

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

Lesson 23 – Part 2

A Warrior God?

I have a philosopher friend ... ok, well, he's not really a philosopher... And I should add he's not really a friend... But I would love to have him as a friend... And he does publish poetry expressing some really good ideas!

So to write more precisely, I have listened to music written by an Irish fellow (that I wish was my philosopher friend) named Paul Hewson. He is popularly known as Bono, front man for the world's greatest band U2.

Bono sings a song on the *All That You Can't Leave Behind* release entitled, "Stuck in a Moment." The song prods one from the too frequent lapse of living in a limited perspective of a moment, rather than the flowing movie of life.

You've got to get yourself together
You've got stuck in a moment
And you can't get out of it
Oh love, look at you now
You've got yourself stuck in a moment
And you can't get out of it.

"Stuck in a Moment" is stuck in my mind as I write this conclusion to last week's lesson. Hopefully this is not because I am stuck, but rather it is my recognition of an issue in discussing suffering and God's direct role in it.

The "moment" is a time issue. I am writing this at a time certain, on a day certain, in a certain month and certain year. I write it as a man who has lived for fifty years of moments. I am acutely aware of moments. Some fly by, others stay long past their due.

Yet I know, as revealed by Scripture, that my life itself is a mere moment in the history of our world. My time is not even a drop of water in the ocean of eternity. In terms of God's eternity, *our earth's existence* is not even a drop of water. So if we roll up all the suffering in the history of the world, and view it from God's timeless sense, it was/is dealt with immediately.

Now as we look at God's handling of evil in our life and history, we are examining life's travails stuck in our "moments." We must never lose sight of the eternity, which makes such a question almost moot. For in God's eternity, the problem of humanity's evil is resolved almost immediately. Even a lifetime of pain is not a millisecond of pain as understood eternally.

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So when we cry out, “Why, God?” we do so from within our moment that we are living. That does not mitigate the fairness of the cry, however, for God himself came into our system’s moments through the incarnation. Jesus Christ taught us directly and by example that crying out to God is both appropriate and important. Jesus taught us to ask God for daily bread; he cried out for the passing cup in agony at Gethsemane, and he proclaimed the cry of Psalm 22 (“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”) from the cross.

THE PROBLEM

So we approach, with a measured respect for eternity, the problem discussed last week: How does a God of love (1 Jn. 4:8), a God who teaches love for enemies (Mt. 5:43-44), a God who teaches some measure of personal pacifism (“If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also” Mt. 5:38-39), a God who says we will be known by the love we show (Jn. 13:34-35) – how does this same God tell the Israelites coming into the Promised Land:

But in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall devote them to complete destruction, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the Lord your God has commanded (Dt. 20:16-17).

This same God later told King Saul:

Go strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey (1 Sam. 15:3).

To better understand the solutions, we need to examine the problem more clearly. On a micro-level, this problem is one of these specific instructions pertaining to Israel’s invasion of Canaan and some other military actions. But on a broader level, the problems are larger. For even if we could explain the meaning of these invasion passages as less terminal than they appear, we are still confronted with God proclaiming himself the destroyer of all humanity (save Noah and family) in the flood. This, of course, included every child of every age. Even if we could explain this broader level of concern, however, we have yet a third level of issue, namely God’s passive allowance of violence. How do we wrestle with an all-powerful God allowing the holocaust – or the sexual abuse of a child?

At its core, then, the issue of God’s instructions to Joshua and the Israelites is part of a much broader issue:

How do we explain our observation and experience of evil in light of an all-powerful and all-loving God?

These questions tug at our hearts and minds as we try to make sense of God and of our faith.

REVIEW

Last week we asked the question: what are others saying about this problem? We sought published opinions from a range of scholars with different backgrounds: Protestant, Catholic, and Jew; conservative and liberal; ancient and contemporary. We considered 8 basic approaches to resolving an alleged inconsistency in God. Some approaches change Scripture to remove alleged inconsistencies between the Old and New Testaments (or change Gods, in the case of Marcion). Others change Scripture (or the way Scripture is understood) to alleviate alleged inconsistencies between what is said of God and how people imagine God should be.

Some hold fast to Scripture, choosing instead to defend God's behavior as reported. These theories varied widely: that God is complex and at times abusive; that God is God and not open to question; that God had just cause for his actions; that the ends justified the means; that God was acting for the greater good; or that God was acting in a different way at a different time along a chain of his progression in revealing himself.

