

Innocent Blood



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Job 10, Isa. 53:6, Rom. 3:10–20, Job 15:14–16, Job 1:18–20, Matt. 6:34.*

Memory Text: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (*Hebrews 11:1*).

Algerian-born writer Albert Camus struggled with the question of human suffering. In his book *The Plague*, he used a plague as a metaphor for the ills that bring pain and suffering upon humanity. He depicted a scene in which a little boy, afflicted with the pestilence, dies a horrific death. Afterward a priest, who had been a witness to the tragedy, said to a doctor who had been there too: “That sort of thing is revolting because it passes our human understanding. But perhaps we should love what we cannot understand.” The doctor, enraged, snapped back: “No, Father. I’ve a very different idea of love. And until my dying day, I shall refuse to love a scheme of things in which children are put to torture.”—Albert Camus, *The Plague* (New York: First Vintage International Edition, 1991), p. 218.

This scene reflects what we have seen in Job: pat and lame answers to what doesn’t have a simple solution. Job knew, as did the doctor here, that the answers given didn’t fit the reality at hand. Thus, that’s the challenge: How do we find answers that make sense of what so often seems without sense? This week we will continue the pursuit.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 19.

Job's Protest

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar had a point: God does punish evil. Unfortunately, that point didn't apply in Job's situation. Job's suffering was not a case of retributive punishment. God was not punishing him for his sins, as He would do with Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Nor was Job reaping what he had sown, as can so often be the case. No, Job was a righteous man; God Himself says so (*see Job 1:8*), and so Job not only didn't deserve what had happened to him, he knew that he didn't deserve it. That's what made his complaints so hard and bitter.

Read Job 10. What is he saying here to God, and why does it make so much sense, considering his circumstances?

At times of great tragedy, have not those who believe in God asked similar questions? *Why, Lord, did You bother to create me at all? Or, Why are You doing this to me? Or, Would it not have been better that I had never been born than to have been created and face this?*

Again, what makes it all harder for Job to comprehend is that he knows that he has been faithful to God. He cries out to Him: " 'Although You know that I am not wicked, and there is no one who can deliver from Your hand' " (*Job 10:7, NKJV*).

There's a difficult irony here: in contrast to what his friends said, Job was not suffering because of his sin. The book itself teaches the opposite: *Job was suffering here precisely because he was so faithful*. The first two chapters of the book make that point. Job had no way of knowing that this was the cause, and even if he did, it probably would have made his bitterness and frustration worse.

However unique Job's situation, it's also universal in that it is dealing with the universal question of suffering, especially when the suffering seems so greatly out of proportion to whatever evil someone might have done. It's one thing to go over the speed limit and get a speeding ticket; it's another to do the same thing to kill someone in the process.

What can you say to someone who believes that he or she is suffering unjustly?

Innocent Blood?

We often hear the question of “innocent” suffering. The Bible even uses the phrase “innocent blood” (*Isa. 59:7, Jer. 22:17, Joel 3:19*), usually in the context of assault, or even murder, of people who didn’t deserve what happened to them. If we use this understanding of “innocent blood,” then, as we all know, our world is filled with many examples of it.

On the other hand, the Bible does talk about the reality of human sinfulness and human corruption, which brings up a valid question about the meaning of “innocent.” If everyone has sinned, if everyone has violated God’s law, then who is truly innocent? As someone once said, “Your birth certificate is proof of your guilt.”

Though theologians and Bible scholars for centuries have debated the exact nature of the human relationship to sin, the Bible is clear that sin has impacted all humanity. The idea of human sinfulness is not found only in the New Testament. On the contrary, the New Testament exploration of the theme expands on what was written in the Old Testament.

What do the following texts teach about the reality of sin? *1 Kings 8:46, Ps. 51:5, Prov. 20:9, Isa. 53:6, Rom. 3:10–20.*

Besides the clear testimony of Scripture, anyone who has ever known the Lord personally, who has seen a glimpse of God’s goodness and holiness, knows the reality of human sinfulness. In that sense, who among us (we’re going to skip, for now, the whole question of babies and young children) is truly “innocent”?

On the other hand, that’s not really the point. Job was a sinner; in that sense he wasn’t innocent, any more than his own children weren’t innocent. And yet, what had he done, or they done, to deserve the fate that befell them? Is this not, perhaps, the ultimate question for humanity in regard to suffering? Contrary to his friends’ “defenses of clay” (*Job 13:12, NKJV*), Job knew that what was happening to him was not something that he deserved.

How does the experience of knowing God and His holiness, which makes our own sinfulness painful, help us to see our absolute need of the Cross?

Unfair Fates

Read Job 15:14–16. What truth is Eliphaz presenting to Job?

Again, Eliphaz was speaking truth (as did the others), this time in regard to the sinfulness of all humanity. Sin is a universal fact of life on earth; so is suffering. And as we also know, all human suffering ultimately results from sin. And there's no question that God can use suffering to teach us important lessons. "God has always tried His people in the furnace of affliction. It is in the heat of the furnace that the dross is separated from the true gold of the Christian character."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 129.

There is, however, a deeper problem with suffering. What about the times we see no good come from it? What about the suffering of those who don't have the dross separated from the gold in their character because they are killed instantly? What about those who suffer, never knowing the true God or anything about Him? What about those whose sufferings only made them bitter, angry, and hateful toward God? We can't ignore these examples or try to put them in a simple formula; to do so would perhaps make us guilty of the same errors as Job's accusers.

