

Sermon Series: "Questions I would like to ask God?"—Lord of Life Lutheran Church—11/5/2000

Title: "Why do bad things happen—especially—to good people?"

Text: Acts 24-28 (selected verses)

Introduction: **Illus.: Asking God "Why?" and "Suffering for the Right Reason"**

Theme: Often the evil and tragic take our attention off of what God is doing and how he is delivering. If we begin with framing life's circumstances and God's action in Christ's love, life and its problems come into clearer focus.

• ***Some Biblical Principles to clear the air and frame the discussion***

1. Discarding the myth that there is such a thing as a "good" person
 - **All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." "The poison of vipers is on their lips." "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know." "There is no fear of God before their eyes. . . Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law. Romans 3: 12-20**
2. God does not punish the believer because the past payment of Jesus is sufficient
 - **For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. 1Peter 3:18**
3. Nothing, **NO MATTER WHAT**, separates us from God's love for us in Christ
 - **For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8: 38-39**

• ***At the Whim and Will of Wicked/Treacherous People or in the Hands of a Living God?***

1. **PRINT AND READ ACTS 24: 10-21, 26-27**
2. Often we view ourselves as victims of a world political system which seems to work against Christians bringing harm
 - **ILLUS.: HE HAS CONQUERED EVERY DEMOCRAT**
 - Paul truly was at the mercy of less than mercy driven leaders who were acting out of selfish motive and greed
 - Living with cynical bitterness, we blame every evil on "the government" and fail to see God's hand at work
3. God's hand and plan are always at work and never thwarted by the evil wickedness of men and institutions
 - a. Paul went to Rome and witnessed to empire leaders which was his wish all along— not think happen this way
 - b. **Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Romans 13: 1**

• ***Suffering for Christ or Witnessing for Christ?***

1. **PRINT AND READ ACTS 25: 23-27; 26: 1-2, 19-29, 32**
2. Often we whine instead of witness when Divinely allowed suffering enters the picture
 - it would have been easy for Paul to focus on the injustice and miss the once-in-a-life-time witness opportunity
 - **Dear friends, don't be surprised by the fiery troubles that are coming in order to test you. Don't feel as though something strange is happening to you, but be happy as you share Christ's sufferings. Then you will also be full of joy when he appears again in his glory. 1 Peter 4:12-13**
3. Look for the resurrection hope to be the source of your *endurance* and your *witness*
 - **In every way we're troubled, but we aren't crushed by our troubles. We're frustrated, but we don't give up. We're persecuted, but we're not abandoned. We're captured, but we're not killed. We always carry around the death of Jesus in our bodies so that the life of Jesus is also shown in our bodies. 2 Cor. 4: 8-10**

• ***When Is 'Enough -- Enough'?***

1. **PRINT AND READ ACTS 27: 1, 9-14, 21-26, 40-46**
2. Exasperation over "*piling on*" comes when we are not listening for God
 - a. Paul was busy, not worrying about the storm, but looking for God's comfort and deliverance at work
 - b. When the trials are piling up is when you need to commit more time to pray and meditate on God's Word
3. **ILLUS.: When you have nothing left but God, then you become aware that God is enough. Maude Royden**

• ***Snake-bitten or God's Miracle in Process?***

1. **PRINT AND READ ACTS 28: 1-10**
2. **ILLUS.: COMPLAINT**
3. Paul's experience shows how God is not in the business of punishing (4) but saving and delivering for His glory
4. How is God turning what appears to be a disaster, defeat, collapse, into an opportunity for his glory shown in you?

ASKING GOD `WHY?'

It is always best to go first for our answers to Jesus himself. He cried out on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It was a human cry, a cry of desperation, springing from his heart's agony at the prospect of being put into the hands of wicked men and actually becoming sin for you and me. We can never suffer anything like that, yet we do at times feel forsaken and cry, "Why, Lord?" The psalmist asked why. Job, a blameless man, suffering horrible torments on an ash heap, asked why. It does not seem to me to be sinful to ask the question. What is sinful is resentment against God and his dealings with us. Citation: Elisabeth Elliot, *Keep a Quiet Heart* (Vine Books, 1995)

SUFFERING FOR THE RIGHT REASON

Perhaps the main task of the minister is to prevent people from suffering for the wrong reasons. Citation: Henri Nouwen

HE HAS CONQUERED EVERY DEMOCRAT

One Sunday morning during junior church we learned a song with the line, "He has conquered every foe." When I saw a number of puzzled expressions, I explained a foe is an enemy. Still thinking on my feet, I said, "The name of one of our foes begins with the letter D." I was referring to the Devil, but I got some immediate insight into one family's politics when one child replied, "Oh, you mean the Democrats!"

