



Middlesbrough

Suffering

There are no easy answers to suffering. That doesn't mean that there are no answers to why we suffer, but there are times when we are experiencing suffering, that philosophy is the last thing we need. It is usually some time after a period of suffering that we are able to sit down and make some sense of what we have experienced. We all go through periods of hurt and pain at various times of our lives. As Christians we also go through these periods of hurt and pain. We are not exempt from it, far from it. If becoming a Christian meant freedom from hurt and pain, then I'm sure everyone would want to be one. In some ways being a Christian can make things worse, as the living out of our faith can bring inner turmoil as we try to deal with sin. The sinful nature wars against us, just as it wars against the created world. The Bible says that the world "groans". The natural world is restless and chaotic at times. Something is wrong with our world. C. S. Lewis said that "Suffering is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world." The world is suffering and we are suffering, in body, mind and spirit. This isn't the world that God created. Everywhere we look, there is suffering. When God created, the Bible says that everything was "good". What happened? Sin happened. Sin separates us from God and from each other. Sin destroys lives. Sin is destroying the world. What can we do about it? The Bible says "for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God". We can't blame other people, we're all to blame. The first thing to do is accept that there is something wrong, then we must admit that we are responsible, not everyone else, me! We need to take personal responsibility. It is so easy to blame God for the suffering of the world, and completely ignore the suffering that we have caused, either directly or indirectly by thought, word and deed. Once we have accepted that something is wrong and that we are responsible, are we then able to approach God and ask Him, what He is doing about the suffering in the world.

The first thing that God did was deal with the sin, and for that He had to suffer, suffer at the hands of those he had come to save. We cry out for justice, but how unjust is the fact that Jesus had to die for OUR sins. We blame the Jews or the Romans for the death of Jesus, but everyone of us are guilty because of our sin. We denied Him, we betrayed Him and we nailed Him to the tree. But there is hope, before He died, Jesus said "Forgive them for they know not what they do." Forgiveness is the key. How much evil and suffering in this world, are the result of our inability to accept that we need forgiveness and that we need to forgive each other? God is working through people who have accepted this good news of forgiveness and salvation to bring about good in the world. Our aim is to preach the Gospel to all nations, but there is still resistance to the Gospel. There are still people who want to spread fear, hatred and persecution. There are still people who will not forgive. We still haven't learned. Do we want to put Jesus on the cross all over again? Must someone die all over again before we sit up and take notice?

People often say that they don't believe in God because of all the suffering in the world. They ask "Why does God not do anything about it?" The people who ask it seem oblivious to the fact that they are part of the problem. Have they asked themselves how much suffering they may be causing and whether they might be used to relieve suffering? People often use this as an excuse for atheism or agnosticism, but does this add up?

When people say that they don't believe in God because of suffering in the world, they are basically saying that atheism or agnosticism are better solutions. Well, lets ask the question. Is atheism or agnosticism a better solution for suffering? If atheism is true then the world is deaf to our cries. We are governed by the survival of the fittest, why should the fittest and strongest care about the weakest? We are just animals, so why not act like animals? It's nature, red in tooth and claw. There is no justice for the widow and the orphan, there is no justice at all. You suffer until you die. There is no judgment for those that do evil. There is no good and evil. We become a rule unto ourselves. No-one is accountable, everything is acceptable. There is no right or wrong, no true or false. Everything is relative, there are no absolutes. There is no hope. I ask again "Is atheism or agnosticism a better solution for suffering?"

Someone once said to me "everything is relative." So I said "If everything is relative, then so is the statement 'everything is relative', therefore, it can not be absolutely true that everything is relative, so everything is not relative." What this person was trying to do was deny that there are absolute truths, for example, in the Christian faith. This is a way of undermining any claim that you make from the faith as being absolutely true. On the other-hand he wanted me to accept the statement "everything is relative" as an absolute truth i.e. something that is not relative.

Prayer:- Heavenly Father, we pray for everyone who is suffering, whether it be in mind, body or spirit. Help them to experience your forgiveness so that their healing might be complete. Father we also pray for those that care for the sick and dying, so that you will minister your forgiveness and healing power through them. Amen.

Prayer:- Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven, give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.