



## **9-11, Evil, Suffering & Jesus: Job 1:8-12**

Today of course, is the tenth anniversary of 9-11. It is hard to believe it has been a decade; it just seems like only two to three years have gone by since that tragic day. It is hard to forget the image of those planes crashing into the twin towers, and the smoldering Pentagon in our nation's capital. After ten years, the video clips continue to well up emotion in us when we see those images of those office workers jumping out the windows, the towers imploding in a matter of seconds, and the debris of smoke creeping through NYC like a scene from that 1970's movie, *The Blob*, only worse, much, much worse!

The situation was so tragic; nearly three thousand people were killed. 1609 people lost a spouse and 3051 children lost a parent. Not surprisingly, with all the destruction and deaths, people began to ask the question, "Where was God in all of this?" When a terrible tragedy like that happens, in the recesses of our minds, we begin to wonder why God would allow that kind of suffering.

Of course, this has been an age-old question, which philosophers and theologians have tried to address for centuries. One of the major arguments goes like: Either God is all-loving but not powerful enough to stop suffering and evil that comes from a 9-11 like event; or He is powerful enough to stop it, but He doesn't, which indicates He is not loving. How should we respond to such a seemingly convincing argument from the surface? There is really only one answer of course; we must show them that God is both all-powerful and all-loving. So where do we begin? We have to start by showing them from Scripture that God is all-powerful. We can demonstrate this in two ways....

### **1. Admit God Permits Suffering**

There are important lessons the Bible teaches when it comes to suffering; the most humbling is that historically God has permitted suffering, pain, and evil to take place. Sometimes the cause is personal or corporate sin; other times it is not. The Bible shows us that suffering also happens to good people. The clearest example of "righteous suffering" comes from the book of Job.

#### **Job 1:8-12**

**<sup>8</sup> And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" <sup>9</sup>**

**Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason? <sup>10</sup> Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. <sup>11</sup> But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face."**

Here, we read that Satan believes Job serves God dutifully because he has money and possessions, and he has been sheltered. Take away all he cherishes, and like others, Job will curse God to His face. There is a lesson here, isn't there? Satan believes our allegiance to God is conditional. In the story of course, God permits Satan to make his life miserable, with the exception of killing him. Inevitably, Job loses his fortune, his business, his children, and his health. Everything about his life is hell on earth.

But why? Job certainly was not a bad person. He did not do anything to make God mad. Yet he loses everything that is valuable to him in life. As readers, we know why Job suffered, but the problem of course, is that He had no clue. The book of Job makes us wrestle with the question, would I still be faithful to God if I lost everything.

Job is not a fun book to read, but it is a true book. It describes what we know to be real in life, namely people suffer and on certain occasions, there is no explanation. Yet through all this uncertainty and hurt, one thing becomes evident. God permitted the evil and suffering of Job.

He could have prevented it, but He did not. Therefore, the life of Job proves that God is powerful, the question the reader has however, is whether He really loves. Maybe you have experienced the same in your life. You do not know why God allowed such a terrible thing to happen and you wonder, though you would not admit it, if He really is a loving God. Does He really care for you?

We cannot deny the reality that God allowed the majority of the 911 attacks to be successful, we cannot sugar coat this reality.

We also have to confess that he permits suffering, pain, and evil to happen primarily because He gives people the ability to make choices. Some have great potential use this choice to do good like Jesus, or Gandhi, or Martin Luther King Jr. Others exercise choice to do bad to others, like Joseph Stalin, Adolph Hitler, and Osama Bin Laden. Inevitably, God did not make us puppets; he made us freethinking, choice making people who can choose whether to do good or evil. Furthermore, the Bible also shows that God permits pain, suffering, and evil to occur when it comes to creation itself.

## **2. God permits suffering for Creation**

### **Romans 8: 19-22**

**19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 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. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.**

Paul the apostle, mentions here that creation longs for redemption and wants to be set free from its bondage to corruption. How did this happen? Verse 20 mentions that creation was subject to futility not by its own choice, but by "him" who subjected it. The Him, here of course, refers to God. Scripture reminds us with stories like the parting of the red sea, Jesus calming the storm, and an earthquake freeing Peter and James from jail, that God has authority over nature, thus once again demonstrating He is all-powerful. If you recall the original sin of Adam back in the Garden, one of the punishments for original sin was that the ground Adam walked on was cursed. Part of that curse was thorns and thistles, and hard work in the agricultural industry. However, this curse nature effected more than plant life, it affected everything in creation, the plant-life, the animals, the weather, seismic plates, and the universe.

