

Hebrews

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Preacher: Marvin Wiseman

[0 : 00] I lost all faith in everything after the incident, Marsh said. What kind of God sends kids out and kills them?

The following school year was the most terrible he's ever experienced. He no longer felt welcome at Bulge Springs Christian Academy.

Other students and parents made him feel almost guilty for surviving when others did not. Similar to many conservative private Christian schools, Bulge Springs promises to protect children and teach them to walk with God.

According to the current student handbook, children are given detention for holding hands or hugging, the same punishment given for cheating on a homework assignment. Marsh transferred to a public school midway through the year.

I don't fit in with your Christians, basically, Marsh said. I ask too many questions about the whole belief. Too many open-ended questions.

[1 : 15] Today, he wears his gray, wiry beard long, just off his chin, and he's covered in tattoos.

He calls his roadmaps. His right arm has eleven skulls on it. One for each of the ten lost that day, and one for Chatham's brother, Scott.

Well, that's just an excerpt from an article that appeared recently, several-page article in Christianity Today.

And this is entitled, Pass Through the Waters. Three teens survived a deadly flood at a Bible camp in Comfort, Texas.

Would their faith survive? So, at the end of today's session, I've got copies of this article that I would really appreciate all of you reading.

[2 : 40] I would also appreciate those of you from the prayer meeting group last night who already got a copy to forego taking the copy this morning because I don't think I have enough to go around.

It's multi-pages. But it deserves a reading. It deserves a very careful reading. It addresses the issue that has been of age-old concern to philosophers and theologians for thousands and thousands of years.

And in the article, you'll see a term introduced that perhaps you're not familiar with. It's called a theodicy. T-H-E-O-D-I-C-Y.

A theodicy. The first part of the word, of course, is connected to the word theos, which is the Greek word for God, from which we get the word theology. And a theodicy is an effort, a human effort, to try and correlate the coexistence of an all-powerful, wise, loving, benevolent God, to correlate that with the existence of evil and pain and suffering and adversity that comes into the lives of people, including Christian people.

We are not exempt from these things because we are in Christ does not mean that we get some kind of a free ride when it comes to pain and suffering.

[4 : 09] So this is an issue that mankind has struggled with and continues to struggle with. And as I shared with our group last night, we have a small group meeting for prayer each Wednesday night.

And as I shared with them last night, this issue of the theodicy, of how to correlate these two, how to explain how they can coexist, is perhaps the greatest single sticking point that unbelievers have that prevents them from embracing the God of Scripture.

And their reasoning goes something like this. There is supposed to be a God in heaven who is in charge of things. He's supposed to be sovereign.

That means everything is under his rule. And if he is sovereign, that means he's able to do things. Whether or not man wants them done, he's able to do things.

He's the boss. Now, I'm not in that position. I'm just a poor human being. A lowly individual. But if I had the ability, you better believe there's a lot of things I'd change real quick.

[5 : 32] First thing I'd do is, I'd go down to Dayton, and I'd walk into Children's Hospital, and I would empty that place.

I would send every kid out of there, hail and healthy, back home where they belong. That's what I would do if I were God, but I don't have the ability to do that.

But he does. So why doesn't he? Why does God allow these things to go on? That is the question. And some conclude, and as I've shared with you before, perhaps the greatest constituency of those who conclude that such a God could not possibly exist.

And even if he did, I wouldn't want anything to do with him, if that's the way he operates. And as I shared with you before, on a per capita basis, you will not find anyone that has come to that conclusion more than the Jewish people.

You will find a greater percentage of atheists among the Jewish people than you will with any other group. And the reason being, of course, more than anything else, is the Holocaust.

[6 : 51] And the Jews, understandably, reason this way. Supposedly, we are God's chosen people.

The Bible says that. And when you have chosen people, that means you care for them and you provide for them. Yeah, I know, he did all of that stuff, supposedly, in the wilderness and the manna from heaven and the water from the rock and crossing the Red Sea and all of that stuff.

