

Jesus and Demons (Part 3)

The Messianic Permission

Introduction

The Text

²⁶ Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. ²⁷ When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs. ²⁸ When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me." ²⁹ For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many a time it had seized him. He was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert.) ³⁰ Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion," for many demons had entered him. ³¹ And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss. ³² Now a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. ³³ Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned.

³⁴ When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. ³⁵ Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. ³⁶ And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. ³⁷ Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. ³⁸ The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹ "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him. (Luke 8:26–39)

Theodicy in Theology

- A. If, as the Bible presents it, God is all-good and God is all-powerful, why is there so much evil and suffering in the world?!
1. If God is all-good, but He's not all-powerful—well, that would make sense of things: He wishes He could do away with evil and suffering, but He can't. He's doing the best He can to make good from a bad situation that, quite frankly, is somewhat out of His hands.
 2. If God is all-powerful, but He's not all-good—well, that would make sense of things: He could do away with evil and suffering, but He doesn't want to. He kind of gets a kick out of watching us squirm.
- B. But, again, if, as the Bible presents it, God is all-good and God is all-powerful, why is there so much evil and suffering in the world?! If He has a heart to do away with it, and He can do away with it, why does He not do away with it now?!

- C. It's the subject in theology called "theodicy" (Gk. theos [God] + dike [justice] = "justifying God"). Meriam-Webster defines it as: "[the] defense of God's goodness and omnipotence in view of the existence of evil."

Theodicy in Our Lives

- A. But this is not just a subject for theologians. The problem of evil, these questions, will grip your soul by the neck as you sit by the hospital bed of your dying loved one, or when cancer comes for you. If you haven't wrestled with it yet, you will soon.
- B. Do you want to hear how my Wednesday night went?
1. At about 6 PM I get a call from one member in this church telling me he just got back from the hospital where his wife's mom was being held. They took her in because she wasn't eating, they discovered she has cancer, doctor comes in: "She's got maybe two months."
 2. Then we have a couple from the church coming over for dessert to talk about membership, leadership, church stuff. And when I ask how their week's been going I learn that around midnight the night before one of their cousins, 21 years old, was stabbed to death with a broken bottle of glass just a few miles away from here on Branham Lane East. What kind of a nightmare is that for a family to deal with?!
 3. After this couple leaves, my wife gets a text back from a lady she was encouraged to reach out to—a girl who was in Mandalay Bay when the bullets began flying—everyone's running, and screaming, and dying. Can you even begin to imagine the horror?!
 4. And then, finally, around midnight as we're going to bed Megan is scrolling Facebook and there on her feed is news that a childhood friend just died in a car accident, killing not just him but two others.
- C. So what do you do with a Wednesday like that? Doesn't everything in you start to rise up with this question: "Why God?! Where are You?! What are You doing?! Are You even there at all?!"

Theodicy in Our Text

- A. You say: "Why are we talking about this, right now? In this text? I'm not sure I see the connection." Well, let me show you.
- B. No doubt Jesus is shown to be all-good in our text. He takes a man who's life has been utterly ravaged by demons and with a word He drives the Devil out . . . and this man goes free!
- C. Certainly, then, Jesus is also shown to be all-powerful in our text.
1. Did you notice the contrast Luke draws up for us here? We're told that no one could keep this man and these demons under control: "He was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert" (v. 29). You couldn't contain the chaotic fury of this evil.
 - a. And then . . . Jesus arrives. And suddenly these demonic terrorists are reduced to mere beggars on the floor at His feet: "²⁸ When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell

down before him and said with a loud voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me . . . ³¹ And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss. ³² Now a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him to let them enter these. So he gave them permission” (vv. 28, 31-32).

- i. There is no doubt in their minds who the Superior is. “If you want to torment us . . . You can. If you want to command us to depart into the abyss . . . You can. We are utterly beholden to Your command. But we beg You, let us enter into these pigs instead.”

(1) And Jesus “gave them permission” (v. 32).

- D. Now I read this and I said: “That’s a problem! What in the world is Jesus doing giving permission for these wicked spirits to do anything? Why not torment them? Why not send them into the abyss? Why not make a full stop of them here and now?!”
- E. That’s the question I’m dedicating this whole sermon to. Jesus, if You have such a heart for humanity and such authority over all things, why is there still so much evil and suffering in the world?!
 - 1. Now I don’t think the Bible provides us with all the answers here. But it does provide us with a lot of help. And I’ve tried to organize some of this for us under three headings: (1) Perspectives; (2) Principles; and (3) Paradigms.

(1) Perspectives

Creator or Creature?

