

**Sermon Transcript from May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016**  
**Understanding Evil**  
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Inside the Year of Biblical Literacy, we have this mini-series', and right now we're in a mini-series called "The God I Don't Understand." And what we've been doing in this series is discussing and learning and responding to topics that we come up with and we've been seeing in our reading that might cause us not to understand the God of the Bible. So, we have maybe a framework or a working understanding of who God is and then we get to the Old Testament and, if you're reading the Old Testament for the first time or the first time in a long time, you get very disrupted by the Old Testament and you might say to yourself, "God, I don't understand You right now. I don't understand what's going on here."

So, we've been trying to take these topics and go into them. Today is the last sermon in this series and I want to talk about the problem or the understanding of evil. This is going to be a very difficult topic to teach on because – I called this sermon "Understanding Evil," but you'll see that's like a false title because we can't really understand evil. It's hard to understand. But, I encourage you to take notes. Some of the things I might say, you might not agree with. Which is, again, fine. But, I hope that you at least start thinking about this topic if you're not already doing so as you're reading. And know that, after this series, we're going to go into a series on the book of Isaiah as you guys are reading right now. A three-week series on Isaiah that will actually help us to understand all the Prophets and their writings.

But then, after that, we're doing wisdom literature. We kind of see wisdom literature as being a multi-faceted view of what's wrong with the world and why evil is a part of the world. So, we'll be talking about this topic more in-depth with a lecture by one of my theological heroes and mentors, Gerry Breshears, who will be here lecturing on the problem of evil. Him and I will team-teach on it in a few weeks.

So, consider today like sort of a primer sermon. Getting us ready for all of this that's coming up. So, if you have a Bible, Genesis 3. Let me just start by praying. I'll start by praying.

Lord, I think I speak for a lot of us in saying that there are parts of life in this world that we just don't understand. And, as we read the Bible and we see the world and we read our newspaper and read social media feeds and watch the news, there's so much of it that we don't understand. It doesn't mean that we don't love You, God, it doesn't mean that we don't trust You, but we have a hard time understanding. So, I pray that wherever we're at, whether we're in the midst of evil or observing evil or in a lot of suffering right now, I pray that, as we opened up the first set of music, that we'd be able to say, "How long, O Lord? How long?"

That You would hear from us lament and even petition asking You to come quickly, Lord, and deliver, asking You, "Why? What's going on?"

But, behind all of that that there would be trust. So, I pray, God, that You would, in this room this morning, foster faith in us. We pray together in Jesus' name, amen.

A few years ago a musical artist by the name of David Bazan recorded an album in 2009 and it became his breakup album with God. He was in a band before that called "Pedro the Lion" and then left that band to do a solo project called "Curse Your Branches." And a lot of this album that David Bazan writes – he writes and records this album – deals with the creation account in Genesis and a lot of this album is him wrestling with serious questions about life and faith and God. Questions that he ultimately left the faith over.

In one song, called "When We Fell," he sings this to God:

"When you set the table and when you chose the scale, did you write a riddle that you knew they would fail? Did you make them tremble so they would tell the tale? Did you push us when we fell?"

These are honest questions. There's been a lot of people that, when this album came out, said, "Finally, you've given voice to my angst. I grew up in church, I've seen the world, I've read the Bible, I've prayed to God and I have these questions and you've captured them in music."

There are people that, probably in this room, at one point in their life if not right now, have walked away from the faith because of these questions. And these are the questions that come up when we start to read through the Bible. The questions that I

would say all the other questions that we've been answering in this sermon series hang on. And it's this question here: if God made the world, why did He set it up like this? If God really did make the world and He really did create this world, in Bazan's words, "Is this whole thing, this whole world, rigged? Did God push us when we fell? Did He set it up so that we would fall?"

Couldn't He have created a world that's different than this one? "Why is there so much evil in the world," is another way of saying it. And, if God created this world, why is there so much evil in the world God created? If God is really responsible for all creation, why did He set it up like this? Why are children trafficked into the sex trade? Why does a tsunami kill hundreds of thousands of men, women and children in moments? Why does cancer whither away young lives in months, leaving behind broken families and broken hearts? Why do terrorist groups kidnap children, even children who are mentally challenged and torture them and burn them alive or strap bombs to them and use them as suicide bombers?