But he also allowed six million of his chosen people to die in concentration camps and Adolf Eichmann's gas chambers in World War II.

And this supposed God who is in charge of everything and has chosen Israel as the apple of his eye was out to lunch.

Didn't care. Wasn't involved. Or doesn't even exist. That this God is just a figment of man's imagination from time immemorial.

[8 : 00] And man has convinced himself. Someone said, and by the way, I think this was on a prominent display on a bus in Great Britain, driving all over London.

Big sign plastered on the side. And it said something like this. In the beginning, man created God. That's the atheist answer to Genesis 1.1.

That there was no God that created man. It was just man that created God. And the reason he did is because he likes to think that there's somebody out there that is really in charge.

And the idea of man being all alone and that there's no one greater than himself that exists terrifies him. And he cannot deal with that concept.

So he manufactures and creates this God and makes him the kind of God that he wants him to be. This God in reality does not exist at all.

[9 : 15] And the theodicy is one of the great reasons that some have come to that conclusion. The Holocaust and other things. So, we find in the book of Job, and I've referred to Job as the poster boy for suffering.

And in it, in this book, we do find answers that you will not find anywhere else. And in connection with this, guys, there's something that I've been dealing with, and I have not been able to resolve or come to any conclusion until just recently.

In fact, until just this morning. Just a few minutes ago. I don't know how many times I've been through the book of Job, and I've talked through it a couple of times.

And, of course, it is the most information you will find on why human suffering and so on.

And one of the things I've been struggling with for the last few years has to do with the enormous, what we would call phenomenal acts of nature.

[10 : 38] And I guess maybe we could go back to New Orleans and what happened there, which to date is the greatest natural disaster in the history of the nation from the standpoint of costs and lives lost and so on.

And now we're looking at another possibility. Who knows what's going on? And, you know, Puerto Rico has been just absolutely clobbered.

I mean, there are people there that still won't have electricity after all of that time. And it got hit again recently. And now the Gulf Coast is preparing for more natural disaster.

And there's flooding everywhere. California is burning. All those forest fires that have been going on out there. And it has made me wonder, is the Almighty trying to communicate a message to this nation?

Is God behind this, either behind it directly or behind it by permitting it? Because of all of these, what we call natural disasters.

[11 : 54] You know what the insurance companies call it, don't you? They call it acts of God. Acts of God. For lack of a better term, I guess. But even the insurance companies like to believe that there is someone in charge that is above us all.

And the thing that really puzzled me, and to a certain degree still does, and I've got more questions about the Bible than I have answers. But one of the things that really puzzles me is that if God is allowing these things that we call natural disasters, by the way, by the way, most of the forest fires are, no, they are not man-made.

Most of them are what we would call natural. They are the result of lightning strikes. Lightning strikes. Lightning strikes have started more fires than anything else.

Of course, there are some lame brains out there that have been known to deliberately set them. And these people are in a class of their own. But the thing that really puzzled me, and to some extent still does, is that if God wanted to use these natural disasters to get our attention, it seems to me that he would have ways of letting us know that he is behind this.

Therefore, America, get your act together. Because more of the same is going to be coming if you don't. So if that's the case, we don't want to be a nation of slow learners.

[13 : 31] We want to get right with God as a nation. Take the pressure off. But I was thinking, I don't know that God is involved in this at all. It may be just the thing that the phenomena is taking place because of a whole bunch of scientific things that sometimes we don't understand are kind of coming together and creating what we are seeing now.

And this is the result. The floods, the fires, the hurricanes, tsunamis, and all of this stuff. So it seems like God wouldn't do that if he wouldn't also, along with it, let us know that he is behind it.

But how would we know that? How would he communicate that to us? And is there a possibility that somebody else could be involved? And who might that be?

Well, think about this. His infernal majesty, Satan, is referred to as the prince of the power of the air. He is also referred to, and this is a very sobering thought, he is also referred to as the god of this age, the god of this fallen planet.

