

## Why do Bad Things Happen?

May 14, 2017

Psalm 46

...and today, we come to the topic – Why do bad things happen to good people?

As I sat down with God to prepare this sermon, I began to think about all the suffering that I am aware of in our own CrossPoint family. An overdose of a young adult. The woman who has lived well her entire life whose body is just so frail and failing. Several people who are dealing with the “C” word. The parent of teenagers who is still mourning the death of their parents. Couples who have lost children. Our kids being bullied in school and on social media. Families that have been torn apart because of bad decisions. The level of abject poverty in Sierra Leone and other places in the world. Christians are being persecuted at a level we have never seen in our modern era. There is suffering in the world and sometimes, we all want to ask why. And that’s exactly what we are struggling with this morning on the fourth Sunday of our series, Why. And frankly, my answer to you is – I don’t know exactly why bad things happen. I mean I could give you a theological treatise right now on free will and the meaning of Original Sin and the Fall. And yet, that won’t answer the question behind the question which is...why do bad things happen to me and the people I love? Why does it seem so random and if God has the power to prevent it then, why doesn’t He?

I can’t tell you why some people get cancer. I don’t know why some bodies are wracked with frailty and others suffer from mental illness. We don’t have a specific answer to each tragic situation. There’s a whole book in the Bible called Job, who has every sort of bad thing happen, and even he doesn’t get a specific answer. The gospel of John talks about this in 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.”*** It seems that Jesus is telling us that:

**IT’S NOT SO MUCH WHY, BUT IT’S WHEN.**

***“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.”*** (John 16:33 NLT)

But, pay close attention to the end of that verse. It ends with hope...***I have overcome the world.*** Jesus is greater than this moment and Jesus is greater than this suffering. So, why do bad things happen may not be the question to focus on. As believer’s, we trust in a savior who has overcome the world and all its troubles. The question may not be “why trouble” but, what is our relationship with Jesus Christ, the great overcomer like when/not if trouble comes. In holding onto Jesus, we are a people who are greater than a moment of pain and who have a hope in something eternal all because of Jesus.

All during this series we have really been trying to answer the Why questions. We answered why Jesus is for us, and why the church is important and why we take communion. And while I don’t have a perfect answer to why bad things happen, the scriptures provide us with assurances on God’s presence in times of trouble when bad things happen and ways to walk through the pain with God by our side.

But, here’s what I have learned in my short, 55 years of life...

So, what do we do when bad things happen? Psalm 46 lays out how we deal with difficulties. It says that in the good times and in the bad, it is important to know what it says in verse 1 says, "**God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.**" Look, the Psalm doesn't start out with the problems that we face. The Psalm doesn't even start out answering the question, why do bad things happen. Instead, the Psalm begins with – God. As believers in Jesus Christ, that's where our lives are supposed to start and end - with God. Whether we are suffering from bad things or at the top of our game, our lives begin with God, who is our refuge and strength.

Refuge – what an awesome word. God is our refuge. Now this word is a really important in the Psalms. It is used over 24 times in the first 72 chapters when talking about God. In both Psalm 1 and 2, God is named as our refuge; the author of the Psalms wants to be very clear that God is our refuge. The writer starts with this image and repeats this aspect of God, over and over again. In the Hebrew, this concept of taking refuge means to trust in God. God is our refuge – and we can trust in God. When trouble comes, we are to run to that refuge trusting that God will take care of us. In times of trouble, when the bad things start happening or the storms begin to rage, we are to first and foremost remember our God – to take refuge and trust in Him and know, as the verse says that he is there to help us in our time of pain.

So, first, when trouble comes we are to turn to God who is a refuge we can trust in.