There is groaning throughout nature and it is experienced when meteors collide, stars cave in, earthquakes rumble, tsunamis burry, volcanoes explode, and when animals kill each other. The curse in the Garden is far-reaching and if you contemplate it, you are aware there is a groaning. As beautiful as creation is, restlessness is felt because something is not right in life. Paul says here, creation groans and longs to be set free from its bondage.

And if we reflect at the events in recent years, we see this groaning. The tsunami in Indonesia, the hurricane in New Orleans, the earthquakes in Japan and Haiti, are all examples that something is not right with nature. We were not meant to suffer like all those people did in those natural disasters, yet they did. God allowed it, we are under a curse and so is the creation. I am sure there are some occasions were God did protect people, we never talk about those in these discussions, but for whatever reason we all experience evil and suffering. The natural question at this point revolves around whether God loves us. We know He allows suffering, but does that mean he is not loving? Maybe you have asked yourself that exact question. Yet there is much evidence that suggests that His love is far reaching.

### **3. God Experienced Suffering on our Behalf**

Think about that for a second. The Bible teaches that in the beginning, God came down from heaven to make his dwelling with man (John 1:1, 14). Jesus was God in the flesh. That is phenomenal for the simple reason that God willingly chose to come into this world that is under a curse, and live among humanity, who is sinful. Why would God want to be a part of this world that is filled with evil and suffering? He lived the good life in heaven, angels worshipped Him, everyone had nothing but reverence and appreciation for him. Yet...he came here. John Stott, a legendary theologian, put it this way,

"I could never myself believe in God if it were not for the Cross. In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it?"

We don't know the reason God allows evil and suffering to continue, but we know what the reason isn't, what it can't be. It can't be that he doesn't love us! It can't be that he doesn't care. God so loved us and hates suffering that he was willing to come down and get involved in it. We have a God we can identify with. We serve a God that did not come down to earth to live a privileged life. We do not serve an aristocratic Jesus, we serve a God who hates sin so much He sacrificed for you.

That is really the only thing that can transform you when you go through suffering and evil. Jesus demonstrates that God is both all-powerful and all loving. So when you talk about your hurt or the evil you and others have experienced, think of this image as well. A man who lived a sinless life for you, stretched on a cross, beaten and bloodied unjustly, not reluctantly, but willingly for you. Think about the time he cries out to God, "Why have you forsaken me," and recall some of those times you felt abandoned by God. Think about those loved ones who passed away because of sickness and illness, and remember that Jesus came to earth TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT!

Think about all the injustices that have occurred to you personally, not to mention others that you read about. Moreover, reflect on the phrase Jesus says before he dies, "It is finished!"

What is finished? Jesus was ready to die and offer himself as a substitutionary atonement, agreeing to pay the price for all the sins of the people, past present and future. He had finished paying the price for all the evil and suffering that ever existed. If you can imagine a God who is willing to place all the evil things that have been ever done on his shoulder, you can understand just how tremendously Jesus loves you. The greatest prayer was recorded on the cross before he died, Forgive them Father, for they do not know what they are doing.

Because of Jesus, nothing will be able to separate us from God, no matter how evil it is. Paul the apostle puts it like this in the Book of Romans.

#### **Romans 8:35-39**

**35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 As it is written,**

**"For your sake we are being killed all the day long;  
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."**

**37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

If you can live your life with that assurance, you can make it through when evil and suffering come. Ultimately, though, there will be a day when the suffering will finally stop. This is the Christian hope that keeps us moving forward.

#### **4. Eventually, God will put an end to suffering**

##### **Revelation 21:1-8**

Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away." And he who sat upon the throne said, "Behold I make all things new."

That is our hope, isn't it? That one day there will come a day when Jesus says, "Behold, I will make all things new." This is arguably the most beautiful portion of Scripture. Revelation says, those who have held fast to Jesus will never again the things that cause you to experience pain, emotionally, spiritually, or physically. It will be a time when that child that lost a parent in 9-11, will be reunited with their parent, when spouses will once again hold each other, when mothers and fathers, who have lost their children, naturally or tragically, will be reunited.

In the last book of The Lord of the Rings, Sam Gamgee wakes up, thinking everything is lost and discovering instead that all his friends were around him, he cries out: "Gandalf! I thought you were dead! But then I thought I was dead! Is everything sad going to come untrue?"

The answer is YES. And the answer of the Bible is YES. If the resurrection is true, then the answer is yes. Everything sad is going TO COME UNTRUE.

Until that time, we can learn from the prophet Habakkuk.

##### **Habakkuk 3:17**

Though the fig tree may not blossom,  
Nor fruit be on the vines;  
Though the labor of the olive may fail,  
And the fields yield no food;  
Though the flock may be cut off from the fold,  
And there be no herd in the stalls—  
18 Yet I will rejoice in the Lord,  
I will joy in the God of my salvation.  
19 The Lord God is my strength;