



God, Evil, & Suffering

WHAT SHALL WE SAY?

Today



- ▶ Relationship between God and Humanity.
 - ▶ What does God do? What does God promise?
 - ▶ What are the created limitations humans face?
 - ▶ What is the role of sin?
 - ▶ Why are we even having this conversation? The Enlightenment and adaptations in theological perspective.
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Pre-Enlightenment Theology

- ▶ **Job 4:7-9** ⁷ "Think now, who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off? ⁸ As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same. ⁹ By the breath of God they perish, and by the blast of his anger they are consumed.

The Black Death - Europe 1300's



- 45–50% of the European population dying during a four-year period.
- Between 75 & 200million people died
- Seen as God's punishment
 - Jews, Foreigners, Lepers, Beggars, and Gypsies were to blame...

Martin Luther



- ▶ **Anfechtungen**
- ▶ Luther was terrified that God was going to judge and condemn the sinner at any moment.
- ▶ God Hidden & God Revealed
- ▶ Hidden so that he might be found where he wants to be found.

Lisbon, Portugal – November 1, 1755

A turning point?

- ▶ All Saints Day
- ▶ Lisbon was the center for piety in the west
- ▶ Population 250,000
- ▶ 50,000 + died



The Enlightenment



- ▶ Followed the 30 years War – 1618-1648
- ▶ Skepticism of Religious Tradition
 - ▶ Most scholars became Deists
- ▶ Rise of “Natural Philosophers” – Scientists
- ▶ Empiricism – knowledge comes from senses & experience
 - ▶ Not just tradition
- ▶ Reductionism – complex objects/systems are sum of their parts

Civil War



Pat Robertson on Hurricane Katrina



100,000 + people died in Haiti – Hatians are cursed because they swore an oath with the Devil

1800 people die in New Orleans - "We have killed over 40 million unborn babies in America,"

Post-Enlightenment: The WHY of Suffering



What shall we say about Suffering

▶ **Suffering and the will of God**

- ▶ Bible does not say ALL suffering is the will of God
- ▶ Bible does not say that NO suffering is the will of God
- ▶ Ditches
 - ▶ Deism – God absent from involvement in the world
 - ▶ Monism – God micromanaging life of the world.

What shall we say about God?

▶ **God is relational**

- ▶ Asymmetrical Relationship

- ▶ God wills to be known, has revealed God's self, does not seek to keep us ignorant of God's work.

▶ **God is present and active in the world and our lives.**

What shall we say about God?

- ▶ **Matthew 28:18-20** ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. **And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."**
- ▶ Gideon answered him, "But sir, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us?"

What Shall we Say about God?

God has freely entered into relationships in such a way that...

- ▶ God is not the only one who has something important to say.
 - ▶ Prayer
- ▶ God is not the only one who has something to do and the power with which to do it.
 - ▶ Stewards of this earth and of life
- ▶ Allows us to be what we were created to be (in the image of God) –

In the beginning God created...

- ▶ Genesis 1

- ▶ **Genesis 1:26-27** ²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." ²⁷ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

- ▶ Psalm 139

- ▶ **Psalm 139:13-14** ¹³ For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.

What shall we say about God?

- ▶ **Honoring of relationship requires Divine restraint in use of power**
 - ▶ Flood story
- ▶ **God is grieved by the suffering of creation**
- ▶ **This is not the end of the story: - God will set all things right.**
 - ▶ **Revelation 21:3-5** ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; ⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." ⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new."

The Why of Suffering

- ▶ **Some suffering is part of the struggle which belongs to the Created Order**
 - ▶ Loneliness
 - ▶ Limits - *intelligence, agility, and strength among others*
 - ▶ Temptation
 - ▶ Anxiety
 - ▶ Douglas John Hall: God and Human Suffering pg 53-67

The Why of Suffering

- ▶ God has created a dynamic world;
- ▶ earthquakes, volcanoes, glaciers, storms, bacteria, and viruses have their role to play in the life of this world. ... Because we are part of this interconnected world, we may get in the way of these processes and get hurt by them.
- ▶ Terrence Fretheim "About God, Evil, & Suffering"

The Why of Suffering

- ▶ Sin increases our experience of suffering
 - ▶ Our sin has consequences both for individuals and communities.
 - ▶ Non-Deterministic
 - ▶ Consequences often called Divine Judgment in Scripture
 - ▶ “the fruit of their schemes” (Jeremiah 6:19)
 - ▶ Romans 13:4 – Authorities are in place to enforce consequences.
- ▶ Sin as both action and inaction.

What is Sin?

- ▶ **Not simply personal moral deficiencies.**

(stealing, cheating, adultery, abuse, etc.)

- ▶ **Larger communal/national sin**

- ▶ **Sin of Arms races**

- ▶ Overseas weapons sales by the United States totaled \$66.3 billion last year, ... Russia was a distant second, with \$4.8 billion in deals. NY Times 8 -26-12

- ▶ **Sin of 1st World Wealth & Greed**

- ▶ **Sin of Environmental Disaster due to Technology.**

The Why of Suffering



- ▶ We suffer not only because of our sin but because of the sin of others.
 - ▶ Personal level
 - ▶ Communal level
- ▶ Example: People of Israel enslaved in Egypt
 - ▶ God's response - Salvation

The Irony of Sin

- According to Douglas John Hall

- ▶ It is (sin), in short, the failure of trust. In its freedom to accept, embrace, and rejoice in its finitude, the creature grasps instead after infinity. In its freedom to trust the Lord of life the creature instead covets a life that is independent of the act of trust, as security already possessed – such as that one desired, in Jesus' parable, who built bigger barns. But this security is the ultimate insecurity.
- ▶ **And the Irony of it...** In trying to overcome suffering on our own we create more suffering...
 - ▶ those who wish to be “like God” but being human, only end in becoming “unhappy gods”.

The Why of Suffering



▶ According to Fretheim:

▶ We also suffer because we belong to communities that have had a long history of sinfulness with the result that its effects, which can be named “evil,” are integrated into the very structures of our life together. Manifested in such realities as ageism, racism, and sexism, everyone will make their own contribution to these systemic evils to be experienced by coming generations.

The Why of Suffering



▶ Vocational Calling

- ▶ Such vocational suffering, which is explicitly taken up for the sake of the neighbor and could be avoided, may be called the will of God.
- ▶ Examples?

Questions?



Next Week



- ▶ Evil – What is it – who is to blame?
 - ▶ Devil – History of Satan and personification of evil.
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What is Evil?

▶ **Moral Evil:** evil caused by free human beings, such as:

- ▶ Murder
- ▶ Lying
- ▶ Stealing
- ▶ Greed
- ▶ Abuse
- ▶ Dishonesty

▶ **Natural Evil,** such as:

- ▶ Hurricanes, floods, tornados, fires
- ▶ Famines & Floods
- ▶ Cancer, AIDS, & Disease
- ▶ Birth defects and deformities
- ▶ Disabilities: blindness, deafness, insanity