- A. Our starting point when approaching theodicy begins with what I’m calling Perspectives. When trying to make sense of the problem of evil we need to identify the perspective we are approaching the problem from.
 - 1. To cut straight to it, we must beware of our tendency to put ourselves above God and demand He bow to our reason. We must beware of putting God in the dock as if He, the Creator, must answer to me, the creature.
- B. There is nothing more irrational than the creature’s assumption that he can and should be able to wrap his own reason around that of his Creator. We must be willing to admit that mystery will always subsist at the core of our faith because creaturely limits will always distinguish us from the limitless Creator.
 - 1. I love what Eugene Peterson says on this point: “Mystery is not the absence of meaning, but the presence of more meaning than we can comprehend.”

Like Kids on a Push-Car

- A. Our own questioning of God at this point, on analogy, is something like Levi, my little 10 month old, questioning me . . . as if he knows better.

- B. The other day we went to the park as a family and I brought one of those little baby push-cars that I thought I might try to push Levi around in. I wasn't sure if he was even sturdy enough yet to hold on and things but I wanted to try. So I get him on there and help him grab the handlebars and we start going . . . and he loves it! I mean he is having the time of his life.
 - 1. So much so that when it came time to stop it was like WWII just broke out there at Comanche Park in south San Jose. It was the scream heard round the world. I tried lifting him up and off the little car but he had ahold of the handlebars so tightly that the whole car came up with him. His whole body was shaking with refusal.
 - a. I actually thought it was incredibly cute. I was happy to put him back down and we just kept going for a while longer.

- C. But at some point we had to pry the handlebars from his little fingers. And we had to wrench his legs apart where he had them wrapped around the seat.
 - 1. He thought we were crushing his dreams. He thought his life was over. He thought here we were the meanest parents in all the world. And others in the park started thinking that too. They're all looking at us as my boy is screaming out in utter agony. And I'm actually trying to hold back laughter.

- D. But my son doesn't get it.
 - 1. He doesn't get that the sun is going down and if we stay outside for too much longer it's going to get cold and he'll get sick.
 - 2. He doesn't get that we needed to go because we were actually planning to take the family out to eat. We have a fun evening planned. And beyond that, he doesn't get that we actually need food to live, that sometimes we need to stop playing to do more important things.
 - 3. He doesn't get that tomorrow is coming and we'll get to do this again.
 - 4. He doesn't get that even amongst the pain of his crushed little dreams, his parents love him and mean good for him.
 - a. You could say he doesn't have the right perspective.

Psalm 131

- A. One text that is particularly helpful in setting our perspective straight is [Psa 131](#): “¹O Lord, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. ²But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me. ³O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore.”

1. Do you hear what David is saying here? “I know my place in the universe. I’m like a baby and everything in this big world is scary, especially when I start getting weaned off of the comfort of mother’s milk, but I know my mother, or I know my God, I’ve tasted of His tender care and goodness. Therefore, even when life gets rough, I don’t exalt myself over Him and come down in accusation . . . I hope in Him.” And he exhorts Israel and us to do the same.
- B. And you know what? We’ve pushed Levi around on that little push-car many times since WWII, and he’s never again responded like he did at first.
1. He’s begun learning he can trust, even when it hurts, even when he doesn’t fully understand, because he has a mommy and daddy who love him and know just a little bit more about life in this world than he does.
- C. So this is where we begin: “I am the creature. You are the Creator. ‘Behold, I am of small account . . . I lay my hand on my mouth’ (Job 40:4).”

(2) Principles

- A. Now, having established that there are things regarding God’s relationship to evil and suffering that we will not be able to understand, let’s start talking about those things, from Scriptures, that we can understand. Let’s start talking about what I’m calling Principles.
- B. I’ll quickly give five of these principles here and I’ll show you how they can be drawn even from our text this morning.

(1) God Is Not the Author of Evil

- A. Our text makes it abundantly clear: Jesus is not the author of the evil that this demonized man has experienced. Jesus has not done this. No! He’s come to undo this.
1. If you want to see the sort of thing Jesus is the Author of, then you must look to the end of this story. Jesus is the author of salvation . . . not of evil.
- B. James puts it this way: “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. . . .¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (James 1:13, 16–17).
1. Or as John describes it: “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5).
- C. The Bible could not be clearer: God is not the Author of evil, but . . .

(2) God Does Allow Evil

- A. This perhaps is the most troubling principle, and the one that most evades our understanding. But, nonetheless, it is the clear and unmistakable implication of our text. The demons beg and He permits.

1. Whatever evil the devil schemes in his own wicked heart, he needs God's permission to even attempt it.

- a. Read [Job 1](#), read [Rev 20](#), and tell me how you can come to any other conclusion.