In the course of trying to overview what others have written on the subject, we did so with a critical eye, assessing the rationale behind the approaches as well as some of the weaknesses. Our effort was to deconstruct the writings of others before constructing our own observations and ideas. This week, we offer our own opinions.

CONSTRUCTIVE IDEAS

We begin noting that this section is not entitled "Solution." We are not going to solve a problem that has plagued thinking people for millennia in a 45-minute lesson. In fact, one of the biggest difficulties in writing a lesson on this subject, as opposed to a book, is culling the issues and arguments into bite-size while making sense and being fair to the material. Our goal, therefore, is to offer some constructive ideas and resources to help influence our thinking, study, and prayer on these subjects. Hopefully this lesson will serve as a catalyst for further discussion.

The format for this section stems heavily from my life as a lawyer. Lawyers are taught to approach learning and educating through the Socratic method. Named after Plato's teacher Socrates, this method is used in law school education. Most every class is taught not by lecture, but by questions. The professor calls upon the student and grills her or him to both educate and train the future lawyer. Then as trial lawyers, we live in courts built off the same tool in a drive for truth. Witnesses are put on the stand, and the truth is determined through a question and answer process.

The key for a lawyer (or law professor) is to *ask the right questions*. It is too common for someone to ask questions that make assumptions that cloud the answer. Just the other day someone suggested a speech topic for an upcoming lecture:

"The Bible or the Enlightenment: Which is the source of American Religious Liberty?"

Now that may be a valid question, or it may not be. It assumes that the answer is either the Bible or the enlightenment. What if the truth is a combination of the two rather than one or the other? For that matter, what if the truth is that neither is the source?

I would suggest that a similar improper first question on our issue is:

Why would a loving, moral God use evil or allow evil to occur?

This question assumes a definition of evil and, to some degree, a definition of love. For many, asking this improper question is the same as saying:

If I were God I would not allow things I don't like to happen.

If we wish to fairly consider this subject, we need to make sure we are asking fair questions! We set forward four questions as a framework for constructing ideas on the problem of a good God and the presence of evil.

What is evil?

This is a fundamental question that lies at the heart of the problem. How we answer this question determines much of our understanding of the problem of God's existence and God's justice.¹ As we were leaving class last week, a friend of mine in attendance, a very intelligent and well-educated ivy-league doctor, said

¹ The theological term "theodicy" is often used to speak of explaining God in light of the existence of evil. This term comes from two Greek words, *theos* meaning "God" and *dike* meaning "justice."

to me, “You set out my arguments very well. This is why I do not believe in God.” For my friend, there can be no God in light of the evil we see.

My core question to anyone with this view is always the same: What is evil? Evil must be more than pain or harm. For a doctor causes pain when he removes an organ that has cancer. Is the doctor doing evil? Not by most people’s definition. So do we define evil as doing harm when compared to the good that comes from the action? In other words, if the doctor does a better good by his deed than the measurable pain or harm, the deed moves from vice to virtue? That seems inadequate too for perhaps the surgery by the doctor does not work, in spite of the doctor’s best efforts. Do we say then that the doctor did evil? Maybe we need to consider motive. Could we say that evil is doing harm without a superimposing motive of a worthy purpose? Of course the question then becomes one of what is a worthy purpose?

In defining evil, should we give different definitions depending upon the *kind* of evil? Do we say that there is a “moral evil” as opposed to an evil behavior?

As a framework for answering “What is evil?” I would suggest there are alternative perspectives. One is to view and define evil based upon my conscience and observation. If I feel abortion is evil, it is. If I feel abortion is not evil, then it is not. Evil becomes a subjective term. Evil becomes, like beauty, something in the eye of the beholder. Of course the immediate problem here is the fluid nature of evil. What was evil last night may not be this morning. What is evil to one is not evil to another. Evil as a concept is difficult to maintain consistently when it is simply subject to the conscience of the individual.

A second idea is to take the moral consensus of a society and make it the definition of evil. So rather than simply rely on the individual’s conscience, evil gets its definition from community conscience. What do “most people” agree is right and wrong? Again, however, this definition still produces a subjective and inadequate answer. Mere mention of Nazi Germany and the holocaust points to the core problem: If a society deems it moral and ethical to gather all Jews together for a final solution of extermination, does it make it right? Can the community conscience trump that of my own conscience?