[14 : 54] He is described as such in 2 Corinthians 4 and verse 4, a verse that I've often quoted, how that the god of this world.

Now most people would assume that the true god is the god of this world. And yes, in a certain sense that is so, because Satan, who is the god of this world, I have likened to a mad dog on the leash.

And God is at the other end of the leash, and the mad dog can go no further and do no more than what the god holding the leash is willing to allow him to do. But he does have, apparently, a great deal of free reign.

And is he, in any wise, in charge of the elements? So I want to read, and if you've got your Bible, would you turn with me to Job chapter 1, and we will see some important principles that are brought forth here.

I'm going to reserve comments until we get down to the place where I really want to zero in on. But in Job, beginning with the very first verse, There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job, and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning away from evil.

[16 : 18] Now it would be a mistake, doctrinally and theologically, to call Job a Christian. There was no such thing way back then. Job might have even been a contemporary of Abraham. So, while we can't technically call him a Christian, we can certainly call him the equal of a Christian, or at least he was a believer.

He was a believer in the one true God. And of course, you've got to remember, fellas, this is 35, 3800 years before Jesus is going to die on the cross. And this goes back a long way.

And we read in verse 2, And seven sons and three daughters were born to him. His possessions were also 7,000 sheep and the camels. I'm going to skip some of this. His yoke of oxen, donkeys, and so on.

And he used to go, in verse 4, and hold a feast at the house of each of his children. And they would send, invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. And this is a real family setting.

They often got together for feasts and had just great times together. And there was a day, in verse 6, when the sons of God, and throughout scripture, the sons of God are referred to as angelic

beings.

[17 : 31] These are not just believing humans, but sons of God are typically called angels. And in this particular case, they are, for the most part, at least what we would call unfallen angels.

They came to present themselves before the Lord. And Satan also came among them. We don't understand the dynamics that are involved here, how it is that Satan would have access to God in heaven, but obviously he does.

And we also read in the book of the Revelation where he is cast out of heaven. And where is he cast out to? He's cast down to the earth.

And 1 Peter 5.8, I think it is, reminds us that we are to be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary, the devil, walks around as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

He's got an appetite. And he's looking for human fodder. So we're going to skip a bunch of this. But the Lord said to Satan, Where do you come from?

[18 : 44] Satan answered and said, From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it. And the Lord said to Satan, Have you considered my servant Job?

For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil. Then Satan answered the Lord, Does Job fear God for nothing?

Have you not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has and on every side?

You've blessed the work of his hands and his possessions have increased in the land.

Why wouldn't he serve you? You've taken really good care of him. He knows which side his bread is buttered on. Why wouldn't he serve you? And then he says, But, you put forth your hand now and touch all that he has and he'll curse you to your face.

That will turn a... He'll do an about face. When you take away all of his goodies, then he'll show you what the opposite is.

[19 : 58] And this great test is set in motion. And the Lord said to him, All that he has is in your power.

Only do not put forth your hand on him. So Satan departed from the presence of the Lord. In other words, the hand of death.

You can do with Job and to Job whatever you want, but I will not permit you to take his life. That's reaching the end of the leash, the chain that you're on.

And that's the limitation that's placed upon you. Short of that, you can have your way with him, do what you will. So, we all know how this is going to turn out. But, the disasters follow.

Verse 13. Messenger came in verse 14. Says the oxen were plowing, the donkeys feeding beside them. And the civilians, this was a neighboring hostile tribe, attacked and took them.

[21 : 01] They also slew the servants with the edge of the sword. And I alone have escaped to tell you. And while he was still speaking, another also came and said, the fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them.

And I alone have escaped to tell you. Now, we are not given any details about this fire from heaven. John, what? It looks like, correct me wrong, it looks like God provoked this fight that he didn't say this.

Because God said to Satan, have you considered Job? And he, God knows what Satan, how he's going to react. And, so it looks like God orchestrated it.

