Text: Various
Title: Jesus and the Problem of Evil
Truth: Christianity offers the only real solution to the problem of evil.
Date/Location: Sunday November 24, 2024 at FBC

Introduction

I want to explore the interaction that Jesus had with evil and how it impacts our understanding of the problem of evil generally.

I. The Impact of Evil on Jesus

A. If we go back to our earlier studies on the problem on of evil, we remember that there are actually several problems among which are moral evil, natural evil, and the psychological or religious problem of evil. Jesus experienced each of these facets of the larger problem.

B. Ask the audience to brainstorm all the ways that Jesus was impacted directly by the problem of evil. Here are some:

He was left behind in Jerusalem.

He experienced tiredness and hunger.

He had a direct confrontation with the Devil.

His suffering before and on the cross.

He was betrayed by Judas.

He was denied by Peter.

His own did not receive Him.

He was accused of being demon-possessed.

He was mocked, wrongly tried, scourged, and experienced God's wrath against sin.

People tried to catch Him in his words.

He was accused of blasphemy.

He experienced poverty.

He was disrespected.

He had multiple run-ins with the Pharisees.

He dealt with money-changers in the temple, twice.

Herod tried to kill Him when He was just a baby.

The Sea of Galilee arose against Him, after a manner of speaking, with its storms, one or more of which He stilled.

His friend John the Baptist was killed.

He ran into demon-possessed people frequently, like the Gadarene demoniac.

Peter was acting as an agent of Satan when He tried to convince the Lord away from the path of suffering.

Just being around sinners was an impact of evil on Jesus.

People attempted to kill Jesus, by trying, for example, to throw Him off a cliff.

He saw sickness, if not experienced it in His own body. It seems inevitable that He experienced some of the natural consequences of the fall on His body.

C. Death of a family member. Consider the silence about Joseph after the birth narrative of Christ. Since Jesus assigned the care of his mother to the apostle John when He was on the cross (John 19:26-27), we are justified to believe that Joseph was out of the picture at that time. And he was not out of the picture because of divorce—he was a just man and would not do that (Matt. 1:19). He must have died in intervening 30-odd years since the birth narrative. Jesus had the grief of losing his human father to physical death.

D. Death of a friend. John 11: Jesus grieved the death of Lazarus, and probably more broadly the sinful and dreadful condition of humanity that Lazarus's death signified.

E. Discomforts. Jesus suffered lesser discomforts of life like weariness and hunger. While not evil in themselves, they can become suffering if left unattended long enough.

F. The Devil. On one occasion Jesus was confronted directly by the Devil. That would qualify as an encounter with the problem of evil, even evil personified. In the wilderness testing He faced extreme hunger and weakness, and was tested to sin against God. He did not sin, of course, but He felt evil very palpably. He must also have had a confrontation with Lucifer when he sinned at the beginning.

G. Death on the cross. It would be hard to argue that the Lord Jesus experienced any worse evil than the injustice and indignity of the suffering and crucifixion of Thursday night into Friday, and then in the world of the dead—populated because of the problem of evil. At this same time, we might say that there was one worse thing, but it was not evil: it was that Jesus experienced the just wrath of God against sin. Acts 2:23, 3:15.

H. His departure from heaven in the first place. We might imagine what would have happened had Adam not sinned and plunged the world into darkness. Would Jesus have become incarnate? Maybe so to more fully fellowship with man, but it does not seem obvious why He would come in human flesh like He did through a virgin. But that is all moot because God's plan for eternity was what has transpired with Adam and Eve, that Jesus would come to die for sinners. Consequently, the incarnation was necessary, along with the suffering that it entailed for the Son of Man. But just leaving the glories of Heaven, though not technically an "evil," was somehow less than ideal. I'll resign this point by simply saying that God's wisdom is higher than ours, and so the incarnation was somehow more than our version of the ideal Jesus staying in Heaven forever with no incarnation. But the point stands that evil can be seen as a cause for Jesus's coming down here. And with that, He came into direct contact with evil and it impacted Him deeply.

But there is another side of this whole thing…

II. The Impact of Jesus on Evil

A. He solved the problem of evil. Like a superhero, Jesus *ate* the problem of evil. He experienced it to the full, indeed, but He also destroyed it. Its dying remnants fight to maintain power in this

world, but those remnants are on the way out. The sentence is already passed; it will eventually be executed. We are clear-eyed that this is not a triumphalist statement or simply putting a good face on a bad situation. It is true that evil has a short time left, but in that short time it will wreak havoc on all whom it can touch.

In more particulars, we can say that…

B. Jesus solved the problem of death: Heb. 2:15, Rev. 21:4. He became subject to it and turned around and conquered it by rising from the dead.

