

Why Is There Suffering?



Through the media we are continually made aware of murders, famines, earthquakes, cancer, tsunamis and civil wars. We all know that there is suffering in this world.

The people in Jesus' day experienced calamities. In Luke 13:1-5 the people told Christ about a group of worshippers who were murdered by Pilate, the Roman Governor. Christ also mentions others who died when a tower in Siloam fell on them. In response to these disasters, what do Christ and the Bible teach us about suffering?

Bad Ideas about Suffering

Many Jews believed that people suffered because they were very bad sinners. Many people still think that this is so. When people suffer others sometimes say, "They must have done something wrong!" But Christ rejects such an idea. Though we do sometimes bring disaster upon ourselves through our own folly and disobedience to God's laws, not all suffering is directly linked to sin. "Jesus answered and said to them, 'Do you suppose that

these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no'" (Luke 13:2, 3).

Some respond to suffering by adopting a "stoical" approach. Others have taught that suffering and pain is really an illusion. They say that really it is all in the mind. But Christ knew that suffering was real. When His friend Lazarus died, we read that Christ wept (John 11:35). The agonies He knew on the cross were real not an illusion.

Some say that suffering is to do with reincarnation. It's the bad 'karma' we've built up from the wrong we've done in a previous life. The Bible rejects this. It tells us we only have one life: "It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

Atheists say that suffering is a proof that there is no God, but if that is true, the world then becomes a terrible place to live in. It means we are just the products of physical forces and what happens in life is

really just decided by chance. We can have no answers and no hope in a world where really there's no 'rhyme or reason' for suffering.

Suffering and Sin

The Bible says that the world was once a place of perfection, but due to the rebellion of our father Adam, sin has come into the world and brought it's terrible consequences. The world has earthquakes, disease, tsunamis, handicapped babies and famine because creation is now fallen and under a curse due to sin. The whole of creation has been affected.

But what we must also say is that, though suffering is related to sin, Christ makes it clear that people do not suffer in proportion to their sin. In Luke 13 Christ says: "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no" (Luke 13:2-5).

Now sometimes God does make examples of people who have committed great sin. But here Christ refuses to say that there is always a "one to one" relation between sin

and suffering. In other words, we can't always say: "the reason they've suffered like this, is because they must have sinned like that."

Much Suffering Is Because of Man's Evil

Even if we include natural disasters and disease, the vast majority of suffering in this world is caused by man's wickedness and inhumanity to his fellow man.

The last century was one full of death and sorrow. The First and The Second World Wars saw millions killed and the infamous

holocaust. And today, much of the suffering due to famine could be alleviated if men were more willing to evenly distribute food and not worry about profit margins.

Men will wave their fists at God and say, "It is all His fault", but we are all responsible for our actions and choices. Time and again we see, as with Pilate in Luke 13, that suffering is due to the self-seeking, pride and callousness that is found, not just in men like Hitler, but in every human heart.

Suffering Points Us to More Important Matters

The Bible says that God doesn't allow suffering to occur because He is a God who delights in inflicting

misery. In the disasters of His day, Christ made it clear that through suffering God was in fact speaking to the men and women of Jerusalem.

God, out of concern for men and women, allows such calamities to make people think about where they will go once they leave this life. "Or those eighteen on whom the tower of Siloam fell and killed them, do you think they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:4, 5).

People often do not want to consider the greatest question of life: What will happen to me after death? Christ made it clear that calamities like that tower-disaster are showing us all that our lives can't continue forever and that a greater calamity can befall us. When we leave this world, if we leave it unprepared and still un-reconciled to God, we face an eternal catastrophe!

God Himself Has Known Suffering

Wonderfully God has not kept Himself separate from suffering. God, in the person of His Son, entered this world and experienced great suffering. He was hated and

tortured and beaten and crucified. His physical suffering was appalling. However, what was far worse was His spiritual suffering.

The cover of this bulletin says how

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great God's mercy is. The Bible says that this merciful God sent His Son into the world to die and that at the cross Christ willingly

took the guilt and punishment from God, which sinners deserve. All who believe upon Him can be forgiven and reconciled to God. This great work could only be achieved through suffering.

And God's word tells us that eventually there will be a great number of people who will arrive at a far better place called heaven, where there will be "... no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain" (Rev. 21; 4).

They will rejoice in the One who suffered for them on the cross. It is through Him they came to know peace with God. They will rejoice in a Saviour who has suffered for them and has saved them.

Friend – will you be there?

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