

“Why do bad things happen to good people?” by: Doug Warren

The question “Why do bad things happen to good people?” is usually not asked simply as a matter of academic debate, but out of pain and heartache. When something awful happens, some version of this question “why” usually reaches from our hearts to our lips. So let me begin by saying to any of you who are asking this question, I am sorry you are hurting. I care about you and so does God. Let’s look and see if we can’t find some hope and healing together.

I would suggest that our question has at its heart two primary concerns. Is God all powerful? Is God good? We cannot really get very far with answering our initial question without wrestling with these two.¹ They are the foundation of the voiced concern regarding justice. If God cannot do anything to stop bad things from happening, the problem is lack of power. If God is able to stop them, but doesn’t, then how can God be good?

An all-powerful God who is good would be able to create the world in such a way that bad things didn’t happen, right? We look around and find all kinds of bad, so which of these two things is not true about God? As we try to sort through those questions, we are ultimately brought to our own limitations. We have a sense of what God *ought* to be like, but how do we know what God really is like? How do we know how our sense of fairness compares with any sort of transcendent, actual fairness (if there is such a thing)?

The way we can know is that God tells us. Now before you object, let’s see if what God has purportedly said makes any sense in answering our questions. If the root of our struggle is grounded in what God is like, wouldn’t it be fair to listen to God’s account?

The Bible² sets forth that while this world is far from perfect now, God originally *did* create it as perfect and that all was good. The problem is that it didn’t stay that way. The reason that we live in a world torn asunder by evil and chaos is not because God created it that way or is unable to fix it. We are the ones who spoiled it and yet even so, God is miraculously in the process of fixing it.

God says not only were Adam and Eve (our representatives in spoiling it) punished for their disobedience, but the whole world was adversely affected. Not only all people, but all animals, even the planet itself has been scarred resulting in ecological rebellion on a cosmic scale. If we draw this out to its natural conclusion, all the evil that happens is either the direct or indirect result of humanity’s rebellion against God.

¹ I recognize that this is presupposing that there is a God who allows evil to exist. The other alternative, that there is no God really offers no explanation for the question at hand. In fact it makes it irrelevant because there is no good or evil in a godless universe, but that is another column all together.

² I understand that it is not popular to regard the Bible as God speaking to us, but if the reader will hear me out, I believe that this is critical to answering our question.

Direct results would include people violence, corruption, and isolation. Indirect consequences would include everything from natural disasters to disease, from societal ills to entropy.

Yet even with the breadth and depth of misery we have brought on ourselves corporately, God has not left us there. To really see this we need to look at the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. In all of history he is the only one who could fully claim to be good, but his life was filled with grief and ended in bitter injustice. Ironically it is in the miscarriage of justice of his execution that we find an answer to our question of fairness.

Jesus died because he stood in our place. He took on the sins of the world as a sacrifice fulfilling all the promises that God had given regarding the redemption of the good creation originally made. He as the good man received the fullness of evil in his death and defeated it in his resurrection. He took our place in execution and then lead the way to life so that we can live with him. And his work is not finished, Jesus is coming back to finish the restoration of this broken world that his death and resurrection accomplished.

It is because God is both all-powerful *and* good that the world will be restored to perfection where no evil goes unpunished and nothing can harm the innocent. That restoration can only take place because of the cross of Christ. God's goodness demands that our wrongs be righted. God's power accomplished that satisfaction in self-sacrifice. God's love brings both his power and goodness to bear on us and will eventually on all creation.

Let's revisit our initial question. Why *do* bad things happen to people? Not because God is impotent to stop them. Not because God is uncaring about those who are hurt. They happened worst of all to Jesus himself and through his suffering and death he is redeeming creation so that when he comes back there will be no more tears. Until that glorious day, let us cry together in grief and laugh together in joy waiting for him.