

Old New Questions (9): Where in the World Is God?

I. Introduction

- A. Two weeks ago, man walked down aisle of First Baptist church in Maryville, IL
1. Pastor Fred Winters stopped and asked Terry Sedlacek if he needed help
 - a. Sedlacek pulled out .45 auto and began to fire at the preacher
 - b. Winters deflected first shot with his Bible (*great story if it ended there*)
 - c. It didn't; Sedlacek fired 3 more shots & Winters died on way to hospital
 2. Where in the world was God when all of this was happening... in church?
 - a. If the Bible could stop the first shot, why didn't it stop all the shots?
 - b. If the gun could jam after 4 shots, why didn't it jam after one shot?
 - c. If members wrestled the man down to stop more killing, why didn't God
 3. Google "*Where was God*" and get one question for many subjects (*1st page*)
 - a. Some involve natural disaster—Katrina and Indian Ocean Tsunami
 - b. Some are manmade disasters—Sept 11, Va Tech shooting, the Holocaust
 - c. Some are more private and personal tsunamis-- suicide 13 yr old Jared
- B. The songs we sang this morning uplifted and praised God as the Almighty.
1. In fact, one of the names of God is El Shaddai, Almighty (**Gen 17:1-2**)
 - a. God is the Almighty in whose shadow we can rest (**Psalms 91:1-2**)
 - b. But is the world always feel like a place where we are sheltered and safe?
 2. Doesn't the more often feel like a place "*when darkness reigns*" (**Lk 22:53**)
- C. Today is the last lesson in our series of lessons on "Old-New Questions"
1. These are questions everyone once knew the answer... then world changed
 2. Questions today is one believers and unbelievers have asked for centuries
- D. David Hume suggested an "*Inconsistent Triad*" that disproved God's existence
1. Why does evil exist? Where in the world is God in midst of all this evil
 - a. If God really is God Almighty, he should be able to get rid of evil
 - b. If God is a God of love, then God would want to get rid of evil
 2. In the face of such evil and horror in the world, where in the world is God?

