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IF GOD IS GOOD -

Why do His children suffer so?

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Outline

6:1-10

Intro (A) People of Israel did what was evil
Each did what was right in his own eyes

(B) So God Gave them up into the hands of the Midianites
Plundered, stole, burned fields, ravished wives & daughters.

(X) A Relationship -

(C) People called out to the Lord - He sent them a
Prophet, a judge, a mighty man of valor

(X) God is faithful Gideon. Son, prince, make a man of it
Prodigal

6:11-16

(1) Angel came & sat under the Oak tree at Ophrah

(*) Nice
How do you know
its an angel
A tree which belonged to Joash, whose son
Gideon was at that moment beating out
the wheat in the wine press to hide it from
the Midianites. my life - life of my children

(2) The Angel spoke not to his father Joash, but to
Gideon, his youngest son. "The Lord is with you
Gideon, mighty man of valor."

(3) Now Gideon has not read 6:1-10 so he doesn't
know God is behind all this, hideous as it
15.

(4) Gideon asks the Angel "Pray Sir, if the Lord is
with us, then why has all this suffering befallen
us?" & where are all His wonderful deeds?

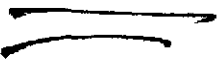
why?

well, initially its easy as pie - your nation
sinned

vs 14 The lord replied 'I have sent for you so I deliver my people from the hand of Midian.'

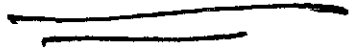
(5) Gideon said "Not me lord, you have the wrong man" "How can I deliver Israel?" "In the smallest in my family, & our clan is the weakest in Manasseh."

(6) The lord said "I will be with you!" Hospital



6:17-24 The Test Show me a sign

So an angel touched a rock which broke into flames & consumed the offering & the angel vanished! Gideon was convinced & set up an altar there



(1) God said Tear down the altar of Baal which belongs to your father & place there an altar to me. He did (by night) The town's folk complained. Joash said let Baal contend for himself.

one man say matters - no I won't put up with it

He named Terubbal "let Baal contend against him"

(3)

Then The Battle Began - The midianites & the amalekites gathered forces & came to Israel

"The Spirit of the Lord" took possession of Gideon
That's the source of power

6:36

Gideon falters again. Fleece Test
fleece Test - a fleece of wool on ground

(a) if dew on fleece alone in the morning & not on the ground - I will believe

(b) Reverse. Dew on ground & not on fleece.

7:11

for Battle - You have too many men. They might think it was your power - not mine

reduced to 300 good men
How they chose them was peculiar

You know how it ends...

Gideon died a good old age.

The opening moment of our sermon today takes us back 3,000 years ago to the period of the Judges, when the Bible tells the story of great heroic exploits of God's Chosen People, between the time of Moses and their trek through the wilderness, and the golden heydays of the nation under David and Solomon. The people of God, in those desperate times, were little more than wandering bands of nomads. The enemy of the day was the land of Midian. ~~and~~ Our story begins in the sixth chapter of the book of Judges, when the Midianites, ~~in~~ ~~most~~ ~~despicable~~ ~~act~~, were plundering farms of the Israelite people at harvest time. Imagine the horror at having broken ground and planted and tilled and coaxed and waited, and then when the full grain appeared, the harvest was ~~destroyed~~. *being senselessly destroyed.* How disconsolate those farming folk would be. So greatly impoverished and dying of starvation, disconsolate and down, the children of Israel, it says, called upon the name of the Lord their God.

Then, ~~as is his wont, the Lord, it says,~~ *as always when his people cry out, God* sent a prophet to rescue them. ~~That prophet~~ *This time the Prophet or* ~~was Gideon.~~ *Judge was Gideon.* ~~His people had been foolish, but God's love is greater than his disappointment. So, he reached out to touch the lives of those hard and dying little people, as his eyes turned toward Gideon.~~ The Bible says, "An angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak tree at Orphah," the little section of the earth which belonged to Joash, a good and godly man. Meanwhile, in a secluded place, the son of Joash, Gideon, it says, was pounding the grain, separating the wheat from the chaff, you would say, ~~hiding from the Midianites.~~ *Attempting to squirrel some of it away to hide from the midianites*