Well, I can, I'm not prepared to dispute that. It could very well be that God has created this scenario for the very purpose of what the end game is going to be.

And, it may very well be that he did it principally not for Job and his generation alone, but for you. And for me.

[22 : 18] For the thousands who would come after Job. For the billions who would come after Job. Because, one of the most revealing verses of scripture in Romans 15, 4 is when Paul says, now whatsoever things happened aforetime were written for our learning that, or in order that, we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope.

and there is no book, there is no writing in all of humanity that answers the theodicy and the issue of the existence of evil and the presence of a good God like the book of Job.

That's why I refer to him as the poster boy of human suffering. He is the ultimate example that God sets forth. And bottom line is this, no matter what happens, no matter what, no matter how painful, no matter how adverse, no matter how difficult, God is still worthy of being trusted.

That's the end game of the book of Job. In the midst of everything that disappoints and everything that is taken from you, God is still worthy of being trusted.

Because, you know, get a perspective because perspective means everything. All of these things, the family, the animals, the wealth, everything that went with it, that's all temporal stuff.

[24 : 05] All of it is temporal stuff. And as far as the material things are concerned, it's just stuff. That's all it is. Just stuff. And someone has replied, you've never seen a U-Haul trailer following along after a hearse.

You leave it behind, you leave it all behind. God has made more than ample provision for that which is not stuff, but for that which will endure for eternity, and that is our human spirit that is one day going to reside in a glorified body that will never know another ache or pain throughout eternity. But, for now, we are in a period that is referred to not only as the age of grace, but it is the time of faith.

And faith, faith is that commodity that we are called upon to exercise when we do not have complete information about anything.

Because if you do, then faith has no basis for operating. And as we pointed out in the past, when Paul writes to the Corinthians, I think it's at the end of the 13th chapter, he says, and now abides these three, faith, hope, and love, charity.

[25 : 32] and the greatest of these is love. And the reason that love is the greatest is that that's the only one that's going to endure.

Because the time is coming when we will not be called upon to even exercise faith anymore for the simple reason that it has been fulfilled.

faith has done its complete work and the end game is realized in the same way with hope. There won't be any need for hope of anything because all hopes will have been realized and there won't be any room or any need for faith because everything will be in actuality.

So faith is only possible where conclusive evidence is lacking. And right now, conclusive evidence is lacking.

Well, what is evidence that is conclusive? It is evidence that leaves no possibility of doubt. None. And that will be realized when Christ returns.

[26 : 44] That will be realized when all of the things prophesied are fulfilled. Faith and hope will both be out of business. There won't be any need for either one. But love is going to continue on.

So faith is the modus operandi in which the Christian faith finds its very anchor. And this is why the writer of Hebrews says, without faith it is impossible to please him.

And all faith means nothing more than this. It just means your willingness and your ability to believe God. Faith faith is not something that we believe and trust in in the absence of evidence.

No, no. No. God is not asking us to believe something where there is no good evidential room for believing it.

No. we have more than adequate evidence that can and should result in our belief and trust. But we do not have conclusive evidence.

[27 : 56] And this is why even in our law courts, even in our law courts today, when an individual has tried for a crime and the judge will admonish the jury and say that you must weigh the evidence and you must conclude that this individual is guilty or innocent based on the evidence that is available.

And they call that beyond reasonable doubt. They don't say beyond any doubt at all. But it is beyond reasonable doubt.

That means there is good reason to convict or not convict because there is sufficient evidence, not complete total evidence, but there is sufficient evidence to render a verdict.

And if that doesn't exist, then the whole jurisprudence system comes crashing down and you can't even have a court. So that's the basis on which faith operates is in the absence of full and complete evidence.

And the time is coming when this faith thing is going to be set aside and will no longer be needed because we who exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ particularly, say for instance, in his second coming.

[29 : 15] Well, when in accordance with Matthew 24 and Revelation 19, the heavens open and Jesus Christ comes riding in on that white horse, nobody is any longer going to need to have faith that there will be a second coming.