Or, we can ask this question in the Genesis framework. What is a tempting, talking snake doing in the good of God's created Eden? What is a tempting, talking snake doing in the good Garden of Eden? I mean, this is really heavy stuff. This is like, we can go over this stuff but, once you start reading it, you have this questions in the back of your mind. This is a very longstanding challenge to the Christian faith. This is a longstanding challenge to faith.

Actually, Epicurus brought it up like 300 years before Christ. And it's this: if God is all-powerful and all good, why does evil exist? If God truly is all-powerful and God truly is all good, why, then, does evil exist? Either God is all-powerful so He could prevent all evil and suffering, but since He obviously doesn't, He cannot be good. He could be all-powerful, but, you know, He's not stopping evil the way it looks today. So, He's not good. Or, He is good. God is all good and would love to prevent all the evil and suffering in this world if only He could, but He can't. In which, He cannot be all-powerful.

The argument goes: you cannot have both. So, we blame God for really horrific things. Think of it like this: the legal term for disastrous events outside of human control, like floods and earthquakes and tornados and hurricanes and tsunamis, is called "acts of God." Legally speaking, when God acts, He wreaks havoc. That's legal. Like, "Oh, that's an act of God. Act of God. That's what happened."

That's the insurance claim. Act of God. When God acts, He just starts destroying stuff. That's when God acts. Not like when you win the lottery, "Act of God."

Like, "No, I think that was luck. God destroys stuff. Luck is the other thing."

So, this question remains. How can God allow such things or how can God cause such things? If God is good and all loving and all-powerful, why do things like this happen? Let's say that we were able to ask God this directly and, for the first time, God answers and He says something like this: "If we were talking here about who allows what, let me point out that thousands of children are dying every minute in your world of preventable diseases that you have the means, but not obviously the will, to stop. How can you allow that?"

Or He might say something like, "There are millions in your world who are slowly dying of starvation while some of you are killing yourselves with gluttony. How can you allow such suffering to go on? You seem comfortable enough knowing that millions of you have less per day to live on than others spend on a cup of coffee while few of you have more individual wealth than whole countries. How can you allow such obscene evil and call it economic systems? There are more people today in slavery now than the worst day of pre-abolition slave trade. How can you allow that in your world?"

Or God might say to us, "There are millions upon millions of people living as refugees on the brink of human existence because of wars that you indulge in out of selfishness, greed, ambition, lying and hypocrisy, and, not only do you allow this, but you collude in it and you fuel it and you profit from it. How can you allow this?"

This is what God might say back to us and then we would say back to Him, "Well, I never asked to be born in a world like this. Why would You even come up with a world that this stuff is even possible? Why would you allow even the possibility of this kind of evil? How could it even be imaginable a world you would create?"

And now we're full circle to what David Bazan was singing. Have You rigged this whole

thing, God? Did You set up a riddle that You knew You couldn't solve? Did You push us when we fell? When we fell into sin, did You push us? Did You rig the system? See, we have ourselves a problem, and the problem is the problem of evil. And I think I don't have to go too far in showing your own and my own culpability in the evil of the world. I don't have to go too far.

Most of us spend money on products that were made by slaves, whether clothes or technology. Most of us buy and eat food of tortured animals who live life in a horrible existence before they are slaughtered, drained of their blood, packaged neatly in your grocery aisle or assembly line cooked for your pleasure. Or how, because of the way we were treated and hurt as a child in development, we now hurt and treat our families and our spouses and our friends bad, and the evil keeps spreading. See, we all know all too well about evil and how we can't easily get rid of it because evil's in us. It doesn't take much to prove to you guys that evil is in you.

As one author has written, "If only there were evil people somewhere, insidiously committing evil deeds and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But, the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being, and who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"

So, you shouldn't be surprised to know that the Bible confirms this. It's not hard to show that you and I are culpable of evil in this world and that a lot of the evils that I brought up are because of human evil; human sin. The Bible confirms all of this very early in Genesis 3. It happened through willful rejection of God's authority, distrust of God's goodness and disobedience to God's commands. And, because of it, sin has invaded every human person. Every single person in here, the Bible would call a sinner.

