

Selected Verses "Why Do Bad Things Happen?"

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

! Some of you thought that. Remember, we are looking at questions like this all summer, at what the Bible says about some of these hard questions, and the purpose is really twofold.

It's both strengthening our own faith and learning to listen and to understand non-Christian neighbors and friends and some of their struggles with God and faith that often are similar to our own.

Almost all of us have at some point asked some version of this question this morning because all of us have suffered. What does the Bible have to say to us when we ask, why?

Okay. We're going to look at several different passages this morning, but first let's pray together and ask for God's help. God, your word has pointed us already this morning to look to you, to cry out to you, to express honestly the struggles, the questions that we have.

[1 : 53] And so we do that now. We come to your word, wanting to hear you speak to us about the questions we don't have answers for, about the difficult things that we struggle with.

So would you give us ears to hear and would you speak clearly and tenderly, Father, to our hearts even now in Jesus' name. Amen.

Why, O Lord, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? Psalm 10. God, why have you forgotten me?

Why do I go mourning? Psalm 42. Why are you sleeping, O Lord? Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?

Psalm 44. Why did you bring me out from the womb? Job asks. Why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?

[3 : 04] The prophet Habakkuk. Why is my pain unceasing? My wound incurable? Refusing to be healed?

The prophet Jeremiah. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Jesus on the cross.

See, the people of God often find the question, why, heavy on their hearts. We understand that, don't we?

I hardly need to give you examples. Why did we have a pregnancy only to suffer a miscarriage? Why do so many children starve each day?

Why did the Venezuela earthquake do so much damage? Why did my loved one have to die so soon? Why are millions of people sold into slavery each year?

[4 : 08] Why will my pain never go away? I could go on all day, right? You know these questions. I don't have to stand up here and try to convince you that there are bad things in this world.

I certainly don't have to convince you that there are bad things in your life. I have been with you. I have shaken my fists and bowed my head with many of you in hospital rooms, in living rooms.

Why? Why? Behind that why question for many people is often a feeling that if God is really God and He's really good, this suffering wouldn't be happening.

And so some people have concluded that the presence of evil, of bad things, disproves God's existence.

And I just want to acknowledge that up front because I'm not going to address it at length this morning in this sermon. Not because I don't care.

[5 : 28] In fact, let's make sure we include that in our discussion afterwards, okay? We'll get there. But because the Bible doesn't focus there when we ask these questions, it doesn't give us this simple, clear answer to why there is evil in the world.

It's that ancient question of theodicy. We will touch on that a bit more in a couple weeks in what's kind of a companion sermon. How can a loving God send people to hell? But the Bible does tell us that all things are ultimately for the glory of the sovereign creator. That sin invades God's good creation.

That the creation is under a curse from its creator. But often it doesn't specifically answer the specific why questions that are asked even by God's people.

Instead, I'd like to focus this morning on what God says he does with the bad things. It's another angle on the same question.

[6 : 42] Because the God of the Bible speaks to this a lot and he offers unique answers to that aspect of the question. See, he doesn't avoid that.

He doesn't philosophize away the pain to defend his reputation. He does speak to us in our pain. So, let's listen this morning to what he has to say. Suffering is so obvious, so heavy on us, that some give other answers from the ones that God gives.

Some conclude with atheism and naturalism, that the world is just a harsh place with no God and no hope to escape the suffering.

Others, not quite so hopeless, they conclude with Buddhism or other religions that suffering is so ubiquitous and so undesirable that you must avoid it.

[7 : 48] And you do that, you disconnect from attachments to life in order to find true happiness. The God of the Bible of Christianity says quite the opposite.

What does he do with bad things? Well, like the others, he doesn't deny the existence of suffering. He doesn't call bad things good.

And please hear that as we get started today. You're sufferers. You need to know that the pain is real. The tears you cry are appropriate.

The evil really is unjust and wrong, and God affirms that. But unlike the others, God engages bad things, real evil, purposefully.

In fact, he assures us that despite what it may often look like to us, our suffering is never pointless or without purpose.

[8 : 57] Now think about that for a minute. Only a sovereign God could promise you that. Only someone who is in total control of all of it could give you a promise like that.

Let's see the same truth in an Old Testament story and then in a New Testament statement. Start with Joseph. Joseph, you may remember, suffers a lot, doesn't he?

Thrown into a pit by his brothers, sold into slavery in Egypt, falsely accused, thrown in prison, abandoned by people he helped, alone, away from family and God's people.

Any of this starting to feel familiar to your own life? But when God works to bring Joseph out of prison and into second in command in all of Egypt, when his brothers and father are reunited to him, when his trust in God eventually brings the nations to Egypt for famine relief, he tells his brothers, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.

