

“The Problem of Evil”

Romans 5:6-15

Last week, among other things, we talked about what the philosophers call “The Problem of Evil.” It is the paradox meant to challenge the existence of a good Almighty God. It goes like this, if God is willing to prevent evil, but not able, then He is weak, feeble, not much of a God – certainly not Almighty. Is he able, but not willing? Then He Himself is evil. If He is both able and willing, then why is there evil and suffering in the world? It is a favorite argument of the haters of God.

In our Epistle lesson today, we hear God’s answer to the problem of evil presented by St. Paul. Actually, what we read in Romans 5 is the beginning to Paul’s answer, because, as we have seen in our Sunday morning Bible class, as we have been working through Paul’s letter to the Romans, chapters 5,6,7, and 8 build one continuous argument concerning what it is that Jesus has actually done for you. How He has rescued you from the wrath and judgment you would be under if Christ had not come and fulfilled the Law and justified us with His own blood.

But as I said last week, God has not solved the problem of evil and suffering in this world by taking a McDonald’s drive-thru approach. It’s not

like He orders up paradise and moments later you have everything that you asked for.

We don't get to see it in this life. He gives us hope – the hope of the restoration of the paradise lost by Adam. The hope that this world is passing away, and this is a good thing. We pray, “Thy Kingdom come . . . Deliver us from evil.” We hope for this world to end soon. We hope for the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. This world is fallen – filled with death, sin, violence, depression, persecution of the children of God.

It is Father's Day. Because of this fallen world, because sin came into this world through the one man, Adam, I have to worry about the safety of my daughters. Because death has come into this world through sin, unless our Lord returns in the relative near future (historically speaking), there is going to be a funeral for someone in my family. Eating right and exercising will not stop this from happening. There is only one answer to the problem of evil.

We want God to just take all of our problems and throw them into some cosmic black hole, but He can't do that. He had to make them His own. He had to take all of our sin, and sorrow, and suffering, and worry, and burdens and nail them to Himself. As Paul says, “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

In approaching evil and suffering focused solely on Christ, I am not trying to minimize or downplay the real and genuine suffering that anyone has endured. On the contrary, I am trying to maximize it, deepen it, hold it

ever before your eyes – not so that you dwell on it and spiral into depression – but rather that you understand more fully what it is that Christ did for you on the cross.

Every pain, every heart-ache, every moment of abandonment or loss which you have endured, He endured with you. The pain of every sin committed against you; the harshness of every word or action which you inflicted on someone else He endured. The guilt for all that you have done is paid for and is instantly lifted off of you, and you are free being justified by His blood.

While writing this on Tuesday, the news of Otto Warmbier was trending on Twitter. Otto Warmbier is the 22 year old University of Virginia student who was arrested in North Korea for taking a propaganda poster from his hotel and was sentenced to 15 years of hard labor in a prison camp in January of 2016.

At the time, I remember thinking that 15 years of hard labor in North Korea is essentially a death sentence – much like the Soviet Union's Siberian gulags. This was incredibly unfair. Well, apparently he came down with botulism (at least that is what was reported), which can be fatal, and has been in a coma for over a year. The good news is that his pardon and release has brought him back to the USA.

I saw an interview with his parents on Tuesday, and preparing for Father's Day, as a father, I was thinking about the suffering Otto's father went through – seeing your eldest son essentially sentenced to death. As

a father, my job is to protect my children at all costs. We pray that Otto's father and all the family are able to receive him back safely.

Then my thoughts turned to my Heavenly Father. His first Son was sentenced to death. And the guilt placed upon Him seems unfair, but, as St. Paul says, "He who knew no sin became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God" [2 Cor. 5:21].

It is this beautiful, glorious exchange that on the surface seems unfair. Given that it is Father's Day, the mind of God can best be understood in light of what it means to be a father. As I said before, "As a father, my job is to protect my children at all costs." Jesus is not the only child of our Father.

Your Father in heaven was determined to rescue you from the guilt of your sin, from your death sentence regardless of the cost. And we know the cost. He had to take all of our sin, and sorrow, and suffering, and worry, and burdens and nail them to His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ. And then listen to His Son cry out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" The Father handed to Him this cup of suffering and "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

This is why we need to remember our suffering and hold the cross of Christ ever before our eyes. The Almighty God was willing to pay any price to solve the problem of evil for you. Amen.