

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben on Psalm 13 on August 17, 2014 at Victory of the Lamb.

Series: Good Questions – Honest Answers
Today's Focus: Why Is There So Much Evil in the World?

“God Has Been Good to Us...Even In a World Gone Bad”

In the name of Jesus Christ who said, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Like an onion where you can keep peeling off layer after layer, our question today is kind of the question underneath all the other questions we've been looking at the last couple weeks. Unfortunately I would say it's a very timely question as well. *Why is there so much evil in the world?*



I'm guessing many of you now recognize this symbol, don't you? It's the Arabic letter "N," which is being used in Iraq to label Nazarenes or Christians. Some of them are being told to convert to Islam or die. In the news you've likely been confronted with pictures or video of the atrocities that have been occurring in Iraq at the hands of ISIS—the most extremist group I've ever seen in my lifetime I think. The targeted, savage persecution of Christians, but not just Christians, occurring there is on an almost unimaginable scale. And the overwhelming evidence of the gruesome murders of children and adults is absolutely horrifying. Of course that's happening a world away from us it seems.

Perhaps closer to home was the sad news this week about Robin Williams. It was discovered sadly this week that he who made so many of us laugh was apparently so depressed that he committed suicide at the age of 63. No one knows exactly why, though many have speculated about the demons that he fought throughout his life.

Closest to home for some of you and for me was the funeral of a two and a half month old baby girl named Paige who we prayed for here in church over the last couple weeks. It was a hard thing for me as a pastor and a father of a couple little girls myself to watch as four strong young men carried out to the cemetery this tiny white casket.

Add up just this week and you can't help but think, “What's wrong with this place?!” Or perhaps more personally, “If God is in control and if he loves us so much, why do we face so much pain and trouble in this world?” If you've ever wondered this, you're not alone.

Jeremiah was a true prophet of the LORD who complained bitterly against God about his hard life. Job was a man who tragically lost his entire family and in his grief cried out “Why, God?” only to have his so called friends offer their simplistic answers that just made things worse (when maybe the best thing they could've done was just to sit there silently with their friend). Habakkuk was another prophet who actually wrote a whole book of the Bible questioning God's judgment. Asaph was a church musician who wrote Psalm 73 in which he says that he almost lost his faith when he looked at and envied the prosperity of the wicked. And today we'll look at King David of Israel who wrote this in Psalm 13...

1 How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

*2 How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?*

How long will my enemy triumph over me?

Four times David in this Psalm cries out, “How long?” This isn’t really a request for information but a cry of distress. And actually the appeal to God, “How long?” is found in ten different Psalms in the Bible. So you can see that even inspired authors of the Bible cried out, “How long, God?” They struggled with this too.

“How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever?” It seems like you have forgotten me, God. Are you too busy? I needed to get paid. And we have nothing. We are broke. Did you forget about us?

“How long will you hide your face from me?” You took away my family. My wife died. Or you never even gave me a wife. I’m alone. And now it seems like I can’t even find you. God, don’t you want me to find you? Don’t you want me to believe in you? Why are you making it so hard? Why are you playing hide and seek?

“How long must I wrestle with my thoughts?” Why don’t you just give me answer? I want my life to make sense. And losing a child doesn’t make sense. Why did you start a life only to snuff it out? Why do you leave me wrestling for answers?

“How long will my enemy triumph over me?” How long will you let me be a victim of abuse? How long will my own family torment me? Aren’t you stronger than my enemies? Are you watching this and letting it happen?

Friends, first of all this Psalm lets you cry out to God without apology. God can take it. He’s got big shoulders. In fact, he wrote these words in Scripture to let you know that he hears your struggle. And he doesn’t give you a cliché answer. These deep cries of David show you that God also hears you. In fact, he echoes your anguish.

Yet in the middle of this anguish David understands something that we often forget. We see the reality of evil, but we misunderstand its origin. We are tempted to see evil as if beginning in the heart of God. We are tempted to see God as the author of evil. As if he enjoys seeing us in pain. As if he takes responsibility for sin.

