

## Introduction:

1. It is one of the things that most often cause people to question their faith.
  2. It is one of the things that atheists wish to bring up frequently to deny that there is a God.
  3. It is something that many religious people through the years would not address.
  4. It is the reality of pain and suffering in this present world.
  5. If God exists, and He is all-powerful, why does He allow bad things to happen to good people?
    - a. A book was written by a Jewish rabbi after his son went into drugs and eventually killed himself – “Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?”
    - b. His conclusion revealed a startling lack of faith: He said that God could not stop these things from happening because God does not have enough power.
    - c. The question alone assumes that people who live good, moral lives should have ZERO sicknesses, diseases, or problems in their lives.
    - d. The question also assumes that all people who do bad things should instantly be cursed with the plague or death.
    - e. We know that neither of these things describe the reality.
  6. Is there a purpose behind pain and suffering?
    - a. Is there a reason why children get sick or are born with terrible diseases?
    - b. Is there a reason why good, faithful Christians are struck with loss of life or family?
  7. To many, this is simply a confusing topic which is ignored because they cannot take their faith being tested.
  8. To others, this topic is ignored because “God knows best.”
    - a. They act as if all the bad things which happen are the result of God’s plan.
    - b. “If a child dies, God wanted it that way.”
    - c. “If a lost soul dies in his 20’s, God planned it.”
    - d. Do you realize that such a stance accuses God of being responsible for all the evils which exist on this planet?
  9. Today we will look at the various causes of physical pain and suffering, and how they fit in God’s grand plan.
- I. Pain and Suffering exists because of our own personal choices.
- A. Since mankind has free-will to make their own choices, we cannot honestly blame God when our choices have unwanted consequences.
  - B. Adam and Eve were given a choice: eat of the fruit and suffer, or leave the fruit alone and live (Genesis 2-3).
    1. Eve, along with Adam, made a conscious choice to go against what God had commanded them.
    2. As a direct result of their choice, they became subject to death.
    3. As a result of their choice, they were exposed to the elements outside of the garden.
    4. As a result of their choice, Adam would have to labor hard and Eve would have “pain in childbearing.”
    5. Truly, their pain and suffering was brought on by their own choices.
  - C. Josiah, the greatest Hebrew king (spiritually speaking-II Kings 23:25) that ever lived, had a choice to make: Let Judah’s constant enemy, the Egyptian Pharaoh Necho, pass through the land to make war with the Babylonians, or to fight against him (II Chronicles 35:20-25).
    1. The Egyptian king was travelling through Judah to fight.
    2. Josiah went out to stop him.

3. Pharaoh Necho said, "I'm not coming to fight you, but the Babylonians. God told me to hurry, so don't interfere."
  4. Instead, Josiah made the choice to disguise himself and fight against the Pharaoh anyway, even though Necho indeed spoke the words from God (II Chronicles 35:22).
  5. Because of his own choice, Josiah was mortally wounded.
- D. Pain and suffering can come today because of our own personal choices.
1. The teenager who goes out drinking and then gets in a wreck which paralyzes him for life caused his own pain and suffering by his choices.
  2. The person who does drugs and then suffers great medical problems later in life as a result of them can only blame himself for the consequences (smoking and lung cancer).
  3. The person who commits a crime and then moans because he is wasting away in prison has only to look at his own choices.
  4. Perhaps you've said or thought "I hope that doesn't come back to bite me."
- II. Pain and Suffering exists because of the choices of other people.
- A. Perhaps this is one of the harder things for people to accept, because it means that there are certain things that are out of our hands.
1. Most people like to be able to be in control of situations.
  2. However, like it or not, we are sometimes adversely affected by the choices others make.
  3. People do not mind when they are affected in a good way from someone else's actions (someone giving them a gift), but they then want to turn and blame God if someone else's actions affect them in a negative way (a car crash, for example).
- B. David, the Israelite king to whom all others were compared, made a choice which affected others (II Samuel 11-12).
1. Instead of making the choice to avert his eyes, he lusted after Bathsheba.
  2. His choice affected Bathsheba, causing her to commit adultery.
  3. His choice also affected Bathsheba's husband, ultimately ending in his death.
  4. His choice also affected the child that he had with Bathsheba, which died after only a week.
  5. Had David made the choice to avert his eyes and follow God's plan, Bathsheba would not have been caused to sin, her husband would not have been sent to the front lines to die, and there would have been no dying child!
- C. Hezekiah the king made a choice which affected the entire kingdom of Judah (II Kings 20).
1. Hezekiah had been sick to the point of death, but God granted him another 15 years.
  2. Some Babylonian ambassadors came congratulating the king on his recovery, and the king made the choice to show off every treasure in the kingdom.
    - a. He showed where all the treasuries of the temple were kept.
    - b. He showed all the treasures of the king's house.
    - c. He showed the Babylonians the armory of Judah.
  3. In doing this, Hezekiah said that all of these things were "MY treasures" (20:15).
    - a. He chose to be prideful about these things instead of giving God the glory for blessing Judah.