Said ~~Then comes our text:~~ **IT Reads:** "An angel of the Lord came to Gideon and ~~said~~: 'The Lord is with you, mighty man of valor'" (He is about to be called to his role as prophet, warrior, and leader of his people) "The Lord is with you". Hail, the

or worse he re direct
another question
to Gideon ~~to say~~:

letdown, to be sure, disappointing, even quite infuriating. But everytime you hear that question in the Bible, on the lips of Job, of Jeremiah, or of Jesus Christ himself, the heavens are significantly silent or terribly evasive, as if he has not ^{heard} ~~heard~~. The angel simply says, "Go to deliver the children of Israel from the hand of Midian, it is the will of God." Upon which, Gideon, the youngest in his family, complained that his tribe ~~was~~ the weakest one in Israel, and he the least in all his family. He wanted to know why God had chosen him, ~~and the angel tells him God has more for him to do.~~ Upon which, the Lord God himself says, "Go, Gideon, and I will be there with you." Like a loving mother might say, "Hush now, son; you have to go to school." Or the athletic coach says, just when you have had enough, "One more time around the track". Or, "I'm sorry, Jane, I have to leave."

am I shaking
so?



So, Gideon went, and I suppose you know the story after that, how God commanded him to pull down the altar of Baal, and Gideon was so afraid he sneaked out at night with half a dozen of his friends. How he persuaded them, it does not say; but they tore down the altar to Baal by dark and, before morning, built a new one to Jehovah, and the next day they hid themselves in fear. "O God, I'm scared...why me? If God is good, why ~~must I suffer so?~~" Upon which it says, "The spirit of the Lord took possession of Gideon." The story has a happy ending, as all the Bible stories do. Midian was subdued. Their land had rest for forty years, when Gideon died at "good old age", it says, and was buried in the city of his birth. The story is over; the question only lingers: If God is good, why must his children suffer so?

So, I'll tell you there is the question, as if you didn't recognize it. It's familiar to the four million refugees who live in squalor all around the globe. It's the constant companion to

the one-third of mankind that agonizes in hopeless hunger. It lives and moves and has its being in every hospital, nursing home, and private dwelling place in all the earth. It's in the papers every night, claiming headlines. Now and then, it circles all the globe and comes to rest on you: If God is good, why does it hurt so much? That's the question

For many, this is the most perplexing question of them all. ~~From the momentary, and~~ ~~the~~ the love of God. We make promises to our children and ourselves. ~~We say, your~~ We say, your prayers will soon be answered. "Ask and it will be given unto you; seek and you shall find." Just trust God, we say, and everything will turn out right. But, wait a minute. Why these ~~tragedies?~~ tragedies? Why the grief of emptiness? Why these ~~terrifying~~ terrifying illnesses? Why the hurt of broken families? Why the loneliness? If God is good, as the little girl said, then why does it hurt so much?

The question comes to you within your private world, to terrify you in the dark of endless night, and rolls down your cheek in tears. I know you know the question. No sensitive believer can ever carry on without the anguish of what it takes to tangle with this question. ~~For myself, I confess to you once more that, while in theory I have pondered this topic endlessly for even decades now, the only useful information I have is entirely secondhand. What I think I know about this topic I have learned from others. I have been their student. And those I have been close to who have seen the deepest darkest valleys of them all. I will tell you honestly, they have walked me through it rather than the other ways around. One of the rare great privileges of being called to follow in the footsteps of the Christ, to be chosen for the ministry, is the privilege of sharing the journey through the darkness with those who have allowed me to walk along. My own life has been grand and~~

here

We preach & try to practice

①

life threatening

~~free of pain. I offer this sermon from the lives
and lips of other people~~

Every living soul must face the question; but, funny, too, my friends, the ones you think would need the answer most of all, are normally the ones who demand it least. Often they never even ask the question. Those who are, or have been, in the deepest darkness, come back knowing that the light and love of God are there. It's a safety for the soul: "I have touched the bottom of the river," Bunyan's Christian said, "and it is good. I have formerly lived by hearsay and by faith, now I have been to where I live by sight." Oh, not that it's a snap; Sometimes the raging river drowns your soul. Sometimes the billows go up and over your head; sometimes you are paralyzed with fear; sometimes in the solemn darkness, the trees enfold themselves and hide the light of heaven. It's normal to feel lost, and it takes a long, long time to find the way again. But when life comes crashing in, "My God," he said, some years ago, "When you have lost all else, you dare not lose the love of God as well..." The cruelest, loneliest moment of your day is often near the best. Strength will be given in proportion to your need. Surely now, you have the question: "If God is good, why do his children suffer so?"

here →
②

Row
Keep this →
③

Of course we cannot answer that question in our short time (right but)

The first thing I want to say is we should not pretend to know too much. As Robert Frost once said, "We know enough to go ahead with", but we do not know it all; like looking through haar, the fog that comes in off the North Sea, as Donald Bailey said one day, through which we cannot see clearly, but we can see.

