

Wide Angle: The Problem of Evil
Matthew 15:10-20
November 24, 2019

I open yesterday's newspaper and what do I find is happening in the world? The news on television only makes the situations even more disturbing and heart numbing. I sit in restaurants and I hear people express their concerns about a world seemingly falling apart. Through all the media I discover that the world is in a bit of a mess. There is war and threats of war, political unrest, brutal treatment of innocent people, corporate greed, disparity between rich and poor grows, and hideous living conditions for millions who live in refugee camps. Add to all this there is the effect of climate change, which threatens our very existence.

You hear it often! How do you expect me to believe in a God who allows all this evil in the world to continue? Does God care about the children who are abused? Does God care about what is going on in all corners of our planet? The depth of despair and violence in our world is mind boggling. Why is the world in such a mess?

If you adopt a biblical worldview how do you answer this question? In short, the biblical position is that God created us good and with a free will to love God and act out with justice and love. The chief reason for the mess, according to the Bible, is sin. The Bible talks about sin as a falling short, like an arrow that misses the bullseye. Our fall, recorded in Genesis 3, tells us that sin entered into the world through our rejection of God's Lordship. We said **no** to God! Our parents passed that spiritual discord on to each one of us. As a result of this the image of God was deeply affected by Adam's choice. The image remains within us, but it is marred.

Our reading from 1John will not let us wriggle out of this reality: *If we claim that we're free of sin, we're only fooling ourselves. A claim like that is errant nonsense. On the other hand, if we admit our sins-make a clean breast of them-he won't let us down; he'll be true to himself. He'll forgive our sins and purge us of all wrongdoing. (1John1:8ff)* The bible tells us that humanity has played its part in this story of evil, not only in acting it out with our neighbor, but with the rape of forests,

destruction of natural habitat, and the slow deterioration of the polar icecaps seemingly propelled by the unstoppable economic engine called progress.

But if there is a God why doesn't God do something about this? For many people this is their rationale for not believing in God. If God can allow the starving of innocent children, the rape and murder of innocents, the unending wars that victimize millions, then this is not a God they can believe in. If God cared why wouldn't God do something about it? I agree! So, yes, me too!

Many, like Richard Dawkins, who wrote the book, ***The God Delusion***, became a star for the atheism club, have chosen to believe that the complexity of life on our planet is simply the result of our gene's relentless drive for survival. In accord with evolution we are the product of natural selection. Ultimately however, Dawkins and his admirers interpret life through their worldview. Their assertions that there is no longer any need for a god to explain the story of life is not science; ultimately it is a form of blind faith that confesses what the science simply cannot prove, namely that there is no God.

One day an atheist was walking through the jungle contemplating his total disbelief in anything remotely spiritual. Suddenly, a Lion appeared - charging toward him and just about to leap. "OH GOD!!!!!" the atheist cried. Then, as if time stood still, the lion was suspended in midair and a voice from Heaven bellowed out. "You called" "Oh Lord, I'm so sorry I have not believed in you, I beg you do something!" said the ex-atheist. Being merciful, God looked down on the situation. He was thankful that, at least the man accepted that He existed. Then He looked upon the Lion pitying this poor dumb creature - and He decided to make the Lion a Christian. "I've done something" God said "I've made the Lion a Christian" "Oh thank you, thank you" Said the ex-atheist, mopping his brow. Then before his eyes, the Lion floated gently to the ground and sat up. The lion looked the man up and down once then closed his eyes. The ex-atheist sighed in relief but then was taken aback with horror as the lion put his paws together and uttered, " For what I am about to receive may the Lord.....".

This is the fourth in our series “Framing Your Worldview”. We have argued that each one of us has a worldview. Each of us has a framework into which we place the reality of our experience of the world, and that includes how we interpret the seemingly endless mess the world is in. It is the lens through which we view the world, ourselves, others, and how we relate to our past and future. It is within that worldview that we understand what truth is and whether it is knowable. It also determines our view of our origins. Where did I come from? Am I simply the result of evolution or did God begin the universe with the big bang and then superintend the beginning and evolution of life right up to its highest expression in humanity? What is your worldview on origins? What is your worldview on why the world is in such a mess?

Remember the words of our Psalm this morning? He sings:

The Lord looks down from heaven; he sees all humankind. From where he sits enthroned he watches all the inhabitants of the earth. (Ps.33:13ff)

God is not a disinterested observer from afar; this is a loving, caretaking vision that God employs all the time. God is not a remote first mover who started everything and then retreated into some mystical heaven where God is unmoved by our plight. No God is deeply connected to us and our universe. He watches; he acts; he has a plan for its future. The incarnation of Christ is a powerful reminder that God has acted by blooding his own hands to offer a way of saving us.

In Adam the human family created the blueprint for disobedience, a pattern we seem unable to break without God’s grace. We have within us a natural resistance to living in relationship with our Maker. The Bible calls us rebels against God. We are described as wandering sheep who went our own way. Our wounds are deep, our sins heavy to carry, and the God-shaped vacuum within us cannot seem to be filled, no matter how hard we try.

Why didn’t God see this coming and do something to prevent it. Well first of all God gave the human family free will. God sought to have a creature that would love him freely, not a robot that had no other

choice. We exercise this free will, just like our original parents in the Adam and Eve story, and just like our parents who bore us. We all tend not to choose God. That is our natural position. And until we come to a point in our life where that choice no longer works for us, when the pain that our life choices causes becomes too much, we will continue to take the path that leads away from God.

We are reminded by Jesus that the breakdown in human relationships is the natural outcome of our sins. And according to Jesus what is the source of sin? He says: *Listen and understand, it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.*” *For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander.* ²⁰*These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile.”*

The Russian writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn, as he lay on the rotting prison straw reflecting on the nature of goodness said: *the line separating good and evil passes, not through provinces, nor through classes, nor between political parties... but right through every human heart and through all human hearts. (Gulag Archipelago)*

C.S.Lewis wrote. *The first time I examined myself with a seriously practical purpose. And there I found what appalled me; a zoo of lusts, a bedlam of ambitions, a nursery of fears, a harem of fondled hatreds. My name was legion. (Surprised by Joy)*

If you are a Christian today then your worldview is informed by Scripture and certainly by Jesus. As Christians we view all of life through this worldview. And we answer these questions through the prism of our biblical worldview: ***Where did I come from? Why is the world in such a mess? Is there a solution? What is my purpose?***

Grace brought us to this point. So out of gratitude and a sense of responsibility to God and our world, we seek to bring justice, peace, good news and healing into all our brothers and sisters.

Amen