

## Why now? Why me? Why this?

There it was. A scrap of newsprint, enclosed in an envelope with a single word sprawled across the center. New Yorker Glen Chambers had a dream of doing missionary radio work in Quito, Ecuador. Before he had boarded the plane, an Avianca DC-4, he had scribbled a note on a scrap of newsprint which had a single word sprawled across the center, and sent the note off to his Mom. Chambers boarded the plane and in flight to Ecuador the unthinkable happened. The huge DC-4 slammed into 14,000 foot El Tablazo. His mom immediately received word of Glen Chambers tragic death. Then the postal service delivered the letter with the note from her Son inside. His mom opened the letter to receive her son's final piece of correspondence. She read his words, but the big bold word of advertising at the center of the newsprint caught her off guard. The ad had a single word splashed across the center, "**Why?**" You've asked similar questions yourself. Why me? Why now? Why this? [See Chuck Swindoll's, *For Those Who Hurt*]. These are primal scream prayers. It's O.K. to be real with God. Deep down, why questions are a mark of faith. You don't ask questions of Someone you don't believe is there. This is the precious thing about the Lord of the Universe. You can be real with Him. He's a big God with big shoulders. He can handle your rage, your tears, and the toughest questions you may ask.

**THE BRIGHT SIDE OF PROVIDENCE.** Consider with me first the bright side, the meaning of providence. Providence comes from the Latin word, *Providere* meaning to see ahead. Thus, Providence means that God sees what lies ahead and makes provision. He meets every need of His creation. Providence means that the all-powerful and ever-present God does two things: He upholds and rules the universe. Like a basketball player God has two hands. With one hand **God Upholds**, sustains, maintains the world. In Acts 17 Paul told the Athenians: "*For in Him we live and move and have our being*" [Acts 17:28]. He said, "*The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth...[He] Himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.*" [Acts 17:24-25]. With the other hand, **God Rules** all things. God rules, governs, directs, and controls every event, every incident, every circumstance. "*Leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty--all things, infact, come to us not by chance but from his fatherly hand*" [L.D. 10 A. 27]. It's all under His control. Nothing escapes God's notice and care. Nothing slips through his fingers. Nothing falls through the cracks. "*There is not one maverick molecule in all the universe.*" [R.C. Sproul]. He's got the whole world in His hands. He upholds and rules. That's the bright side.

**THE SHADOW SIDE OF PROVIDENCE.** There is a shadow side, the mystery of providence, too. Chuck Swindoll once said, "*Never unscrew the inscrutable.*" That's tough to avoid. Especially when the inscrutable has you all tied up in knots. Life is that way. Sometimes it's absolutely inscrutable. Like the way, Churchill described Russia. He said, "*It's a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.*" The catechism wrestles with this. All things--absolutely all things comes to us through God's fatherly hand. Rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty. And yet God is not schizophrenic, part tender Dad, part Cosmic Ogre. "*God is light and in Him is no darkness at all*" [1 John 1:5]. If this is so, why then does bad stuff happen to good people? This is the enigma. Suffering can drive you to the very edge of the abyss and you cry, "God, are You there?" "Do You really care?" "Are You in

control?" "Do I really matter to You?" Or is this whole life epic we're a part of, "*Just a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing?*" In the face of catastrophic nightmares, the best I can do is return to Job's Story. Let me drive home the message this evening in terms of four major thrusts.

**I. NIGHTMARES DO HAPPEN.** We read in vs. 1: "*In the land of Uz [East of Jordan/Dead Sea, area of Edom] there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil.*" In Job 29:4 Job laments: "*Oh, for the days when I was in my prime, when God's intimate friendship blessed my house.*" The remarkable thing is that here is a non-Israelite who was a servant of God, a friend of God, indeed a real man of God. There was no one who walked the face of the earth who could be called his ethical peer. We know from vv. 2-3 that Job cared for and prayed for 7 sons and 3 daughters. Furthermore, we're told that he owned 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys and had a large number of servants. Here was the greatest man in the East. His whole life breathed success. He was living in a dream world. Then the nightmare struck.

Suddenly in rapid fire succession, Job's dream world begins to explode. And the nightmare sends Job reeling. Job's 500 oxen and 500 donkeys were stripped away by the Sabaeans. Lightning incinerated Job's 7,000 sheep. Chaldeans ripped off 3,000 camels. The most heinous moment came when Job discovered that a desert tornado had crushed his son's house and all ten of Job's children were snuffed out. In addition to all the slaves annihilated in the Job holocaust, 10 fresh graves reminded Job of the horror he could not forget.

In chapter 2, Job's nightmare is taken to whole 'nother horrific level. His body is afflicted with gruesome sores; maggots crawled in and out of open sores. Medical scholars call Job's afflictions, Elephantiasis. He was the original elephant man. He was a pathetic sight. So here is Job "*Afflicted...with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head*" [2:7], sitting outside of town on a mound of trash and manure, scratching his bloody body, cursing the very day of his birth. His friends try to pin the blame on him arguing that bad stuff can only happen to bad people [see Job 4:7]. If bad stuff's happening Job, you must have fallen off the moral cliff. No wonder Job cries out for justice. Job protests. Oh God! Enough is enough! How can I get you to step off the throne and get on the witness stand? Nightmares happen.