A third idea is to make evil the core historical values that have led to the development of mankind, as it exists in the modern cultural world. Again, though, we are at a subjective definition that lacks the ability to give an adequate working definition. It is like the old issue of seeing a glass half empty or half full. Do we see the tragedies of Darfur, of the holocaust, of the Bolshevik Revolution, of

American slavery, etc., as acceptable moral good since they were part of the shaping that gave definition to our humanity as it exists today?²

All of these ideas given so far carry a common denominator: they draw their definition from humanity (individually or collectively). In that regard they all also fall short of providing a solid objective working definition for evil (or for good for that matter).

The theist has a different option for defining evil and good. The theist can look outside of humanity for the definition and offer a truly objective (from a human's perspective) definition.³ Evil and good can be defined by appealing to the moral nature of God. "Good" is then defined as the actions and values of God; "evil" is the antithesis of good. What God does is deemed "good" and that which is contrary to God's morality is "evil."

This is not a novel perspective developed conveniently for this class. This concept was in the teaching of Christ. When the rich ruler approached Christ and called him "good teacher," Christ underscored a theistic view of "good" asking,

Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone (Lk. 18:19).

Paul certainly seems to indicate the same objective idea of good. It is the most sensible understanding of his claim that no one does a good deed, "not even one" (Rom. 3:12).

This is not simply a New Testament concept. In Isaiah 64:5 we read,

You meet him who joyfully works righteousness,
those who remember you in your ways.

This is a Hebrew structure called "parallelism." It gives the same idea in two different phrasings as a means of poetic expression. So this passage is equating one who "works righteousness" to one who remembers God's "ways." Goodness or righteousness derives its meaning as the ways or morals of God. Isaiah then

² Some might respond, "No, history has shown these tragedies as against the flow of core values." Yet an argument can be made that the negative experiences helped shape and define the responses and, as such, were an integral good part of the historical development of core values. These arguments can push both ways in an exchange that could continue *ad infinitum*.

³ This lesson is not written as an apologetic. It is not written to persuade or argue for the existence of God. Certainly, however, these issues go to the core of certain arguments for believing in God. The question of which worldview best explains the world we experience is an appropriate question to ask in trying to determine whether the Christian worldview is more or less valid than another.

contrasts righteousness and God's ways in the next verse with those of man whose "righteous deeds are like a polluted garment."

If we define good as characteristic of God and distinguish/define evil as that which is contrary to God and his morality, then how do we process that feeling in our gut that God is doing something wrong when he orders the killing of every "man and woman, child and infant"? I suggest it goes back to our constant struggle to make God into our image rather than seeking our transformation into his. Here is my point: everything dies. It is the factual reality of life in our fallen world. The real issue is, who makes the decision of when someone (or something) dies?

Death is not a pleasant idea for most, and it is a painful emotional amputation for the loved ones who survive the death of someone dear. Some would argue that anytime a loved one dies, there is an evil. I know that as my dear grandmother of 92 lay dying, many of us were still praying for her to have a few more good years (or even months or days). It hurt for her to pass, even after 92 incredible years on earth.

But the decision of her death was not a human one. We did not decide to "put her down" as one might a sick pet. By our faith, we understand God took her. So if we consider death as a moral issue, as an issue of evil, our suggested framework dictates that the decision of human death is God's, not man's. This does give God the right to determine when one dies and, as long as it is God's determination, we deem it moral and right.⁴ Now that is not to say we are pleased with it, nor is it to say that it is the choice we would make. Again though, we are stuck in a moment. We do not share God's eternal view. Somehow in the midst of eternity as well as the space and time of earth God makes choices on death and it might even be a bit arrogant to suggest that we know better than he on this matter.

