

Kenny Moorner - The Dilemma: Evil and Free Will

The dilemma of evil and free will is the title of my lesson. It is not the best title for this lesson now that I look back on what I want to talk about today. But it's the title that I came up with after a long period of thinking about it. It could be called a number of things probably and after this lesson is over, you'll probably think about something I could call it as well. But we're going to talk about some difficult things. And we're going to do it in a pretty short amount of time. I have never purported to know everything about evil, everything about free will, everything about sin, everything about repentance, everything about salvation. That's what the Bible tells us. But it gives us the information that God wanted to give us. It doesn't give us all the answers that we have to questions. But I do want us to talk about it this morning in hopes that it will make some of what, I think, are hard concepts less hard. I don't think, I know, we're not going to answer every question. We're not going to make it a lot easier, because these are hard questions. But my objective is to make the answers less hard. That's really my objective. And I don't know how that plays with you. But that's kind of where I'm coming from this morning. Because not only have I thought about this lesson over the past several weeks, but I've thought about these things for a long time, as I think you probably have too. But I do want to offer some answers, but not all answers. I don't know - sometimes I hear people say we'll have all our answers when we get to heaven. That may very well be the case. I don't know. I don't know if the good Lord is going to answer everything when we get there. But if he wants to, he will. And if he needs to, he will. But if he doesn't, the fact that I'm there for him to tell me that will be just fine. That's all I'm looking for. And so, I hope that we will anticipate that as I think we do.

There is a primary question, there really are two primary questions, it seems to me. There are two questions that have generated the concern that people have had over the centuries, about why the problems of evil and why has evil existed? What does freewill have to do with that? And as I said to you, and as I probably will say, again, before this lesson is over, I'm not going to deal with everything about that. And you may have questions that I've not even thought about that. But I want to deal with two primary questions that I think generate the concern about these topics. And here it is, I think, in a nutshell. Why would a good God create a world in which he knew freewill would lead to sin, and sin would lead to death. Physical death, spiritual death and eternal death. And out of that sin would result unfathomable human pain and suffering. Why would he do that? And those questions alone, because there may not be real obvious, or overtly obvious answers to those questions. And so, people who I think particularly are cynical about that, just avoid it and say, well, because God did that, I'm not even going to believe in God. And I think that that's a cop out, I think that flies in the face of what we do know, and what we should think about and how we should respond to even these questions. And that's really what I want us to talk about this morning. But the problem of evil asks, Why would God do that? Why? Why wouldn't God give us the ability to choose knowing what awaits people in this life and in the life to come? I think that's a legitimate question. And I think the Bible offers a legitimate answer.

Well, as I said, I may have bitten off a little bit more than I can chew to do something in 30 minutes or so. But I think it's important for us to think about that. And I want to start; we're going to look at several passages. And I'm going to start with this passage just found in Ephesians, the first chapter and I just want you to think about this. I'm going to read this and as I read some of these passages I'm going to emphasize. I'm going to, I might state a word a little slower. I might state a word a little louder. But I want you to think about the inflection of my voice where I put it because I think it helps answer, at least in these passages, some of the questions that we've asked. Ephesians one: "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will." There's not much in there that's about what we did. As a matter of fact, I can't really find much of anything in there. That's about what we did. And I think what Paul is stating right out of the box, to the Ephesian Christians, is that God had a plan. God had an answer, and God knew the type of creation that he was about to create. God knew all that. He understood what would be done with freewill. He understood the environment in which he's creating the opportunity for a man and a woman to choose to decide for themselves, what direction their life would go. He knew the binary nature of freewill, he knew what that was about. He knew there would be wise and foolish choices. He knew there would be right and wrong choices. But he knew that the choice would be up to each individual and each individual alone. God knew what he was planning and doing all along. He made and he purposed. And he planned it all. So, it's exactly what he wanted. And Ephesians one, verses seven through 11, tell us this is God's answer. This is God's answer to some of the questions that you may have. And here's the answer. And we're going to talk about it in several ways. And from several passages. That's what God wanted. He made it exactly like he wanted. So, whatever question we might have about evil and good and even free will, we need to understand that's what God wanted. That's what he created. That's what he wants from every single one of us. Again, the apostle Paul would say this way in Romans was the fifth chapter: "For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation." What's Paul saying? He saying God had a plan. When was that plan executed? In due time. That plan was executed at the right time, while mankind was helpless and hopeless. And I think it's intentional. God, at the time when man would understand that he was helpless and hopeless, he brought his Son into the world to do what he always intended for his son to do. This was not a last-minute rescue operation. This was not something that something went awry, and God said, we'll come because something's gone wrong, I'm going to I'm going to do it this way. Now, because this didn't work. I want to do this. That's not what this passage tells us. That's not what any passage tells us. What this passage tells us is that this was God's plan, and the plan was specifically to show God's love for us.