- B. God is not the author of this evil, but He does allow it, and . . .

(3) Whatever Evil God Does Allow He Guides to a Good and Glorious End

- A. This man in [Luke 8](#) becomes an undeniable trophy of God's grace only because it was first permitted that he be a victim of the Devil's malice. The joy he now knows on the far side of this trial, the glory he now brings to God on the far side of this trial, is a millionfold compared to what it would be if the trial had never come.

- B. This of course is the meaning of everyone's favorite verse in the Bible: [Rom 8:28](#): "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."

1. And Paul doesn't want us to miss what he means when he says "all things". He means: "all things"—even horrible things. He goes on in [vv. 35-37](#): "³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ Just as it is written, 'For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' ³⁷ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us."

- C. Whatever evil and suffering God permits in your life Christian, as horrible as it is, you must know that God loves you more than you can even conceive, and He will guide all things to a good and glorious end for you, until finally . . .

(4) On the Last Day God Will Triumph Over All Evil and Do Away with It Forever

- A. The day is coming. Even the demons know it. They beg Jesus not to torment them ([v. 28b](#)). Matthew records it this way: "[Have you come here to torment us before the time?](#)" ([Matt 8:29](#)).

1. In other words, they know there is a time set for their torment. [Rev 20:10](#) speaks of it—when God will throw the devil and his entourage "[into the lake of fire and sulfur where . . . they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.](#)"

- B. And even though Jesus permits them to roam a little while longer, we are still given here a foreshadow of their end. For what happens when these demons enter the pigs? They "[rush down the steep bank into the lake](#)" ([v. 33](#)).

1. You get a lake of water now, but the lake of fire is your ultimate destination!

(5) In the Meantime, We Must Count God's Patience As Salvation

- A. Peter says that God is postponing this last day of final judgment because on the day He condemns all evil spirits, he will also have to condemn all evil men: “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Pet 3:9).
 - 1. Therefore, we should v. 15: “count the patience of our Lord as salvation.”
- B. This is where God takes anyone who ever asks: “Why? Why not do away with evil now?”
 - 1. When the disciples say bring your kingdom now, Jesus responds: “⁷ It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority;⁸ but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses . . .” (Acts 1:7–8). “Go, spread the news, My patience is for their salvation!”
 - 2. When the martyrs under the altar in heaven are crying out for things to be made right (Rev 6:9-11), God responds by saying: “Not yet. More martyrs need to die before I’m ready to call it quits.”
 - a. It sounds morbid, but it’s not at all. He’s saying: “I want to send more gospel witnesses to my enemies. I want more to repent and believe. My patience is for their salvation!”
- C. And is that not the climax point of our text back in Luke? “Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.” (v. 39). “Alright demoniac, I’ve saved you, now let’s go save your family and friends!”

(3) Paradigms

- A. A paradigm is “an outstandingly clear or typical example” of something. Paradigms serve, therefore, as a model, or grid, or lens through which you can interpret and understand all other similar situations.
 - 1. So with regard to God and how He relates to the evil in this world, a paradigm will take what otherwise feels like a horrifyingly chaotic and disorienting event—my mom is dying, my cousin was murdered, my friend was killed in a car accident—and it helps us find our balance: “I’ve seen what God does with evil and suffering there, therefore I can know that that is what He is doing here as well. . . whether I feel it or not.”
 - a. Essentially, a good paradigm here will take our five principles and put them on clearest display.
- B. The Bible actually provides us with countless paradigms to this end:
 - 1. We could look at Joseph and how what his brothers meant for evil, God was meaning for good.
 - 2. We could look at the Exodus and how God’s hardening of Pharaoh’s heart actually brings about the salvation of His people as they walk through the parted waters of the Red Sea.

3. We could look at Job and how Satan's intentions to destroy him lead ultimately to his greater blessing.
 4. Obviously, we could look at this demoniac in [Luke 8](#).
- C. But far better still, we can look at the cross. God takes the most horrific event in the history of mankind and turns it for mankind's salvation! The darkest moment becomes the brightest light!
1. Nobody saw that coming! Even Jesus, as He hung there, struggled with theodicy it would seem. He was no stranger to the "Why?!" question: "[My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?](#)" ([Matt 27:46](#)).
- D. In the face of such evil and suffering, where is God?
1. He is not authoring it, but He is allowing it, and He is guiding it to a good and glorious end, and soon He will do away with it forever, and His patience in the meantime . . . is salvation!
- E. So I don't know what evil and suffering you are facing this morning, but I do know that the God of the cross is up to something good. Will you turn to Him? Will you trust Him?