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Genesis 2:7-9, 15-18, 21-23; 3:1-7
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Where Does Evil Come From?

This morning begins what I hope to be one of my most interesting sermon series yet – trying to answer the questions you would ask God if you had the opportunity.

I have to point out right from the outset, which should be obvious to all of you, I AM NOT GOD.

So, my attempts to answer your questions are always going to be filtered through my unconscious and sometimes conscious bias.

And they probably wouldn't be the answers God would give you if he were here this morning. But I promise to do the best that I can!

It is interesting to me that with all the discoveries that we're making technologically and scientifically and with all the resources that are available to the church today that never before, has there been such an insatiable desire to know everything about everything.

And I gotta tell you that it is somewhat comforting to know that that is utterly impossible!

The truth is, if you can't face the fact that it is impossible to know everything about everything, it will eventually lead to frustration, and maybe even despair.

Let me assure you, it is not my intent to frustrate you or cause you despair.

The horizon says to us, "Thus far and no further." To be sure, there is a horizon to our knowledge. There's a point at which we come, that we must be willing to accept that we can go no further.

All that being said, Proverbs 25:2 says: "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter: but the glory of kings is to search out a matter."

And that is true. God has concealed certain things that we might search them out, and there is great virtue in that. That's how we grow in faith.

We are going to try and do that this summer.

I believe there are many answers that we will discover. Just not all of them. We will not be able to explain everything.

Because if we could explain everything, we would have no need for an all-knowing God.

That's the bottom line, isn't it? We would be God ourselves if we knew everything and could explain it all.

Don't worry, that's not us. And as my wife is quick to point out, definitely not me!

Which brings me to today's question: "If God made all that was made, and it was good, where did evil come from?"

Often, the question or the problem of evil goes something like this: Christians believe God is omniscient (all knowing), omnipotent (all powerful), and omnibenevolent (all good).

So, if God knows all things. If God can do all things If God can and should prevent all things that would frustrate or corrupt good....

That should eliminate the very possibility of evil. But evil does exist.

And that is a logical contradiction. Atheists would say that proves that God does not exist.

They would say that if there is any "deity" out there, because evil exists, he is not all powerful, or he does not know, or he does not care.

In any case, he is not god as Christianity declares and he is not worthy of our concern.

But it is only an assumption that there shouldn't be any evil in the world. Believe it or not, Christianity doesn't teach that there shouldn't be evil.

Maybe we should first define what we mean by God and evil. Establishing the Christian view of God is fairly simple.

For brevity's sake, let's go with something like the "all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-good supreme being."

When it comes to evil, things are a bit trickier. This is because evil is all too often identified as anything that causes pain.

When it comes to evil, Christians do not narrowly define evil as what causes pain, but as any thought, word, and/or deed that is not in accord with God's moral will.

Dustin Leimgruber gives an interesting analogy to the understanding of God and evil. He puts it this way:

I used to meet regularly with a young man to discuss his pressing issues, not the least of which were impatience and passing blame onto others.

Every time we met, we would go to a local pizza shop to get something to eat while we talked.

One day as we arrived, our timing was perfect, as our regular order of one large barbeque chicken pizza with extra sauce was sliding out of the oven.

If you've never experienced a barbeque chicken pizza before, let me assure you it is a vastly underappreciated combination.

The smell wafted through the store, and both of our stomachs grumbled in anticipation of our lunch.

The pizza slid into the box and quickly into our possession. As we sat down to eat, I opened the box, the pizza still steaming.

So, I gave one simple warning, "The pizza is still too hot to eat; let it cool for a few minutes, and then we will eat."

You can guess what happened next. He ignored my warning and grabbed a slice of pizza and crammed it into his mouth.

The pizza which had been in the oven not a minute before, burned not only his mouth, but also his arm because he dropped the slice in surprise.

The pizza wedge landed cheese-side down on his bare skin. He screamed, “The pizza ... is evil!”

I explained to him the pizza was not evil. It was in fact quite good. I had a slice a few minutes later to confirm it.

Unfortunately, he had misused the pizza. Even after a direct warning not to eat the pizza before it had cooled. Rather than blame himself, he blamed the pizza.

