



What Good is God?

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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AM Assembly



Introduction:

It was a Tuesday morning. I had gone to the Early Bird Café on Phelan Blvd. in Beaumont, Texas, to eat a breakfast Panini and drink a latte. I ate, sipped, and joked with the baristas and short order cooks. Then I got in my truck to take the 10 minute drive to my office. As I was turning on to Dowlen Road, I received a call. The station manager for the radio program we had aired up until a month or two earlier frantically asked, “Have you heard the news?” “What news?” “Someone flew a plane into one of the World Trade Towers.” “What?! No way.” My first thought was, “Oh no, someone has messed up big. Heads are going to roll for this.” I hung up and proceeded down the road. Before I made it to the office, my phone rang again. “Someone flew into the other tower.” I knew then this was no air traffic mishap. This wasn’t some rookie pilot messing up. This was on purpose. Something terribly, terribly wrong was happening. I arrived at the office, and along with the rest of the nation, turned on the radio and television. The rest of the day’s timeline was a blur. We learned of a plane flying into the Pentagon and the downed plane in a Pennsylvania field. I remember watching the news and seeing something strange in the floating picture behind the talking head on screen. I remember telling Helen, the secretary for the congregation, “Something just happened. I can’t tell what. But something just happened.” Seconds later they reported that one of the buildings had collapsed. By lunch time, I decided to go home. I wasn’t getting any work done anyway. We watched the news all day. We saw the replay of the collapsing towers over and over again. We saw the billowing dust, the rescue workers, the weeping survivors. We just kept staring at the screen, transfixed, hating to watch, but scared to look away lest we miss something. I was half afraid of what might happen next and half expecting to find out that this wasn’t real; that it was an elaborate hoax on par with the 1938 broadcast of “War of the Worlds.” Surely something of this magnitude simply could not happen, not on American soil. If I live to be a hundred, I will not forget that day.

Every generation has days like that. My grandparents’ generation remembers December 7, 1941: Pearl Harbor. My parents’ generation remembers November 22, 1963: the assassination of John F. Kennedy. I look to the next generation and I regret to inform you, you too will have such a day. Someday within your lifetime, something so dreadful will happen that whether you remember the date or not, you will remember the event. You will remember where you were when you heard about it. You will remember what you were doing, what you were thinking. That is the world we live in.

But there is more than these overarching, monolithic tragedies. There are also the smaller scale, but nonetheless bone-chilling, tragedies—the Oklahoma City bombing, the shootings at Columbine, the Beltway sniper attacks, Virginia Tech shootings, the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger, the explosion of the space shuttle Columbia. Then there are the natural disasters—tornadoes in Alabama, hurricanes in the Gulf, earthquakes in California.

But perhaps even more life-altering than these mutually remembered tragedies, each of us have faced personal tragedies. I remember the day a week after my 12th birthday on which I was shaken awake by my father at about 4:00 AM. We rushed to the hospital where my mother had had a heart transplant days earlier. I remember my aunts and my grandfather had traveled to England to be there in support. We were herded into a waiting room. I remember the doctor coming in to inform us that they had done all they could, but it wasn’t enough. She was dead. I remember walking into the room and seeing her seemingly asleep, never to wake again. She looked better than she had days earlier when I saw her with tubes, IVs, oxygen mask, and all kinds of hook-ups and medical paraphernalia, crying because she didn’t want me to see her like that. Now she just lay there, no cords, no tubes, no crying, hands by her side, peaceful, but dead.

Fifteen years later, I received a heart-stopping call while Marita was in the hospital following the birth of Ethan. My father had pancreatic cancer. I remember flying from Texas to Arkansas, driving to the hospital in Jonesboro with my step-mother. I remember walking in and seeing him in the bed. 5% last two months after diagnosis. 2 % last 5 months. He was part of the 2%. I remember five months later being in the house of my teen years watching him labor to breathe. He was in pain despite the medication. Sometimes he moaned, but he had ceased to be able to talk. I watched him suck in air, then there would be a pause that seemed an eternity. I remember praying that God would let it be his final breath, but then he gasped again. Finally, early in the morning he took that last breath. I watched for more, but they did not come.

I can remember along with Marita the day she learned of her mother’s infidelity to her father and then the day their divorce was finalized. That was the same day Tessa was born. (Praise the Lord, her mother has since been restored, but that doesn’t take away the pain of the personal tragedy or the thousand mini-tragedies that went along with it).