COMPLAINT

While hunting deer in the Tehema Wildlife Area near Red Bluff in northern California, Jay Rathman climbed to a ledge on the slope of a rocky gorge. As he raised his head to look over the ledge above, he sensed movement to the right of his face. A coiled rattler struck with lightning speed, just missing Rathman's right ear. The four-foot snake's fangs got snagged in the neck of Rathman's wool turtleneck sweater, and the force of the strike caused it to land on his left shoulder. It then coiled around his neck. He grabbed it behind the head with his left hand and could feel the warm venom running down the skin of his neck, the rattles making a furious racket. He fell backward and slid headfirst down the steep slope through brush and lava rocks, his rifle and binoculars bouncing beside him. "As luck would have it," he said in describing the incident to a Department of Fish and Game official, "I ended up wedged between some rocks with my feet caught uphill from my head. I could barely move." He got his right hand on his rifle and used it to disengage the fangs from his sweater, but the snake had enough leverage to strike again. "He made about eight attempts and managed to hit me with his nose just below my eye about four times. I kept my face turned so he couldn't get a good angle with his fangs, but it was very close. This chap and I were eyeball to eyeball and I found out that snakes don't blink. He had fangs like darning needles...I had to choke him to death. It was the only way out. I was afraid that with all the blood rushing to my head I might pass out." When he tried to toss the dead snake aside, he couldn't let go--"I had to pry my fingers from its neck." Rathman, 45, who works for the Defense Department in San Jose, estimates his encounter with the snake lasted 20 minutes. Warden Dave Smith says of meeting Rathman: "He walked toward me holding this string of rattles and said with a sort of grin on his face, 'I'd like to register a complaint about your wildlife here.'" Swindoll, Quest For Character, p. 17-18

Acts 24:10-21, 26-27

The governor motioned for Paul to speak. Paul responded, "I know that you have been a judge over this nation for many years. So I'm pleased to present my case to you. ¹¹You can verify for yourself that I went to Jerusalem to worship no more than twelve days ago. ¹²No one found me having a discussion with anyone in the temple courtyard or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues throughout the city. ¹³These people cannot even prove their accusations to you. ¹⁴But I'll admit to you that I'm a follower of the way of Christ, which they call a sect. This means that I serve our ancestors' God and believe everything written in Moses' Teachings and the Prophets. ¹⁵I hope for the same thing my accusers do, that people with God's approval and those without it will come back to life. ¹⁶With this belief I always do my best to have a clear conscience in the sight of God and people. ¹⁷After many years I have come back to my people and brought gifts for the poor and offerings for God. ¹⁸My accusers found me in the temple courtyard doing these things after I had gone through the purification ceremony. No crowd or noisy mob was present. ¹⁹But some Jews from the province of Asia were there. They should be here in front of you to accuse me if they have anything against me. ²⁰Otherwise, these men who are accusing me should tell what I was charged with when I stood in front of their council. ²¹They could accuse me of only one thing. As I stood among them, I shouted, 'I'm being tried in front of you because I believe that the dead will come back to life.' " . . . ²⁶At the same time, Felix was hoping that Paul would give him some money. For that reason, Felix would send for Paul rather often to have friendly conversations with him. ²⁷Two years passed. Then Porcius Festus took Felix's place. (Since Felix wanted to do the Jews a favor, he left Paul in prison.)

Acts 25:23-27, 26: 1-2, 19-29, 32

²³The next day Agrippa and Bernice entered the auditorium with a lot of fanfare. Roman army officers and the most important men of the city entered the auditorium with them. Festus gave the order, and Paul was brought into the auditorium. ²⁴Then Festus said, "King Agrippa and everyone who is present with us! All the Jews in Jerusalem and Caesarea have talked to me about this man you see in front of you. They shout that he must not be allowed to live any longer. ²⁵However, I don't think that he has done anything to deserve the death penalty. But since he made an appeal to His Majesty the Emperor, I have decided to send him to Rome. ²⁶But I don't have anything reliable to write our emperor about him. So I have brought him to all of you, and especially to you, King Agrippa. Then I'll have something to write after he is cross-examined. ²⁷I find it ridiculous to send a prisoner to Rome when I can't specify any charges against him." . . .