He even blamed the person who made the pizza in the first place, and he blamed me for putting the pizza in front of him.

This story may remind you of another food-related tragedy located in the first chapter of Genesis.

God created many things, all of which he described as good, including food for the man and woman to eat.

We don't know exactly what kinds of food there were, but I imagine they were even more delicious than my barbeque chicken pizza.

And God placed two special trees in this Garden of Eden. These two trees represent two very different kinds of knowledge—two distinct types of thinking and ways of living.

The *tree of life*, as is mentioned from Genesis to Revelation, represents the way to eternal life. It is God's revealed way of successful living, with thinking and action that is good as defined by God himself.

It is both a mode of behaving and an outcome that God desires for all of humanity. We might call it *God's way*.

In contrast, however, the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil* represents a mixed way of thinking and acting—a combination of some good and some evil.

This second tree represents the way of *humanity's self-discovery*—working out for oneself what is good and what is evil. We might call this *man's way*.

God grants us humans the freedom to choose between these contrasting ways of living. He wants us to accept him at his word and choose the way of life he designed us to live.

But he allows us to elect the alternative, even though he would prefer to spare us the outcome of such a decision.

God grants free choice because, above all, he is interested in the formation of our character, which results from the choices we make.

You know what happened next. We just read it in this morning's scripture reading. They ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—and they got burned. Then they passed the blame.

Adam said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate" (Genesis 3:12).

Adam did not just blame Eve for his sin. He blamed God for bringing her to him. And thousands of years later, their decedents continue to pass the blame back to God.

Leimgruber continues his analogy ... The man who made our pizza was not evil for making it. I was not evil for buying it. I was not evil for giving a warning. The pizza was more innocent than any of us.

It was the misuse of the pizza that brought evil into the situation, and the only one to shoulder the blame was the person who misused it.

In the same way, although God created everything and set it in front of Adam and Eve, this does not make him the author of evil.

What God created and set before Adam and Eve was good, his warning was good; and when they misused it and brought evil into the world, they had only themselves to blame.

When God created us humans, he gave us intelligence, he gave us reason, and he gave us choice.

Intelligence gave us the ability to understand things. Reason gave us the ability to process that understanding toward behavior.

And choice gave us the freedom to determine that behavior. Intelligence, reason, and choice.

Bottom line: with what we knew, and with the ability we had to process that information, we would be brought to a choice. And we would have the choice either to obey God or not to obey God.

In a way, to disobey God was to initiate evil. But, evil is not the presence of something, evil is the absence of moral righteousness.

Truth is, you can't create evil because evil doesn't exist as a created entity. It doesn't exist as a created reality. Evil is a negative.

It's the absence of holiness. It's the absence of goodness. It's the absence of righteousness. Evil became a reality only when we humans chose to do disobey.

I like the way Lee Strobel describes it in a slightly different way:

God has existed from eternity as the Father, Son and Spirit, together in a relationship of perfect love. So, love is the highest value in the universe.

And when God decided to create human beings, he wanted us to experience love.

But to give us the ability to love, God had to give us free will to decide whether to love or not to love. Why? Because love always involves a choice.

So, in order for us to experience love, God bestowed on us free will.

But unfortunately, we humans have abused our free will by rejecting God and walking away from him.

And that has resulted in the introduction of evil into the world.

Some people ask, "Couldn't God have foreseen all of this?" and no doubt he did. But look at it this way.

Many of you are parents.

Even before you had children, couldn't you foresee that there was the very real possibility they may suffer disappointment or pain or heartache in life, or that they might even hurt you and walk away from you?

Of course—but you still had kids. Why? Because you knew there was also the potential for tremendous joy and deep love and great meaning.

God knew we'd rebel against him, but he also knew many people would choose to follow him and have a relationship with him.

And it was all worth it for that, even though it would cost his son great pain and suffering to achieve our redemption.

One thing we know for sure is that evil does exist. It exists, if nowhere else, in us and in our behavior.

We know that the force of evil is extraordinary and brings great pain and suffering into the world.

We also know that God is sovereign over it and in His sovereignty will not allow evil to have the last word.

And that's it, right? Evil will never have the last word – where ever it came from!

Thanks God!

Amen...