Except deep down, David knows better. David was certainly a man who knew something about evil or sin—all sides of it too. But he was also honest enough to admit that sometimes what happened to him was the result of his own evil, his own sin. David confessed in Psalm 51:5, *“Surely I was sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”* In other words, one answer David would have given to the question, “Why is there so much evil in the world?” is “Because of me. I’m in the world.” And this is a harsh medicine we all need to swallow. There is evil in the world because there are evil people like us in the world. Now don’t just check out on me right now for saying that. I’m not saying there aren’t good

things or beautiful things or pleasant things in the world. I'm not saying that you are I as morally bankrupt as ISIS either.

But follow where David's going with this—that we all inherit a sinful nature from our parents. Right along with our DNA is our spiritual DNA so to speak going back all the way to our first parents Adam and Eve who first brought the harsh reality of sin into God's perfectly created world when they of their own free will disobeyed God. So David doesn't blame God for that. He doesn't blame God for his own sins when appropriate. He takes the responsibility for his actions. He is sorry for the evil he has done. But this didn't come naturally to him, just as it doesn't come naturally to us. In fact David learned this lesson the hard way—through the painful consequences of sins that he had to live with.

And if we're honest, sometimes that's the case with us too, isn't it? When we sin and suffer the consequences sometimes we can't blame God for that. James, the brother of Jesus, who saw in his brother the only person who ever lived without sinning says: *13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.* (cf James 1:13-14). I guess that's why it shouldn't be surprising that we'd all struggle to answer the question, "Why is there so much evil in the world?"

We are tempted to immediately shift blame. We're tempted to see God as the author of evil. But David refused to believe that. And so he calls out to God for help. He knows that God is his Savior, not his enemy, so he says:

3 Look on me and answer, LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death, 4 and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall. God, I'm not able to see how you are always at work in the world much less in my own life (you ever feel like that?) so I need you to open my eyes and illuminate my heart. God, you are my helper and Savior. You are not my enemy. Save me from my foes!

And right in the middle of David's suffering, he also remembered something else: God's unfailing love. *5 But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation.* Maybe David is remembering how as a boy with a simple sling, God saved him and he defeated Goliath the giant. There was a mean, evil dude if ever there was one. Maybe David is remembering how God protected him from the wicked hand of Saul who was using all his power in his kingdom to track down David to kill him. Maybe he is remembering how God anointed him king over Israel, and showered upon him more gifts than he could count. And of course the greatest gift was that one day his great descendant the Messiah would save him from sin. In the middle of his suffering, David confessed that he still knew that every good and perfect gift came from God above.

Now here's just something I've observed, maybe you have too. Sometimes I think we're speedy to complain about or question God for the bad that happens. But then on the flipside we're slow to recognize that everything good comes from God—and even in this fallen world we do often experience so much that is good. I mean *How long...*would your list be if you were to make a list of every good thing that has happened in your life?

How many days have you had a job, a paycheck, food on the table? How many days of breath and good health has God given you? How many sunsets have you seen? How many flowers have bloomed in your yard? How many pieces of fresh fruit have you tasted? How many juicy burgers have you eaten? How many times you have recovered from sickness? How many hugs have you received? How many sermons have you heard? The good things that are in your life are not because you just made better choices than others. Every good and perfect gift that has happened to you was handpicked and handcrafted by God for you. God has given each of us abundant gifts to enjoy, hasn't he? To thank and praise him for. When we see all the ways that our world has gone bad and even when we experience suffering or sorrow we need to look at this verse: *5 But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation.* This isn't just a feel good verse. This is the stubborn faith of a man who refuses to give into despair because he knows that God is not indifferent to his anguish. **God. Has. Been. Good. To. Me.**

What David is saying though is more than just that the good gifts outweigh the evil that happens to us and around us. I mean God wants you to count your blessings. I think for many of us the blessings of God do outweigh the bad things we experience. But David has an even greater hope and so do we. It's what makes him want to sing like Paul and Silas who were thrown into prison for preaching about their Savior Jesus Christ. David says, *6 I will sing the LORD's praise, for he has been good to me.*

David is saying what so many other Scriptures say: God is good and he will work out even the evil I experience in my life for my ultimate, eternal good. God is not the author of evil, and yet he promises to in some mysterious, providential way to turn bad things into blessings. Every evil thing God will in some way use for someone's eternal good. Oh how that must tick off the devil! He works so hard to destroy you and your faith. And God says he's gonna keep turning it into good even if you can't see how now.

