

RELIGION

Nothing Ventured,
Nothing Gained

“Nothing ventured,
nothing gained.”
This quote

reminds us that we take risks, many times, to gain our objective. As coaches say, “We miss every shot we do not take”. Peter stepping out of the boat onto the angry sea is an example of getting out of our comfort zone. I’m sure that the eleven with him counseled him that it was not a wise speculation to venture out of the safety of the boat.

He discovered that the great risk taken gave him a great testimony of his Saviors’ power. Even when he was distracted by the waves, he found his Lord to be there to lift him up. Peter learned a far greater lesson than the eleven who stayed in their fear and perceived safety. He learned that he could have peace in the midst of the storm, whereas the eleven experienced peace when the storm stopped. Robert H. Sculler said, “I’d rather attempt to do something great and fail than to attempt to do nothing and succeed.” Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

The Bible says, “So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.” This lets us know that there are sins committed and righteous-



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ness omitted, which is a sin as well. In a society where, often, people reach for their phones to record instead of reaching out a hand in help. The lines are clear. It goes back to the question of Cain, “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

How many lives are negatively impacted by the sin of omission? Prayers not prayed, gospel not given, and help and aid withheld, can cause great distress and destruction. Risk must be taken in order to enjoy the fullness of this life. The fear of failure has paralyzed many from getting out of their comfort zone to make a difference in this world. Break loose and step over the side of the boat, there is a chance you may fail and need the Lord to pull you up, but you will have learned a valuable lesson. He is near those who cry out to Him. We can all talk about Peter losing courage, but at least he was out on the raging sea.

Nothing ventured,
nothing gained.

Why God allow Evil: Punishment for Sin

This week, we begin to investigate five possible reasons God allows evil to exist, which can be extracted from the biblical text. First, the Bible is quite clear that God allows evil to exist as a form of punishment for sin. Second, some evil comes about due to the consequences of others’ sin. Third, some evil comes about due to the consequences of evil done by spiritual beings. Fourth, the biblical text indicates that God allows evil to exist as a pathway to the greater good. And fifth, the biblical text suggests that some evil is beyond our finite human ability to understand.

It becomes very clear, very early, that God has set forward in the Bible the reality of an if/then structure of how people “are to be” in the world. By that, I mean one need not read too far into the Bible to see that God establishes the first behavior-based contractual agreement with mankind. It is an agreement between God and man principally and primarily based on understanding the proper ordering of reality: the Creator over creation. In this inaugural covenant, God states that man may eat the fruit of any of the trees in the Garden but may not eat of the Tree of Life, or they will “surely die.” It is nothing less than if you do that, then, this will happen. Direct, straightforward, and easy to understand: if/then. It is a daily and life-long fact of life. How often have you heard a similar ultimatum from parents, teachers, law enforcement, employers, spouses, siblings, friends,



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enemies, etc. etc? In all these cases, there is an understood expectation and a warning about what will happen if things go wrong.

This same if/then covenant structure is repeated throughout the biblical text in the various covenants God makes with mankind throughout biblical history. The Adamic Covenant, the Noahic Covenant, the Abrahamic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, and the New Covenant are all examples of particular agreements established at various times between God and mankind. And each covenant is laid out with the same structure: if you do that, then this will happen. In the Bible, this structure is otherwise termed “blessings and curses.” The most powerful of which is recorded in Deuteronomy 28, which is divided into two sections titled Blessings for Obedience (vv 1-14) and Curses for Disobedience (vv 15-68). Of the blessings, Moses speaks to the Israelites: “And if you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth.” So opens the account-

ing of the unimaginable favor that shall come upon them and overtake them. God will bless His people with a great increase in their numbers and herds of livestock. The rains will be abundant and timely. Their enemies will melt before them, and He will bless them in their land. This is an agreement between the Creator and the creature; it is a covenant formed by two willing parties based upon a simple premise established by God: “The Lord will establish you as a people holy to himself. . . if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you today, being careful to do them, and if you do not turn aside from any of the words that I command you today, to the right hand or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them” (13b–14).

The consequences of disobedience are dire, showing that although God does not create evil, disobedience brings about suffering. Moses tells the people, “But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you” (v 15). So begins a list of curses that include cursing their women’s wombs, herds, and crops, being stricken by wasting disease, fever, inflammation, grievous boils, fiery heat, drought, blight, and mildew. They shall fall in battle before their enemies, and the birds and the beasts will consume their war dead. They will be struck with blindness, madness, and confusion of

mind. They shall become a byword and do abominable things to one another, even mother to infant child. And on it goes. Every aspect and nuance of life will be afflicted and infected with immense suffering brought on by the wrath of God for disobedience as punishment for sin. These are the rules established by God for the Israelites to either follow or ignore. They can completely and freely make their own choices. They alone are masters of their destiny. They alone make the free will choice to either accept the offer of God’s blessings or make the free will choice to suffer the consequences of God’s curses. Since these free will options lie before the people, it cannot be argued that God is the Creator of evil, that He is unjust, or that He is without mercy. Nor can it be argued that God is anything less than all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving. It can be said, however, that although God is not the Creator of evil, He has a morally sufficient reason for allowing evil to exist, in this case, as punishment for sin. Join us again next week as we look at what the Bible says about suffering that comes as a consequence of other people’s sins.

Gloria in excelsis Deo!

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Behold what manner of love
the Father has bestowed on us,
that we should be called
children of God!

I John 3:1
NKJV



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Isaiah 40: 3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be exalted And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough places smooth; 5 The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see it together; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.... 28 Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, The Creator of the ends of the earth, Neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. 29 He gives power to the weak, And to those who have no might He increases strength. 30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, And the young men shall utterly fall, 31 But those who wait on the Lord Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.”

Isaiah 40: 3-5; 28-31
NKJV