Wednesday in the Word **Second Baptist Southside** **April 10, 2024**

How Can God be both "Just and "Loving"?

Serious reflection about God raises a dilemma. First, revelation of the divine will of God shows that God is just. Secondly, the divine patience of God shows that he is loving. The difficulty of reconciling these to aspects of God appears in a number of Old Testament stories. The dilemma expands to ask why God tolerates evil in the world at all. Jonah and Job present two classic ways to get at the matter. The personification of evil is a problem that goes unresolved until the end of the New Testament. Faith is the persistent biblical response to these broad questions.

Tonight, we will attempt to answer three (3) questions.

1. How may love be viewed as a manifestation of justice?
2. How can justice be defined?
3. If God loves me, why is this happening to me?

Because of the golden calf at Sinai, Moses in frustrated anger destroys the tablets containing the Ten Commandments> later, however, he intercedes for the people and God shows gracious compassion toward the people. Moses then prepares two new stone tablets and God renews the covenant with His chosen people. **Exodus 34:6,7** is a remarkable pronouncement of God's nature. Here the declaration of saving faithfulness is coupled with the caution of sure justice. *Love and faithfulness are extended to thousands (*possibly generations*),* while guilt *and iniquity* punish only *to the third and fourth generation.*

If these two aspects of God's character seem to be in conflict with one another, be assured that God does not have a split personality. Most of the Old Testament simply accepts love and justice as fundamental characteristics of God and describes the appropriate effects. Stories of God's saving faithfulness tend to stress love, but Go's justice never allows unfaithfulness of the people to pass without note. David receives a great covenant promise, but his sin is none the less condemned. God's justice is aimed at reclaiming the offending person, but many biblical stories tell of fierce affliction for flagrant, persistent sin.

Why didn't God simply destroy Adam and Eve when they went astray? God did in fact punish them severely, but in a sense one might think they got away with their rebellion. There are other passages where the apparent success of evildoers is faced candidly. In I Kings 19:1-1 Elijah is terribly upset because God has allowed Jezebel to chase him out of the country. Jeremiah wonders *why does the way of the guilty prosper?*

Read Psalm 73. In verses 1-14 the psalmist describes vividly the prosperity of the wicked. In verses 15-28 he decides that God's way is finally best. This is really an affirmation of faith rather than a reasoned solution.

When God's people are oppressed by their enemies, another question arises. Often it is a psalmist who insists that God ought to do something about their plight. Sometimes it takes the form of a hope that God ill pay back the enemy (Ps. 137:7-9). Sometimes is suggested that people's predicament may be a reflection of God's power. *Will the foe revile your name forever?* (Ps. 74:10*). Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?" (Ps. 79:10).*

This may imply to some that God is neither just nor loving. But always God's people work through to a response of faith, as in Psalm 73. When King Hezekiah was distraught because of an Assyrian invasion, Isaiah counseled him, Do not be afraid.; and it turned out that this faith was justified. During the Babylonian exile the prophet assured the people that God would respond to their plight.

The Problem of the Prophet Jonah

When the Book of Jonah is read, observe what a minor part the large fish plays in the story. The first two chapters tell how Jonah decides to run away from God's call to go to Nineveh. The fish is simply a part of God's strategy to get Jonah back on call. Jonah's psalm of thanksgiving is evidence that he recognizes God's goodness. "*Salvation come from the Lord".*

Read Jonah 3:10-4:4

Jonah answers the second call to go to Nineveh. When the people of Nineveh turned from their evil ways, Jonah is offended and complains to God because the prophecy of destruction has been replaced by mercy. Jonah does not learn from the object lesson that follows, and God gently scolds him.

What view of God is imbedded in this narrative?

How does Jonah expect God's justice to be exercised, and what is Jonah's role?

The Problem of Job **Read Job 1:6-11, 2:1-6**

The dramatic intensity of the Book of Job is present from the very beginning, because Job, his family or his friends have no foreknowledge of the meeting that has taken place in the heavenly realms. This is precisely where the problem of the book lies; how can a just and loving God do this to Job? How can job's awful misfortune and suffering be reconciled with a loving God? Job steadfastly denies that this treatment is just. He complains to God, but he carefully avoids an accusing confrontation.

In chapters 4-28 three friends attempt, in their oversimplified view of God's justice, to convince Job that God is just; the wicked are punished and the innocent are spared. Surely Job must've done something to incur the wrath of God. The solution; throw yourself on the mercy of God. But Job insists upon his innocence.

After a fourth friend meets with Job, to no avail, God responds to Job. He completely accepts the God's will and in the end receives more than he had prior to his affliction.

The Judeo-Christian traditions, in contrast to many other religions, reject "dualism," the belief that two great cosmic powers are in constant conflict in the world with the outcome in balance. The Bible everywhere assumes the almighty power and sovereign supremacy of God. God is the source of everything, but "everything" is not equated with God. This means that the power of any personified evil is limited by God's absolute control. The texts never represent God as the creator of evil, but the remaining problem of the source of evil is never worked out in a rational way. This vagueness is not allowed to be a valid excuse for human sin. The Gospels portray Jesus as the antagonist to and victor over evil and the evil one.

The Role of Faith **Read Job 42:1-6**

Job's final answer to his questions about evil is, after all, an answer of faith. This is striking because the book makes great efforts to find another solution. The prophet Habakkuk deals with the same problem in a different framework. He comes to the conclusion that evil will lose and God will win (Hab. 1:12), and *the righteous live by their faith*.

As covenant responsibility is not easy for God's people, neither is reliance upon God's love and justice. In Luke 17:7-10 Jesus uses a sharp illustration to make it clear that complete obedience to God's will is a minimum requirement for a faithful person. God's love and justice are totally one, so must be the response of God's people.