This is what makes the issue of war perplexing to many people. At what point is it proper for man to wage war and, consequently, to make the decision of when some people (even "collateral damage civilians") will die. Aquinas went to great lengths to set out the "just causes" necessary for a leader to declare war. His reasoning was a process that analyzed the values of God in such a way as to determine whether such a war was God's will. In other words, before man should ever take a life, whether in war, in self-defense, or in capital punishment, the

⁴ Lawyer turned theologian Udo Middleman would likely object to this point as worded asserting that God "seems to be often outraged, disappointed even" over some deaths like that of Lazarus, where Jesus openly wept (Jn. 11:35). *The Innocence of God*, (Paternoster 2007) at 9. Our response is that the text does not indicate Jesus wept over the death as opposed to over the hurt in the people who did not know, what Jesus already knew, that Jesus was about to raise Lazarus from the grave. We do agree with Middleman that in God's principle design of life on earth, death, pain and misery are not the "good" in the creation story.

question involves determining the will of God in that situation. Death is God's jurisdiction, not man's.

This approach on the death issue allows us to accept that God has every right as well as reason to order the deaths of Canaanites or anyone else in the Old Testament, the New Testament, or today. For God to move someone from earth's temporal moments into eternity is part of his work and plan and we can accept it as such. But what do we do about the suffering that occurs short of death? How does this objective view of good and evil fit into the suffering of a defenseless child at the hands of a sexual predator?

This issue does not fall into our question on the table! This issue gets dealt with in a later question of this lesson. This first question is simply, what is evil? As people of faith we answer that evil is that which God would not do, as opposed to good, which is what God would do.⁵ Our chore, then, is to determine the will of God in situations and, in doing so, determine what is good.

At our disposal on such determinations are the revelation of Holy Scripture, as well as prayer, godly counsel, and Spiritual insight. As Paul explained,

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the *will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect* (Rom. 12:2).

Our greatest resource is the life of Christ. For in Christ we see God manifest and dwelling in the form of man. We see God's interaction with people from all walks of life. We see God teaching his followers what to say, what to do, and how to understand and relate to God. Jesus taught that when seeing him, one was seeing the Father (Jn. 14:8-11).

Now if we take our definition of evil further into our questions, we now ask, why we have evil in a world made by God?

Why is there evil in our world?

If we carry forward into this question the definition of evil as that which is contrary to the nature and morality of God, we are asking this question in a very specific light. We want to know why there exists in our space and time, anything

⁵ From a human definition of evil as that which we detest or find harmful, we can certainly find God doing "evil." God brings righteous judgment upon sin, including the punishment of death. That may not seem "good" or "right" to us but as God does it, we must proclaim it righteous.. Isaiah the prophet uses this sense of the word "evil" writing of God, "I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity ["evil"]" (Isa. 45:7). This calamity/evil is distinct from true moral evil. It is the just recompense for sin.

contrary to God's will and morality. As God is all-powerful, should there be anything that is not aligned with him?

The orthodox biblical answer is that we live in and experience a fallen world in travail and groaning for redemption. The Biblical story of Adam and Eve provides the contrast between how God wills creation and how we live creation. God created and everything was good. Within his creation, however, were free willed beings that could choose to live within God's morality or not. They could choose God or choose rebellion – good or evil.

We find here that while facing the intellectual struggle of evil's genesis, we run straight into the paradox of free will in the midst of an omnipotent God! (As if our chore was not daunting enough). Again it is useful to remember that this lesson offers constructive ideas for dialogue, not the finely packaged gift of full and satisfactory answers to answer everyone's every question. In this regard, however, we urge the premise that God has set the world up in a way where man can freely choose. Adam and Eve could choose to eat or not to eat. Jerusalem could choose to honor and follow God or not ("O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and *you would not!*" Mt. 23:37).

We would urge the discussion around the idea that God is a reality who has definite morality in his existence. As such, to the extent there is something that God is, there is also something that he is not. In moral terms, if there is something about God we define as good, there is that which he is not we can define as evil. In Biblical terms, God is "light" and in him is no darkness (I Jn 1:5). God is "truth" (Jn 14:1); but that which is adverse to God has nothing to do with truth, but inhabits lies (Jn 8:43-45). God is "just" and his ways are ways of "justice" (Dt. 32:4); injustice is the opposite of righteousness (Jer. 22:13). God is "life" (Jn 14:1); while that which is not of God (immorality/sin) brings death (Rom. 6:23).

So God created a world with a humanity able to choose between God's ways and ungodliness – between good and evil. Man chose the evil, and just as evil is outside of God's essence, so evil leads to its own consequences which are outside of God's essence. Evil choices brought evil conditions into the world.