4. His choice to expose all of these things led to a very easy and complete Babylonian victory against Judah some years later.
    - a. The Babylonians knew what treasure there was in Judah, and eventually took it all.
    - b. They knew what kind of weapons, and how many, existed in Israel, and therefore knew what size army would have been needed.
    - c. The entirety of Judah (except for some extremely poor people left to take care of the land) was made slaves in Babylon.
    - d. Even Hezekiah's own descendants were made eunuchs (20:18, see Daniel 1-2).
  5. The enslavement of an entire nation was the result of the choice of one of her kings to be prideful.
- D. The same situations exist today.
1. 6,000,000 Jews (and countless others) died as the result of one man's (Adolph Hitler) choices.
  2. Someone decides to drive while they are intoxicated and hits an innocent family, causing death or life-long injury. That family did not make the choice, but they were indeed affected by it.
  3. A woman decides to drink or do drugs while she is with child, and then the child is born with birth defects as a result. That child did nothing wrong to cause it to suffer.
  4. The government decides to enact laws which raise taxes which puts people out of a job to where they struggle to provide for their family. It was not through their own choice that they suffer.
  5. Indeed, pain and suffering can exist as a result of other people's choices.
- III. Pain and Suffering can exist for our betterment.
- A. We have many phrases which encompass this idea today.
1. "That which does not kill us, makes us stronger."
  2. "No pain, no gain."
  3. "trial by fire" (meaning to purify and strengthen us).
- B. Manasseh, the worst king in the history of Judah, experienced pain and suffering which led to his betterment.
1. This wicked king had corrupted the entire nation to the point of offering human sacrifices (II Kings 21:6, 16).
  2. God sent His messengers, the prophets, to Manasseh trying to get him to repent, but he would not (II Chronicles 33:10).
  3. Manasseh was taken in chains by the Assyrian armies and carried away as a common prisoner (II Chronicles 33:11).
  4. During his affliction, Manasseh was caused to think about God and all the things which he had done against the Almighty One.
  5. This pain and suffering of being in prison caused the king to humble himself before God and pray to Him for forgiveness (II Chronicles 33:12-13).
  6. After returning to Jerusalem, Manasseh sought to undo everything wicked he had previously done, destroying the idols and altars which he had built, commanding the people to worship the LORD God of Israel (II Chronicles 33:13-16).
  7. His suffering led to his betterment.
- C. James, the brother of Jesus Christ, expressed this thought very clearly.

1. James 1:2-3 – My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations [the word here means trials], knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.
  2. When we have difficulties and endure through them, they allow us to build patience and confidence in God.
  3. As we go through more trials in life, our faith will grow and be perfect, complete, or mature (James 1:4).
- D. Today, we have the same experiences.
1. How many of you can look back on your lives and see that certain difficult events prepared you for things later on in life?
  2. Enduring hardships helps us to become spiritually stronger, emotionally stronger.
  3. Even in the physical this is true:
    - a. You have to train your body, which can be quite difficult.
  4. Fasting was called “afflicting your souls”, yet it was done to strengthen the people.
  5. Sometimes we have pain and suffering in order to make us stronger Christians.
  6. Sometimes we have pain and suffering so that we can help others later who are dealing with the same problems.
- IV. Pain and Suffering exists sometimes because of Divine retribution.
- A. With this one, we must tread lightly, because we are not God.
1. Since we are not God, we cannot know what things are results of His direct action, and what things are simply permitted to occur.
  2. Some people stated that Hurricane Katrina was sent by God to New Orleans because of a homosexual festival that they were having in that city.
  3. Others said the attacks on 9/11 happened because of things like taking prayer out of the schools.
  4. As we look through the Scriptures, we can see instances of Divine retribution carried out on those who were in stubborn rebellion to God. So, such actions have existed.
  5. However, we must remember that since we are not God, and God does not send out emails to people saying, “Oh, by the way, I did this as a punishment for such and such...” we cannot say for sure that something is punishment sent from Above.
  6. However, we must be willing to accept that it is a possibility.
- B. The inhabitants of the world were destroyed because of Divine retribution.
1. Every thought of man’s heart was on doing wickedness (Genesis 6:5).
  2. As a result, God destroyed every one of them (except Noah’s family) with a massive rainstorm and flood.
- C. The inhabitants of Canaan were destroyed because of their sinfulness.
1. When Abraham was going through the land, God said the inhabitants’ iniquity was “not yet full” (Genesis 15:16).
  2. By the time Joshua led the people into the Promised Land, those who inhabited the land were being cast out because of their uninhibited sinfulness (Deuteronomy 12:29-32, Joshua 24:11-15).
- D. Two of Judah’s sons were wicked and killed “by the Lord” (Genesis 38:7, 10).
- E. The entire Israelite nation was made slaves to ruthless people.

