

REMINDER #1 REGARDING EVIL AND SUFFERING—
GOD’S PERFORMANCE OF GOODNESS AND JUSTICE IS SUPERIOR TO OURS

INTRODUCTION

For several weeks now, we’ve been examining the age-old question of “Why does a loving, all-knowing and all-powerful God, allow evil and suffering in the world?” To recap, here is what we have seen so far:

1. The Reality of Evil and Suffering—we know evil and suffering is real because we see it every day—and God declares it is a reality in His Word. Habakkuk 1:2 “O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! Even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!” David, Asaph, and Jeremiah make similar complaints.

2. Second, we looked at God’s Declared Reason for evil and suffering. In a word: SIN! The fall of man—specifically the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden—brought sin into the world and from that point until the present, the earth has been cursed—and every person born since then—except the God-Man, Jesus Christ—has been born with a corrupt, sin-controlled heart. With sin came death—“and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” we read in Romans 5:12.

3. The Fall of Man did not take our All-Knowing God by surprise, however—He knew it would happen and had the plan in place to restore man before He even created man! In spite of sin’s consequences, God could bring good out of evil and suffering. We noted two designed reasons for evil and suffering. One is that it reveals God’s glory. Who but God could give Stephen a loving and forgiving heart as he prayed for those who were stoning him to death? A second designed reason for evil and suffering is the refining of God’s people; the molding of us to make us more dependent upon Him. Paul said “most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (II Cor 12:9).

4. We then noted God’s plan to conquer evil and suffering; comprised of both the cross and the resurrection. The cross remedies the eternal consequences of sin whereby sinners can justly enter the presence of the Holy God of heaven because Jesus’ death satisfied the wrath of God on our behalf. Repentant sinners—those that come to Jesus asking for mercy and forgiveness and trusting His work on the cross—not their works on earth—to save them, have the punishment of hell removed from their future. They will not come into condemnation, John 5:24 tells us, but have passed from “death unto life.”

The cross does not totally conquer the problem of evil and suffering, however, because it still exists! Part 2 of God’s plan requires the **return** of Christ—made possible because He rose again—when Christ will someday defeat His enemies, destroy death, and deliver the kingdom to the Father. When will Jesus return? We don’t know when, do we? It could be today—or 100 years from now—we simply don’t know.

Text: Exodus 34:1-8

Title of my message this morning: Reminder #1 Regarding Evil and Suffering—God’s Performance of Goodness and Justice is Superior to Ours!

1. God’s Performance of Good is Superior to Ours

Ps 119:68 “Thou art good, and doest good.” Why does God **do** good? Because He **is** good; it is one of the attributes that make God, God. Ps 119:68 reminds us that godness is both an attribute of God—and an activity (or action) of God.

A. God's Goodness is Declared in His Word

Notice verse 6 here in Exodus 34: "The Lord, The Lord God is...abundant in goodness and truth"

Psalm 25:8 "Good and upright is the Lord: therefore will He teach sinners in the way."

Psalm 34:8 "O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him."

Psalm 100:5 "For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting; and His truth endureth to all generations."

Psalm 145:9 "The Lord is good to all: and His tender mercies are over all His works."

Matthew 5:45 "That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

B. God's Goodness is Demonstrated in His Word

Gift of deliverance and protection—Psalm 107:6, 13, 19, 28 "Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses."

Gifts of provision—Since God feeds the fowls of the air (Mt 6:26) and clothes the lilies and grass of the field (Mt 26:28, 30), He most certainly cares for our food, drink, and clothing (Mt 6:31).

Gift of salvation—Romans 5:7-8 "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Ephesians 2:8-9 "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast."

Gift of the Word—II Pet 1:4 "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

Ps 19:11 "Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward."

C. God's Goodness is Demonstrated in the World

Gift of life—Acts 17:25, 28 "Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed any thing, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things....For in Him we live, and move, and have our being...."

--We have life, and breath, and the ability to see and hear and smell and taste and feel because God is good and does good.

Blessing of healing because God is good and wise and powerful. Imagine if every bruise...every broken bone...every cut....every scrape...every pain....remained.

God's hand in daily life—Psalm 104:13-14 "He watereth the hills from His chambers: the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works. He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth;"

Contrast God's goodness with ours. Who are **we** good to? Those that are good to us! **Matthew 5:46** "For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same?"

Think about this for a minute: If you were God, would you heal the wicked...or allow their crops to grow? Would you allow them to have jobs and homes—or would you make everything that they touched break? Would you allow them to enjoy life—or would they be in constant misery? God is good to everyone, isn't He?

