

Why Good Things Happen to Bad People
Answering the Christmas Question
(Other resources below at
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But now God's way of putting people right with himself has been revealed. It has nothing to do with law, even though the Law of Moses gave their witness to it. God puts people right through their faith in Jesus Christ. God does this to all who believe in Christ, because there is no difference at all: everyone has sinned and is far away from God's saving presence. But by the free gift of God's grace all are put right with him through Christ Jesus, who sets them free. Romans 3:21-24

Most of us at some point in our faith have wondered why a good, all-powerful God allows suffering, especially when the person in pain is someone you respect—even yourself! It doesn't make sense. Why would bad things happen to someone who's good?

Clearly, either God is unfair, or He has a much different view of what's fair than the rest of us.

"I understand why bad people suffer," we reason. "After all, they deserve it; you break the law, you go to jail. But I'm basically pretty good, and that should earn me a ticket out of suffering—or at least, to less suffering than those others."

We all want to believe this, simply because if it's not true, that means bad things can happen to good people...like me.

STARTLING FAIRNESS

If you can allow that God is not unfair, however, then you're ready to hear the Apostle Paul's strong hint about God's unique, even startling view of fairness: Being right with God "has nothing to do with the law"—that is, with your performance or righteousness. The plot thickens considerably when Jesus, the most righteous of human beings, suffers terribly on the cross.

So before our tortuous reasoning draws us any further away from Jesus, let's go back to the trailhead and start with His view:

There simply are no good people.

I'm not just being cynical here. I'm quoting Jesus.

"Good teacher," a rich man asked Jesus, "what must I do to receive eternal life?"

"Why do you call me good?" Jesus replied. "No one is good except God alone" (Mark 10:18ff).

Jesus' self-deprecation here is surprising, but we soon see why He's quick to make such a radical distinction. When He instructs the rich man to keep the basic biblical Law in order to receive eternal life, the man declares, "Ever since I was young, I have obeyed all these commandments."

The Kingdom of God, however, is not about keeping the commands. It's about knowing the Commander. Once you know His heart for you, you'll beg Him to tell you what to do.

In order for that to happen, however, most often we need to be jarred into humility. That's what enables you to value His saving grace—that is, to celebrate Christmas genuinely. Otherwise, you fancy that you don't need God—so what's there to

celebrate? Santa, sparkling trees, sales at the mall, office parties, and “holiday cheer” will do just fine.

A SIN TO BE POOR--?

Worse, such a performance-oriented, cash-and-carry view of God’s favor leads you to believe that others materially less fortunate than you are not so blessed, and therefore, simply aren’t as righteous as you.

“Where money is worshipped,” as wisely noted, “it’s a sin to be poor.”

Jesus knows the rich man has literally invested his identity and righteousness in the world’s fortunes and his religious performance. He also knows that the economy of God’s Kingdom is not about what you’ve done, but rather, Whose you are.

Christmas, that is, rescues us from the distraction of performance religion in order to restore us to our true identity as sons and daughters of Father God. That’s what frees us to receive the blessings of His Kingdom rule (see Rom. 8:14-16, Galat. 4:1-7).

By instructing the rich man to give away his fortune to the poor, Jesus would save the man to be restored to his identity and destiny as God’s son.

To someone who worships—that is, attributes their identity and saving power to wealth, here at last is a commandment the rich man cannot obey—at least, not without sacrificing his identity and, indeed, his god.

And that, of course, is the Father’s strategy. Even as a surgeon cuts, the rich man is broken: “At this, the man’s face fell, and he went away sad.”

This is not a diatribe against money. It’s a plea not to miss what God has done in Christmas—and is prepared to do again in the heart of anyone who’s humble enough to confess you need it.

The not-good-ness in our human sin-nature stirs shame. When suffering strikes, therefore, we balk. “Why me?” we ask in defense. “What did I do to deserve such misfortune?”

From a biblical perspective, however, God’s answer might well be, “Why *not* you?” That is, “You have a sin-nature just like everyone else; what makes you think you should be exempt from the fallout of a sinful world?”

Indeed, bad things happen to us all—at times, simply because we live in a fallen world and that fallenness lives in us. As Jesus noted, God “sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” alike (Mt. 5:45).

NOT WHAT YOU DESERVE

Sure, it’s unfair from our self-centered human perspective. In fact, if you want to shake your fist at God and demand, “Give me what I deserve!”, I understand.

But wait just a minute, please, so I can step away before the lightning toasts you.

The Good News of Christmas is precisely that we do NOT get what we deserve.

It’s called “grace”—as Paul proclaimed, the “free gift of God’s grace in Christ Jesus” that “sets us free” from the demands of our performance to receive the promise of God’s performance.

Christmas is not about our goodness, but rather, God’s goodness; it’s not about the law’s commands and punishments, but rather, the Father’s grace and blessings (see Ezek. 36:26ff).

