

Why Does The Lord Let Bad Things Happen?

A Sermon by Rev. Grant R. Schnarr

Sometimes the world can appear so cruel. In fact it is cruel if we look at it. Men can be so cruel. We don't have to look very far back into history to remember Adolph Hitler, what he did, the horror of exterminating six million Jews. We don't even have to look that far back if we know anything about Cambodia and what has happened there lately, or even some of the happenings that go on in South Africa today. Or on a different scale, all we have to do is turn on our television sets and we can see things that happen in our own neighborhoods. And we can wonder to ourselves, why does the Lord let man be so cruel to his brother or sister? It is an amazing thing.

Also we can look at life, and life sometimes can appear to be so cruel. Earthquakes or volcanoes burying thousands of people. Sickness and disease, famines, have wiped out innocent children who did nothing wrong. Why do these things happen? If there really is a loving God, why does He allow bad things to happen to people?

Well one answer to this would be that there is no God, that life is just sort of running in its own way in some sort of chaotic path, and no one knows where it will go. Some people have looked at the world and come to that conclusion, there can't be a God with all this suffering. But many of us have not come to that same conclusion. In the good times we've seen that there is a God because we've felt Him. There have been times when we've been up in the mountains away from the city, in nature. We've felt God in that nature and had an understanding of Him deep in our hearts. Even in times of distress we've felt that God was closer to us. We've felt His presence. Perhaps when we were reading His Word He spoke to us. And we know He exists. Then how do we reconcile this loving God with the world that seems so cruel?

In the first place, no one can make the horror OK. It is horrible! No one can say that these disorders that happen are good, are right. They aren't. The Lord does not make these disorders happen. The Lord does not punish people. We cannot say it is God's will when someone dies before their time. It's not. God wishes all people to grow and lead a healthy and productive life. God won't punish anyone for doing anything wrong. The nature of God is Love itself, and we know that. It's common sense. Well, how can we turn around and say that Love itself is going to

punish somebody, to hurt them for something they did wrong? It doesn't work that way. God is the God of love but He had to allow these things to happen. And that's what we'll look at.

In order to get an understanding of this, we have to look at God's view of the world, the way the Lord looks at it and not from the way we look at it. What is God? He is Love itself. In the beginning, whenever that was in creation, however that took place, God created mankind so that He would have someone to love outside Himself. The nature of love is to love someone outside of yourself, to want to bless them, to make them happy from yourself. But not only that, also to have that love returned to you. We know, in relationships, when we think of a time, maybe when we were in high school and had a crush on someone, how much we thought that we loved them, and we wanted so much to have them return that love to us, and how frustrating it was when they didn't. The same is even more true in adult relationships. We know that it takes two to have a relationship, two to have genuine love, friendship, blessing. So God created mankind, not only to love and to bless, but to have man love Him back.

Now the only way that man can love God back is if mankind is free to love God. And in order to be free to love and follow God, he also had to be free to turn away. And when we turn away from the Lord, that's when we get into trouble. That's when we hurt ourselves. That's when a lot of this horror is seen in the world that men do to each other. Freedom is essential with love. If you take away freedom, you take away love.

Imagine yourself and some of the things that you love to do, even those things that are wrong, maybe not terrible things, but the little habits that you love to do. Imagine if you were just getting ready to do them and starting to enjoy yourself, and all of a sudden they were taken away from you and you couldn't do them any more. You'd feel robbed. You'd feel as if you weren't free. Imagine if you were in a world where everyone was perfect, everyone appeared to be loving each other - everyone was working for each other, but they weren't free to do so. They *had* to love each other. They *had* to work for each other. They had to benefit each other. It wouldn't work. It's like something out of an Orson Welle's book, or one of the Star Trek episodes, to have that happen.

Now the Lord couldn't just set it up so there would be appearances of freedom, but then if we went too far He would stop us. He couldn't do

that because that would wreck freedom for us. Imagine that. We could do anything we wanted. And yet as soon as we went to do something wrong, God would stop us, "Nope, you can't do that." It wouldn't work that way. At Oakton Community College, someone asked me once, "Do you mean, Adolph Hitler was allowed to exterminate six million Jews simply to preserve *his* freedom?" And the answer is, yes, but not just Adolph Hitler's freedom, mankind's freedom. God can't break His rules. If God came down and stopped Adolph Hitler by some miracle, everyone would lose their freedom. He'd take away humanity. Now God did work through man, through armies, through setting up situations to help man defeat Adolph Hitler but God couldn't come down and break His laws of order. If He did, He would destroy our humanity. We have to be free to choose what we want to do wrong, even if that means we're going to hurt other people.

If we had choices that were apparent choices but we couldn't really choose something wrong, it would be like going to someone's house and having dinner there, and then for dessert they said, "Would you like apple pie or chocolate cake?" "Oh, I'll take the chocolate cake." "Sorry, you have to have the apple pie." It wouldn't be fair, would it?

It would be a facade. If we didn't really have those choices that we could make, and choose and follow, even if it hurts our self physically, even if we get into misery, we wouldn't be free. We've got to be free to hurt ourselves. God doesn't like it. God wishes all of us would follow Him and do His will. But He wants us to do that freely.