Then there was the day while Marita was pregnant with Trina that we learned about Mesothelioma, an asbestos-related cancer that is fatal in nearly 100% of its cases. We learned about it as Marita's dad explained his diagnosis to us. I remember the night we were frantically trying to get to Shreveport, Louisiana, to see her father one last time before he died. We didn't make it.

Each of you listening has your own personal tragedies. Some may not be as intense as ours and others make ours pale in comparison. The day a parent, spouse, sibling, or even child was diagnosed with cancer or some other fatal disease. The day that parent, spouse, sibling, or child died. The day you found out your spouse was cheating on you. The day the divorce was final. The day of a miscarriage or car wreck. The day a house caught fire or was robbed. The day that the unthinkable happened as you learned about suicide or murder.

This week I read of a woman who attended a Bible college, married a missionary, and 25 years later discovered that he had betrayed their marriage bond hundreds of times with both heterosexual and homosexual liaisons. Her father who had brought her up conducting family worship every day was molesting his granddaughters. Her teenage daughter was later raped by an intruder. What kind of tragedies does she remember?ⁱ

I remember walking into a hospital emergency room, a woman I had known for a couple of years stood there holding her husband's hand as it stretched out from beneath the sheet that covered his entire body. He had died from a massive heart attack about an hour earlier. Her mother had died that year. Her father had immediately remarried. She had endured intense pain from physical maladies that the doctors couldn't figure out. Her daughter had been in and out of jail. Her son had fathered a child out of wedlock. Her life since I had known her had been one perpetual piece of tragic news after another. I remember walking into the room and giving her a hug as she asked, "When will God make it stop?!"

And that's the rub, isn't it? When will God make it stop? My friends, there was nothing wrong with her question. It was the same question the psalmists asked over and over again: "Why, O LORD, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?" (**Psalm 10:1**, ESV); "How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?" (**Psalm 13:1**, ESV); "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?" (**Psalm 22:1**, ESV); "O LORD, why do you cast my soul away? Why do you hide your face from me?" (**Psalm 88:14**, ESV). It was the question the martyred souls beneath the altar asked God, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (**Revelation 6:10**, ESV).

When you survey these tragedies, international, national, local, and personal, you may ask yourself the same question. When will God make it stop? Day after day we watch the news—immorality, murder, theft, pain, tragedy, torment. We go to sleep, wake up, and find the same stories. Oh, the names and faces have changed, but the stories remained the same. And some begin to ask, "What good is God?" What good is God in a world like this? If He isn't going to stop it or keep it from happening, what good is He? When people perpetrate many of these tragedies in His name and He does seemingly nothing about it, what good is He? When people faithfully serve Him for years and yet endure such tragedies, what good is He? This is a good question. There is nothing wrong with asking, so long as we wait around to find out the answer.

Discussion:

I. God is the Powerful Creator of a good world.

- A. The world we see on the news is the not the world God created. It is not the world God intended. God is the powerful creator of a good world. Seven times in **Genesis 1** God looked at His creation and saw that it was good (**Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31**). There was no sickness. There was no pain. There was no sorrow. There was no death. There was holiness, happiness, joy, and life.
- B. What changed all that? We did. In **Genesis 3:1-7**, the first couple violated the one restrictive law God had placed on them. They ate of the forbidden tree. And the world changed. In a sense, it was no longer God's world, but ours. God gave us the freedom to wrest control of this world from Him. He gave us the freedom to change and mar the very nature of His great creation. Pain, sickness, sorrow, and death became part of our world.
- C. Are we all paying for that first sin? Are we being punished for their failure? No. We have all willingly fallen in line with Adam and Eve. **Romans 3:23** says we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory. We may not have eaten that first forbidden fruit, but we have all entered fellowship with them, proving over and over again had we been in the garden, we would have done the same. Understand what this means. When we watch the evening news, we are seeing the world as we have made it, not as God has made it. We are seeing the results of man's controlling influence. We are seeing the results of our sin.
- D. Please, don't misunderstand. I'm not saying it was your sin that caused the collapse of the Twin Towers. It wasn't my sin that caused the early deaths of my parents. But it was sin. And none of us can declare innocence. We may try to claim that we haven't done as bad as some we hear about in the papers. But we have taken part in this

world's vain course. As **Ephesians 2:1-3** explains, we have all carried out the desires of the flesh. We have spurned the spirit. We have followed the prince of the power of the air and we have become children of wrath like the rest. We have all had our part in the sinful world that has made this world what it is, changing it from the good world that God created to this sinful world that man has altered.