II. Toward an Answer: Some Definitions

- A. Bible proclaims that God is God Almighty— God can do anything ([Reading](#))
(*Genesis 18:14, Job 42:2, Jeremiah 32:17, Jeremiah 32:27, Matthew 19:26, Luke 1:37*)
1. Does that mean God can do anything? *What about logically impossible?*
 - a. Can God make a round square? Can he make a rock so big he can't lift?
 - b. Pancake so flat it has one side? Car with interior bigger than exterior?
 2. God can't do what can't be done even with unlimited power (round square)
 - a. And there is something else that God can't do— he can't lie ([Titus 1:2](#))
 - b. God can't be unloving (*God is love*) or be unrighteous (*God is Holy*)
 3. Almighty God can't (1) *violate His nature* or (2) *do logically impossible*
- B. OK, that is all *really* fascinating, but what does it mean and why should we care
1. This understanding of God Almighty is crucial in understanding evil.
 - a. When God created humans in His image, he could have done 2 things
 - 1) He could have created us with free will and the ability to choose evil.
 - 2) Or God could have created us without free will and incapable of evil.
 - b. But He couldn't **both** give us free will **and** assure we not choose evil
 - 1) That's a logical impossibility—just like making a round square.
 - 2) Evil came into the world when we rebelled against God—it still does
 2. The evil that we see in the world is the result of free will gone very wrong
 - a. When Terry Sedlacek shot Fred Winters, he was making a moral choice
 - 1) The tragic result was that Winters died and his family suffers
 - 2) Sometimes because of prayer and providence, God does step in
 - 3) If God routinely prevented consequences of evil chose—not free
 - b. C. S. Lewis imagines a world with no consequences of evil choices
We can, perhaps, conceive of a world in which God corrected the results of this abuse of free will by His creatures at every moment: so that a wooden beam became soft as grass when it was used as a weapon, and the air refused to obey me if I attempted to set up in it the sound waves that carry lies or insults. (p. 33)
 - c. **Lewis:** if there are no consequences for our evil choice, we aren't free
 3. That means that the evil in the world is really the result of God's goodness
 - a. What? Yes, the gift of freedom of will and choice was a good gift
 - b. The evil we see in the world is the consequence of our misused gift!
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- C. But does that *totally* explain evil? Much of our suffering seems more random
1. OK, we can all see that Sept 11th was the result of evil men (“*evildoers*”)
 - a. What about Tsunami? Katrina? Disasters insurance calls “*act of God.*”
 - 1) We’ll not mention the merits of building a city below sea level.
 - 2) Horrific natural disasters seem to have nothing to do with human sin.
 - b. Why does God allow what we could call “*natural evil*” to take place?
 2. God made the world subject to natural laws; the only alternative is chaos
 - a. Sometimes those laws can cause harm to people in wrong place/time
 - 1) Hurricanes distribute weather; earthquakes relieve pressure in crust
 - 2) Those are necessary things... and tragic if we are in the wrong place
 - b. People suffer and that is tragic; but not evil. That’s the way the world is
 3. When I was in college, a friend died when his plane crashed into woods
 - a. Everyone was devastated, and we ended up discussing it in a class
 - b. Someone ask, “Why can’t metal repel wood; plane wouldn’t crash”
 - c. Professor smiled, “That’d work... til you needed to cut down a tree”
- D. So we may suffer, in words of Bruce Hornsby, “*That’s just the way it is.*”
1. But one another level, even that is the result of human choice and sin
 - a. Paul tells us that death came into the world because of sin (**Rom 5:12**)
 - b. Paul further says all creation was affected by the fall (**Rom 8:20-22**, NLT)
 - 1) We look at the world as it is now and say, “*That’s just the way it is*”
 - 2) God says, “*But that is not how it was, and that is not how it will be*”
 - c. So even floods, tornados, earthquakes are brokenness of fallen world
 2. We may want someone to blame for suffering in world, but it isn’t God!
- E. Just as we point to benefits of hurricanes, God can use suffering to bless us
1. God doesn’t directly cause suffering, but He can use it in powerful ways
 - a. Suffering can be used by God as discipline to make us strong (**Heb 12:7**)
 - b. Suffering can teach us humility and openness to God (**2 Cor 12:7-10**)
 - c. Suffering tests our character and gives opportunity to grow (**Rom 5:3-4**)
 - d. Ultimately, suffering can make God’s reality more real (**Job 42:5**)
 2. Suffering isn’t from God, but He can use it to bless us for good (**Rom 8:28**)

III. Conclusion

- A. So where in the world is God when bad things happen to good people?
1. He is on throne and with His people, “*the Holy One among you*” (**Hos 11:9**)
 - a. Suffering doesn’t take place because God is not good, but because He is
 - b. He blessed us with freedom—the freedom to choose, the freedom to love
 - 1) But that means we are also free to choose evil and we free to hate
 - 2) Sin has consequences—without consequences, there is no freedom
 2. Ultimately, all human suffering happens because of consequences of sin
 - a. It may be consequence of our sinful choice (*drug user with hepatitis*)
 - b. It may be consequence of another’s choice (*drunk driver who kills*)
 - c. It may be the consequence of a world that is broken by the fall
- B. I think this may move us in direction of answering, “*Where in world is God?*”
1. But does it help comfort someone who is in the middle of suffering?
 - a. Is one who lost a loved one comforted by “*that’s just the way it is?*”
 - b. Is one facing extended illness put at ease by choice and consequence?
 - c. Is one trying to deal with tragedy reassured that we live in broken world?
 2. No, it’s not our **head** asking, “*Where in the world is God?*” It’s our **heart!**
 - a. We must work through these issues before our world tumbles in.
 - b. Remember, Job’s friends were a comfort until they started talking!
 - 1) When in the middle of the storm, we don’t need explanations
 - 2) What we need are people willing to struggle alongside us
 3. And that is precisely what God does for us and with us at the cross
 - a. We know that God does not remain aloof and untouched by suffering
 - b. In Jesus, God fully identifies with us in our weakness and struggle
 - 1) Like us, Jesus “*learned obedience from what he suffered*” (**Heb 5:8**)
 - 2) And like us, Jesus was overwhelmed by his suffering (**Matt 27:46**)
 - c. Where in the world is God when we suffer? He suffers with us
- C. There is one answer for the problem of evil... it’s in the shape of a cross!