To bring it about that many people should be kept alive as they are today. The things you did, he says, were really bad. You meant evil.

[10 : 29] And on top of that, I couldn't see the good from the pit or the prison. But God had other things in mind.

Somebody else was in control. He had in mind to bring good. In fact, to redeem evil things for the saving of many lives. And there were years and years where you couldn't have explained this.

And Joseph says, I couldn't have told you what was happening. But then all of a sudden, you could. We may not have the explanation of our bad things even in our lifetimes.

But Romans 8.28 reminds us that all things, even if we don't understand how, work together for good for those called according to God's purpose.

He has a purpose. So, so far from disproving his existence, suffering bows to God's power and will.

[11 : 38] He is so strong, y'all, and so gracious that he regularly brings good out of bad. Nowhere, of course, is that seen better than when the greatest redemption in the history of the world comes through the greatest act of unjust violence ever committed.

More on that later. But like Jesus and Joseph, we often see only the knotted, confusing, messy backside.

If you just look at the left side, can you even tell what that's a picture of? We only see the backside of the tapestry like this while we're living our lives when in fact God is weaving a beautiful tapestry,

a good story from all of the bad on the backside.

Now of all the good that God could bring out of bad things, one purpose sticks out from all the others. the ultimate good of deepening our relationship with him.

This is, after all, what God says we were made for, right? This is why we exist, to know him, to make him known. Peter tells us that towards that end, it is necessary that we face some temporary trials.

[13 : 16] Because the trials are gonna do something. They're going to refine our faith. Right? That's our relationship with God, our trust in him. It's gonna be refined like gold being refined in a furnace.

He says the trials deepen our love for Jesus so that we rejoice in him eternally. Peter goes on to say, you rejoice with a joy that is inexpressible and glorious because your love for Jesus is growing. And we do that because the bad things have shown us afresh our need for him, our dependence upon him. See, originally, in the Garden of Eden, God made Adam and Eve and put them in the garden, and he gave them the sun and the moon, of course, to light their days.

And he also visited, right, from time to time. He walked with them. But in the new heavens, in the new earth, the way God's going to make it one day, there is no need for the sun because what? God is the light. We live always in his presence. That's how God can call our struggles here momentary and light.

[14 : 35] That's what he says in 2 Corinthians 4. Because the eternal and weighty glory of living in dependent relationship with him, sharing that loving relationship of father and son and spirit, that is the glory that we need.

That's what we're actually longing for when we feel alone or abandoned. That's what you're longing for when you feel discouraged or depressed.

That's what you're longing for when you feel anxious or fearful. You're longing to be enlightened, held, comforted by the God who made us and came to be with us and promises never to leave us.

That's what you were made for. Let me see if I can picture it this way. Think of the bad things like this. Many of you parents have rushed to the aid of a crying child in the middle of the night.

Right? I know my kids didn't enjoy those scary moments. We call them bad dreams for a reason. Right? Night terrors.

[15 : 48] In fact, even I, as the one who wasn't having them, probably was wishing I was asleep too. Nobody liked it. But I found that getting to show up, thank you for the object lesson, I found that getting to show up and hold my girls while they're crying, to comfort her as she's hurting or afraid, to reassure her of my care and commitment to her in those difficult moments, has helped her experience my love in ways that she never would have without the dark night and the bad dream.

Now, we don't stop to think like that as crying toddlers, right? And we're screaming in the middle of the night. But we're learning night after night and time after time when mom or dad shows up and holds me and is there and comforts me.

We're learning that to make it through the dark nights of the soul, we actually depend on someone who loves us and will be with us.

That's a really important lesson to learn. One last note here. You've probably heard Christians say that God will never give you more than you can handle.

That's not what the Bible says when you just apply it broadly to all bad things, to suffering in general. The Bible doesn't say that.

[17 : 35] There is a verse that says that about temptation. That it won't be beyond what we can bear. But Paul actually says the very opposite when talking about some of his sufferings.

It's important for us to see this in 2 Corinthians 1. Paul says we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself.

It was more than he could bear. Right? Even Paul. Paul. Why? Why? Why is this happening? We felt we'd received the sentence of death but that was, you could say, that happened so that that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.

You see what he's saying? Why did we have to feel like there was no hope for our lives like we were under a sentence of death? because the God who was teaching us to trust him is the one who raises the dead.

That no matter what we went through we could trust him. You see, God wanted to deepen their relationship with him to help Paul rely more on who he really is.

[18 : 54] So I just want to say to you this morning if you are in over your head and many of us are, if you are burdened beyond what you can bear, you may be right but it's not because God wants to drive you away from him.

No. It's because God wants to draw you close. It's because he wants you to know him more deeply as he held close Paul and Ruth and Jesus in the garden.