Sin distorts and affects every dimension of the human personality. So, sin and separation from God affects our spirituality. It affects us physically, it affects us mentally, emotionally, socially. Sin affects everything. Sin pervades the structures and the conventions of human societies and cultures. We're even shown in Genesis 3 that sin affects creation itself. So, it doesn't take much to stop and realize that the evil we so much wish God would prevent and punish and get rid of in this world might lie right inside ourselves. So, it wouldn't be wrong to say that the problem with evil is a problem with us and that the vast amount of suffering and evil in the world can be explained in relation to human wickedness, whether directly or indirectly.

However, if you're following along you're like, "Okay, yeah. I think I'm guilty."

However, it still doesn't answer the question of the randomness of tragedy. Like, why do some people get lung cancer who never smoke ever? Why do innocent children die in tsunamis or earthquakes or in the womb? It doesn't answer that question. Yeah we're all evil, but why them? It also doesn't answer the question of why is the world even set up this way for this kind of stuff to even be a possibility?

So now, we turn to Genesis 3. Genesis 3:1. I'm only going to read verse 1, so calm down. You're like, "Oh my gosh. Here we go again."

Just verse 1.

Genesis 3:1: **"Now the serpent..."** – now, Genesis 1 and 2... okay. I'm sorry. Genesis 1 and 2, God creates everything. It's good. Got it? Good.

Genesis 3:1: **"Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals that the Lord God had made.**

**"And the serpent said to the woman, 'Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"**

You can read the Bible from cover to cover – some of you are – and you could look for one simple and clear answer to the question of the origin of evil. You could read it cover to cover – and if you start doing it right now and go, "I want the answer to the question 'what is the origin of evil,'" and you will not find the answer. The ultimate origin of evil is not explained in the Bible. It seems that the Bible compels us to accept the mystery of evil.

I will tell you this as a Bible teacher and a pastor that I don't like this answer. But, it's the answer that we're given. I want to know the origin of evil, and the Bible says, "Accept the

mystery of evil." I'm like, "I don't want to accept the mystery of evil."

We are told the entry of evil into human life and experience right here in Genesis 3. But, if your question is, like mine is, "Where did it come from? Where did that snake come from and why is he tempting humanity towards evil?"

We are not told. Look at Genesis 3. Evil, in the form of a snake, seems to show up just – look at Genesis 2:25:

**"Adam and his wife were both naked and the felt no shame."**

Next chapter. Actually, next verse. The Bible wasn't written in chapters, so it's the next sentence.

**"Now the snake..."**

You're like, "Whoa, whoa. Wait. What? Where did he come from? Who is he? Why is he there?"

The snake shows up, unannounced, already formed, without explanation or rational. That sounds just like evil, doesn't it? We're not told why he was more crafty. We're not told who taught him how to talk. That would've been my first question. "Who taught you how to talk?"

All we observe from this scene is it's not right. Something's wrong. I mean, everything was great, but then this talking snake? This isn't right. Snakes aren't supposed to talk. We also observe from this scene that this snake is not God. Okay? This is not God. This is a serpent. And we also realize that this is not a human. It's not God and it's not a human being. This is what that means: evil wasn't a part of God or a part of humanity (or what it means to be human), it's different.

We also can observe that the snake comes from within creation, but he's not a regular animal because he talks. Therefore, what we know about evil is that it comes from within creation in some sense, but not from human creation. Meaning, it's not in humanity because humanity was once without sin. So, it's not God, it's not human, but it comes from within creation. Okay, now hang with me here because this is where you're like, "Oh, okay. I'm out. I can't do this."

So, the only other created beings capable of such thought and speech are angelic beings. So, hang. Stay with me. This is actually what we find out later in Scripture. We're not told in Genesis 3 who this serpent is. It's mysterious and it's supposed to be. And, as the narrative of the Bible unfolds, at the very end of the Bible, which is not an accident, we're told who this serpent is.

Revelation 12:7: **"A war broke out in heaven, Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down,"** – and John explains who this dragon is – **"that ancient serpent,"** – "Ancient." Taking you all the way back to Genesis 3. – **"called the devil or Satan, who leads the whole world astray."**

The serpent that we meet in Genesis 3 is the devil, and the question is, "What is the devil doing in God's good creation? And the answer is we do not know. God never tells us. God doesn't tell us. "How did this serpent get in? Who let the serpent in?"