This God of grace is not Santa Claus. He’s not making a list and checking it twice to find out if you’re naughty or nice. Yes, as our Father, He’s pleased when we trust Him

and aim for His path—thereby beckoning His saving presence alongside. But He knows **we all have a rebellious, naughty chip in our human hard drive** which lures us away from our Father toward death—and which only the birth of Jesus can overcome.

To receive eternal life and not just to grasp after eternal comfort, you need to face your unworthiness.

WHY ME?

Some years ago, my older sister told me that during WWII our parents had scheduled a Navy doctor to abort me. Stunned, soon thereafter I cried out for Jesus to come into my heart where that memory was lodged. I saw Him come and take the pre-abortion pills out of my mother's hands and throw them in the trash, as my mother had apparently done. He then turned to me and said simply, "You don't owe your life to your mother; you belong to me."

I was thrilled, of course. Yet my elation was sorely tempered by knowing that millions of others have not been saved from being aborted. What's more, I know that Jesus didn't save me because of my righteous performance in the womb.

Amid my joy, therefore, the question has upended and challenged me throughout my life:

Why me?

In my 75 years, I've had plenty of bad things happen to me. But since discovering that Jesus saved me in the womb, I don't ask, Why?

I do ask, How? When I'm sick or distressed, that is, I ask the Father to show me what's wrong and seek His healing, whether natural or supernatural. Even as I search out the best medical treatment, like King David I ask God to "search my heart" for any brokenness in me, from sin and unhealthy lifestyle to emotional wounds and demonic oppression (Ps. 139:23,24).

But I don't rely on my religious performance for the Father's favor or healing.

Instead, I remember all the times He's saved me in the past. And then, gratefully, hopefully, I cry out yet again for His mercy—even to give me His battle plan for victory over my situation.

As I come thereby to experience His mercy, I do what He tells me. Not because He'll punish me if I don't, but because I know it's best for me. And when I discover I can't do it, that's when Christmas becomes real to me—and I surrender to Him at last.

"I know that good does not live in me—that is in my human nature," as Paul declared. "For even though the desire to do good is in me, I am not able to do it.... What an unhappy man I am!" (Rom. 7:18-8:1).

WHO WILL SAVE ME?

Like all of us, Paul is trapped between the rock of his self-centered sin-nature and the hard place of its bondage. That dilemma prompts him at last to ask The Christmas Question for everyone real enough to confess you don't deserve its blessing: "Who will save me from this body taking me to death?"

This is the question required of every man and woman who dares kneel at the foot of the Cross and call Jesus, the most worthy of human beings, "Lord." Both awe-ful in its truth and blessed in its grace, this question stands between every one of us and eternal life. It's the gateway to God's Kingdom come "on earth as it is in heaven"—that is, to receiving the joyful heartbeat of Christmas.

“Thanks be to God,” as Paul answers himself, “who does this through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

At Christmas, Jesus has come to bear the shame of our otherwise unbearable not-good-ness. He thereby re-opens the avenue to the Father’s heart—closed by Adam and Eve in the Fall—and restores our innocence (see John 14:6,7). That marvelous, unfathomable gift enables you even now to walk out your destiny as planned by the Giver.

This means you can fall on your knees and confess to God your unworthiness. You can then proclaim His worthiness to be praised and “ask God for what you need, always asking Him with a thankful heart” (Philip. 4:6-7).

Christians are not shamed by such humility, but indeed, commissioned by it, for it frees you to rest in the Father’s presence and trust Him to lead you in His purposes.

That’s why good things happen to bad people (like us): Because the Father whose love endures forever (Ps. 118:2) has a role for each of us in advancing His Kingdom rule.

What’s more, He holds the power to accomplish it (Ephes. 2:8-10).

He knows we can’t achieve it—but He’s sent Jesus so we can receive it.

If you want that, you’re ready for Christmas.

Resources

* Getting Ready for Christmas:

Understanding the Bible; An Overview from Creation to Easter mp3, 6 teachings \$8. <http://store.abbafather.com/SearchResults.asp?Cat=3>

* *Loving to Fight or Fighting to Love: Winning the Spiritual Battle for Your Marriage*

--book at <http://store.abbafather.com/SearchResults.asp?Cat=1>

--YouTube video interview at <https://youtu.be/SnnomO1WuhA>

--mp3 reading by the author (cds available, ask at Contact link Home Page)

<http://store.abbafather.com/SearchResults.asp?Cat=1>

* Holy Spirit’s ministry of healing: Podcast links on Home Page

1. Healing Emotional Wounds

2. Physical Healing

3. An Introduction to Spiritual Warfare

* Teachings with Spanish/ French/ Cantonese translations

<http://store.abbafather.com/SearchResults.asp?Cat=6>