You're going to be looking at it. And seeing is believing. There won't be any faith needed. And those who refuse to exercise faith for whatever reason will see the error of their way when that time comes.

But I want to get back to this now about God notifying or letting us know. We've got all of these hostile forces that have done damage, brought death and destruction upon Job and his family. And now, Job doesn't have a clue. He doesn't have any idea why these things have happened to him. And you go on reading and something that I've read before and I completely overlooked it. Just completely overlooked it. This is all human instrumentality that we've looked at so far. These are all human beings. Invaders, raiders, whatever you want to call them. But now, we've got a new wrinkle.

[30 : 30] And it is in verse 19. Well, let's read verse 18 first. And while he was still speaking, another also came and said, Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house.

Now, please don't read into that that this was some kind of a drunken orgy. It doesn't mean they were all together getting smashed. It just means that they were drinking wine and everybody drank wine with their meals and it wasn't at all an unusual thing.

And behold, a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house and it fell on the young people and they died.

And I alone have escaped to tell you. You know what we would probably call that today? A tornado. I mean, it's got the earmarks of a tornado, doesn't it?

And the house collapsed and everybody that was in it died. Where did this come from? Well, in the context, it came from Satan. It was one of the prerogatives that God gave to Satan.

[31 : 38] You can do anything you want to him, you can take from him anything you want, but you can't take his life. So here is the question. Is it possible that God is allowing Satan to bring these calamities upon us, these fires, and floods and all of the negatives that go with it because he has actually given Satan the latitude and this is what he's doing?

And the thing that led me to say, no, I don't think that's the case at all, is because I never thought that God would allow these kind of calamities to come upon this nation without somehow informing our nation that he was behind it.

He was doing it. Therefore, America, get your act together. You have deeply offended me as a nation. And that's pretty much the position that I took. And I still cling to that a little bit.

But I have to ask this question. Did Job have any idea that God was actually behind this, giving Satan permission to do these things, take his family, bring this wind and everything?

Did he inform Job as to what was happening? No. He did not. And Job goes throughout all of this experience with just that one question that won't go away.

[33 : 17] You know what it is, don't you? Why? Why? Why is this happening to me? What did I do to offend you? Where have I gone wrong?

Please tell me how I have displeased you and I'll do whatever I can to fix it. But I've got to know. And heaven was totally silent.

Not a word. Not a word. And it got to the place where Job's wife, wife, and remember, she's lost just as much as he has.

We're talking about a mother's heart and all of these kids. And she sees her husband in anguish and pain and suffering.

And her advice, her advice to Job is, why don't you just curse God and die and get it over with?

[34 : 20] I just can't stand seeing you like this. And he responded and said, you speak as a foolish woman. Shall not we who have received good from the Lord receive evil also?

And the King James uses the word evil and that's not a good word because evil has a connotation of morality, but the word ought to be adversity.

We've received prosperity from the Lord should we not also receive adversity from the Lord? And Job said, the Lord has given and the Lord has taken away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. Next time you see Job, he's sitting on a pile of ashes wearing sackcloth and he's full of boils, sores all over his body and he picks up a piece of broken pottery and starts scraping his skin to try and alleviate the pain and the burning sensation and all that went with the boils, covered with boils from head to toe.

And you know, in the end, in the end, as you read the whole story, some 40 chapters, God never does really answer Job's question.

[35 : 57] Why? what he does is he once again asserts the enormous gap that exists between himself and humans.

Where were you, Job, when I created the heavens and the earth? Where were you? Well, Job was unknowing, out of existence, a total blank, never even thought of at the time by anyone, and God made a comparison between himself and humanity, and bottom line was, Job, Job had to hang his head and say, you're right, you're right.

Please forgive me for even questioning you, you know, and, what a story, what a story. So, say all that to ask the question about the theodicy, is it possible that this nation that has been founded under circumstances like no other nation and has enjoyed 270 plus years like no other nation, and by the way, you are aware, I'm sure, that as far as the nations of the world are concerned, we're still the new kid on the block.

