

WHERE IS GOD?

E.T.S.: The passage comes from Jesus' Olivet Discourse, and it speaks to the circumstances of world events preceding the return of Jesus Christ.

E.S.S.: From the text, we will seek to give a response to the question, "Where is God?".

Christ Follower: Even though we struggle with this question, discover the hope found in Jesus while living out His life on earth.

Christ Seeker: Respond to the hope provided by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Illustration

Steven Fry is an avowed atheist.

On January 28, 2015, he did an interview which aired on Ireland's National Public Service Media. I want to actually show it to you today. Watch this two minute clip.

Introduction

I find that difficult to watch. While his response is so combative, the question of evil or suffering is one that has been asked by Christian and non-Christian alike throughout history. It's often

posed in one of these forms:

- How could a good God allow that?
- Why do bad things happen to good people?
- If there is a God, why didn't He keep that from happening?

Some may even ask the question this way: Where is God?

Would you find the 21st chapter of the Gospel according to Luke?

When the world experiences evil, whether it is natural or moral evil, this question resonates in the minds and hearts of people. For the sake of our understanding, let's briefly define terms.

- *Natural evil* describes tragic calamities within the realm of nature that are not directly caused by mankind such as earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, etc.
- *Moral evils* are tragic occurrences that are directly caused by the depravity of mankind such as acts motivated by hatred, greed, covetousness, selfishness, etc.

Whether natural or moral evils occur, people want to know about God's involvement.

Do these events prove that there is no God?

If there is a God, what kind of a God would cause or even allow these evils to happen?

Where is God?

Even believers can experience questioning God during times of personal loss. When we get a bad report from the doctor, when we suffer through some personal tragedy, when we

experience a family break up or blow up, when we lose a job, when we experience a tragic loss or death, etc.

"Where is God?" is a deep question that cannot be treated fully in one message. However, through the passage in Luke 21 that we will read in just a moment, I hope to at least give you a foundation built on God's Word that will encourage believers and challenge unbelievers.

Follow along now as I read Luke 21:25-28. The words will be on your screen as I read.

Bible

(25) And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; (26) Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. (27) And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. (28) And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.

Luke 21:25-28 - KJV

Introduction

These verses in Luke 21 are a portion of Jesus' Olivet Discourse given to His disciples when they questioned Him about the signs of His coming and the end of the world.

There is debate present in Christian scholarship about whether the Olivet Discourse applies

more directly to the rapture of the church and the time of tribulation following the rapture of the church, or applies to the return of Christ following the tribulation and the establishment of His millennial kingdom. I personally believe that the Olivet Discourse lines up more closely with the latter of the two.

Regardless, both of those events are still in front of us and, regardless of Jesus' intent, the applications that we can draw from His words are identical.

Look with me again at verse 25.

Bible

(25) And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring;

Luke 21:25 - KJV

Explanation

Jesus said that, due to these signs in nature, there would be *distress*, or *anxiety*, in nations.

Do we see *anxiety* in the nations of the world today?

He said that there would be *perplexity*. That is, there would be uncertainty about how to deal with difficult situations. The word is used at times to describe one who has lost his way.

Does it ever seem like the world has lost its way?

This leads to verse 26 where Jesus describes men's hearts *failing*, or *fainting*, because of *fear*.

Not only fear of now but the apprehension or expectation of what is coming. People are fearful about the future.

Regardless of whether it is natural evils or moral evils that we face, these situations often lead people to distress and perplexity.

How should we respond?

Let's follow along in God's Word and reflect on three actions we can take in response to this question.

1...Remember Who God is

Explanation

Look with me at Isaiah 45:6-7.

Bible

(6) That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else. (7) I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.

Isaiah 45:6-7 - KJV

Explanation

Note that God makes peace and creates evil.

Before we get lost, understand that God is presenting contrasting ideas. Light and darkness are spoken of just previously. Here, God means that, just as He presides over peace and those things that make for peace, He presides over evil and those things that make for evil.

Evil here does not denote the moral sense of evil, but the sense of calamity. The thought is that God directs, purposes, and works in all events.

