

Why Do Bad Things Happen?

Series: It's Somewhere: Looking for Answers

James 1:2-4

April 23, 2017

We might as well get something out of the way right now. You may have heard that the Germantown United Methodist preacher was collecting boxes, and that could only mean one thing: he was moving. Well, now you know that there might be another reason I might be collecting boxes, and it's not that we are moving. We're not. Just to make that clear. Although our son Matt is moving from Richmond to Columbus in a couple of weeks, so he might need some boxes.

No, the boxes are here as part of a visual for our new message series. You see, as we move through life, from place to place, we all have experiences that we would say are wonderful: learning to ride a bike, getting your driver's license, graduating from high school, going to college, getting your first real job, getting married, having children, watching them do all those things you have done, then grandchildren. These are wonderful things.

Unfortunately, we all know that as we travel through this life, we experience difficult or life altering times. Sometimes they are sudden; other times, they come upon us gradually. Sometimes they are completely devastating; others times, while difficult at the moment, life goes on.

And often, we ask ourselves, "Why do bad things happen?" And we start looking through the boxes of life where we have stored ideas, experiences, that we hope will help us through.

So today we begin a new series called "It's Somewhere: Looking for Answers." We will explore the Bible to find the answers to some of the most difficult issues of life: Our Future, Doubt, Relationships, Fear, Assurance, Belonging, and Purpose.

Today, we are going to talk about "Why Do Bad Things Happen."

Turn in your bulletin to page 5. There is a place for you to take notes. And if you have your Bible, grab it to.

The question, "Why Do Bad Things Happen" has boggled the mind of men and women, boys and girls, throughout existence. Why did my dog die? Why did my house burned down? Why does my child have diabetes? Why can't my son be normal? Why were my parents abusive? Why did he or she leave me? Why can't I find my place? Why did my mother die? Sister? Spouse? Child?

Need I go on? You know what I am talking about. We all wonder why bad things happen in life. Throughout the millennium, people have wondered why bad things happened. Some people created gods out of the physical elements or mythical thoughts and explained away that the bad things in life were because of the whims of the gods, so they would do things to appease them: sacrifices, rituals, even killing their children or a virgin. But, that's not much of a reason. If gods are so malicious and petty, why worship them?

The atheist creates the idea of fate, karma, chance to explain why bad things happen. They really never find an answer either. They just say, "Well, that's the way life is. You win some, you lose some."

Of course, it may be the Christian who has the most difficult hurdles to encounter in answering the question “Why do bad things happen.” If there is a sovereign, all powerful God who supposedly loves us, then why do bad things happen to His people? This is not a question to take lightly, for it inevitably is what we cry out to God in the midst of the pain: “Why is this happening to me?”

Let me see if I can find some answers for us today.

Let’s first turn to Genesis, the first book of the Bible.

- Genesis 1:1-5. God created, and even in the very beginning, there was light and what? Darkness. And which one was called good? Darkness.
- Genesis 1:31. Very good.
- Genesis 2:15-23

So even before we get to chapter 3 and the Fall of Man, we see that there was darkness, need, and even loneliness. Yet overall, everything was very good.

It’s not until we turn the page to chapter 3 that things go so badly. And I want you to write this down in your bulletin.

Corruption came into the world and human experience because of sin.

READ GENESIS 3:1-21

I want you to note something. Even if Adam and Eve didn’t sin, I believe the Scripture is clear about something.

READ GENESIS 3:22-24

Write this down.

That does not mean we were destined to never die.

Apparently, death was part of life. We were never meant to live forever. So if you experience death, realize that it is part of life.

So let me in the minutes we have remaining suggest 5 reasons why do bad things happen?

First, Because of the Human Condition.

Because sin has brought corruption in our existence, bad things will happen.

READ ROMANS 8:18-28.

Sin has caused all creation to fall from the perfect state in which God created it. The world is in bondage to death and decay so that it cannot fulfill its intended purpose. One day, all creation will be liberated and transformed. Until that time it waits in eager expectation for the resurrection of God's children.

God works in "everything"—not just isolated incidents—for our good. This does not mean that all that happens to us is good. Evil is prevalent in our fallen world, but God is able to turn every circumstance around for our long-range good. Note that God is not working to make us happy but to fulfill his purpose. Note also that this promise is not for everybody. It can be claimed only by those who love God and are called by him, that is, those whom the Holy Spirit convinces to receive Christ. Such people have a new perspective, a new mind-set. They trust in God, not in worldly treasures; their security is in heaven, not on earth. Their faith in God does not waver in pain and persecution because they know God is with them.¹

So before the disobedience of Adam and Eve, things were perfect. However, their sin resulted in pain, suffering, struggle, and eventually death for all their

¹ Life Application Study Bible, Romans 8:19-22,28

descendants and the created world, and there is no way around it. A corruption in one's DNA leads to many hereditary diseases (heart, digestive, many cancers, genetic diseases, etc.) We humans, the animal kingdom, and even the plant kingdom have been affected by this sin-caused corruption.