~~_____~~ Karl Barth, the ~~_____~~ eminent theologian of this century, said that the moment you think you

passing

come to understand God's will and way, that is the moment you have missed it. All great truths, he said, end in paradox: My ways are not your ways, saith the Lord, my thoughts are higher than your thoughts. That is the way it's supposed to be. You had better believe that. We yearn for simple answers and pine for a ready anchor to hold on to. But it is a deep and weighty topic, and I caution you not to answer it too simply.

I will say in passing that often it is not a theological question at all. It is a very human question, born of our inability to comprehend beyond the furthest reaches where our minds can penetrate. We yearn to know. We want to gain an easy mastery, and seldom are content to end in surrendering ourselves. But, it is a practical kind of question; for, while it is true to say that nothing falls outside of the time and providence of God, and that His will includes the preconditions that allow everything to come to pass, that does not imply that all things are the way God wants them to be. The Bible surely witnesses in favor of the opposite. Sin can thwart God's will for a time - a brief moment. Surely, there are questions regarding why God made the world the way He did. But that He made it the way He did, and that it follows consistently within His purpose, is not up for question. It all is consistent within His purpose. We do not know why God and nature made us so that in a given span of years we die. We do not know why we were made to die, but it is our knowledge which is lacking, not the will of God.

That is not to say God wants what falls within His will. Take a human illustration. Say a certain man has a son who asks, as the Prodigal did, to take his share of the fortune and carts off to some foreign country to squander it away. The

~~STOP~~ STOP

So
over

father is so constructed that he says "Yes"; the son has a right to his own life. Unimpeded and unhindered by his father, it is within his father's will that he should have his freedom. But even if the father knows that it will end in ignominy and disgrace, and diametrically contrary to what he wants for his younger son, still, constructed as the father is, he must needs grant the freedom anyway.

There is a hint, my friends, if another hint you need, to separate God's Will from what He wants. He did not want his son, Jesus Christ, to die a horrid death upon the cross, stretched in agonizing, suffocating hour, burning up with pain - of course not. But because His Will took precedence over what he wanted, it happened anyway. The question, I repeat, should never be a challenge, to assault the central citadel of the truth of God itself. Our question is legitimate - it must be asked from time to time - but listen, in the end the answer is terribly incidental. You can trust the God who made the world, you can trust that it all belongs together, you can trust that one day you will know in full even as you now are known - or you cannot trust anything at all. While His Will includes all which happens, He would wish for nothing but the good.

And Heaven weeps as well as you and I...The day when Jesus died, young and strong and barely three years into His life-long work, dismal dreary day, the Heavens blurted out their agonizing disappointment. Darkness covered all the land. Storms raged and the Temple split in two. Mighty Romans fled in terror. Quiet loved ones cried their tears: "Oh, God, no!" But the heavens answered "Yes". Sad and terrifying, lonely and ridiculous; still, it is as it should be. God Himself is there, and in that beleaguered moment, the Will of God was done, for sure, His Will for then and now and evermore. Do you believe it?

~~Secondly~~, I think we should say it loudly

(I)

FIRST

and clearly, some suffering and evil come quite directly and logically from human choices and decisions. If you chose to drink yourself to death, you could hardly blame your God. If you overextended yourself and taxed your human body beyond all possible extension, you could hardly blame your God. As Markham said,

"I will leave man to make the fateful guess
And leave him torn between No and Yes,
Leave him in tragic loneliness to choose,
With all in life to win and all to lose."

If madmen like Hitler roam the earth and we do nothing to prevent them; if we allow reckless drivers to drive our highways, and treat drunken driving lightly; if we plant the field with mines; allow anybody and his brother to own a gun; pollute the earth with hatred - we can hardly blame the concomitant occurrences on God. That does not answer everything, but it begins to claim some order for it all. As Christians still, you can question why the world is such that the Adolph Hitlers come, or that people overeat and overdrink or that the pressures rise, and accidents occur; but, again, they are practical questions and do not challenge the original belief that

"This is our Father's world,
And to His listening ears
All nature sings,
And round me rings
The music of the spheres."

The world is made in such a way that disobedience to what God wants is possible, and nature sings off key, and the music of the spheres becomes a dirge.

Secondly, I think we need to say, some evil comes logically from human freedom. "I", Dr.

*of various criminals
loose on the planet*

Kanwischer used to say, is in the middle of sin.