We're still a bunch of upstarts, nationally, speaking. I mean, you think back to the 1300s and 1400s and you know who the world power was? I mean, the world power, the world superpower, Spain, Spain, England, and, of course, you know, they're all history now.

And here is this upstart ragtag nation begun by a bunch of commoners, if you will. And, boy, look what we've come to.

[37 : 59] And God has blessed this nation in ways that are just, I think, undeniable. But, you know, slowly but surely, we have been turning away from our founding roots, from the philosophy, from the underpinnings upon which this nation was found.

We are leaving them more and more behind. And, and I am satisfied that the greatest reason for it is nothing more than human arrogance.

It is our usurping, we have become, we have become worshippers at the altar of science and technology as opposed to worshippers of the true God.

and we're paying the price day by day in immorality and lawlessness and everything that goes with it. And, if the foundations are removed, what can the righteous do?

And that's where we are. So, one has to wonder, maybe all of these things that we're looking at is a wake-up call. And if God is allowing Satan to have his way with us with all of these things, and God is behind that, he knows what he's doing, and Satan is still a mad dog on a chain.

[39 : 25] But, the question is, if, and I'm not saying that I know this because I don't, I've still got serious questions, but, if God is behind this, or if he is allowing Satan to have latitude in these areas, then the question becomes, are we getting the message?

And will we? I don't know. That makes your wonder, doesn't it? While they're dishing out the food, have you a comment or question? Paul.

I really don't think it happened. I mean, you just thought something brought us to our knees would be 9-11. I remember that after it happened, everything was calm.

I mean, everybody was courteous and polite for about a day or so. Yeah. Well, one wonders if maybe 9-11 was not an initial effort to awaken this nation.

And we would say, well, how can that be? I mean, these were terrorists that did this, you know? These were terrorists. Well, yes, indeed, indeed they were.

[40 : 38] And there's no question about that. Thank you, ma'am. but so were the Sabaeans who lived next door to Job, you know? They were terrorists too. And God has established a methodology where He has used those worse than His people to judge His people.

He used the Babylonians to come against, He used Nebuchadnezzar, a pagan, thoroughgoing pagan idolater, to come against His own nation, tear down the city of Jerusalem and lead the people into captivity.

And He did the same thing with the Assyrians and the northern ten tribes. And He even warned them that that's what He was going to do. He said, I'm going to bring a nation that does not have your values and does not have your history, does not have your connection with Me.

I'm going to use them to chasten you. That's exactly what He did. And that was Jeremiah's message. And it certainly came to pass. Yes, I don't know where you're trying to make an analogy or comparison with the Job story with what's happening now.

It's that Job did not do anything. I mean, he did not leave God. Right, right. Whereas, you're saying here, we are, this country, we have left God.

[41 : 58] And therefore, he is acting, bringing all these calamities on us. But Job got all these calamities even though he didn't leave God. True. So, I still can't get that in my mind.

In other words, obviously, who he was, Joe, who are you here to talk about me doing this thing? Look who I am. And now, you've got a valid point.

You can't make the comparison. Somehow, I don't see how you can tie that. I hear what you're saying, and I tend to agree with you. All I'm saying is that there are principles that are operating here, and I wish I understood them better.

But I do know that the bottom line is that God is worthy of our trust. Yes, Larry? What's the history of Israelites, how they would go away from God, and things would happen to them, they'd come back, things would happen to them, they'd go.

repent, and return again. The cycle would be repeated over and over with different generations.

Yes. There are parallels, but there are legitimate differences, too, as Joe has brought out.

[43 : 08] And that's something that we need to process. So, guys, when you on your way out, each of you pick up one of these, and keep it intact, because it's several pages.

I don't know, make sure you get all of it. And just take what is incorporated in this, and if you're from Greece, don't take one, because I might not have enough, and you can get yours at church, okay?