David Birnbaum commented on the choice of man in Eden:

Thus, when man chose to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, he chose to accept the entire set of dynamics of the Tree of Knowledge, and he turned his back on the entire set of dynamics of the Tree of Life. It was actually man who determined his own "expulsion" from the Garden of Eden's bliss.

It was man seeking the destiny of the Tree of Knowledge with all that the choice implies.⁶

This is now the world into which we are each born and in which we exist. A world sculpted by rebellion to God and his character. A world destined for those things outside God. Rather than a world of good, of light, of truth, of justice, or of life, we have a world of evil, darkness, untruth, injustice and death.

We should add that the choice of rebellion and evil was not simply that of Adam and Eve. It is also the choice of people today. Paul made clear that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom.3:23), but it goes deeper than that. Man can, and occasionally does, choose to do awful acts of evil. Hitler’s holocaust was a horribly evil act. Sexual abuse is a horrible evil. Emotional abuse can destroy much of a person. These are not “creations of God;” these are not the “will of God;” these are atrocities and acts against God’s will done by free choosing humans. These are acts the believer laments and fights against.

Now while man’s choosing evil changes man, it does not change God. God is still good, light, just, etc. How this good God fits into the evil in the world is our next question.

Where is God in the midst of the evil in this world?

The magnificence of God is his presence in this world and in its pain while also existing beyond this world and moment. In theological terms, God is both immanent (present in all aspects of space and time) and transcendent (lying beyond our limits of space and time). In Bono-speak, God is both in the moment, but not *stuck* in the moment.

The atheist abandons the quest of finding God in the midst of evil, believing that the two cannot co-exist. The theist finds God working in and even through the evil of this world. That does not confuse this issue with one of God being responsible for evil. We need to keep our questions separate.

God works through evil and suffering to develop character. Paul found that, “insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities” developed the character of Christ in him (2 Cor. 12:10). The author of Hebrews explained Christ was fulfilled in his humanity as he garnered the experiences and fruit of obedience in suffering (Heb. 2:10; 5:8-9). Peter emphasized the blessings on those who suffer (1 Pet. 3:14ff).

Paul saw God not only working in his own life through suffering, but also in the lives of others. Certainly this is the example of the cross, where all humanity gains profit even as God/Christ suffered from the evil of injustice. Paul adds that

⁶ Birnbaum, David, *God and Evil: A Unified Theodicy/Theology/Philosophy*, (Ktav 1989) at 87.

it is his experience as well when he gladly suffers with Christ “for the sake of the elect” (2 Tim. 2:1-11). Paul thought it of supreme importance to share in the sufferings of Christ (Phil. 3:8-11).⁷ He even thanked God for his suffering that resulted in benefit to the church (Col. 1:24).

The Psalmist found affliction worked in his life to bring about obedience and growth:

Before I was afflicted I went astray,
but now I keep your word (Ps. 119:67).

James wrote of the transformational power of suffering and trials,

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (James 1:2-4).

One of the lessons of Job is that God is able to work through the suffering and tragedies both to grow the individual and to work out God’s plan in the lives of his people.⁸

It is apparent from our reading of Old Testament texts that God uses death, military conquest, and suffering as tools for recompensing sin. In Zechariah 13:8-9, the prophet writes the declaration of the LORD,

I will...refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, “They are my people”; and they will say, “The Lord is my God.”

The imagery of heating the metals to a melting point for purification applied not simply to the individual but to the community of God as well.

We should add that as we are considering God’s role in the midst of evil, we are not able to do so fully. Understanding God fully is far beyond our comprehension. We can know him truly, but not fully. Stuck in our moment, we see in a mirror dimly as opposed to eternity where we shall see clearly (1 Cor. 13:11-13). We can say with confidence, however, that God, who knows when a sparrow falls, knows our moments and our travails (Mt. 10:28-30). He promises that they will never be

⁷ Church history is replete with examples of God using the believer’s suffering and even the martyr’s death as a testimony to grow the church. The lawyer turned theologian Tertullian wrote that: “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church” (*Apologeticus*, Chapter 50).

⁸ More careful examination of Job and God’s seemingly passive approval of suffering will come in the upcoming classes on that book.

more than we can handle (1 Cor. 10:12-13), and that through each issue, nothing will separate us from his love (Rom. 8:35-39).