We're not told. But, it seems – now, listen here – that the creation narrative unfolds in a larger, unfolding story. Our story is one of God creating humanity in our world good. God created it shalom. Right? Full of peace. Full of potential. Full of beauty. And we are created in God's image to reflect God's creativity, we are created in God's image to reflect God's love and peace and goodness and to spread that goodness all over the world.

Let me show you what I mean by that. Genesis 1:27. This is when God created humanity.

**"So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."**

So, you and I all, male and female, are created in the image of God and God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it."

This is the first hint that we get that something is not completely right. Because that word "subdue" in Hebrew is a warfare, conquest word. It's a warfare word. "Go take battleground." What is that word doing there? Why is that in there? It seems that our story – the story of humanity – is dropped into a story in progress that we are given hints of later on in Scripture. That there is a cosmic, heavenly war already in progress. It's like Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope. Right? It's like it's dropped in the middle of an ongoing story. It seems like something like that is happening. When God creates humanity, we're dropped into an already in progress, heavenly war. And God has created us in our world to bring about the good and the beautiful, to shalom the planet with Him.

But, the serpent got in and lead the whole world astray. Which brings up all kinds of questions like, "When did this happen? Why did created angels turn and become rebellious? Were the angels themselves tempted by something evil as the serpent has tempted Eve? Where did the evil come from that led created angels to fall and that ultimately led humans to fall?"

Like, where did the evil come from? And the Bible gives no answers. I'm going to be honest. I don't like that. I want answers. I'm like, "Wait, wait, wait, wait. You can't just not give answers."

Two reasons, though, scholars have come up with why God doesn't use the Bible to explain the origins of evil. And these, I like. Here's why. Here's the two answers that scholars come up with as to why the Bible doesn't explain the origin of evil.

One: because evil makes no sense. That's supposed to be that way. And two: because God is preoccupied with overcoming it, not explaining it. Those two reasons. Evil makes no sense. And, if you've ever been the recipient of some evil, it doesn't make sense. It's not supposed to make sense. And, secondly, God is preoccupied with overcoming evil, not explaining evil.

So, first, let's talk about the first one. It makes no sense. Human existence started with Adam naming the animals in the garden. And that's playful and cute and stuff, but it actually has a lot of meaning to us as humans. This dimension of being made in the image of God would mark us ever since. We live on earth to name, investigate, understand and explain created order. That's what we do. And, by understanding something, we create and shape and care for it. This is what we do. This is what we all do for work. This is how tech is born. This is how sciences and medicines work. We learn something, we name it, we explain it and we put it with other things to move humanity forward. This is what always happens.

This is what it means to be human; to find reasons and purposes for things and objects and materials and to explain them and why they are there and what they are there for. And we have this insatiable desire to organize and order the world in the process of understanding it. So, when we encounter the phenomenon of evil, of hundreds of thousands of people dying in a tsunami or millions in death camps or a child of a loved one dies, we try with all our human skill to explain evil, but it doesn't work. It never works. You try to explain evil, you try to explain the tsunami that took 250,000 lives like that, you try to explain someone who's lost a child in their womb why it's happened.

"Because God's trying to teach you something."

What? What kind of God teaches like that? It doesn't make sense, and that's the point. It doesn't make sense. Evil makes no sense. That's actually a conviction of the Bible. Sometimes, suffering makes no sense either. We can sit with people and just cry and not give them answers or platitudes. We can just say, "I don't know."

"Why would this happen?"

"I don't know."

I don't know. I know that God is with us, but I don't know why this happened. Because, sometimes, it doesn't make sense. And some suffering, even what seems like trivial suffering compared to other suffering, doesn't make sense. I haven't shared this in a while, maybe, gosh, years. But, I get a lot of questions about this. So, my wife and I have been married for a while. Twelve, thirteen, something like that, years. Thirteen? Yeah. That's not the point. The point's this. Thirteen. We can edit this later.

