

WHY DO THE WICKED PROSPER?

ser3978 When Life Sucks, Pt 2
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Last week, we began our sermon series called, “When Life Sucks,” with Pastor Bruce in a sermon entitled, “**Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?**” Truly this is one of the most commonly asked questions, not just within Christian circles, but really every form of religion and philosophy since the dawn of time.

The opposite question that seems to be just as common and that is, “**Why do good things happen to bad people?**” We may have all asked this at one time or the other, right? This is especially true when we have worked really hard at our jobs, doing the best we can and we see the guy who steals and cheats move ahead of us. Or the husband or wife who did all they could to make sure their spouse was happy and tried to be the best they could be in their relationship, only to be cheated on. To make matters worse, their ex is in a seemingly better, longer lasting relationship than they were with you.

Maybe you were counting on God to come through for you, but things did not turn out the way you had expected. Then you see an atheist who scoffs at God is doing great. You begin to wonder, “**Why follow God when those who don't follow Him do better in life?**”

In response to these questions, I’ve titled this week’s sermon in the form of a question: “Why Do the Wicked Prosper?” Is it

true that the “good people” of the world suffer the most and the “bad people” of the world seem to get away with everything and have better lives? Or do the righteous really have victory over the world?

It seems that Christians believe it to be both ways and their belief changes with their **perception** in the moment. Let’s look at the word for a moment:

*Psalm 1: 1-3 (ESV) Blessed is the man who walks **not** in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night. **In all that he does, he prospers.***

Wow, when I read this, I’m filled with confidence that if I walk a Godly path, my life will be more prosperous.

But then we read;

*Psalm 73:1-3 I had nearly lost my foothold. **For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.***

This psalm was written by a guy named **Asaph** and it explains our perception. We see celebrities, sports figures and business owners who seem successful and happy, but they also seem to be far from godly. This causes us to become frustrated that they have “everything” and we don't.

That is exactly where Asaph was. In his psalm, he states that he almost turned to the world because of his **perception**. But

then we get to verses 16-17...

*When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply till I entered the sanctuary of God; then **I understood their final destiny.***

You see, on the surface, there IS a benefit to being unrighteous. To live a life without rules reaps temporary rewards. If I steal, I will have money that I didn't have. If I cheat, I will advance myself to a winning position even though I didn't earn it. But it is just that. **It is temporary.** It could be a short time, it could be a long time. But the time will come when their ultimate destiny is ruin.

As for us, we want the ungodly to see the consequence of their faithlessness in this world, especially when there is an offense. Then we want justice right away, right when the offense occurs. We want our ex-spouse to call and say **"Hey, look. My new wife cheated on me, too. Now I understand and I just want to say I'm sorry."** Or we want the boss to call us into his office and say, **"Look, we realize that you were the right candidate for the job all along, not the bad person we promoted."** That seldom, if ever, happens and certainly not as immediately as we want it. **And because it doesn't, our perception makes us believe that the wicked win.**

Why are we so quick to see things this way, with this perception? It's because we were led to believe, since we were young, in a belief system called **Retribution Theology.** Retribution theology is the idea that **since God is just, He sees to it that the good people get good things in life, and**

the bad people get bad things. God punishes people in this world in direct response to their actions.

Retribution theology says, for example, if you get sick, it's a sign that God is punishing you for something bad you've done. If your business prospers, it's a sign that God is pleased with you. **In other words, we often (myself included) equate misfortune with short-comings.**

The danger comes when we don't see what we think should happen. It shakes our faith. We start wondering, "*I thought God was just. Why isn't He doing anything about this?*" We almost become embarrassed for God because of His inaction.

I believe the reason we fall victim to this doctrine is its similarity to another similar and very popular belief: ***Karma***.

This philosophy has been a part of most religions of the world including Buddhism, Hinduism, Satanism, Witchcraft and, unfortunately, compromising Christianity.

Think of it. Karma also says that your actions determine the good and the bad that happens to you in this life and in that which follows, the afterlife. (What goes around comes around.) I must tell you, this is 100% unbiblical.