It is quite a contrast to see what sin and evil and freewill and eternal destinies that are evil and the end result being evil. It's easy to see that all of that speaks to something better. All of that speaks to something different, or as this passage tell us, it was to demonstrate something about God that he wanted us to see. It was a part of his plan to demonstrate to us what he wanted us to see. And that was specifically God's love for us. The word mystery is used a lot in Scripture, it's used a lot in the New Testament especially. Talks about the mystery that God revealed, if something is a mystery. It's something that needs to be revealed. And I think there's a sense in which that mystery has to do with the fact that the Gentiles were to have access to what God was going to do through His Son, Jesus Christ. I think that is part of it. But I think part of the mystery too, is that it was impossible to give a human explanation to what God showed mankind. A human mind couldn't figure out what God was doing. And God explains through His Son and through what his son did, he explains the mystery to us. He says, I'm showing you who I am. And I'm showing you what I've planned, even before time began, before I created anything and everything. This plan was in my mind. It was his eternal plan, as Ephesians three tells us. So, it's something that God intended. 1st John 3:16 says, "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us." Again, telling us that it's the love that he wanted to provide for us, and that was the mystery that was going to be revealed. Or this passage in First John four, "In this, the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." All that says that God loved us. We didn't love him, but he loved us. And because he loved us. He made this plan. I keep going back to that. But I think, again, that's what I want us to see. He made this plan. Or this passage in First Thessalonians five, "For God did not appoint us to wrath. But he appointed us to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." There's so many passages in Scripture that point out the fact that, and you've heard me talk about this. And one of the great, it's not a quality I don't suppose. But one of the greatest things about God to me is that he wants me with him. With all of my flaws, with all my imperfections, with all the sin, He wants me with him. He didn't appoint us, He didn't appoint me, when I take it personally. He didn't appoint me to wrath. He did not appoint me to be with the devil and his angels in the place where he's prepared for the devil and his angels. He didn't appoint me to that, and he didn't appoint anybody for that. What he appointed us for was to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, which is the demonstration of the love that he has toward us. Verse 10, of this same chapter in same letter, "who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him." You see, there's the ultimate outcome of this salvation, that we should live together with him. "Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing." See, that ought to comfort us. There is a point of reference, there is a perspective that some have that God's trying to destroy us. No, just the opposite. He's done all he can to save us. But he's given us the option. He's given us that particular choice. And I understand that you and I both need to understand it. So, Jesus' death solves, in a sense, it solves this problem of evil for us. His death shows the extent to which God would go to save us. Even though with the evil we're going to talk about that in just a moment. But even with all the evil that's a part of that, and even the choices that are made that result in this evil, God still loved us, and He wants us to get past that that's, But the death of his son is the solution for that.

And then a third apostle, not just Paul, not just John, but Peter says this in first Peter three and I absolutely love this. "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit." You see the phrase the just for the

unjust. The reason so many struggle with evil, listen carefully, is because evil seems unfair. It seems unfair. Why do you do that God? There's an unfairness there that why speaks to the just for the unjust, that's unfair. It's not fair for the just to suffer for the unjust. And in this passage, specifically, Peter says, well, that's what Christ did. It is unfair. By the way we look at it, yes, it is unfair. But Peter says, listen carefully, that fairness has nothing to do with it. It's not about fairness. What Christ has done, what happens to us in our life, it's not about whether or not it's fair. You may be suffering, you may have gone through difficulty and in your mind going well, that's not fair. Doesn't matter whether it's fair or not. The point is not that it's fair or are not fair. The point is, is that it exists. And you're not the first person who may be going through something that's unfair. Everything about Jesus death was unfair. Everything. Everything. The beatings that he took, the trials that he went through, the verdicts that were reached, the death that he went through. Everything about that was unfair. It was something that was unjust, it was unjustly done, nothing fair about that. But even the sinless one suffered, you see? Because he suffered that eliminates this business of fair and unfair.

There is another key phrase in this verse. Have you ever - I know you have but I'm going to ask anyway. You ever read a verse, or a section of scripture or a passage, and you know you've read it before. You know you read it maybe 10s of times, dozens of times, you may have read it hundreds of times, maybe 1000s of times. Have you ever read it, though, and this time, the time that you read it, this time, something just jumps out at you. That's this verse with me. "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." I want you to think about that. He did what he did, Peter says, "that he might bring us to God." It makes goosebumps come up on my skin. There's no way. There's no way we, ourselves, could be brought to God except for someone to bring us to God. Except for someone to suffer on our behalf so that we could eventually be with God. And that's exactly what this passage tells us that Jesus Christ has done. He did what he did. He did the suffering for us. Yes, it was unfair. But he did that so that we could be with God. You do what you want with the verse. You do what you want with the phrase. But it is a powerful phrase. "So that he might bring us to God." Not only am I planning a sermon with that title, I'm planning a series with that title. That's strong right there. That's strong. I don't know that gets stronger: that he might bring us to God. And I hope that this morning, it's powerful to you, as well.