It is not as if God is on the throne in the good times, and has slipped off or been removed from the throne in the bad times. He is always on the throne, always accomplishing His purposes for His ends in this world.

Bible

(28) For the kingdom is the LORD's: and he is the governor among the nations.

Psalms 22:28 - KJV

(24) The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand:

Isaiah 14:24 - KJV

Illustration

My children do not always understand the reasons why I give them certain instructions or why I allow them to experience certain things.

Why should I think that this same principle would not be true with God?

Explanation

I would not be so arrogant as to say that I understand all of God's workings, and can see how He will accomplish His purposes through all the events of this universe, let alone my own life. However, I will be so bold as to proclaim that I believe His Word and know that God is in control, and He is accomplishing His purposes whether I can see it and understand it or not.

Illustration

The illustration of Job in the Scripture is so helpful.

Neither his friends, nor Job understood the counsels of God as it related to what Job experienced in his life.

From Job chapter 38-41, God questioned Job wondering how any man could be so bold as to think that he understood God entirely.

In the end, Job, nor us, are given a reason for why he experienced what he experienced. We are left hanging, just like we are in our own lives sometimes.

Bible

(8) For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. (9) For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Isaiah 55:8-9 - KJV

Explanation

Yet, God tells me in His Word how I can and should respond to these tragedies of life.

Bible

(1) I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. (2) My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth.

Psalms 121:1-2 - KJV

Application

Whatever the tragedy in this world, or your own life, remember Who God is.

2...Recognize that Jesus is Coming Soon

Explanation

Look back at Luke 21 with me.

Bible

(27) And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

Luke 21:27 - KJV

As Jesus speaks of these signs, He told His disciples that these things would point to His

return and the redemption of the believer.

Look with me Romans 8 as a parallel passage.

Bible

(22) For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

Romans 8:22 - KJV

Explanation

Paul stated, "...that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth..."

I do not intend to be crude, but the picture is of a woman in labor. As a woman's body progresses in labor, she begins to have contractions. These contractions progress in frequency and intensity the nearer to delivery that she gets.

Here's the thought in Romans. As creation draws closer to delivery, there will be an increase and frequency in groaning and travailing.

What is the groaning and travailing?

I believe it is the signs that Jesus speaks of in Luke 21 and other places.

What does the Scripture point to as the delivery?

Look at verse 23 of Romans 8.

Bible

(23) And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.

Romans 8:23 - KJV

Explanation

The delivery is the redemption.

In Luke 21, Jesus said it this way:

Bible

(27) And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. (28) And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.

Luke 21:27-28 - KJV

Explanation

You say, “Pastor, I thought we were already redeemed.”

Yes and no.

We’ve been redeemed from the penalty of sin – salvation.

We are being redeemed from the power of sin – sanctification.

But it is in the future, at the time Romans 8:23 and Luke 21:28 speaks of, that we will be redeemed from the presence of sin – glorification.

Application

So, when these things happen, we have to face them and deal with them. However, in our spirits, we look up with recognition and hope that our redemption is drawing nearer.

Bible

(11) And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

Romans 13:11 - KJV

3...Reflect God's Love to Others

Application

How does God want us to respond to the world around us and our brothers and sisters in Christ when tragedy occurs?

Through reflecting His love for the world!

Think about our Jesus!

Our Jesus ate with publicans and sinners because He knew that they were in need of a

physician.

Our Jesus went out of His way to minister to the needs of those who were the castaways of religious society.

Our Jesus stood up to the religious crowd in the temple courtyard when they brought an adulteress to Him and said, “He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone.”

Let me ask you this: if Jesus were physically on the earth, do you think He would be picketing at scenes of tragedy that this is God's judgment coming to pass, or would He be seeking to minister to the needs of those who were affected by it?

That's a pretty loaded question, isn't it?

As we have opportunity and means, we need to reach out to those around us who are in need.

Conclusion

Where is God?

He is where He always has been, on the throne, working in and through all things to accomplish His purposes.

How should we respond?

Remember Who He is, recognize that Jesus is coming again, and reflect God's love to those around us.