E. What is God good for? He is the powerful creator of a good world. And now He watches while we destroy His creation. And He let us experience what we have done to His good world. But that is not all.

II. God is the Patient Redeemer of fallen sinners.

A. In 2002, Steven Spielberg directed the Tom Cruise film, "Minority Report." The back story was that by the year 2054, crime had been eliminated because folks were able to see into the future, recognize a crime was going to happen, stop the perpetrator, and then arrest and imprison him or her before the crime ever happened. It seemed like a perfect system until it messed up. Some of us want God to act like that. He knows what is coming, so He should stop it. If He doesn't, we ask what He's good for.

B. The problem is that if God worked on that basis, who among us would be here? **Romans 3:23** says we all have sinned. If God stopped us and meted out the sentence against our sins simply because He knew what we were going to do, we would all already be in hell. There would be no chance for repentance. There would be no chance for salvation. There would be no redemption.

C. Praise God, He isn't like that. We have destroyed His good world with our sinfulness, but instead of simply wiping us out like He could have, He deals with us patiently. **II Peter 3:8-9** explains that God doesn't want anyone to perish; so He gives us time to repent, surrender to His Son, and allow Him to redeem us. We're all happy when He does this for us, even though our sins have hurt others. But we get upset when He does the same for those whose sins have hurt us. And we get upset when He does it for those whose sins are large scale (i.e. Hitler, Osama bin Laden, etc.). But God is not willing that any should perish. He gives us all the time we need to repent. The downside of that is it means also giving us the time to rebel. What God is good for is His patience in letting us make our own bed. No doubt, He could stop all the sin and judge all the sinners based on what He knows they will do, but that would leave us all without hope. I am thankful that He is the patient redeemer of fallen sinners. We must not miss how powerful this is. Because in order to be this patient redeemer, He allowed His sinless Son to suffer at the hands of sinners to purchase our redemption (**John 3:16; I Peter 2:22-25**). The one person in all of history who did not deserve to suffer did so that we might be redeemed.

D. What good is God? He is the patient redeemer who sent His Son to redeem those of us who have destroyed His creation with our sin.

III. God is the Unlimited Strength of powerless people.

A. As we point out, God's patience not only gives us time to repent, it gives us time to rebel as well. When folks choose to rebel, people get hurt. We have all suffered because of sin. But God does not leave us hopeless and helpless in the midst of facing this world and its sinfulness. According to **Isaiah 40:28-31**, we learn that God is the strength that allows us to make it through the difficulties and traumas.

B. Paul recognized this in **II Corinthians 12:7-10**. At first, he couldn't understand why God allowed him to suffer this thorn in the flesh, this messenger of Satan. But he came to understand that it was being used by God to strengthen Paul to make it through life.

C. Yes, we as sinners have altered the world. We have made it a place that has hurt, pain, trauma, and tragedy. We are not always the authors of our own tragedies, but we have been willing participants in the sinfulness of the world. We have played our parts. God has patiently allowed this even though it means some will be hurt because that is what means some can be saved. But He has not left us alone while we endure this life. He walks alongside us, strengthening us, empowering us, growing us. Sometimes that growth comes through the very pain itself. Paul's growth came from the thorn in the flesh. Our growth may come from our tragedies, but God is always there, carrying us through. He has asked us to bring our cares to Him (**Philippians 4:5-7; I Peter 5:6-7**). He will care for us. He will provide us peace in the storm.

D. What good is God? He is the strength that lets us stand in the face of our enemies. He is the power that lets us endure in the face of tragedy. He is the calm assurance that lets us wade through our anxieties. He is the one that does allow us to sink in the waves so that we may experience that great assurance that comes from turning to Him and crying out, "Lord, save me," and then watching Him do it.

