

Why Would God Allow Suffering?

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John 5:1-15

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Synopsis:

Sometimes we ask the wrong questions. It's like a child asking you a question. You listen and begin to answer, even though you know that the question isn't the one we should be asking.

We ask, "Why would a good God allow suffering?" This may be the wrong question, but let's listen and begin to answer.

John's Gospel teaches that what Jesus says and does is what God says and does. Today we take a look at what God says and does about suffering.

I.

Our Questions with Suffering

John 5:3 In these porticoes lay many invalids

Questions with suffering begin at home

My experience with suffering:

- raised in relative affluence
- alcoholic and abusive Dad
- ugly divorce
- death: grandparents, uncles and aunts, sister, best friend
- Mom died from pancreatic cancer
- my share of illness, none severe

*Experience shapes my questions
What's your experience?

Western experience shapes our questions:

1. David Hume: 18th cen Scot

Is God willing to prevent evil but not able?

Then God is impotent

Is God able but not willing?

Then God is malevolent

Is God both able and willing?

From whence then is evil?

*An intellectual issue

2. Rabbi Harold Kushner:

When Bad Things Happen to Good People

*An entitlement issue

If we let the Bible shape our questions about suffering,
what would it ask?

II.

The Bible's Questions with Suffering

John 5:5 Do you want to be made well?

Scene in John 5

-Beginning of stories set in festivals (Weeks, Tabernacles, Passover)

Chs 5-11

-Teaching focuses upon healing and authority: heal/Sabbath

-READ carefully John 5:1-30

-note words for sickness and health

-note what Jesus does

-note what he *asks*

-note what he *doesn't* ask

-note the discussion afterwards:

vv 24-26, 28-29 is key = What is God up to?

God restores all things, foretaste now

TEACH:

1. Jesus says and does what God says and does

-maxim this week in *The Shack* study:

*You cannot separate the person and work of the Trinity

2. Jesus seeks and heals as a sign of resurrection life

3. God seeks and heals as a sign of resurrection life

Bible teaches about suffering: Here and elsewhere

1. Isn't part of God's good creation (Gen 1; Rom 1)
2. Has to do with human choice (Gen 3; Rom 1)
3. Has to do with brokenness/sin (Gen 3; Rom1; John 5:14)
4. It exists; is not an illusion; isn't explained (Job; Ecc)
5. God comes, suffers, dies to redeem and restore (NT)

Frederick Buechner: *Peculiar Treasures*

-Job:

doesn't give Job an *answer*
gives *restoration* and help

III.

The Bible Helps Our Suffering

John 5:8 Jesus said, "Stand up, take your mat and walk"

Keller's book:

1. Evidence against and for God
 - no-see-um story, Plantinga
 - "Just because you can't explain, doesn't mean there aren't reasons for suffering"
 - Joseph; *The Shack* (God's purposes and our choices)
 - our objection to unjust points to a just criterion
 - no horrifying wickedness if no God
2. Jesus and the suffering of God
 - Jesus suffers unlike martyrs
 - Jesus bears the exclusion: "Why have you forsaken?"
3. God redeems suffering and death
 - God dies for us on the cross
4. God resurrects and restores, not consoles
 - resurrection is not consolation but restoration
 - Tolkien = "Everything sad is going to come untrue"

What is the right question?

NOT: Why would a good God *allow* suffering?

BUT: What does God *do* about suffering?

God's story and our story intersect at human need

-We don't need an *answer*; we need *help*

E.g. family, sister, Mom: God showed up

-God shows up, seeks you out,
brings resurrection life now and later