

- ***Read Revelation 21:1-7/Prayer*** The things revealed by John here in **Revelation 21:1-7** are certainly the things that we dream of. We dream of that place where God will dwell intimately among His people. We dream of the place where there will be no more tears, where there will be no more death, where there will be no more mourning, crying, or pain. This is the stuff of our dreams because it is certainly not the place where we currently exist. Surely this broken world is often overcome with tears, death, mourning, crying, and pain. This is simply our currently reality.
- Because this is the case, those who have set their hearts against God will give great efforts to reason that the God we follow, the God who we claim is good and loving...they would say the he can't exist and allow a world like this to exist, as well. They would probably be quick to claim something along these lines, "The existence of evil, pain, and suffering are incompatible with the existence of a loving God." Many an atheists such as Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Dan Barker and the like would all seek to destroy our faiths with the type of logic.
- But there is another side of this argument, and men such as Kyle Butt, William Lane Craig, and others would argue vehemently that this so called problem of evil, pain, & suffering is truly not a problem at all. Another truth is that this is not really a new argument by opponents of God. In fact, this argumentation has been around a lot longer than any of us. All the way back in the 3rd century BC, a man by the name of Epicurus made this statement, "Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is no omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?" Let's use our time this morning to consider these questions and make a case for the God of the Bible in spite of these supposed philosophical problems presented by the skeptic.

I. There is no problem of evil if there is no objective standard to determine what truly is evil.

- A. The atheists wants to claim the moral high ground in regards to God, but they run into some problems while trying to establish what is evil.
 1. They want to claim that God Himself is not moral if He exists yet allows or permits evil to exist or be perpetrated. Like Epicurus, they would claim that it must be that God doesn't exist, He doesn't care, or He isn't able to do anything about it.
 2. However, the question that needs to next be asked is this...where does the atheists get the idea that some things are evil? Is it just their opinion that some things are evil? That must be the case because if there is no God then there can be no objective absolute standard for morality...there can be no standard that applies to all people. The atheists might want to say that something is evil, but they can't say for certain and they can't use it as a proof that there is no God.
 3. Furthermore, to say that there is evil must mean that there are things that are good. Again, who determines what is evil and what is good? If man sets that standard then everything is just subjective and we have our choice about whether or not to agree.
 4. This was an issue that came up during the Nuremberg trials for the men who committed the atrocities of the Holocaust. The German soldiers and doctors claimed innocence for their crimes because they said they were just following orders and that their actions were legal in their country.
 5. But US Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson made the rightful claim that even though their actions might have been deemed allowable by their country, they still went against the "very law of nature." They were guilty of breaking God's objective moral law of killing the helpless and innocent.
- B. The claim that there is objective evil demands that there is an objective standard and standard giver.
 1. Jackson appealed to the higher standard of God's moral code as the standard that the Nazis had broken. Even though they didn't deem their actions as wrong according to their own subjective standard, the world knew they were wrong based upon something that is larger than mankind.
 2. If the atheist wants to claim that there is objective moral evil then they must admit that there is an objective moral law giver. Atheism can't give us an objective moral standard because there is nothing beside mankind. If there is no God then there is no objective standard and we are free to do whatever we want with no ramifications. It is truly survival of the fittest.
 3. There are many arguments the atheist chooses from to argue against God, but this is one that he cannot logically or philosophically stand on. To claim there is objective evil demands there is an objective standard giver and they certainly will not surrender to God fulfilling such a role.

So when this type of philosophical reasoning fails, the atheist will often turn to an emotional argument to show that God can't exist when there is so much pain and suffering in the world today. How can a loving God allow for His greatest creation to suffer and feel pain as we often do is their argument. Dan Barker is quoted as saying this, "All you have to do is walk into a children's hospital and you know a loving God does not exist."

II. There are times when pain is profitable and needed.

- A. To the atheist, any pain is proof that God isn't truly loving or He doesn't exist.
 1. The fact that we suffer in different ways in this life proves to the atheist that God isn't there or doesn't care for the well being of His creation. "How can a loving God allow such a thing?!"
 2. Love, in their minds, demands that God must perfectly keep us from pain or suffering and His failure to do so is a strike against Him and the believers claim that they serve a loving God.
- B. However, they will walk back from this and admit that it "could" be morally acceptable for God to allow pain and suffering if it was for a greater good. ***Humanistic/situational morality***
 1. Dan Barker said this during a debate with Kyle Butt, "You can't get through life without some hard.....I think we all agree that it is wrong to stick a needle into a baby. That's horrible. But, if that boy needs a life saving injection, we will cause that harm, we will do that. The baby won't understand it, but we will do that because there is a greater good. So, humanistic morality understands that within certain situations, there is harm, and there's a trade off of values."

2. To the humanistic moralists, causing harm to others *could* be permissible if it brings about a greater good. If they say this is true, then how can they say that God wouldn't allow the same thing to take place? The inconsistency is profound, yet it is present because they cannot accept God in their world view.
3. The truth is that some pain in this world does us good. This is exactly what James puts forth in **James 1:2-4**. The trials and struggles can produce a stronger and more founded faith in one who endures. Good can come from these sorts of pains. When a child misbehaves, the parents will punish the child in hopes of the child avoiding the bad behavior in the future. Would we argue the parent is unloving? Of course not! The parent is showing love in spite of the pain because it is a deterrent. **(Heb. 12:5-11)** We are being inconsistent and unfair if we don't allow God that same love.