He will hold me fast. And see, the bad things, when you see bad things, it should make you draw near to a good God.

That's his design. One more part of his design, of his purpose, the way he engages purposefully with bad things is to bless our relationships with others.

This is in 2 Corinthians 1 also. God comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction.

[20 : 06] How are we going to do that? With the comfort that we ourselves have received when God comforted us. Not only do you grow in your dependence on God in those hard times but then he works so that you also get the privilege of comforting others, helping them depend on God also when they walk through hard times.

Haven't we all been there where we've needed an older parent or someone who's had the same disease or surgery that we're facing or a fellow addict to say I know what you're feeling.

It's so hard. God is enough. He's good. Trust him. We've needed that haven't we? I'd encourage you to look around this morning and in your life.

Look for someone with whom you can share comfort and maybe the bad things that you've walked through will have a new sense of purpose in your mind as God works in them to bless you and through you to bless others.

Lots of purposes God has with the bad things but as important as it is to understand that they're not meaningless, the things in our lives and in our world. They're not missing God's sovereign work in them.

[21 : 28] That's a big deal. It's also really helpful to know that God promises to end bad things permanently. We've already read several phrases about the temporary nature of suffering for a little while momentary and that is because God says He is making all things new.

Revelation 21. He talks about the former order. When He talks about the former order of things that's the one you know so well. The one with tears and sorrow and pain and death.

It will be no more. The judge of all the earth will somehow set right every wrong will in ways we can't even imagine make just every injustice will hear our groanings will heal every hurt.

That's the promise that Romans 8 makes to all of creation that groans with us longing in these present sufferings for a glory He says a freedom that's ahead that ends all the bad things.

It's coming. And don't we need to know that? Don't you need to know that dementia has an expiration date on it? Don't we rejoice even at a graveside at the promise of our hurting loved ones having resurrected bodies?

[23 : 03] Don't we resonate with the hope that war and slavery and starvation and death itself will one day, can you imagine this?

Be so many millions of years behind in our rearview mirrors that we can't see them and we can't imagine living in a world where they exist.

You don't get that kind of hope anywhere else than from a God who engages purposefully enough with suffering that He can be sovereign over it one day to bring it to an end.

Y'all, we've tried. Try as we might. We have never been able to create utopia even for a small group, even for a small amount of time, much less been able to create a world that will last forever like that with no fear of the good things ever stopping or the bad things ever coming back.

that is the promise of a resurrected and reigning Jesus who will bring us with Him into a relationship in a world that will never perish, spoil, fade, or cease to exist.

[24 : 25] Friends, God promises there's an end to the bad things you hate. He's the only one who can guarantee that.

He's the only one who has shown He has power over bad things even death to bring them to an end. And every time you open the Bible and there's a psalm of lament like we prayed together this morning, there's a prayer of pain from God's people or there's a prophecy of hope in God's Word.

All of those are longing for that with you, feeling the ache and the groaning with you. That's a great comfort. It is so important that God works in our suffering and that He promises to end it.

But I want to be honest with you, if that is all that we get, for many of us, that's not good enough. For many of us who have heard those promises, it is still very easy to resent a God who from His comfortable spot up in heaven gets to watch us suffer bad things for even a little while. That would still be too much for many of us to bear. And that's why it's so important even to God that He also endures bad things personally.

[25 : 53] You may remember Hebrews. Do you all remember Hebrews? Oh, good. Somebody remembers Hebrews. That makes me feel so good. You may remember repeatedly, Hebrews would make this point, that the one who would bring us our salvation needed to be like us in having suffered.

That was fitting, remember? It made Jesus perfect as a Savior because He suffered too. So He can really sympathize, empathize with, and He can truly represent before God those who likewise are real sufferers.

That's you and me. So Jesus famously stands before the grave of a loved one and weeps in the face of death.

Y'all, there's no way that Jesus is taking our suffering lightly when He knows what it feels like, when He hates it as much as we do.

Maybe even we could say He hates it more because He created a world free from death. He designed us never to be separated from Him or from our loved ones.

[27 : 13] He recoils at the idea of death intruding into His good creation and impacting people He loves. and yet, He willingly sets out to be what Isaiah prophesied God would be like when He would enter into this world and take on flesh.

What was He going to be like? What was the promise from the very beginning? Was He going to be riding in on a cushy throne with a crown and with everybody praising Him? He was going to be despised and rejected by men.

A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. As one from whom men hide their faces, He was despised. We esteemed Him not. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.

Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities.

Surely, y'all, that's what our God is like when He willingly dwells for a while among us. Just stop and think, what a unique comfort.

