

2 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted



She's an intelligent, successful career woman and writer, deeply burdened for the poor and disenfranchised people of the world. She uses her considerable resources to help them. I'd been so eager to introduce her to Jesus. We were on a ferry, crossing the Strait of Juan de Fuca to Seattle, sitting in a booth in the café when I broached the subject again.

She looked at me, with eyes full of pain, and said, “Libby, I’d rather believe in no god at all, than to believe in a God who lets innocent people suffer.”

Her cry is echoed by a million souls who have lived tormented in this broken world. And it deserves an honest answer.

My first thought was, “It doesn't really matter what we would *like* to believe. What we *want* to believe doesn't change what the truth actually is.”

God is. We know He exists. If for no other reason, even if we didn't have a reliable written record, we know He is God because His power and godhead are revealed in His creation, as Romans chapter one says so clearly.

So the only question is, what kind of God is He? Why is there so much suffering and evil in this world? If God is truly God, He has the power to stop evil and pain. Why doesn't He?

What Causes Pain and Evil?

1. We know that God created this universe with great joy. God actually described to Job the emotions He felt at creation: “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?” (Job 38:4-7)

Proverbs 8:27-31 expresses the delight Jesus felt in the creation process:

“When He prepared the heavens, I was there, when He drew a circle on the face of the deep, when He established the clouds above, when He strengthened the fountains of the deep, when He assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters would not transgress His command, when He marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside Him as a master craftsman; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him, rejoicing in His inhabited world, and my delight was with the sons of men.”

So God found great joy when created the heavens and the earth for the human beings He loved. When God surveyed His finished creation, what did He announce? (Genesis 1:31)

2. So what happened? We know from experience, and the Bible tells us, that we now live in a broken world. What damaged it? The choices human beings made!

God yearned for companionship, for friendship, with people who would love Him and whom He would love.

(That's difficult to comprehend, that the Almighty, All-Sufficient God longs to have fellowship with human beings, but it is the truth, stated innumerable times in Scripture.)

But if these human beings created by God were to have an honest, deliberate choice about loving Him, God could not coerce them to love Him. He couldn't "program" love into their hearts. They had to be able to make the choice to love Him or not. They had to choose.

3. We learned in the last lesson concerning Psalm 8, God made us "a little lower than the angels" or, more accurate and faithful to the Hebrew text, "a little lower than God." Given the choice to love their Creator/God or not, what did human beings choose? (Genesis 3:6)

Adam and Eve rejected God's love and authority. Instead, they took Satan's slimy, subtle offer to let them choose for themselves what is right or wrong, to be their own gods!

God, in His mercy and grief, drove Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden, lest they eat of the tree of life and live forever. He was being merciful, because the consequences of sin are so lethal to the human body, living forever would mean blindness, deafness, paralysis, decay. And the earth itself was cursed.

4. But we can't put all the blame on Adam and Eve, because every single one of us have made the same terrible

choice. We too have sinned. What was the result of that choice? (Romans 5:12,14)

(I have to interrupt this terrible line of thought to remind you of the good news in the very next verse: “But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many” (Romans 5:15).

This battered earth is the consequence of sin.

5. So how does God feel now toward His creation that He created with such joy? (Romans 8:19-22)

God “subjected” the earth, let it be broken, not because He was angry, not because He gave up on us, but He subjected it “in hope.” Redemption and restoration are coming!

The Scripture continues, “Because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.”

Psalm 82:5 says that all the foundations of the earth itself are unstable.

But our predicament did not catch God unawares. He had already resolved the terrible dilemma of loving His

creatures, but obligated to punish them for their sin, long before He even created the world. What was that solution? (1 Peter 1:18-20)

How did Jesus make the atonement for our sin?(Isaiah 53:3-7).

But God must deal with our sin, as a loving father must deal with the misdeeds of his children. He does it with the same compassion and reluctance a father feels when he must discipline a wayward child. How does Lamentations 3:31-33 express God's heart about our afflictions?

6. We may misunderstand this. The suffering Job certainly did. In Job 16:9, 13, 21, he cried, "He [God] tears me in His wrath, and hates me. . . He pierces my heart and does not pity . . . Oh, that one might plead for a man with God, as a man pleads for his neighbor!"

When I lost my dear husband of 66 years, I could not stop weeping. I was ashamed of my tears, because God had given me such a wonderful man, for such a long time. He left me in a safe financial situation. I should have been glad that his suffering was at last over, and that he was resting in the presence of Jesus. I am surrounded by loving family and friends. But day after day, I could not stop the flow of tears.

Finally I said to Him in agony, “God, I’m so ashamed of crying all the time. Please forgive me.”

And I thought I heard His sweet voice in answer, “Libby, I’m crying with you.”

John chapter 11 tells us Jesus wept at the death of Lazarus, wept even when He knew He was going to raise him from the dead. He wept because of our tears. He mingles His tears with ours.

What did King David ask God to remember? (Psalm 56:8)

Every disappointment, every fear, every loss we have ever faced, Jesus experienced it as well. “For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted” (Hebrews 2:18). He endured every loss; He can help us for whatever reason we mourn.

Hebrews 4:15,16 expands this. Why is it that Jesus can sympathize with us in our troubles?

And because Jesus has endured every temptation, what are we to do when we are in terrible need? (Hebrews 4:15,16)

I take heart when God tells me I have a right to walk right past the guardian angels and stride right into His holy presence, boldly, without fear. He wants to give me mercy and grace. Those are not just beautiful words. These are the very Word of Almighty God, who tells us to run to Him, climb into His lap, and tell Him all our griefs.

7. Yes, we live in a broken world. We suffer the consequences of the sins of others. . . . betrayal by someone we trusted. . . loneliness. . . alienation. . . illness. . . the death of someone very precious to us. The deeper our love, the greater our grief will be. But what does Psalm 34:18 promise?

Why, did Jesus say, He came to earth? (Luke 4:18,19)

What does Psalm 30:5 reminds us?

So, says First Peter 5:7, we are to “Cast all your care upon Him because He cares for you.” In this broken, disappointing world, we are to "throw" those heavy burdens on Him.

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear” (Psalm 46:1). That word *very* is translated "utterly," "quickly," "at once," elsewhere in Scripture. He is here with you, right now. He is present, poised and eager to act on your behalf. He is a very present help in trouble.

8. Yes, you mourn. You may not yet be comforted. First Corinthians 7:29-31 says, "Let me say this, dear brothers and sisters. The time that remains is very short. So from now on . . . Those who weep or who rejoice or who buy things should not be absorbed by their weeping or their joy or their possessions. . . For this world as we know it will soon pass

away." This seems to tell us we don't have to be paralyzed in our grief, that we can still do God's work while we mourn.

9. And while you wait for God, rest in these two precious promises:

“Let the beloved of the LORD rest secure in Him, for He shields him all day long, and the one the LORD loves rests between His shoulders. . . . The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”

Deuteronomy 33:12,27

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”

2 Corinthians 1:3,4

I grieve for my losses and sins,
but God grieves with me and He will comfort me.