2. God's Punishment of Evil is Superior to Ours

A. Superior in Knowledge—knows **who** did it—and **why**

We sometimes don't know who committed the crime, do we? I'm not going to ask for a show of hands, but were you ever punished as "group punishment" because your parents weren't sure who was at fault? Maybe as a parent, **you** did that very thing—"The lamp didn't break by itself and since none of you are saying who did it, you are ALL going to get punished!" God does not have that problem, does He?

Revelation 20:12-13 "...and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works....and they were judged every man according to **their** works." God records the works of the wicked—they are written in books—not because He forgets, but to demonstrate—I believe—what those who reject Christ have forgotten! Each one is rightly punished for his own sin because God is all knowing.

Born again Christians don't go to the Great White Throne Judgment, however—they go the Judgment Seat of Christ. Their sins are not pointed out or brought up because they have been paid for by the precious blood of Jesus. Their judgment has to do with rewards—not punishment.

Notice **I Corinthians 3:8** "...and every man shall receive his *own reward* according to his *own labor*." I find it interesting that the Bible does not mention a book for the good works of Christians. Why do you suppose that is? Don't know for sure because we aren't told, but here are my guesses.

1) Whereas the wicked in their pride may try to argue with God at the GWTJ, there will not be arguing at the Judgment Seat of Christ. It will be a blessing—not a curse—to be reminded of things that we did for God that we've forgotten about.

2) Second, will not the saved—those that have trusted Jesus for the payment of their sin—**trust** Jesus' fairness and love when it comes to rewards? I believe the predominant attitude will be amazement over God's grace and the fact that we are being rewarded on top of having eternal life.

B. Superior in Motive

As parents, we sometimes discipline for the wrong reason. We discipline because we are "fed up" with what our child (or children) are doing so we discipline out of anger. Sometimes we have a nobler motive—we discipline because we want them to "turn out right" but if we want them to "turn out right" so **we** look good, is that the right motive?

God **always** disciplines with the right motive—ALWAYS—and that motive is love. Hebrews 12:6 reminds us "For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth ever son whom He receiveth." God chastens His children because He loves them—He wants them to turn from their sin so they do not have to suffer the consequences of their sin.

Does God punish the wicked because He loves them—or because He hates them? **Psalm 7:11** "God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day." And yet, God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked: **Ezekiel 33:11**—"Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

I could be wrong—and feel free to disagree—but I believe God's motive for punishing the wicked in this life is because He **loves them** and He wants them to repent so He can forgive them. If they remain unrepentant, however, and die unforgiven—"die in their sins" is the phrase Jesus uses in John 8—they will face God in His **anger**. We also know that men will face God in His anger during the Tribulation. Between now and then, however, God's heart-beat is to want the wicked to turn from their wicked ways; "He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" we are told in II Peter 3: 9.

3. God's Delight in Mercy is Superior to Ours

Psalm 103:10-11 "He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him."

Aren't you glad God does not deal with us after our sins? I obviously can't even begin to do justice to the subject of God's mercy in the little bit of time we have left, but consider this question posed by Randy Alcorn: "Do you believe the world would be a better place if people immediately paid the just penalty for every sin?" (332).

Think of it, what if everyone who....

--**Complained** were struck with fire from God and consumed like we read in Numbers 11:1?

--**Complained** against their spiritual leader was struck with leprosy like Moses' sister Miriam was in Numbers 12:10?

--**Worshipped God the wrong way** and offered "strange fire which He commanded not" were devoured by fire like we read of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, in Leviticus 10:1-2?

--**Took something** forbidden by God had to be stoned to death like Achan and his family in Josh 7:25?

--**Proud and arrogant** was punished like King Nebuchadnezzar who "was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagle's feathers, and his nails like birds' claws" (Dan 4:33)?

--**Told a lie** were struck dead like Ananias and his wife Sapphira in Acts 5?

--**Man who looked** on a woman to lust after her had his eye fall out?

Randy Alcorn writes: "Fallen beings could not survive in a perfectly just world where God punished evil immediately" (331). Oh, how glad we ought to be that God is plenteous in mercy!

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

1. Life is hard—but God is good! There are things that happen that we don't like and we don't understand. And because we don't like what happened and don't understand "why," we are tempted to think God is not good...or fair....or merciful. Don't let whether you understand something or not be the determining factor in your opinion of whether or not God is good. God IS good—we need to remember that **His** performance of goodness...and justice...and mercy...is superior to ours.
2. Who are you good to? Who are you merciful to? God is good **to all**; His tender mercies are over all His works. We are to be like our Father who is in heaven. Are you striving to be like that?
3. Lastly, are you saved? God's mercy is available to all—but not all are partakers of it. Are you a partaker of God's mercy? If not, why not? II Corinthians 6:2 says "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."