So, my wife and I, we've even trying to have children for over 10 years and it's been hard. It's been very, very difficult. We've never been pregnant ever. We've tried. And we sit with people from our church that have lost children and that's just horrific and hard. I can say this: some of the darkest places that I go in my heart and in my mind is when I follow rabbit trails to try to explain why it's happening. That is the worst place I go mentally, spiritually, emotionally. When I try to explain, "Well, this is happening to me because," or, "This is happening to Ashley because," or when we say, "This is happening to us because..."

When we see something suffering or evil even done in our world and things don't work they way they do, we try to explain, "Why this person and not this person?" or "Why this and not that?" And we try to explain them. "The reason why you were born like that is because..." and you try to explain it. It falls apart. I feel like sometimes the reason why we want to know why is that we can assign blame, then. So, as soon as we know why, we can go, "Well, it's because it's your fault. You did that."

We want to blame God. "It's because God did that."

We want to blame someone. Or we feel like we can be excused from compassion when we know who to blame. So, when someone gets lung cancer and we're like, "Do you smoke?"

And they're like, "Yeah, I smoked."

We're like, "Dude. It's on the box. That's on you. I don't have to have that much compassion, because you knew the risks."

We want to know why so we can excuse ourselves from blame. "Who's to blame? Oh, that's to blame. Okay. So, then, I don't have to show you that much compassion. I can show you a little, but not a lot."

But when someone that's never smoked gets cancer and dies, you have so much compassion for that person. But, the person that had it coming? "Oh, I don't have to show you that much compassion."

When we assign blame, it's easy to get off the hook. "Oh, you're homeless because why? Oh, yeah, yeah. I don't have to show you that much compassion. I could show you a little compassion, but not that much compassion, because that's on you."

We want to assign blame and we want to know, "Why is this happening? Oh, because of this. Oh, then I don't have to be accountable or I can blame you or I can blame this person or I can blame myself or I don't have to show you compassion."

See, God is wise and there is a reason why the origin of evil and the evils in this world are not explained. God desires that we enter into someone's pain and that we would show compassion. In John 9, something similar happened where Jesus and the disciples were walking and, as they went along, it says, "They saw a man who was blind from birth."

The disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned? This man or his parents that he was born blind?"

Who do we blame? Parents? Him? Who sinned? Whose fault is it?

Jesus says, "Neither. That's not how this works. Neither. No."

"Neither his parents nor him sinned," Jesus said, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him."

And then, this is important. We always stop there, but you've got to keep reading.

**"As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."**

So, they want to know why. Who's to blame? Whose fault is it? And Jesus said, "That's not what this is about. This man's here so that the works of God might be displayed through him."

Then he says, "Get to work. Get busy doing ministry. Do ministry in my name. Work while it's day."

Start touching people's eyes in the name of Jesus. Start bringing in the name and the rule of God on earth as it is in heaven. Get to work. Start doing ministry. We want to sit and theologize about, "Well, why does this happen? Why does that happen?"

Jesus is like, "Get to work. Start showing people compassion. Start working in my name. Start doing something."

See, the other reason scholars give as to why God doesn't use the Bible to explain the origins of evil is God doesn't waste time explaining evil because He's preoccupied with overcoming evil. See, evil is not there to be understood; evil is there to be resisted and, ultimately, expelled. Evil is to be resisted and expelled. Turn to Mark 4. I'm not going to read the whole thing. I think it might help if you saw it with your own eyes. I'm just going to skim through part of this.

Mark 4:34. Your heading should say something like "Jesus Calms the Storm" right over verse 35. And then, if you skip down in Mark 5:1, it should say, "Jesus Restores a Demon-Possessed Man." And then, right down from there at Mark 5:21, "Jesus Raises a Dead Girl and Heals a Sick Woman."

Do you guys see that? Okay, so, what's going on here in just a chapter and a half – I've told you a million times. I love Mark. Jesus is going after the works of evil in the book of Mark. Mark 4:34 starts when Jesus is on his way to heal a man who is demon-possessed. And, in order for them to get there, He has to get into a boat. So, He's in a boat and, all of a sudden, a hurricane happens in the middle of the sea. A huge squall happens. And the disciples start crying out to Him. They're like, "Wait, Jesus, Teacher."

