

When Good Things Happen to Bad People

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction:

- A. Consider a perennial question: Why do bad things happen to good people?
 - 1. Not understanding the answer to this question has moved many to doubt the love and power of God.
 - 2. "We are trying to please the Lord, and these bad things keep happening to us. It is not fair."
- B. It has a companion question: "Why do good things happen to bad people?"
 - 1. "They are living to please themselves and are not suffering for their sinful choices. It is not fair."
 - 2. We often ask such questions in songs like "Farther Along" ask the question of why the wicked prosper
 - 3. Answers seem elusive and difficult to accept

I. AN OLD TESTAMENT QUESTION

- A. Question is not a new one; a theme seen often in Scripture
- B. Asaph considered the question in Psalm 73:2-16
 - 1. Stumbled when he considered how the wicked prosper - Psalm 73:2-3
 - 2. All seemed well with them in spite of their evil - Psalm 73:4-12
 - 3. Felt righteousness was vain - Psalm 73:13-15
 - 4. In the sanctuary, Asaph came to the realization that even if the wicked do not get their comeuppance in life, they will in death - Psalm 73:16-20
- C. Job considered the question
 - 1. Despite what his friends said, Job affirmed that the wicked do prosper
 - a. Job 21:7-20
 - 2. Lamented that they sinned willfully without judgment - Job 24:1-21
 - 3. Job knew that there is wisdom in fearing God and turning from wickedness, but despaired of judgment of the wicked in life - Job 28:28
 - 4. He was silenced in regards to all these speculations when shown the majesty, omnipotence, omniscience of God - Job 38-41, 42:1-6
- D. Solomon the Preacher also considered it
 - 1. He saw oppression in life, but no comfort - Ecc. 4:1-3
 - 2. Saw that all had the same fate, whether righteous or wicked - Ecc. 9:1-3
 - 3. Learned that the question of why good things happen to bad people is vanity - Ecc. 8:14
- E. The question of why good things happen to bad people has been considered in depth and by inspiration for 4000 years
 - 1. All will die, righteous and wicked
 - 2. After death, the wicked will reap what they have sown
 - 3. There is no satisfying explanation why the wicked prosper in this world
 - 4. Dwelling on the question is vanity

II. A NEW TESTAMENT ANSWER

- A. So why do good things happen to bad people?
- B. Old Testament authors recognize that it happens, but offer little by way of an answer. What about the New Testament?
 - 1. Jesus speaks about it in Matthew 5:44-45
 - 2. Again, statement of reality, but why?
 - 3. Reflects the wisdom of Solomon - Ecc. 8:14
- C. Just as there is no in depth, satisfying explanation ever given for why bad things happen to good people, so no precise, satisfying explanation is given as to why good things happen to bad people
 - 1. We can know from both Testaments that God will right all wrongs on the Day of Judgment - Psalm 73:16-20; Rom. 2:5-10
 - 2. But when it comes to understanding why it is that God allows good things to happen to the wicked, it one of those mysteries that God understands, and we do not
 - 3. We can trust that even if God's judgment is not executed quickly, it will be executed - Ecc. 8:11-13
 - 4. What we can do in the meantime, as God's true children, is engage our Father's instructions and manner of treatment of the wicked

III. FACT: GOOD THINGS HAPPEN TO BAD PEOPLE

- A. In all honesty, the question cannot really be resolved to our satisfaction
 - 1. Just like the question of why bad things happen to good people, we cannot supply an answer that makes us happy
 - a. I am aware of many faithful parents have laid their Christian children at rest in the earth
 - b. I find it presumptuous to the point of folly to hear well meaning people offer clichés and worn out platitudes in misguided efforts to comfort them
 - c. We come to bear with it by faith over time, trusting God to give true comfort and a complete understanding in the world to come
- B. In point of fact, bad things do happen to bad people
- C. We need to come to terms with the reality that none of us "deserves" to have anything happen to us, good or bad
 - 1. God doesn't define worthiness the same way we do
 - a. In this world, He has not punished us as our sins merit
 - b. In this world, He has not rewarded the righteous in this world to the extent that their good deeds merit
 - 2. So, good things can happen to good people, bad things can happen to bad people, but bad things can happen to good people, and good things happen to bad people, and that is the way it is. God is in charge, not us.
 - 3. We also must understand that because of sin and free will, people undeservedly suffer the consequences of someone else's sin.
 - 4. Likewise, people can undeservedly reap the benefits of someone else's righteousness

5. That is precisely what Jesus commanded His followers to do
 - a. Matt. 5:44-48
6. God knows why good things happen to bad people in any given circumstance; we do not
- D. We can glory in the fact that good things happen to bad people
 1. How can we glory in such things?!
 2. Normally, when such questions are considered, "we" are the "good people," and it's those "others" who are the "bad people"
 3. Yet, who among us is really good?
 - a. Ecc. 7:20; Rom. 3:23
 4. We have all been "bad" people at some point in our lives
 5. Aren't you glad you haven't reaped all the evil you sowed in the past?
 6. After all, if only bad things happened to bad people, what would have been your fate?
- E. Do you see the value of the patience, grace, and mercy of God?
 1. Patience: suffering long
 2. Grace: unmerited favor -- receiving good when evil was deserved
 3. Mercy: not receiving what is justly deserved
- F. This is God's message to us through the cross of Jesus Christ
 1. If bad people got only bad things, then we would all be lost without hope of being saved
 2. Jesus died while we were yet sinners, allowing us to be reconciled to God - Rom. 5:6-11
 3. God has been patient toward us, giving us the time to realize that we have sinned and need the redemption that comes through Jesus
 - a. 2Peter 3:9
 4. Through the cross and the abundant blessings, God has shown us grace and mercy - Rom. 3:24; Eph. 2:4-9
 5. And we continue to receive better than what we deserve
 - a. If only bad things should happen to bad people, then when we fall from grace, we should be stuck outside - 1John 1:8 - 2:2
- G. And since we have received mercy, we are to show mercy to others
 1. Matt. 5:38-45; Luke 6:36; Eph. 4:32
 2. The reasoning is clear: if God has been merciful, compassionate, loving toward us as sinners who have rebelled against Him, and if we are to be like our Father in heaven, we must also be merciful, compassionate, and loving toward those who sin against us.
- H. Therefore, in the end, the question of why good things happen to bad people is vanity
 1. If it were not for good things happening to bad people, we would be lost
 2. Instead of questioning why it is so, we should fulfill it and do good to bad people just as our Father does
 3. And if we do it for others as God has done for us, they may see God's love and may turn from wickedness to righteousness, as we once did