IV. God is the Faithful Judge of the rebelliously impenitent.

A. Because all we can see is the here and now, we tend to be myopic, short-sighted. We see the towers fall and it seems that those who would perpetrate such evil just get away with it. We witness injustice in the courts and it seems that God is just turning a blind eye to all that is going on down here. According to **Ecclesiastes 8:11-13**, because the sentence isn't carried out quickly, many turn to evil thinking they can get away with it. But the

Preacher goes on to say that in the end it will be well for those who fear the Lord and it will not be well for those who do not. God may be patient in carrying out the sentence, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. But, He is the faithful judge. In the end, those who reject Him and rebel will be judged.

- B. As Peter explains in **I Peter 4:4-5**, those who malign God's people may seem to get away with it for a time, but they will give account to the judge. As **II Timothy 2:11-13** explains, if we are faithless, He is faithful. That doesn't mean if we reject Him He will be faithful to saving us. No, it means He will be faithful to His Word that says we will be judged.
 - C. When the martyrs of **Revelation 6:9-11** asked God when He would avenge them, they were told to wait a little while until the time was right. There were others that would die at the hands of persecutors. The point was not simply that God was waiting so His people could suffer. The point was that He was waiting so that those He judged and condemned would be completely without excuse. He was waiting for them to fill up their sins so that not only would they be worthy of their judgment but they would know it to be so.
 - D. What good is God? He is the judge that will set all things right in His time. The sentence may not be carried out as quickly as we would like, but it will be carried out. But we are again thankful that God is patient in carrying out that sentence because it is that patience that has allowed us to be redeemed rather than simply punished.
- V. God is the Master Planner of our eternal destiny.
- A. **Romans 8:28-30** is the passage that most helps me answer our title question. This passage does not say that God is the direct cause of all things. But what it does say is that God can redeem all things. No matter how bad things are, God can use them to accomplish good ends for us who love the Lord.
 - B. Think about it. God is the one who can turn a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, into a powerful tool to bring salvation to Paul's life (**II Corinthians 12:7-10**). God is the one who can turn a betrayal by brothers, an enslavement, a frame-up by a master's wife, and a prison-sentence into salvation for an entire family and nation (**Genesis 37-50**). God is the one who can take a betrayal with a kiss, abandonment by friends, false accusations, scourging, and a crucifixion on Friday into a Sunday resurrection that produces salvation for all mankind (**Matthew 26-28**). That is how amazing God is.
 - C. There is nothing so bad in your life that God Himself cannot redeem it and turn it into the very means that will save us in the end, if we will simply love and surrender to Him. He knows the end from the beginning. He knows how everything can come together to bring us to Him in the end. We cannot see that. We get distracted by these momentary tragedies. But God sees the big picture. He is the master planner who is shaping our eternal destiny through every event in our lives.
 - D. What good is God? He is the one that is getting us to heaven, if we will simply let Him.
- VI. God is the Loving Preparer of our eternal home.
- A. Yes, we live in a tragic world. As we have seen, though, it is really a world of our choosing. God created this world good, but we have turned it into the evil place it is. He is letting us see what we will do with a world when given the chance to run it. But, He is working a plan to redeem it and us. He is patient with us so that we might come to repentance, He is strengthening us that we might endure what we face, and He is planning our eternal destiny so that we do not have to be in a world like this forever.
 - B. As **II Peter 3:13** says, we are awaiting a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. God is preparing a place that will not experience unrighteousness. He is preparing a place that will not have sin, sorrow, and death. He is preparing a place where we'll all live in holiness and happiness with Him. He is the author of our hope, providing for us an incorruptible inheritance reserved in heaven (**I Peter 1:3-5**). Jesus prepared that place for us through His death (**John 14:1-3**).
 - C. What good is God? He is the God that has promised He will not leave things like this forever. He will take us on to a better place. But His patience is what allows more people, including us, to experience that better place.

Conclusion:

When tragedy strikes, we wonder what good is God? When will He make it stop? Why didn't He do something? Let me assure you, He will make it stop one day. The reason He hasn't yet is to redeem more folks like us, sinners who need a Savior. Further, He has done something. He provided a Savior and prepared a place for us. Yes, His patience means we must go through more suffering, but what sacrifice is that in comparison to the sacrifice Jesus made so our eternal destiny might be purchased and our place in heaven reserved. God is good and we are the recipients of that goodness. Let us praise Him!

¹ Philip Yancey, What Good is God? In Search of a Faith that Matters, Hachette Book Group, New York, 2010, Kindle Edition, location 1769