C. Jesus solved all results of sin: sorrow, crying, pain, the "former order" Rev. 21:4

D. Jesus crushed the serpent, Satan: Gen 3:15, Rom 16:20

E. Jesus took off the table the ordinances that were against us, which we could not fulfill and which condemned us, Col. 2:14.

F. Jesus took the consequences of sin from us and offers forgiveness from the evils we have done. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (1 Tim. 1:15).

No other faith can claim all that, and certainly not produce the results that we have seen done by Christ.

III. God *Has* Done Something About Evil

Often God is on the receiving end of the criticism that He has not done anything about the problem of evil. But the basic facts of the Christian faith demonstrate otherwise. 464 verses of Scripture mention the word evil, and the idea is present multiplied times more than that. God commands against evil. He is personally against it. He punishes it in this life through governing authorities and natural consequences and at the inception of the next life.

Rom 2:9 tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does **evil**…

Rom 3:8 Why not "do **evil** that good may come"?...Their condemnation is just.

Rom 12:9 abhor what is **evil**.

Rom 12:17 Repay no one **evil** for **evil**.

Rom 12:21 overcome **evil** with good

Rom 13:4 the authorities are "God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices **evil**."

Rom 16:19 be wise in what is good, and simple concerning **evil**.

1 Cor. 5:13 put away from yourselves the **evil** person

1 Cor. 10:6 we should not lust after **evil** things

2 Cor. 13:7 "I pray to God that you do no **evil**."

Gal. 1:4 Jesus "gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present **evil** age."

Eph. 4:31 put away **evil** speaking

Col. 3:5 put to death **evil** desires

1 Thess. 5:15 do not render **evil** for **evil** to anyone. Pursue good.

1 Thess 5:22 abstain from every kind of **evil**.

Titus 3:2 do not speak **evil** of anyone, but instead be peaceable, gentle, humble.

Heb 10:22 Jesus cleanses our hearts from **evil**.

James 1:13 God is not tempted by **evil** and does not invite anyone to sin.

1 Peter 3:19-11 Do not return **evil** for **evil**. Refrain from **evil**. Turn away from **evil** and do good.

1 Peter 3:12 The face of the Lord is against those who do **evil**.

3 John 11 do not imitate **evil**.

Rev. 2:2 an example of a church that cannot bear with those who are **evil**.

IV. The Christian Faith Solves the Problem of Evil

Everyone faces the problem of evil. Atheists and Christians face the problem of evil. What is the difference between the atheist's handling of the problem evil and the Christian's handling of the

problem evil? The problem for the atheist is that they (a) **do not have an objective basis** for how they know what evil actually *is*; and (b) they offer **no solution** for evil; and (c) they offer **no justice** for the evil that has been done because everyone just dies and that is all. In the end, after they complain that evil is a problem, it remains unsolved both as to its existence, its past and present occurrence, and its future adjudication. Their good works may fractionally reduce the evil in the world, but will not make a significant dent in it, especially since others of their ilk are busy making *more* evil! In the end, their view is hopeless, about like nihilism.

The Christian, however, can (a) give an **objective explanation for what evil actually is**: it is anything done outside of God's desired will. It is anything done against God's commands or character. It is anything done in violation of rightly-interpreted Scripture. We can also explain where it came from: the rebellion of one of the angelic beings now known as Satan, and in the rebellion of Eve and Adam to the clear command of God.

But we Christians also (b) **offer hope** for the solution to evil—not all immediately, but some immediately and the rest long term. The situation we know to exist brings hope to those looking for relief from evil, a hope that does not exist in the atheistic worldview. The first part of our hope is that personal salvation brings relief from the problem of evil in our own lives (Titus 2:14). It deals with the sin and death problem for that individual person.

For example, Romans 7:24-25a says "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

The second part of the Christians hopeful outlook is that the "cosmic salvation" of the restoration of all things (3:21) in the millennial kingdom and beyond brings a new heaven and new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13). Sin will be banished forever; death conquered; pain gone; suffering finished.

Third, Christians can also (c) **explain what happens to the evils that have gone unpunished** today. There is a judgment and punishment at which those evils are addressed. There are two

pieces of that: **first**, the cross of Jesus where He bore evil and took the punishment for it, to offer salvation to His people. The second piece is that those who reject His offer will see God and address their own part in the evil of this world directly with Him.

The ungodly are not so, my friends. They have no explanation for all of this except "whatever is, is. It's part of the struggle for existence. It is the survival of the fittest."[1] The Christian outlook is much more satisfying, but beyond that, it has plenty of justifying features to be not only plausible but also convincing.

MAP

[1] Those who are not the "fittest" are often the subject of our kindnesses and labors to assist them in their difficult path. Those efforts bring out the best in humanity in terms of service to others, compassion, love, sacrifice, etc. Even an atheist whose spouse falls critically ill will not dismiss him or her as so much trash because the image of God in both will not permit it to be so.