These things just happen.

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount:

*For [God] gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike.*²

The good and the bad of life fall upon all without consideration of their righteousness before God.

Second, bad things happen because of the freewill of others.

Some trials come from how humans treat other humans. Sin brought us selfishness, pride, abandonment, marginalization, etc. Many of the issues of life are the direct result of humans behaving badly towards other humans. Therefore, abuse, infidelity, robbery, slander, murder, and so many others become a regular part of some people's lives because of others.

Because of freewill, the world can and does produce the Hitlers of history. Because of freewill, the world can and does produce those who place others in the bondage of the sex trade and trafficking. Because of freewill, the world can and does produce companies and individuals who take advantage of others. Because of freewill, the world can and does produce constant armed conflicts and wars. So bad things happen because of the freewill of others.

Third, bad things happen because of our own freewill.

Some of the trials of life are the result of our own self-destructive behavior. If one finds themselves in prison because of the commitment of a crime, that trial is on them. If one is experiencing a trial because they participated in high risk activities (does flying an airplane qualify?), then they are responsible for that. If one finds themselves brain damaged due to drugs and alcohol, then they have no one to blame but themselves. Of course, there are exceptions here. How is Keith Richards still alive?!

All of these first three reasons are a direct result of sinful choices, and most importantly, God does not will it for us or anyone else.

But, sometimes God does get involved, and this may be the most challenging for us, as the trials that we have just talked about simply come upon us all. Now are the tough ones, and here they are: there are some trials of life that are brought upon us, or allowed to come upon us, by God Himself. God gets involved in our final two reasons.

Fourth, bad things happen because of God's punishment of the wicked.

Now, I guess that's not so bad. Most of us would agree that God should punish the wicked.

My Sunday School class has been studying the book of Revelation, and we have seen clearly in it something that this is a pretty consistent theme throughout the Bible, and it's this: God pronounces judgment and delivers consequences upon the unrighteous. It may be a sickness or an ailment or even death. God judges the wicked.

But something else we've learned in Revelation is that God's judgment upon the wicked is in part to turn their hearts towards Him. God continues to woo us, to get our attention, in order that we might turn to Him and submit ourselves to Him.

² Matthew 5:45b (NLT)

There are plenty of cases throughout history where a trial due to judgment has converted someone to Christ. A great Biblical example is Saul. Let's look at Acts 9.

READ ACTS 9:1-8

Becoming blind on the road to Damascus is a judgment upon Saul. He was persecuting the Christians, and unknowingly, Jesus. But it is also a call to repentance and conversion. Jesus wants Saul to turn from destroying the Church to building the Church, and that took getting knocked off the horse and becoming blind.

But our final reason is the really hard one to understand.

Fifth, bad things happen because of God's work to perfect us.

There are trials sent by God to the godly. You see, the Bible never promises perpetual health, success, ease, or freedom for trouble. Luke 4:1 says:

Then Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan River. He was led by the Spirit in the wilderness,³

Where did the Holy Spirit lead Jesus? Into the wilderness. For how long? 40 days. And what didn't Jesus do during those 40 days? Eat.

There are times when God places something in the life of the believer to teach them a new lesson and bring them to a deeper dependence on Him.

That's why James can say in James 1:2-4:

Dear brothers and sisters [that means believers], when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.⁴

Needless to say, God knows His plans for us as believers, and they are consistently designed to make us more like Christ. God is more interested in our character than our comfort.

The trial has a greater good – sometimes discovered in this life; and other times, its meaning is left to the hereafter.

I've included a quote from Oswald Chambers for you to take home and consider.

In the end, sometimes we do not exactly know why bad things happen to us; it is how we respond to them that matter. If there are things in our lives that are causing trials (by our own volition or from others), we have the opportunity to do something about. If through self-examination, we discover there is something between our Lord and us that needs to be pruned as He talks about in John 15, then we need to repent, turn it over to the Lord, seek His forgiveness, and promise to serve Him more closely.

We must hold on to the truth that throughout the trials of life, God's love is unconditional and true, His patience and grace always amazing, and His presence and peace is always there for us.

Remember what Romans 8:28 says:

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.⁵

³ Luke 4:1 (NLT)

⁴ James 1:2-4, NLT

⁵ Romans 8:28 (NLT)