^{26:1} Agrippa said to Paul, "You're free to speak for yourself." Paul acknowledged King Agrippa and then began his defense. ²"King Agrippa, I think I'm fortunate today to stand in front of you and defend myself against every charge that the Jews brought against me. . . ¹⁹"At that point I did not disobey the vision I saw from heaven, King Agrippa. ²⁰Instead, I spread the message that I first told to the Jewish people in Damascus and Jerusalem and throughout the whole country of Judea. I spread the same message to non-Jewish people. Both groups were expected to change the way they thought and acted and to turn to God. I told them to do things that prove they had changed their lives. ²¹For this reason the Jews took me prisoner in the temple courtyard and tried to murder me. ²²"God has been helping me to this day so that I can stand and testify to important and unimportant people. I tell them only what the prophets and Moses said would happen. ²³They said that the Messiah would suffer and be the first to come back to life and would spread light to Jewish and non-Jewish people." ²⁴As Paul was defending himself in this way, Festus shouted, "Paul, you're crazy! Too much education is driving you crazy!" ²⁵Paul replied, "I'm not crazy, Your Excellency Festus. What I'm saying is true and sane. ²⁶I can easily speak to a king who knows about these things. I'm sure that none of these things has escaped his attention. None of this was done secretly. ²⁷King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you believe them!" ²⁸Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think you can quickly persuade me to become a Christian?" ²⁹Paul replied, "I wish to God that you and everyone listening to me today would quickly and completely become as I am (except for being a prisoner).. . ³² Agrippa told Festus, "This man could have been set free if he hadn't appealed his case to the emperor."

Acts 27:1, 9-14, 21-26, 40-46

When it was decided that we should sail to Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were turned over to an army officer. His name was Julius, and he belonged to the emperor's division. . . ⁹We had lost so much time that the day of fasting had already past. Sailing was now dangerous, so Paul advised them, ¹⁰"Men, we're going to face a disaster and heavy losses on this voyage. This disaster will cause damage to the cargo and the ship, and it will affect our lives."
¹¹However, the officer was persuaded by what the pilot and the owner of the ship said and not by what Paul said.
¹²Since the harbor was not a good place to spend the winter, most of the men decided to sail from there. They hoped to reach the city of Phoenix somehow and spend the winter there. (Phoenix is a harbor that faces the southwest and northwest winds and is located on the island of Crete.) ¹³When a gentle breeze began to blow from the south, the men thought their plan would work. They raised the anchor and sailed close to the shore of Crete. ¹⁴Soon a powerful wind (called a northeaster) blew from the island. . . ²¹ Since hardly anyone wanted to eat, Paul stood among them and said, "Men, you should have followed my advice not to sail from Crete. You would have avoided this disaster and loss. ²²Now I advise you to have courage. No one will lose his life. Only the ship will be destroyed. ²³I know this because an angel from the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood by me last night. ²⁴The angel told me, 'Don't be afraid, Paul! You must present your case to the emperor. God has granted safety to everyone who is sailing with you.' ²⁵So have courage, men! I trust God that everything will turn out as he told me. ²⁶However, we will run aground on some island. . . ⁴⁰ They cut the anchors free and left them in the sea. At the same time they untied the ropes that held the steering oars. Then they raised the top sail to catch the wind and steered the ship to the shore. ⁴¹They struck a sandbar in the water and ran the ship aground. The front of the ship stuck and couldn't be moved, while the back of the ship was broken to pieces by the force of the waves. ⁴²The soldiers had a plan to kill the prisoners to keep them from swimming away and escaping. ⁴³However, the officer wanted to save Paul, so he stopped the soldiers from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and swim ashore. ⁴⁴Then he ordered the rest to follow on planks or some other pieces of wood from the ship. In this way everyone got to shore safely.

Acts 28:1-10

When we were safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. ²The people who lived on the island were unusually kind to us. They made a fire and welcomed all of us around it because of the rain and the cold. ³Paul gathered a bundle of brushwood and put it on the fire. The heat forced a poisonous snake out of the brushwood. The snake bit Paul's hand and wouldn't let go. ⁴When the people who lived on the island saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, "This man must be a murderer! He may have escaped from the sea, but justice won't let him live." ⁵Paul shook the snake into the fire and wasn't harmed. ⁶The people were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly drop dead. But after they had waited a long time and saw nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god. ⁷A man named Publius, who was the governor of the island, had property around the area. He welcomed us and treated us kindly, and for three days we were his guests. ⁸His father happened to be sick in bed. He was suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went to him, prayed, placed his hands on him, and made him well. ⁹After that had happened, other sick people on the island went to Paul and were made well. ¹⁰They showed respect for us in many ways, and when we were going to set sail, they put whatever we needed on board.