② ~~thirdly~~ ^{IWO}, I think we need to say that pain is not punishment from God. It would hardly be necessary to say those words again, were it not for rather universal, if often hidden, acceptance of them as true. We train ourselves that our happiness comes in relation to our goodness: Do a good job, and you will be promoted, and make more money; if you do and don't, then enormous disappointment. Be a good wife, be a good guy, good student, perform your part; and everything will be okay. Do what I want you to do, the parent says, then I'll be nice to you; be bad, and I'll withhold my love. It's as subtle as it is insidious.

Some years ago, I ministered to a lady in her late eighties, who was dying of old age and a terminal illness. "Why is God punishing me?" she asked. I said I didn't know; then it came to me that she was listening to the voice of her Sunday School teacher before the turn of the century, or her grandmother: "If you are bad, God will punish you." Remove those voices, friends; pain is not punishment. People have weak hearts for the same reason they have blue eyes: they are made that way.

3 But, ~~fourthly~~ ^{True}, I think we need to speak about what the Bible calls the treasures of the darkness. In our suffering, we come as close to living out the Christian life as we ever do at all. The glories of the night yield a special privilege and lasting insight. All is not lost. The victory still belongs to Christ.

"I walked a mile with pleasure
She chattered all the way,
But left me none the wiser
For all she had to say.

"I walked a mile with sorrow
And ne'er a word said she;
But oh the things I learned from her
When sorrow walked with me."

- Robert Browning Hamilton

We all love the sunny uplands of the human spirit; we love the mountain top with its great and wandering view upon the neighboring valleys; but, in the darkness, we learn to touch and take and trust what we never find beyond.

This portion of the story begins and ends the same, in the life and death and Resurrection of our Lord. If anyone in all the history of the earth ever deserved a sweet and happy life, it surely was our Lord. No one ever gave more of self for others, no one ever found perfection in obedience. No one ever did the will of God so finally and selflessly. No other person ever lived the perfect life. We should try to be like Him in all our ways, to duplicate His giving. But we reflect His grandeur most of all, I think, when we kneel within the garden and tears run down our cheeks and our soul is empty and our spirits hurt and are harmed and dimmed. There we come the closest to living out the life in Christ God gives us. Faith is not a rabbit's foot, a lucky charm to carry.

It sounds a trifle weak, as if a trick is being played on you; but normally we get it wrong: the purpose of life is not to be happy, the purpose of life is not to get what we can for ourselves and those we love. The purpose of life in the ultimate is never selfish. As Jesus said, "Not my will, but thine, be done, O Lord". The purpose of life is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, to accept the life He gives us, to work to change the fortunes of the earth for good, but to reach out our hand into the hand of God. "To suffer, passes; to have suffered last forever", the French proverb says.

5. The last thing we need to say is the thing that matters most: God can use your suffering and mine to the greater glory, in your life, in mine, and in all the world around us. On almost every page of all the Scripture, you could find some way to echo the words that I will use from Paul, and I am sure the Bible means it: "God works all things together for good for them that love him and are called according to his purpose." Those are the most precious words in all the Bible, and they echo down through all the lingering eons of time since that first moment when the universe was made, with every new explosion of another galaxy of stars, of the endless patience of our Lord, but working things together for good. Out of that primordial mass of nothingness came this round and spinning planet on its axis through the gravitational field of this isolated corner of the Milky Way and the form of molten mass of the billions of some eons more, its shape began to be. Then a tiny fragmentary motion we call life was planted there on the planet. Then through the shifting surface of the earth, through time out of mind, through a billion different disappointing cul-de-sacs; then, on down to your life and mine in every passing moment, day and decade. Look back over it, my friend, God taking hold of your life and working each part together for good.

So, just when you have had enough, just when you're slipping off the edge, just when you come to the end of your sanity - wait and watch and listen - let go, even the air will hold you up in time - wait and listen - and an angel of the Lord will come your way and say to you:

"Hail, O favored one, The Lord is with you and He has work for you to do."

Just when you say, "Oh God, No!", the Spirit whispers, "Yes". But it's all right; this time

*an angel
will come
as it down
with you*

*The Lord has
work for you to do*

will pass. You will learn to live again....Come my son, my daughter, my friend...Come on now; we can manage it together. Like the old and seasoned soldier prayed each day he went to battle: "O Lord, don't let nothin' come my way today that you and me can't handle together."

Come on now...we can manage it together. I'll explain it on the way.

"Hail, O favored one...
The Lord is with Thee."

Glory be to God, now and evermore. Amen.

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