

Evil - John 1:9-13
Notes, Family Worship, Bible Reading

Notes from the Sermon

In my childhood years my parents played a card game called Rook. It was similarly to playing Spades, but the deck was a little different, with four colors of numbered cards and one card that had an ugly bird in the center that was the “Rook card”. This card was the highest trump card in any hand, so you had to be strategic when you had it. But laying that card on the table won the hand, nothing could beat it. Many who don’t believe or who are walking away from the faith believe they have a Rook card when they drop the question of evil and suffering on the table. One person in our church heard it like this, “How could a loving God who knows that millions of children are starving not do something about it?”

The first thing we need to do is acknowledge that this is a deep and difficult question. Neither a short (OK, not so short) sermon today or a cup of coffee discussion with a friend will not sufficiently answer this question. The best Christian philosophers throughout history have engaged this question and we need to know that all attempts at an answer are complex and leave other questions. Second, this question actual hits our humanity in two dimensions. There is the intellectual question for which we seek Biblical and philosophical answers. But this question also hits our humanity on an emotional level because we as humans are deeply affected by the evil in the world around us. And the effects of evil in the world hurt, often deeply, as death and suffering often are the most present reality in our lives.

But the question of evil and suffering are far from the Rook card for us. Often when engaging these discussions a person will raise the question of evil like this:

- A perfectly powerful being can prevent any evil.
- A perfectly good being will prevent evil as far as he can.
- God is perfectly powerful and good.
- So, if a perfectly powerful and good God exists, there will be no evil.
- There is evil.
- Therefore, God doesn't exist.

Therefore, we feel obligated to defend the existence of God in a world where evil definitely exists. And we should. But we can also go on the offense, asking the questioner how he or she seeks to answer the question. Here is the reality, while the Christian answer is complex and difficult, it is still the best, most rational, and most fulfilling answer to the question. A person who leaves the faith over this question will not embrace a worldview with a better answer, actually they will end up running to places that have absolutely no hope nor any solution to this question.

John pushes us again to the incarnation, the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us as the answer to both why evil exists and the hopeful answer God has to this question. First, we are reminded that the core problem in the world is that Jesus is God, and therefore creator of all, yet the world does not know Him. We were created by God, for God, to live in intimate relationship with God, yet because of sin the world has had its relationship with this creator severed.

What exactly is evil? It is my belief that evil is a thing that is actually no thing. Of course, evil exists, and we are deeply affected by both moral and natural evil. But evil is not something in and of itself, it is actually the absence of something. John uses a couple metaphors to help us get this. He speaks in terms of light and darkness, life and death. Darkness and death are real things, but really they are no thing. Darkness is actually just the absence of light. Death is the absence of life. In the same way, what we call evil is really the absence of something. Our first response is to say that it is the absence of good, but the Scriptures push us further, to see that evil is actually the abscess of God, His glory and grace at work and on display. Evil exists where the knowledge and glory of God are shadowed by humanity that places itself in the place of God and creates an eclipse to the light of God’s presence. We are cut off from the One who said, “Let there be light.” The relationship with the

One who breathed the breath of life into Adam's nostrils has been broken. So the human heart is turned in on itself, and the creation that was under our dominion is now cursed. This is evil, the shadows in this world obscuring the glory of Jesus.

But the text also tells us how it is fixed. It's interesting how the more enlightened our culture believes it has become the more terrifying the human condition grows. The more we try to be the solution to how to fix the evils of the world, the more of a mess we make of it. Politics and human progress seem to be having negative energy on the human soul, and can't do anything about a world with devastating tornadoes. But the story of the Gospel is that God came Himself and entered the evil world, and all through His life seemed to submit Himself humbly to every form of evil, all the way to His death. But the humble life and violent death of Jesus led to the resurrection and the declaration that evil has been defeated and will not have the final say. No other worldview can give you this hope!

Bible Reading for the Week

Daily Bible Readings

Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Isaiah 18	Isaiah 19	Isaiah 20	Isaiah 21	Isaiah 22	Isaiah 23	Isaiah 24

Reading from this past week: John 1:9-13

Reading in preparation for this coming Sunday: John 1:1-14

Family Worship

Song - *He Who is Mighty*

<https://youtu.be/Jbo3tjoazww>

Gospel Project

Unit: Out of Egypt

Story: God delivered His people.

Big Picture Question: Does God keep His promises?

Answer: Yes, God always keeps His promises because He is faithful.

Scripture: Exodus 5-12

New City Catechism

Question #50: What does Christ's resurrection mean for us?

Answer: Christ triumphed over sin and death so that all who trust in him are raised to new life in this world and to everlasting life in the world to come.

Verse: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

Scripture

John 1:9-13

- What is evil? Why do you think there is so much evil in the world?
- How would you answer someone who said they cannot believe in God because of all the evil in the world (see the example above)?
- How does the Gospel and the incarnation engage this question in a way that offers us hope that nobody else can find?
- Why is the existence and ministry of the church to be part of the answer to this question in the world at this time? What can we do to be the hands, feet, and heart of Jesus in an evil world?

Prayer

*Pray for those who find Christmas difficult due to their struggle, doubt, and loss during the holiday season.

*During this week of Advent, pray that we would find true joy, not just fading happiness, but lasting joy experienced through knowing Jesus deeply.