How can I trust that this is true—that God can take even the worst things and work them out for your ultimate good? Because of Jesus. Just think about the worst evil, the most unjust thing that has ever happened. Jesus Christ, who was truly good and innocent, the Son of God himself, was abused, stripped, and beaten. Though he had done no one wrong, he was hung up on a cross and murdered by the very people he came to save. Yet God turned this very worst thing into the greatest blessing so that you do not have to wonder if God loves you. Just look at the cross of Jesus Christ, God's Son, our Savior and know that he does. **In Christ God has been good to us...even in a world gone bad.**

Now maybe you wondered earlier, "What does a pastor like you, Ben, say at the funeral of a little girl who dies at just 2 months old?" In closing I want to share with you what I shared with all those this week at the funeral home in Racine. There's a story I read from the life of Jesus. It's found in Luke 18:15-17. *15 People were also bringing babies to Jesus for him to place his hands on them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. 16 But Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 17 Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."*

So the story is that people were bringing babies to Jesus. Yes the word means babies. Little babies like Paige. Why? Because parents had heard about Jesus. They'd heard that in our world of cruel sickness, he is kind. That he is good. That somehow you can trust that he is loving because he came from God in

heaven to this earth on a rescue mission. Because he loves all of us so much he was actually willing to come live as one of us to endure all the brokenness, hurt, evil, and sin this life has to offer so that he could be our Savior. So these parents brought their children to Jesus, the Savior they knew we all need.

But what did Jesus' disciples do...you know, some of the other grown-ups? *When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them.* They said, "What are doing that for, people? Jesus has more important things to do. Why bother bringing those little kids to Jesus?" You know sometimes us grownups can be so cynical, right? I know I can be this way too. This broken world of broken hearts and broken bodies can make us jaded and think, "Well why bother believing, anymore? Why trust that God is good when he lets things happen that seem so sad?"

Why? Jesus says, *"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.* The kingdom of God! That's why. When I was invited Children's hospital to baptize baby Paige I was thankful because I was being given the opportunity to bring her to Jesus so that through the water and God's Word of Baptism, baby Paige would be given the free gift of the kingdom of God. That's what God promises to give through baptism. The kingdom of God belongs to such as Paige even though she was so little, so young, so helpless.

This is why Jesus came—to rescue helpless people like us who can't prevent death. Yet God loves us and our children so much that he gave his own eternal Son, Jesus, so that we could live with him forever. This is why Jesus died on the cross, to pay for everyone's sins and remove what separates us from God. This is why Jesus rose from the dead, so that we too would conquer death and be reunited in heaven. This is why God gives the gift of baptism so that we might all belong to him, be part of his family, and freely by God's grace enjoy one day living in the kingdom of God!

Jesus says, *17 Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.*" What this means to me and what I hope this means to you is that we don't have to have it all figured out here on this earth. We're never going to have it all figured out! But neither then do we have to torment ourselves with questions of Why did you let this happen, God? Why couldn't that have happened instead? Why, God? Well God doesn't always tell us *why*.

Instead he invites us to simply rest our hearts like a child in *who* he is and trust him. He is our Savior God who loves us so much that he has done everything to prepare a home for us in heaven through Jesus. I don't know what heaven will be like. But I do know what Jesus promises. He says, *"Behold, I am making all things new"* (cf. Rev. 21:5). In heaven every hurt will be healed. Every tear will be wiped away. Every wrong will be made right. And everything sad will come untrue. Those are eternal blessings that little Paige is enjoying even right now. Those are the eternal blessings in store for all of you who trust in Jesus Christ and his unfailing love. **God has been good to us all...even in a world gone bad.** Amen.

My Next Steps

Connect: If you could stop all the evil in the world, wipe out all the pain and suffering, it would seem a no-brainer, right? You'd do it in a second. God could stop all the evil in the world. He could wipe out all pain and suffering in a second. But he doesn't. Why?

Aha: We have a hard time understanding that, in a fallen world in need of redemption, God uses pain and suffering to accomplish ultimate good.

Treasure: *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).*

Challenge: Look back on your life and think about a time or two when you really struggled, when life was painful and hard, yet now, in retrospect, you can see that God used that pain to grow you. Share your story of God's faithfulness with someone.