

## HOW CAN A GOOD GOD ALLOW SUFFERING?

### INTRODUCTION

- **For many people suffering is the reason why they don't believe**
  
- **Think: How do *you* explain the problem of suffering?**
  - When bad things happen to you what do you say to yourself?
  - When bad things happen to someone else what do you say to them?
  - Why is it hard to find an answer that is both true and comforting?
  
- **How do *other people* explain the problem of suffering?**
  - Hinduism: it's your fault
  - Buddhism: it's an illusion
  - Islam: Allah wills it
  - Atheism: stuff happens
  
- **Warnings...**
  1. There is NO answer to *specific* suffering
  2. There is a time NOT to give an answer
  
- **The Bible is honest about pain and grief**
  - Are you surprised to find words like these in the Bible?

*Job 3:11-16*, "Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb? <sup>12</sup> Why were there knees to receive me and breasts that I might be nursed? <sup>13</sup> For now I would be lying down in peace; I would be asleep and at rest <sup>14</sup> with kings and counselors of the earth, who built for themselves places now lying in ruins, <sup>15</sup> with rulers who had gold, who filled their houses with silver. <sup>16</sup> Or why was I not hidden in the ground like a stillborn child, like an infant who never saw the light of day?"

## 1. SUFFERING IS IN THE WORLD BECAUSE WE HAVE REBELLED AGAINST GOD

- **The world was perfect (Genesis chapters 1 & 2)...**

- **Discuss: What went wrong?**

Read Genesis 3:1-6 (see below) and discuss these two questions:

1. Adam and Even disobeyed God. What did they think they would gain by disobeying him?
2. What would it be like to live in a world where everyone imagined that they were God?

*Genesis 3:1-6*, "Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"<sup>2</sup> The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,<sup>3</sup> but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"<sup>4</sup> "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman.<sup>5</sup> "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."<sup>6</sup> When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it."

- **The result? Suffering...**

- **Inherent suffering (cause and effect)**
  
- **Imposed suffering**

*Romans 8:20, 22*, "For the creation was subjected to futility... we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now."

## **2. GOD PROMISES TO END ALL SUFFERING**

- **Suffering is not beyond God's control**

- **There will be a perfect world**

*Revelation 21:1-8*, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. <sup>2</sup> I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup> He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." <sup>5</sup> He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." <sup>6</sup> He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. <sup>7</sup> He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. <sup>8</sup> But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars-- their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death"."

- **Why not now? God would need to get rid of...**

### **3. ON THE CROSS GOD THE SON SUFFERED**

- **Jesus identifies: he knows what it is to suffer**

- **Jesus saves: "he died for me"**

*Mark 14:32-36*, "They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." <sup>33</sup> He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. <sup>34</sup> "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch." <sup>35</sup> Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. <sup>36</sup> "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will"."

- **The Cross most clearly shows that God uses evil to bring about good**

### **4. GOD USES SUFFERING TO WAKE US UP**

- **A massacre and a disaster...**

*Luke 13:1-5*, "Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup> Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? <sup>3</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. <sup>4</sup> Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them-- do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish"."

- **Think: what do you make of these two statements?**

"God whispers to us in our pleasure, speaks to us in our difficulties and shouts to us in our pain. Suffering is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world." (C.S. Lewis)

"I'd rather suffer *with* Jesus than *without* him."