#### **WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN, TAKE REFUGE IN GOD.**

**"God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble."** (Psalm 46:1 NLT)

So, stay with me. In verse 2 the Psalmist finally gets to the human problems. **So we will not fear when earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea. <sup>3</sup> Let the oceans roar and foam. Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge!**

Today, when we read this we hear earthquakes and mountain slides, but the wording used here actually describes the ancient idea of an apocalyptic end of the world. The idea of mountains crumbling into the sea, at the time of this writing, meant that the earth was falling in upon itself. If the earth is quaking and the mountains are falling apart then the ground is going to collapse and the sky is going to fall in on us – hence the end of the world. So, this Psalmist is describing the worst as we can imagine it. This was it ... the end of the world as we know it. Yet, despite this apocalyptic end of the world, the psalmist still tells us not to fear, because he goes on to describe God as the ruler in charge of everything. That while we see our physical world collapsing, the city of God is still strong. No matter how bad our circumstances might be or how bad things are in the world or the government, God is still sitting on the throne caring for everything.

Not only do we learn that God is in charge and in control of everything, there is a very powerful phrase repeated twice in this Psalm. **<sup>7</sup> The LORD of Heaven's Armies is here among us; the God of Israel is our fortress.** What a promise. Yes, our worlds can be shattering, the government...anyway, our aging parents are sick and our houses are in foreclosure hearings and yet, God is with us and God is our fortress.

#### **WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN, WE ARE NOT ALONE.**

**The LORD of Heaven's Armies is here among us; the God of Israel is our fortress.** (Psalm 46:7 NLT)

This presence of God is at the core of our faith. At Christmas, we use the word Emmanuel – which means God is with us, to describe Jesus. A few weeks ago, we celebrated Easter and the resurrection of Jesus that conquers sin and death because God is for us, not against us. And his promises at his ascension is that we would never be alone and that the Holy Spirit would be with us as an advocate, our comforter and the living presence of God Himself in times of need. And while we may not always know why bad things are happening, we can know that we are not alone.

And then in v. 10 there is the refrain that I read over and over again when I experience troubles in my life, ***"Be still and know that I am God."*** Be still and know – as an extrovert and animated personality, I hear 'be still' as a negative, to slow down and wait for what God is doing, which is not easy for most of us, not just us hyper types. But, the Hebrew word expresses something even more extreme. The Hebrew is very firm, it isn't this hey, calm down ... it's more like – STOP. Stop what you are doing and pay attention. It carries a connotation of warfare because troubles in the Ancient Near East were often put into military language when picking up a weapon could solve your problem. Instead, this verse says Stop – drop your weapons and depend on me, God says. When we read this verse, and apply it to our lives, we are to Stop – stop our planning and questioning, our anger and frustration, drop our need to control the situation or research everything or find the answers and instead – Stop, Drop and Depend on God.

So often, during our troubling times, when bad things are happening, we tighten up and rely upon ourselves more. Struggling financially, I'll just buckle down and keep checking my bank account. I'll work harder and drop out of church and my small group for a while. Emotionally hurting, I'll just keep telling everyone that I'm fine, I'll be alright, keep plowing forward. Going through relationship troubles or a divorce, I'm going to deal with this my way...so we keep yelling and trying what doesn't work. Physically suffering, I'll try everything in the book.

But God wants us to stop our stewing, and our ranting and instead depend on him.

### **WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN, DEPEND ON GOD.**

***Be still, and know that I am God!*** (Psalm 46:10 NLT)

Now, I don't want to sound like you have to be a Pollyanna or wonderfully happy when bad things are all over you. To depend on God and trust in God as your refuge does not mean that you can't get angry. In fact, the Psalms contain every emotion in the human spectrum, including anger. When bad things happen, it is natural to get angry, or frustrated, or hurt or sad or mournful or you name it and to yell out, at the top of your lungs, WHY!!!

Whatever you are going through, God knows and is big enough to handle your emotions. And this psalm is telling us how to deal with those emotions - don't turn away from God because you're angry. Don't shut off every influence of God including your church and your small group and your friends because bad things are happening. Don't even try to fake it ... instead, Be Still - Stop and lay it at God's feet. Get it out and then practice the suggestions of this Psalm. Seek out God and take refuge instead of running and controlling the situation.

Life is about living to its fullest. As believers ... following Jesus to the fullest. Where are you? How do you cope?