For instance:

The blind man's sin

When Jesus' disciples saw a man born blind, they asked, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2). (retribution theology / Karma) Jesus destroyed this

thinking in **verse 3**: *“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened **so that the works of God might be displayed in him.**”*

Paul's shipwreck

When the ship carrying Paul was shipwrecked on the island of Malta, the apostle gathered sticks to help build a fire on the shore. As he threw some sticks into the flames, a viper came out and bit his hand. Immediately, the islanders assumed they knew why:

Acts 28:4 *They said to each other, “This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, the goddess Justice has not allowed him to live.”*

The islanders believed in retribution theology, but they were wrong about Paul.

Tower of Siloam

Luke 13: 1-5 *Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them – do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”*

World Trade Center

A modern example would be the World Trade Center, where in 2001, 2,606 people died. Do we think that they were all evil? Or, were they all good and the wicked weren't there and therefore prospered? Obviously not.

Approximately 11,000 people died in natural disasters in 2019, which ranked among the ten years with the lowest number of disaster-related deaths since 1950. The deadliest natural disaster of 2019 was the monsoon flooding in **India**, which killed an estimated 1,750 people. Do we think that they were all evil? Or, were they all good and the wicked weren't there and therefore prospered? Obviously not.

***Matthew 5:45** says it all: He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.*

There is No Retribution Theology. There is no Karma.

There is simply nothing you can do to make God love you more. There is nothing you could have done to make him love you less. Therefore, there is nothing you can do to ensure that you will have a life without suffering. **There is simply no overall pattern of what happens to people.**

Of course, we reap what we sow. If I don't use drugs, I may live longer than someone who does. If I eat right and exercise, I may live a longer, more satisfying life. Or...maybe not.

The fact is, God will not be put into a box where we make Him

fit our perception of what is just and when it is to be administered. In other words, if we do this, He automatically does that.

The truth is, every religion has tried to find patterns and ways to escape suffering. They all want you to believe that they have the answer to navigating through life, pain free.

The purpose of religious practice and various schools of **Hinduism**, for instance, is to resolve human suffering. Yet India has 212 million undernourished people. Over 7,000 people of India die of hunger every day (including 3,000 children).

Buddhism doesn't have the answer although it began by observing human suffering, but even the enlightened Buddha could only answer it by denying attachments and desire. He taught his followers to live life without living life, to outpace the tragedy.

Witchcraft, pantheism, the New Age Movement teach "unity with nature." Yet nature is no friend of man from sunburn to hurricanes. Nature is deadly.

Atheism teaches self-sufficiency. Yet the celebrated mechanism to make evolution happen is based on suffering. They call it survival of the fittest.

Here's the truth. Only the Bible gives us an answer.

*Jesus said in **John 16:33** "I have told you all this so that you may*

*have **peace in me.** Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."*

When we see the wicked prosper, it's ok. Jesus, Himself, was wronged. He was falsely accused. He was punished for something He didn't do by the wickedest of men. And yet, He overcame it by saying, "**Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do.**"

The enemy of this world would have you take a different approach. He tries to neutralize and render you ineffective for the Kingdom of God. One of his strategies is to accuse God of being a respecter of persons, of caring for and blessing others even more than He does you. He knows this tactic is even more effective when he continually points out how ungodly people are seemingly blessed far more than you.

He makes you focus on what you don't have or the wrongs laid out against you, which turns your focus off of the blessings of the Lord. We should never spend even one second, not one, being envious, jealous or upset when the ungodly prosper or get recognition we don't.

In Matthew 5: 44 we are told: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

You see, that's why, as believers, we find purpose in suffering. All these other religions try to escape suffering and yet cannot. Christianity was based around suffering. So many in our world wear crosses around their necks as jewelry and don't

think of the suffering that occurred on that cross. And that's the answer, you see. That's what separates Christianity from every false religion.

***Romans 5:8** But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

That's how God demonstrated love. And you and I are little Christs. We are to take up our own cross and follow Him because there is no greater demonstration of Christ-love, no better testimony, than those who see us suffering honorably. Loving those who sought to harm us, that's the key. That's the answer. **Suffering gracefully as believers** is the best way **other people can see God, without seeing God.** They see faith, they see joy despite the sufferings. No sermon or preaching can come close to this demonstration of Gods power. We are the only religion in the world who has a reason and hope **beyond** our suffering.