1. The northern half was captured by the Assyrians because of Divine retribution (II Kings 17:7-18).
2. The southern half was captured by the Babylonians because of Divine retribution (II Chronicles 36:11-21).
- F. Ananias and Sapphira sinned and were put to death by God for their wickedness (Acts 5:1-11).
- V. Sometimes pain and suffering happens as we seek to defeat Satan.
  - A. Though we have not time to cover this topic in-depth in this sermon, let it be said that sometimes pain and suffering exists as a temptation to leave God behind.
    1. Satan approached God saying that he was having his way with all the people of the world, even God's own people (Job 1:6-7).
    2. God said, "have you considered my servant Job?" (1:8).
    3. As the book unfolds, God allows Satan to cause Job untold pain and anguish, losing all of his possessions and children until all he has left is a vindictive wife and three friends who accuse him of being a terrible sinner.
    4. What was the purpose of this pain and suffering of Job?
      - a. Job did not know, because he proclaimed his innocence in all things.
      - b. However, the answer is given to us in Job 1- God and Satan are at war, and the battles are fought on the battleground of individual souls.
      - c. In the battle for Job's heart, God most obviously won.
  - B. If everything was perfect and wonderful, there is no choice to be made.
    1. What kind of victory could God claim if there was no possibility of choosing the other side?
    2. God expects His people to choose Him, through good times and bad.
    3. Ecclesiastes 12:13 – fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole of man (it is man's entire reason for being here is to do God's commands).
    4. We were created to do the good works of God (Ephesians 2:10).
    5. We have been completely furnished to do all of those things by God through the Scriptures (II Timothy 3:16-17).
    6. Who is winning the battle in your life?
      - a. Do you let the trials and tribulations which you experience keep you from fully depending on God?
      - b. Or do you take those things which are thrown at you and use them to make you stronger?
- VI. Pain and Suffering exists to help us appreciate the joys of heaven.
  - A. If there were no pain and suffering on earth, what allure would heaven hold?
    1. Heaven is described as a place prepared for the faithful where they will be victorious (Revelation 2:10).
    2. Heaven is a place in God's house, prepared by Jesus Christ for us (John 14:1-3).
    3. But if everything were great here on earth, what motivation would we have to go to heaven?
  - B. If there were no pain and suffering on earth, what motivation would we have to live right?
    1. If there are no consequences for sin, why live a godly life?
    2. We long to be out of this physical body and in heaven with God where there is no more pain and suffering, no temptation.
  - C. It is only by this contrast that we can see the unspeakable joys of "no tears in heaven."

Conclusion:

1. Though we might not understand why exactly we are having pain and suffering (Deuteronomy 29:29), rest assured there are reasons for it.
  - A. It may be that others' actions caused it.
  - B. It may be that we caused it ourselves.
  - C. It DOES help us appreciate heaven.
  - D. It IS designed to strengthen us and give us patience.
  - E. Our reaction to it determines who wins on the battleground of our souls: God or Satan.
2. We all have pain and suffering in our lives, but if we will look to God and trust Him, we can get through every one of them.
3. It is up to you how you deal with these events in your life.
  2. Will you let them destroy your faith?
  3. Or will you overcome them and let them strengthen your faith?
4. The choice is yours.