonders and miracles” (keep that in mind)

Won't go through his whole sermon—it starts at 7:1 and ends at v 53—but I do want to focus on the ending:

--He was a **faithful** preacher (Acts 7:47-50)

--He knew God well and promoted His greatness; His glory

--He was a **fearless** preacher (Acts 7:51-53)

To sum it up, Stephen was faithful and fearless—he preached what needed to be said regardless of how it was received. Let's bring this to where we are. We have a small congregation and want to see it grow. Is there a temptation to preach certain things—or not preach certain things—to avoid offending people? Is there a temptation to change certain things—like our music or stance on alcohol—to appeal to a wider group of people in order to grow the church? The temptation is there, but it comes down to this choice—am I going to strive to please God...or men? Paul wrote to the Galatians “For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ” (Gal 1:10).

Pastors, of course, are not the only ones who need courage to do right in the face of opposition. In the work place, **men** are tempted to use language that they most certainly would not want their wife or children to hear them use. **Women** are tempted to “bash” their husbands because their co-workers do. **Teenagers** are tempted to experiment with alcohol or drugs or sex because “everyone” else is doing it. Even **children** must decide if they are going to make fun of someone because everyone else does—or stick up for those who are picked on and treat others the way they want to be treated.

We live in a fallen world where often times those that do right are made fun of. Courage to stand up and do right—whatever it might cost us in the way of ridicule or shame or persecution—is not something we can manufacture on our own. God can give us that kind of courage—and ought to be praised when He does.

Not only does the **courage** that God gives His children bring praise to Him,

B. The Christ-likeness given to the saved brings glory to God

--V 55a He was the **full of the Holy Ghost**

What does it mean to be “full of the Holy Ghost?” It depends, of course, on who you ask. Some believe it means to have the ability to speak or pray in tongues; either a known language or some kind of spiritual gibberish. To others it means simply to be controlled by the Holy Spirit; to demonstrate the characteristics of Christ-likeness. I believe there is more Biblical support for the latter.

First, we must realize that the Holy Spirit is a person—the third person of the Trinity—but is immaterial; meaning He has no body. He is **not** an object like water that you can pour into a glass and measure if it is full or not.

Second, just because He is a person without a body does not mean that He is a “force.” Like a person, He has emotions and personality and a will. Because He is God, however, He also has the ability to influence us and change us. To be full of the Holy Spirit does not mean that God gives us more of the Holy Spirit—it means that we give ourselves more to God. We yield to the Holy Spirit’s leadership in our lives instead of yielding to our sin nature. When our life is predominantly lived under the leadership of God, we are “full of the Holy Ghost.”

Not only was Stephen full of the Holy Spirit,

--V 55b-56 He was **focused on the glory of God**

In spite of the hatred these men had for him, Stephen did not focus on that. He did not let what they were doing or saying keep him from having a steadfast—an unwavering—gaze toward heaven. What did Stephen see when He looked toward heaven? He saw the glory of God. He saw the endless greatness of His perfectness! He saw the awesomeness of God and the beauty of God and the brightness of God and the holiness of God and the power of God and the wisdom of God—and the **love** of God—Jesus Himself!

With that focus—and with the realization that the heavenly audience was also looking at him—he had the courage to be faithful—and the ability to **forgive** like His Savior (60a)—“Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.”

In our earlier description of Stephen we noted that he was a man “full of faith and power [who] did great wonders and miracles among the people (Acts 6:8). What reveals God’s glory more—wiping out your enemies or supernaturally loving them and praying for them? God’s desire for Stephen was not to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them; instead God allowed him to be martyred. He was doing right and obeying God—and it got him stoned to death (v 59).

Seems impossible, doesn’t it, to forgive the ones who are in the process of killing you. Stephen did it, however, as did Jesus when they nailed Him to the cross. Others, too, have forgiven those who have brought them incredible pain and suffering. A woman by the name of Thomas Ann Hines lost her 21-year-old son, Paul, when he was shot by a 17-year-old, Robert Charles White, who was sentenced to 40 years of prison. In Hines’ own words, here was her initial reaction:

“I worked, then went home and cried and screamed and walked the floor. I couldn’t stand being with my friends, because they couldn’t handle my anguish...I wrote letters and made phone calls to the parole board to make sure Paul’s murderer never got out of prison. I woke up every morning thinking, ‘I hope that guy dies today.’” For 13 years Hines was bent on vengeance and was finally given the opportunity to meet—in

person—the killer of her son. Armed with a picture of her son and his baby shoes, she met the now 30-year-old Robert and said to him, “If you knew how much I loved him, you wouldn’t have killed him.” He put his head down on the table and started crying. I gave him a tissue, and something inside me cracked.

After talking for nearly eight hours this heart-broken mother reached across the table and put her hand on Robert’s. “In that moment,” she said, “I was transformed. I was holding the hand of the man who murdered my son, and I didn’t hate him. He never said, ‘I’m sorry,’ and I never said ‘I forgive you,’ but I knew he felt genuine remorse for what he’d done.

Can God bring about that kind of forgiveness in a person’s life? He most certainly can—and He can do it in your life, too! Christ-likeness is not just forgiving those who have hurt you, though. It is patience and trust in the midst of difficult times; it is being characterized by love, joy, and peace when your circumstances are everything but joy-giving or peace-bringing. God bringing joy and peace to your heart during those times points to the endless greatness of His perfectness.

C. The conviction that Christ is worth dying for brings glory to God

--Stephen became the **first martyr** for the cause of Christ because he had the conviction that it was better to die for Christ than to deny him (60b). There was evil—cruel men hated Stephen and stoned him to death. There was suffering—the pain of the rocks, one after another, striking him. Maybe he was knocked unconscious—or maybe he was fully awake as the weight got heavier and heavier until he could no longer breathe and his life was snuffed out.

Neither his life or death were wasted, however. In fact, Stephen was quite possibly more **fruitful** in his death than he was in his life. Why do I say that?

--Notice vs 58—Laid down their clothes at the feet of Saul. Their outer garments were laid aside, guarded by a young man whose name was Saul

--8:1 “And Saul was consenting unto his [Stephen’s] death.” He was pleased with it; he was in hearty agreement with it.

--And if we were to turn to Acts 9 we would see that Saul was still “breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord.” But then came a bright light from heaven, accompanied by a voice that said, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” “Who art thou, Lord?” was Saul’s response.

“I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.” In Bible times, stubborn oxen were “urged” to move with a sharp piece of iron stuck into the end of a stick called an “ox-goat.” For an ox to kick against it did not bring relief; instead, it only brought more pain.

Jesus was telling Saul that he was kicking against—fighting against—the conviction that Jesus was the only way a person could be forgiven of his sin and allowed entrance to heaven. What was convicting Saul; what kept reminding him of his need? Can’t say for sure, but I believe it was being haunted by the memory of Stephen—a man who not only **lived** for Christ—but also died for Him.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

1. Are you saved; are you 100% certain you have been forgiven by God and will go to heaven when you die? The last part of v 60 says of Stephen that “he fell asleep.” He did not fear death because Jesus was waiting for him on the other side. Do you have that same assurance?

2. God can bring glory to Himself in a world of evil and suffering—and He calls us to be part of that process. May I suggest that instead of looking for a way **out** of the storm; bring glory to God by rejoicing **in** the storm and trusting in the endless greatness of His perfectness to uphold you in the most difficult of circumstances.