

Greetings Church Members and Friends,

This week I would like to introduce to you a new term called “apologetic theodicy”. Before you stop reading, I wish to inform you this was the pastor’s idea.... ha ha!!

This is an extremely important subject. If you can hang with me through this, I’m convinced you will be blessed and you will be a blessing to others who are struggling with life’s difficulties, injustices and tragedies. It will take a few weeks to get through the entire subject, so I want to work through this in baby steps.

The study of apologetics is simply known as a defense of the Gospel. Theodicy is a study within apologetics that deals with the difficult question of: How can we reconcile our belief in a God who is omnipotent, righteous, and loving, with the reality of injustice and suffering in the world? The word theodicy is translated from two Greek is two words: “theos” which means “God” and “dike” meaning “justice”.

The question of why God lets bad things happen to good, innocent people has created and fueled many atheist and non-Christians conversations. **“It is incomprehensible how a supposed good God would introduce evil and injustice into the world in the first place and then tolerate it”**. This question has run an untold number of people away from Christianity.

This week, was a tough week for me as I looked at the faces of evil as watched the news reels of the murder of Ahmaud Arbery in south Georgia.



Now looking at those faces, does it make you wonder where was God when all this was happening? Couldn’t God have stopped it?

This week was also difficult for me because it reminds me of what happened over 50 years ago when I was in the 6th grade. There was a little girl I called “my Little Ragdoll”. She was the sister of my best friend. She had a crush on me (if you saw me then, you would understand why 😊). Her complexion was very dark and was quite petite. Her family was poor. They were so poor, that when I went into their house, I was constantly cautioned by her parents where I could walk for fear of me falling completely through the floor to the ground. Her clothes were

always torn because they could not afford new clothes for her. On a warm Thursday afternoon in May, there was a big commotion in the neighborhood. My “Little Ragdoll” had died. She had been bitten by a snake in her back yard. My “Little Ragdoll” was dead. Over the years I asked myself, where was God? She was innocent of any wrongdoing. Yet the evil get away with absolute murder many times over.

I also had an elementary school classmate who had seizures. One day he had a seizure that was so bad, he fell into his fireplace and was disfigured for life. He was innocent of all charges. He came into this world with a handicap. It was not his fault! Again, I asked myself, where was God?

I have many other stories, but I think you get the picture. Simply, where was God when all of this was happening?

The bible warns us that we will have these perplexing questions. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon wrestles with these perplexing questions when he uses the phrase “chasing after the wind” or “vanity of vanities”. In essence, Solomon is saying that life is full of **anomalies**. Let me give you an example. A no good, stingy, rotten man who goes to church. At his funeral, everyone says good things about him. To be exact, Ecclesiastes 8:10 says “Then too, I saw the wicked buried – those who used to come and go from the holy place and receive praise where they did this. This too is meaningless.”. **That is an anomaly of life.** In verse 12, Solomon encourages himself when he says “**Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, I know that it will go better with God-fearing men, who are reverent before God.**”. In other passages, Solomon talks about a wise person saves an entire city, but when he dies, he is completely forgotten. **That’s an anomaly of life!** We need to adjust to the fact that this is a fallen, sin-sick world. Expect to see and experience these kinds of anomalies every day.

Now that I have proven that evil and anomalies exist in this life (that was the easy part), I want to prove that God is still good and God is just. Again, this is the first lesson on this subject and we are moving in baby steps.

The piercing question we are dealing with in the study of theodicy is: If God is so good, why doesn’t He use His power to prevent evil and suffering? The theologian Millard Erickson says “this is the most difficult intellectual problem for the Christian faith”. For me to deal with this question in completeness, I will have to start with Genesis. That’s next week’s lesson.

I recognize that God does not always stop evil and calamity immediately, but scripture tells us He is just. Scripture also tells us that he is a “**consuming fire**”. Hebrews 12:28-29 says: “Therefore, we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our “God is a consuming fire.”. Every wicked action performed by every person, be it dead or alive will be dealt with. Either by forgiveness through the blood of Christ, or through eternal fire (suffering forever and ever). Again, we will discuss this in coming weeks.

As we are dealing with the pains of life and the delays in our cries for justice, I want to prove that God is good and does feel our pain.

In the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead in John, chapter 11. Verse 2 says that Jesus received notification that “the one you love is sick”. In verse 4, Jesus states that Jesus said “all of this for the glory of God”, so he delayed going to Bethany for two days. Verse 11 states Lazarus was already dead when he (Jesus) heard about the sickness of Lazarus, so that accounts for Lazarus being dead four days when Jesus arrives in verse 39. Does that not seem like those anomalies we were discussing earlier? Verse 15 states that Jesus was glad he let Lazarus die so that his disciples could believe. Note, it is clear that Mary and Martha knew nothing about the overall plan of Jesus. As the result, there is adequate evidence that they experienced significant anxiety and grief with no idea of what Jesus was doing. That’s another anomaly of life!

Here’s the main point I want to make. In verse 33, Jesus sees Mary crying. (Note, there’s enough evidence that she had a uniquely gentle personality (we’ll talk about that in one of my future lessons)) . The scripture states that Jesus was “deeply moved in spirit and troubled”. The word “deeply moved” can be translated “enebrimesato” from the Greek, implying anger or sternness. The word “troubled” is translated “exaraxen” indicating that he was stirred or agitated. Could it be that Jesus, who is God, experienced emotion! I think he experienced emotion. Look at verse 35. Scripture says “**Jesus wept**”. It says to me that Jesus feels our hurt and understands our predicament on this fallen earth and the sentence of death on us as the result of the original sin. Jesus cares!!!!

God takes both the good and the bad as Romans 8:28 states and makes something good of it for his people. He has a unique plan for all of us.

This week, I ran up on part of a manuscript that was not published by Christian Century, April 27, 1960 because Martin Luther King Jr. did not get it to them on time. It is my understanding that he was hesitant to send it to them because he did not want it to seem like he was making light of his own trials and tribulations. It was based on Matthew 11:30 – “For my yoke is easy and my burden is light”.

His writing is as follows:

Due to my involvement in the struggle for the freedom of my people, I have known very few quiet days in the last few years. I have been arrested five times and put in Alabama jails. My home has been bombed twice. A day seldom passes that my family and I are not the recipients of threats of death. I have been the victim of a near fatal stabbing. So in a real sense I have been battered by the storms of persecution. I must admit that at times I have felt that I could no longer bear such a heavy burden, and have been tempted to retreat to a more quiet and serene life. But every time such a temptation appeared, something came to strengthen and sustain my determination. **I have learned no that the Master’s burden is light precisely when we take his yoke upon us.**

My personal trials have also taught me the value of unmerited suffering. As my sufferings mounted I soon realized that there were two ways that I could respond to my situation: either to react with bitterness or seek to transform the suffering into a creative force. I decided to follow the latter course. Recognizing the necessity for suffering I have tried to make of it a virtue. If only to save myself from bitterness, I have attempted to see my personal ordeals as an opportunity to transform myself and heal the people involved in the tragic situation which now obtains. I have lived the last few years with the conviction that **unearned suffering is redemptive.**

I hope this gets your week off to a good start!

Be blessed!

Deacon Edward Wood Jr.