**II. GOD IS GOOD AND SOVEREIGN.** Irrespective of what happens, **OUR GOD REIGNS.** He's in charge of history. He takes meticulous care of every miniscule detail of our lives. **God is in charge of everything that happens, but He's not morally responsible for everything that happens.** Joni Eareckson Tada [quadriplegic @ 17, breast cancer victim at 60] writes: "*God permits all sorts of things that he doesn't approve of*" [*Christianity Today*, Oct. 2010, p. 33]. "*For God does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men*" [Lamentations 3:33]. God's Kingdom reigns over all, but under the umbrella of His rule there are rebel forces, agents: both human and angelic that oppose His reign: death (the final enemy), demons, the world, the flesh, the Devil. God is not the puppet master. Otherwise you make God out to be the author of all unbelief and evil, a blasphemous thought [James 1:13]. When Dr. Lewis Smedes' wife, Doris contracted cancer he clung to the text in 1 John 1:5

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"God is light and in Him is no darkness at all." Remember, when Jesus ushered in His Kingdom, he performed mighty signs (healed deaf, dumb, blind, raised the dead) to demonstrate that His resurrection rule was breaking into history. Jesus never made people sick. At Lazarus' tomb Jesus "snorted in the spirit" like a mighty Stallion [Jn 11:33 & 38]. Jesus hates death and everything that leads to it.

The Job holocaust was the Devil's idea. He plundered all of Job's wealth. He sent the tornado that that massacred Job's 10 children. He afflicted Job with a terrifying skin disease. He assaulted Job for this purpose, so that Job would become a traitor to God. Satan was driven by his mad quest to drive a wedge between God and His servant. And here's the bizarre thing about Satan in the book of Job. Job had no idea Satan existed. Remember the Job saga took place around the time of Abraham (2,166-1,991 B.C. 2,000 years before Christ). On Job's lips is not a whisper of Satan. Job was in the center ring slugging out with Satan but was clueless about the 10 ft demon he was up against. All Job had to do was stand there and take the beating of his life without cursing God. By God's grace Job emerged a champion. By hanging on to the most slender thread of faith, Job won a crucial victory in God's grand plan to rescue planet earth.

**III. IN THE FACE OF MONSTROUS EVIL, BLAME THE MONSTER NOT THE GOD WHO HATES THE MONSTER.** Chief justice, Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote: *"I would not give a fig for simplicity on the near side of complexity."* Some people operate with too simplistic a paradigm [diagram]. There's God and Us (humanity). And if any bad stuff happens, any horrific nightmares, any famine, any holocaust, Asian megathrust earthquakes and tsunamis, mass genocide, terrible "accidents"; God is the bad source, the chief instigator, the criminal responsible for the mess we're in. The real paradigm is much more complex. 1) Some suffering comes our way from God as just judgment and as His tough love & chastening hand. 2) other suffering is self-afflicted or what spiritually twisted people do to one another [German holocaust, AIDS epidemic, Rwandan Genocide, Racism, The Wreckless Plunderings of ISIS]; 3) Still more suffering occurs because we live in a fallen world and our bodies are afflicted with the curse of death. Romans 8:22 tells us, *"the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth."* This curse is embedded in the crazy shifting of earth's tectonic plates. 4) Much suffering comes our way because Satan and the hordes of darkness want to blast God's creation and drive a wedge between us and God (Satan was behind the WWII Jewish Holocaust-I John 1:5; James 1:13; John 8:44-45). 5) In His mercy God checks (like hockey!) and restrains Satan from doing more damage. 6) God is not finished with evil yet. One day at Christ's return, all accounts will be settled, and all evil will be snuffed out. At Christ's return, the devil and his hordes will be thrown in the lake of fire. Famished bellies will be full again and earth's poverty will be swept away by the Wedding Supper of the Lamb. Utterly annihilated cities will be transfigured into cities of gleaming gold and cultural magnificence. Jesus will cry, *"I am making all things new"* [Revelation 21:5]. And over the mass decaying stench-drenched graves of Christian sons and daughters of Asia, of Haiti, we will shout: *"Death is ended! Death is ended! Death is swallowed up in victory."* [I Corinthians 15:54].

**IV. GOD IS NO STRANGER TO YOUR PAIN.** You don't understand Job until you read the rest of the story. 2,000 years later, another champion entered center ring to face the fight of his

life. He was a 2<sup>nd</sup> Job. And there on cross at the city garbage heap the Messiah, a Jew, suffered history's most terrifying holocaust. It was the rulers of this age who crucified the Lord of glory [I Corinthians 2:8]. Pilate, Herod Antipas, the chief priests were the Murderer's hit men. The suffering servant was belted with the blast of Satan's fury. But there on the cross, God's servant pulled off history's most surprising victory. He emerged the champion. Just by taking it all he crushed and mortally wounded the head of the serpent. And now alive from the dead, Christ enters the ring with us and no matter what challenge we face: cancer, a stroke, infertility, a miscarriage, the tragic death of a loved one—our own personal holocaust, we know we'll emerge champions, more than victors through Him who loved us.

Dr. Nicholas Wolterstorff in his book, Lament For a Son, [picture of book and philosopher], writes about how he shuddered in pain when his 25 year old boy, Eric, was crushed to death in a mountain climbing accident in Austria. The event tore Nick's heart out. Every page of the book drips with pathos and torture and agony. There are not flippant answers. And yet as I read this document one thing hit me the most. God is no stranger to our pain. He quotes passages like Isaiah 63:9 *"In all our afflictions, God is afflicted."* Isaiah 53:4-5, *"He bears our griefs and carries our sorrows."* And John 11:35, *"Jesus wept."* I don't know what nightmare you may be going through, but does this help? Jesus feels your pain in His heart. Lift up your eyes to His eyes. Can you see your Savior? Tears from your pain moisten His cheeks. Jesus feels your pain. And what is more, He is big enough to do something about it. One Day He will.