The atheist might then concede the point that pain is sometimes for our good and that God *could* be capable of the same, but they might move on from that and say that God is unjust for allowing so much pain and suffering to exist in the world today. "A loving God would never allow such unnecessary and pointless suffering" would be their claim. God is wrong for creating a world that hurts us so much. All of the blame is laid at the feet of God for things being as they are.

III. The suffering endured by man is most often a result of sin and its consequences, not God's will.

- A. God created a world that was very good.
 1. The atheist wants to pin the suffering on this world upon God, but He didn't create this world in the state that we find it in, today. In fact, in **Genesis 1**, we find it recorded for us that the world God created was not just good, but it was "very good." **(Gen. 1:31)**
 2. The garden was a place of perfect bliss between God and His creation of man and other living things. God walked with His creation and was in perfect fellowship with them. Not only that, but there was no physical pain and suffering because the tree of life was there in their midst. **(Gen. 2:9)** They were permitted to eat of this tree and every other except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As long as they kept God's command, it seems as if things would have gone well.
- B. It is man's decision to follow self and to sin that resulted and continues to result in pain and suffering.
 1. A part of God's very good world that He created is man's ability to choose his actions based upon his free will. God instilled within man the ability to reason and decide for himself. God did not create us as robots to mindlessly obey Him, but He wants for us to choose to obey Him.
 2. Unfortunately, Adam and Eve used that free will to disobey God and negative consequences quickly followed. They were expelled from the Garden and no longer had access to the tree of life which meant physical decay and death would ensue.
 3. Then beyond the actions of Adam and Eve are the continued sins of mankind. Eventually, it gets to the point where God can't stomach the actions of man and sends the flood to purify the earth. The atheists might deem God wrong for such, but the flood was a punishment for sin. **(Gen. 6:5-7)**
 4. God's commands to man are for our good. He knows what is best, and His standard for man is most beneficial for mankind. **(Deut. 6:24; 10:13; 1 John 5:3)** When we suffer, it is not because God wants it or has brought it upon us undeserved, but it is a result of mistakes on our behalf as man. Sam Harris said, "an atheist is a person who believes that the murder of a single little girl—even once in a million years—casts doubt upon the idea of a benevolent God." Harris wants to blame God for the pain and suffering of this girl's murder, but the truth is that her death is on the hands of the man who committed the heinous act, not the God who gave him the free will to do so. Man's decision...not God's.

IV. Sometimes bad things just happen because we live in a broken world.

- A. Not everything bad that happens to a person is a direct result of someone's mistake.
 1. Life just happens sometimes. Sometimes we get sick from no fault of our own or others. Sometimes we get hurt because of sheer dumb "un"-luck. Things just happen from time to time.
 2. The atheist would like to blame God for pointless or unnecessary suffering or pain, but again these things are only a part of the world because of its broken nature. God's original design didn't include such a thing, but through man's use of free will to choose to abandon God...bad things now happen.
 3. Sometimes people like to think that every bad thing that happens to someone is a result of their sins or mistakes. Job's three "friends" were under the impression that his suffering was a result of his sin. "Lo, God will not reject a man of integrity, nor will He support evil doers." **(Job 8:20)** Their thoughts were that if you suffered at all then it was because of sin, but we know that wasn't the case with Job.
 4. Even some people in Jesus's day thought this way. The disciples asked Jesus, concerning the blind man in **John 9**, who sinned so that the man was blinded...was it the man himself who sinned or was it his parents? Elsewhere we see Jesus stating that bad things just happen sometimes. In **Luke 13:1-5**, Jesus's attention is brought to some Galileans who had been killed by Pilate. Jesus then mentions some other individuals who had been killed in an accident. His point is to show that bad things can happen to anyone and everyone. More importantly, He makes the point that what we ought to be concerned with is repenting and gaining the reward in the next life.
- B. The broken nature of this world should cause us to long and desire for the Eden-like place of heaven with God.
 1. Again, **Revelation 21:1-7** is the goal. We ought to want to be there more than anything else, and this world should push us to have those kind of feelings and desires.
 2. With the pain and difficulties of this world, we ought to live in such a way that we get to experience existence without it all. Much like what Peter says in **1 Peter 3:10-14**, because we know there is something better in the next life, may we live this life in such a way that we will be there and experience bliss. Sure this world is difficult at times, but we live and await for something so much better in the next and this life just reminds us of the better place that is out there for us.

When philosophy fails, those opposed to God will appeal to people's emotion in order to push their agenda. Sure the evil, pain, and sufferings of this world are not enjoyable, but we look forward to something better. Plus, we recognize that these things are not the fault of God, but they are a consequence of our selfish decisions. May God help us to remember that this world is not our home and that we are just preparing ourselves for what will be our eternal home if we remain faithful, heaven in the presence of God.