And Jesus is asleep, by the way. Only Jesus could sleep through a storm like this. That's a miracle in itself. But, no one talks about that miracle. So, Jesus is sleeping in a boat and it's like storm, right? Crazy storm. And He's asleep. I don't know how He's doing it, but He's asleep. And they wake Him up and they say, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown? Don't you care about us? Like, we're drowning here. We're all about to die. Don't you care that we drown?"

And Jesus gets up and He rebukes the wind and the waves. He says, "Quiet. Be still."

And then the wind stops and listens. And then it says that they were scared of the storm, but they were freaked out by Jesus. They're like, "The storm! Jesus? Who talks to storms and storms listen? Who is in our boat?"

So, Jesus calms the storm. Then they get over to the other side and there's this crazy, demonic man who's in a tomb, chained and naked. Just crazy. And Jesus walks up to him and said, "What's your name?"

And he says, "My name is Legion."

The demon is talking here. "My name is Legion, for we are many."

And he knew who Jesus was. Then Jesus casts out these demons and sends them into pigs and the pigs jump off the cliff and drown and die, and the man is brought to right order. They put clothes on him and everyone is freaking out. Like, "What is going on?"

The disciples are like, "Storm? Demon boy? This is crazy."

Then they come back on the other side of the lake and, as soon as they step off, a large crowd gathered around Him and then a guy name Jairus came to Him and said, "My 12-year-old daughter is sick. Could you come and heal here?"

He's like, "Yeah."

So, He's walking and everyone's around Him and this woman who's been bleeding for 12 years, bleeding, a menstrual cycle for 12 years straight, has gone to every single doctor and done everything, just thinks in her mind, "If I just touch the hem of his garment, I will be made well."

And she's ceremonially unclean, right? So, she's not really allowed to touch anyone. But, she does. She had just come to the end of her rope. She breaks through the crowd,

touches the hem of his garment and is immediately healed. And then Jesus – imagine like a giant concert happening and you're in the middle of a concert and you're like, "Okay, stop. Everybody stop. Who touched me?"

Jesus does that. "Who touched me?"

And everyone's hand goes up. Like, "I touched you."

Like, everyone's touching you. And Jesus is like, "No. Who touched me?"

They're like, "What are you saying right now? What do you mean?"

He goes, "I felt power come out from me."

And they're like, "No. We didn't touch you. That wasn't us."

Then this woman comes up and says, ashamed, "It was me."

He said, "I want you to know your faith has made you well."

And then, someone from Jairus' house comes over and says, "Don't bother the Teacher anymore. Your daughter's dead."

And the way this is supposed to read is like, "Storms? Check. Satan? Check. Sicknesses? Check. Death? No. You can't do that one. Don't bother Him anymore. He can't help you there."

So, Jesus goes, "Don't be afraid. Just believe."

And He goes over to the house and He grabs her and says, "Talitha koum!" which means, "Little girl, get up. Time to wake up, little girl."

He grabs her by the hand and she wakes up because Jesus raises her from the dead. So, in this chapter and a half story – this little picture here – Jesus overcomes all the evil that would plague us. Natural evil in storms that can wipe whole countries away. Demonic evil in this man. Even social evil because they try to bind this man, this poor, demonic man. They tried to bind him with shackles and chains and let him off outside of the city. It was, socially, really bad. Jesus heals sickness and then, ultimately, He heals death.

This is the Kingdom of God. This is what God does. When He comes in, He doesn't explain it as much as He overcomes it. And I guess that question that we're really asking are the same questions that the disciples ask in the boat when the storm is about to overtake them. And it's really the human challenge to God. It's really David Bazan's challenge to God. "God, don't You care? Don't You care that we're about to drown? Don't You care that our world is full of evil? Don't You care that I'm suffering?"

And Jesus meets them and us with a challenge and He asks them – and I think He would ask us – "Why are you so afraid and where is your faith?"

These are both real questions because they both reflect real realities in our lives. On one hand, you have the desperate human situation; the difficulties of life, which leads us to say, "God, why don't You care?"

On the other hand, we have God's assurance. His assurance that He is good and that He is powerful and that He will win the battle against sin and death and evil, which leads us to the question, "Why don't you trust?"

See, the ultimate issue at stake in any given circumstance, in any one of life's difficulties is, "Which of these two realities will you live by?"