One vivid location of God in this world of suffering is found in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Through the incarnation, God definitively entered into our moment in human form, subjecting himself to human suffering and evil. The famous question, “Why do bad things happen to good people?” really finds expression in the experiences of Jesus. Orthodoxy teaches that Jesus alone is the one man who lived a perfect life (i.e., lived as God himself would live). Jesus had no sin that would incur death, no errors that needed refinement and sculpting. Jesus existed in the very form of God and emptied himself taking the form of a man to deliver mankind from the penalty incurred in Eden and through lives of sin. Jesus suffered at the hands of a just God because justice demands vengeance (or punishment if we’d rather be milder in language).

If we are to find God acting “unfairly,” punishing the innocent, and raining death on the undeserving, we find it once in history—in the life of Christ. Of course we know that this punishment was voluntary. As John wrote, “God so loved the world, he sent... (Jn. 3:16). Or as Paul wrote, Jesus so loved the world; he came (Phil. 2:8-10)!

Here at the cross of Christ we see God’s dynamic usage of the harms and evil from the sin of the world. Under his hands sin and suffering brings forth the fruit of forgiveness, his will for the ultimate good of mankind.

What is the future of evil?

The crucifixion and resurrection signals the end of evil. Evil and the curses of the fall do not gradually go away. They are not made better and better as time goes on. They do not one day cross the line of morality into the zone of “goodness.” They are destined for death, the right and just result of sin. That which is not of God, is not of life.

Paul wrote about the Ephesians being “dead” in their trespasses, not sick or gravely ill (Eph. 2:1-3). Jesus did not say that one needed to improve for eternity, but used the term of needing a new birth (Jn 3:1-8). In this sense Paul writes of Christ as the new Adam, the firstborn of a new creation (Rom. 5; 1 Cor. 15:45ff).

Not just people, but creation itself groans for the release from the bondage of sin’s curse.

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of

God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now (Rom. 8:20-22).

Revelation shows Christ coming forth in warrior form to put the final deathblow to the forces of sin and its curses. Consider Revelation 19:11-16,

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

The promise of a new age where “the dwelling place of God is with man” and where “He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God” (Rev. 21:3-4) is a place where,

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away (Rev. 21:5).

In that coming age, the Creator God will make “all things new” (Rev. 21:5). It is this assurance that brings Scripture to a close with John’s plea, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! (Rev. 22:20).

CONCLUSION

We do not suggest that all answers to all probing questions are or could be in this lesson. We are presenting core ideas for discussion and consideration. When considering the actions of God as set out in difficult Scriptures, one of the hardest things is being stuck in a moment and contemplating the deeds of an eternal God. In doing so we must never lose sight that our struggle against evil and suffering is God’s struggle as well. The story of the cross is the story of an historical intervention of God directly into human history to bring victory over the suffering and evil of man’s sin.

Our struggle for good is God’s struggle for good. When we give food to the hungry, water to the thirsty, when we tend to the sick, we are doing the work of God (Mt. 25:39-40).

POINTS FOR HOME

1. “*No one is good except God alone*” (Lk. 18:19).

This is the core of ethics. God is good. Surely our desire to be like God is a desire also to be good as he is. Let us make a conscious decision to read our gospels regularly with focus on watching God in Christ on earth as a human. As we see his love and life, let us purposely practice and emulate him.

2. “*I will...refine them as one refines silver*” (Zec. 13:8).

God is not the author of evil. Yet God is able to work through the atrocities of man to bring his people to a greater purity of heart and life. This is part of the tools of God in renewing our minds and transforming our lives to better service to him while in this world. Identify where there is pain and difficulty in your life. Do not blame God, but instead pray and know with confidence that God will bring good from evil, life from death, and that while weeping may last a night, joy comes in the morning.

3. “*He will wipe away every tear*” (Rev. 21:5).

This promise of an age where God will again dwell with man is not some pie in the sky. It is not an unreal promise that has deluded well-meaning people for millennia. It is a very real destiny for which we wait expectantly. As you see yourself, and as you see others, view with an eye toward what will be, and not simply what is. Long for the day when things will be made right, and live confidently that such a day is coming.

WANT MORE?

Read the gospel of John until you find a trait in Jesus that you want in your life in some greater degree. Then pray about it and seek it through God’s help. Email us the trait at wantmore@Biblical-Literacy.com and let us see God at work in you!