[28 : 27] The incarnation of God, the enfleshing of the divine, what a unique comfort that provides. Especially when it's not just for a moment, but when Jesus goes all the way to the cross to suffer and die in our place.

I want to just contemplate for a minute with you the reality of the cross of Jesus. Because the cross of all places assures us that the bad things in our lives cannot possibly mean that God is not with us.

That's a conclusion that we sometimes reach when we're overwhelmed. God's not here. He doesn't see me. He doesn't care. It can't be true. It's like when Daniel's friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego got thrown into the fiery furnace and all of a sudden the king saw in the furnace a fourth man walking around in the flames with them while they were completely unharmed.

The cross assures us God is with us in the worst of things no matter how high the heat gets turned up to protect us. He's not aloof from suffering.

He's not sitting off in heaven somewhere away from us. Quite the opposite. He has entered in. And think of what happens on the cross. Okay? Think about this with me.

[30 : 01] God endures pain. Unspeakable physical torture. Unthinkable shame and humiliation.

unbearable relational breaking. Because at the cross God loses a loved one, even his only son, to death.

Indeed at the cross God asks why? My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

That is how completely he enters in to endure our suffering in our place. There must have been so many why questions between crucifixion Friday and resurrection Sunday.

When we are asking why, as the Bible assures us, we will, our questioning cries are heard by a God who has endured what we are feeling and more.

[31 : 12] And so very importantly for us, that means he has not left us in the midst of those bad things, but he will remain with us in them.

Y'all, that is so hopeful because if he's there, and we remember that out of the ultimate bad thing, the murder of the innocent son of God on the cross, God brings the ultimate good, the rescue of so many lives, right?

See, that's what he does when he's present in the bad things, and God is present to work the bad things for good, to deepen our relationship with him, to bless others through us, and eventually to resurrect us to where the bad things are gone forever.

But the good thing, him, is never gone, always, always with us. See, there is an end to the bad things coming, isn't there?

Aren't you glad? The Bible speaks way more to that than it does to their specific origin. Their beginning may be a bit unclear, but their ending is not uncertain at all.

[32 : 36] Don't ever forget that. When the bad things seem overwhelming, seem all-consuming, seem unending, don't forget the end is coming.

In fact, even the why questions that we've been asking for millennia will be coming to an end. All the ones that matter will be answered, and those that don't will fade from our consideration.

Won't that be wonderful? Can you imagine living like that and not asking why all the time? Not having to wonder the why questions that we cry in desperation and wonder in our fears and wrestle with in our doubts?

They'll be gone because we will see him as he is and know him even as we are fully known. I think the only question, the only why question that I can imagine in heaven is one along the lines of, why am I here?

Lord, why am I a guest at this incredible eternal feast? And even there we will know the answer, won't we?

[33 : 51] Love, relationship, grace, Jesus, the cross, glory.

We know it in part because this table is a foretaste of that unending glory and that unending relationship of that eternal wedding feast that we share with Jesus as his bride.

Why can you come? Why can I be here? You know the answer? Our Savior. He brings good things out of bad things.

He's washed us clean. He's set the table. He's insisted that we come and be with him. Remember what he said to his disciples.

That it would all be about his work done for us. It was that night that he was betrayed to such an awful death that he took bread and he broke it and he gave it to his disciples as I am ministering in his name.

[35 : 06] Give this bread to you. He said, take and eat. This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. And then the same way after supper he took the cup and he said, this cup is the new covenant in my blood shed for many for the forgiveness of sins, their sins.

Drink from it all of you in remembrance of me for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

If you do not trust Jesus to rescue you from your bad things and to give you good things forever, don't come and eat at this table where we celebrate that, where we say, this is our hope.

We proclaim his death. If you don't, don't proclaim outwardly with your actions something you wouldn't proclaim with your words. But we do welcome you.

We welcome you to come forward with us or even to stay in your seats, whatever you would prefer, and to consider the hope of Jesus, the offer of someone who would love you like that.

[36 : 30] And to know that that hope and that offer is for all whoever would trust him. He offers it to you today if you will but trust him.

And if you do trust in him, then come eagerly and eat with us. Whether you're a member of this particular church or some other, come to be reminded that he is with you in your bad things. Come to draw strength from his sacrifice. Come to look forward to the good things that he promises are yours to enjoy with him forever because he has purchased them for you by enduring the ultimate bad thing so that you will not forever.

What a good Savior we have. Let's pray and then we'll come celebrate. Jesus, do remind us of that, of your great love for us. Don't let us complicate this beyond the truth that Jesus loves me.

that's why we can be here and there is no other way. And so would you indeed bring comfort because you know we need it as we remember that you're with us and for us and will never leave us.

[37 : 47] Give us joy in that together. We ask in your name. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org. Thank you.