Your desperate, human situation or God's assurance? God's promise that He is overcoming and has overcome evil? Will you suffer? Yeah. Will you still be a part of a world that's evil and it's hard to explain? Yeah. But, nothing can separate us from the love of God. Not famine or feast, not height or depths, nor things created, heaven or below, nothing can separate us from the love of God. Nothing. We have that assurance. But, I would be lying if I didn't



say some people get lost in the storm. Sometimes the storm sweeps over people and takes thousands. Sometimes the little girl dies. Sometimes you keep bleeding.

So, the question is: are you willing to live with the understanding that the God I don't understand has chosen not to explain the origin of evil, but rather wants us to concentrate our attention on what He has done to destroy it? Are we then to gag our desperate questions and accept that it's a mystery and then shut up? Like, "Okay, it's just a mystery. Stop complaining. It's just a mystery."

No. That's another part of the beauty of the Scriptures is that no, what we get to do is we get to grieve, we get to weep, we get to lament, we get to protest, we get to scream in pain and anger, we get to cry out, "How long must this kind of thing go on, God?"

It seems that, in the Old Testament, those that know God most have the biggest problem with the present world. They actually go to God with it. Like, "God, what's going on? This is not how it's supposed to be."

We actually have a whole book of these called the Psalms where this lament happens. And there is room for this. There's room for this in our own journey, our own faith, our own experience. There's room for us to say, "How long, God, will this go on?" There's room for us to lament, there's room for us to even protest. To say, "God, this is not right. This is not right and I need You to hear my right now."

There's room for this. Nicholas Wolterstorff wrote a book – he's a theologian – on reflections on death, because his adult son died accidentally in a climbing accident and he had a hard time with this. Theologically having a hard time with this as a theologian. And he writes a reflection: "Lament for a Son."

And in his reflections, he says this, and I'll close with this quote:

"The cry [lament] that we're allowed by God occurs within the context of the 'yet' of enduring faith and ongoing praise. For in raising Christ from the dead, we have God's word and deed that He will be victorious in the struggle against all that frustrates His desire. Thus, divine sovereignty is not sacrificed, but reconceived. If lament is indeed a legitimate component to the Christian life, then divine sovereignty is not to be understood as everything happening just as God wants it to happen or happening in such a way that God regards what He does, not like as an acceptable tradeoff for the good thereby achieved."

That's very important. He says, "Divine sovereignty consists in God's winning the battle against all that has gone awry with respect to God's will."

We say really silly things when really tragic things happen. We, as Christians, sometimes, are the worst. What lament does is give us the room to say, "This was the enemy and I don't understand it. But, I know what God's divine sovereignty means is that God is winning the battle against all that has gone awry with respect to His ultimate will. And He has won it on the cross and He will win it one day."

Let's pray.

Lord, I pray that during this time of response, You would cause us, by Your grace, in a very safe space like this, to go deeper in our relationship with You than maybe we've ever gone. To that place where we can lament and cry and tell You what's wrong and even protest with You and say, "God, this isn't right. I feel this is really wrong and I feel like You should be doing something about this and it feels like You're not and I don't know where You're at right now and I don't like it."

Whatever that language is, God, if we've never hit that depth of relationship with You, I pray that today we'd begin to know it's safe to do so. It's safe to cry and lament and cry out in anger about the things wrong with our nation, about the things wrong in our city, about the things wrong in our heart and our family and our marriages and our immune systems, God, and our bodies and our friendships and our jobs and our minds. To say, "God, it's wrong. This is wrong."

And I pray that we would all hear back from these things, the words You said to Jairus. "Don't doubt, but believe."

Give us faith, God. Bolster our faith. Give us words and language to trust You in the mystery of it all. And then, through that, would You fortify us, build us up, make us stronger in our faith? Stronger in our belief? I pray for those in here that have wrestled

with this question and have been on the brink of giving their life to You but have not because of this. Like, "I don't know if I can really, fully give my life to this God. I don't know if I can trust this God."

I pray they'd be honest with that today and be able to say that to You. And then I ask, God, that You'd give them faith. That You'd give them faith to not be afraid, but believe. We thank You for the cross, Lord, where You've overcome evil by Your stripes, by Your wounds, by Your death. You took evil in Your body and then destroyed it. Thank You, God. It's in the strong name of Jesus that we pray, amen.