Also, what good arises from the fate of animals in a forest fire who are slowly burned alive in a horrible death? Or what about the thousands of people killed in a natural disaster? Or what about civilians in war? What possible lessons could they have learned, or their families, when their families were swept away with them? And one could reasonably ask questions not just about Job's ten dead children but about his servants who were killed with "the edge of the sword" (*Job 1:15*) or those burned alive by "the fire of God" (*Job 1:16*) or the other servants killed "with the edge of the sword" (*Job 1:17*).

Whatever lesson Job and his accusers might learn, and whatever defeat Satan will face through Job's faithfulness, the fate of these others certainly doesn't seem fair. The fact is, these things are not fair, are not just, and not right.

We face similar challenges today. A six-year-old dies of cancer, and that's fair? A 20-year-old college girl is pulled from her car and sexually assaulted, and that's fair? A 35-year-old mother of three is killed in a car accident, and that's fair? What about the 19,000 Japanese killed in the 2011 Tohoku earthquake? Were all 19,000 guilty of something that made this a just punishment? If not, then their deaths were not fair either.

These are the hard questions.

Sufficient for the Day . . .

Read the following verses and think about the immediate fate of those depicted in the texts. Then ask yourself the question: How fairly was life treating them?

Job 1:18–20 _____

Gen. 4:8 _____

Exod. 12:29, 30 _____

2 Sam. 11:17 _____

Jer. 38:6 _____

Matt. 14:10 _____

Heb. 11:35–38 _____

The Bible reflects a harsh fact about life in our fallen world: evil and suffering are real. It's only a superficial reading of the Word of God, pulling a few texts out of the whole context, that could give anyone the idea that life here is fair and just and good, and that if only we remain faithful to God, suffering won't come. Certainly faithfulness can reap great rewards now, but that doesn't mean it provides an absolute barrier to suffering and pain. Just ask Job.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave a powerful homily on why we need to trust God and not to worry about what we will eat, or drink, or wear. And Jesus used examples from nature as object lessons on why we can trust in God's goodness to meet our needs. He then included these famous words: "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (*Matt. 6:34*).

Notice, *sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof*. Jesus wasn't denying the presence in our lives, even the *daily* presence, of evil (from a Greek word that can mean "badness," "depravity," and "malignity"). If anything, He was doing the opposite. He was acknowledging the prevalence and presence of evil in our daily lives. How could He not? As the Lord, He knew more about the evil in the world than any of us ever could, and all of us certainly know a lot about it already.

Who hasn't tasted a bit (or maybe a lot) of just how unfair and bitter life can be? How can focusing on Jesus' acknowledgment of this evil's reality help to give us comfort and strength amid it?

Things Not Seen

Read Proverbs 3:5. Though it is such a common text, what crucial message does it have for us, especially in the context of what we have been studying?

Though the case of Job is extreme, it does reflect the sad reality of human suffering in our fallen world. We don't need the story of Job or even the other stories we can read in the Bible to see this reality. We see it all around us. Indeed, to some degree, we all live it.

“Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not” (*Job 14:1, 2*).

So again, the question we struggle with is how do we account for suffering, the kind that seems to make no sense to us, that kind in which innocent blood is shed?

As the early chapters of Job have shown, and as the Bible elsewhere reveals, Satan is a real being and is the cause, directly or indirectly, of so much suffering. As we have seen early in this quarter (see Lesson 2), the great controversy template works well in helping us to deal with the reality of evil in our world.

Still, it's hard to understand at times why things happen that do take place. Sometimes—many times, actually—things just don't make sense. It's at times like these, when things happen that we don't understand, that we need to learn to trust in the goodness of God. We need to learn to trust God, even when answers are not readily apparent and when we can see nothing good coming from the evil and suffering around us.

Hebrews 11:1 reads: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” From the things that we do see, how can we learn to trust God about the things that we don't see? From what we have read in the book of Job so far, in what sense has Job learned to do just that? How can we learn to do the same?

Further Thought: Last Sabbath's introduction began with Albert Camus, who wrote a lot about his struggle for answers, not just to the question of suffering but to the question of life's meaning in general, which suffering made only more problematic. As with most atheists, he didn't make much headway. His most famous quote shows how little: "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy."—*The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), p. 3. For sure, the question of human suffering is not an easy one to answer. The book of Job pulls back a veil and shows us a bigger picture than what we might have seen otherwise, but even when we read it all, the book still leaves many questions unanswered.

There is, however, a crucial difference between those who struggle for answers to the question of suffering without God and those who do so with God. Yes, the problem of pain and suffering becomes more difficult when you believe in the existence of God, because of the inevitable problems His existence in the face of evil and pain bring. On the other hand, we have what atheists such as Camus don't have—and that is the prospect of answer and of resolution. (There is evidence that Camus later in life had wanted to be baptized but he was killed in a car accident.) We have the hope that "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (*Rev. 21:4*). Even if someone didn't believe this promise or many of the others in the Bible, that person would have to admit, if nothing else, how much nicer life would be now, to have at least that hope, as opposed to the prospect of just living here amid our toils and struggles and then dying forever, with it all meaning nothing.

Discussion Question:

① One argument that people bring up in regard to the question of evil is the idea that, *Well, yes, there is evil in the world, but there also is good, and the good outweighs the evil.* The first question would be, *How does one know that the good outweighs the evil? How does one make that comparison?* The second question would be, *Even if true, what good would that idea do for Job (or others) amid their suffering?* German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer used a powerful example to debunk that whole notion of some sort of balance between good and evil in this world now. "The pleasure in this world," he wrote, "it has been said, outweighs the pain; or, at any rate, there is an even balance between the two. If the reader wishes to see shortly whether this statement is true, let him compare the respective feelings of two animals, one of which is engaged in eating the other." How would you respond to the idea that good somehow balances out the evil?