We can imagine that world where people are prisoners and have to do good. Can you imagine a world where everyone's giving, everyone's loving each other and sharing and growing together and concerned about God, and they're doing it because they want to, because they're free to do so? That's heaven. That's what the Lord wants us to have, not only here on earth but together with Him forever, in eternity.

Now you might ask, why do bad things have to happen to good people? Why isn't it just that when people do bad things, then they get it? Or the evil people - whoever they are - why don't they just get it? Well, it doesn't work that way. Again, freedom would be taken away. Can you imagine every time you did something wrong, all of a sudden you were hurt because you did it? Imagine, you really cut somebody up bad today and then you walk out the door and get hit by a car and are in the hospital for six weeks? Or you really insult someone and then you get

sick, violently sick for two weeks? After a while you'd realize, "I can't do evil." Now evil does bring about its own punishment, but never to the degree that we're not free to do it. We are free. We're free to hurt ourselves. That's what it's all about. But, if every time someone did something wrong, they were punished, then everyone would walk around doing good in fear, afraid to do anything wrong. And that would take away our freedom completely.

It would be like going to someone's house for dinner and asking for dessert, and again being offered chocolate cake or apple pie. "Sure, you can have the chocolate cake." And then you eat it and get sick for six weeks. After a while you'd realize, "I can't have that chocolate cake. No, I'm supposed to have the apple pie."

The Lord has to give us that freedom. That's why evil picks people indiscriminately. He doesn't pick people indiscriminately, but evil does and He works with it. He works within bad things. He's there, His presence is there, He cares, and we'll talk about that in a while.

Now why are there natural disasters? Why do people get buried with earthquakes and so on and so forth? Well, first we have to say that natural occurrences are part of this earth. That's the way they happen. But again, you have to look back at the Lord's plan for mankind. OK? Not only did He create us to be here for a brief moment in time so that He can render us blessed, but if you believe what Swedenborg said in those Writings, we are created to be with Him forever, in heaven for eternity. Life on this world is a fleeting moment compared to the eternity of heaven that we can have with the Lord. And you should think about that as a very real place, very real. Your friends are there. You have bodies, you have a house. You have everything you have here. Heaven is a real place where people work together, support each other, where the Lord is and where you can be with Him forever.

Now if you think about that and realize that the thing God cares about more than anything else, is that you can be with Him forever in heaven, then it makes death a little less frightening. It doesn't make it completely understandable but it makes it less frightening because death just becomes a transition from one world to another. Death becomes a time when you go to meet your Maker, in a very real way. You know it's twentieth century materialism and their religion humanism that makes death such a frightening, scary, final thing, that when we die it's the end, that's it. That's robbing the Lord of His real purpose here. The Lord's

real purpose is that we can be with Him forever in heaven. And if a young person dies we can rest assured that they are with the Lord. If you have lost someone close to you, they are not gone. They are not wiped out. They are with the Lord even now and being cared for in a very miraculous and wonderful way. That is the truth.

And so a lot of times we can look at death and we can be sad, and we will be sad for our loss, for the loss that we have because that person's gone, but we shouldn't feel sorry for that person. They're in good hands. God's plan for creation comes true, a heaven from the human race. They are with Him in heaven. And some day we will see them again.

Now, even in tragedy, whatever that tragedy is, it's not as if the Lord just sets it up, lets it go, lets it happen, and gets away from it. Not at all. The Lord works in all tragedy to make the best possible good come out of it. And He wants us to recognize that. He doesn't cause the tragedy, saying, "Well, this will make them learn their lesson." No. But when tragedy happens He is there in a very real way, and I'm sure some of you have felt that in a death. He's there to bring good out of it. We've got to recognize that good and open our hearts to Him in those times of tragedy. He's there. And good can come out of bad situations. Sometimes it's hard to see, but if we look today at how many people come together and work to relieve people of the famine, to relieve people who are caught in an earthquake. People get out of themselves, come together, rock musicians and politicians together. Amazing! Priests, nuns, people like you and I, all coming together to help people. That's good, real good coming out of that. It doesn't justify. It doesn't justify the thing that has happened. But the Lord works with it, to make as much good come out of it as possible.

In the time of death in the family sometimes, a couple is brought together in a way that they never would have before. They come to a realization of how much they need each other, how much they really do love each other, how hard they have worked together. And a lot of good comes out of it, spiritual good that will last. Maybe the body can die but the spirit never can. The spirit will live on, and we've got to remember that. The Lord works in all tragedy to bring about good.

So when we look at a tragedy in the world we're not going to feel the complete comfort that God offers us, but we've got to remember, even in those times when tragedy hits us, that, one: it is not God's fault, God is not punishing us, God did not do it to us. Two: He is working with us,

with all His power, to make the greatest good come out of that, to help us along, to bring us closer to Himself. And that, three: if we follow His will and open our hearts to Him, He will be with us, and when we die and come into the other world after this brief moment of life on earth we will be with Him for eternity.

Lessons: Psalm 139, Divine Providence n. 27