Take your Bible and turn to Luke 13. And we're going to go back to what Chad read a little earlier as we began, or before I got up here this morning. There is another element to all this that I want to share with you this morning from Luke 13. These five verses are telling. I don't mean they're just sharing something. I think they're telling in that they show something very important for us to consider that, I think, maybe a casual reading of it might not show. I want to try this morning to point out some things to you that, even about this that I think even here recently I've seen, about this passage, that I think really helped me understand what Jesus is saying about evil things. Let's read it. "There were present at that season, some who told Him about the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. Jesus answered and said to him, do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans? Because they suffered such things? I tell you, no. But unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those 18 on whom the tower of Siloam fell and kill them, do you think they were worse sinners and all other man who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no. But unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." This is a very interesting exchange. I want you to notice what Jesus emphasizes and what he does not emphasize. He does not emphasize what they want emphasized. He does not

even emphasize what they apparently ask about. It's almost like he dismisses what they're saying altogether to tell them something that he wants to tell him not once, but twice. Verse one, the text says there were some at that season, there were some who told him a story. To legitimate story. It's about, apparently, it's about Galileans, who are in the temple worshipping, they were offering sacrifices. And I don't know if this is exactly how it happened. But it would seem likely that Pilate sent some detachment of soldiers into the temple and really performed probably some execution. He at least spilt blood of those who were in there performing those sacrifices of worship in the temple, and he mixed their blood with the blood of the animals that were being sacrificed. That's what they said to him. And then verse two says, "Jesus answered." You know, what's interesting to me about that is I didn't hear a question. Did you? Says Jesus answered but didn't hear a question. They just gave some facts about the story. And they assumed Jesus knew what they were talking about. And he did know what they were talking about. But I think he knew. They asked him a question, and it may even be that they asked a question that Luke didn't record. But Jesus answered them, he said, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners and all other Galileans because they suffered such things?" It's almost as if he's saying, okay, I get what you're saying. You might not have asked the question, but I know why you ask what you ask. I know why you mentioned what you mentioned. And he says, do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners and other Galileans because of what happened to them? And he didn't even answer that question. He said, I tell you. No, that's not the issue. The issue is not what you're trying to make the issue, which is you're not the sinner that they were. That's not the issue. Jesus says here's the issue: you're sinners and you need to repent. Just like they are sinners, and they need to repent. He said it, particularly, I tell you, no. Unless you repent, you'll perish to just like they perished.

And in case they didn't get the point, I love this, in case they didn't get the point, when Jesus says, "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." He says, you got to story for me? I'll give you a story. Here's the story that I'll tell you, "Of those 18, on whom the tower in Siloam failed and kill them. Do you think they were worse sinners than all the other men who dwelt in Jerusalem?" You shared a story with me, let me share a story with you. You remember the Pool of Siloam? And again, we don't have a specific record of this but obviously it's something that they recognize. Jesus recognizes and that they recognized and evidently there was a tower that had been built next to that or near that, probably at some construction site, and 18 men had lost their life. And Jesus said, so are you saying that those 18 men are worse? They're worse sinners and everybody else in Jerusalem? In other words, your story and my story make the same amount of sense in terms of what you're asking. It's not about the level of sin. It's about sin. It's about sin. And Jesus point is, no, sin is sin, and everybody needs to repent because all sin. That's why he repeats what he said, "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." Had we heard him say that before? I mean, there's emphasis there, right? And there's emphasis because that's the point. That's what he wanted him to know. It's not a question of who's the greater sinner. Who had the worst sin them, us, somebody else? Jesus says not about that. Now why would I bring up this passage? Why am I even talking about this passage? I think this is very interesting. Jesus doesn't even deal with the evil. As a matter of fact, I don't think there's really anywhere in Scripture either in Old or New Testament, there may be some there may be some statements that deal with it and might try to help us understand something about the nature of evil. But no place in Scripture explains it. Genesis three the serpent shows up. We know who the serpent was. We know what the serpent's intent was, but we don't know much about it other than that's where he was. And there was a decision to be made. There was freewill to be made between Eve and between

Adam and then they made a choice, and they suffered the consequences for those choices and that's what we know. But in Luke 13, when some around him said, well, what about those Galileans that were in the temple offering that sacrifice and Pilate sent that detachment troops in and they mingled their blood with the sacrifice, the blood sacrifices. What about that? Jesus could have said Well, sit down fellas. Let me explain. Let me give you a background. Let's just talk a little bit more about the sin and why this took place. Jesus could have gone back, and he could have had a discussion, or he could have explained the how of evil and the why of evil and the when of evil and the who of evil and the what of evil. And he didn't do any of it. And to my knowledge he didn't do it anywhere else either. What he did do was say I'm going to give you the solution. Sin is sin. All sin and all fall short of the glory of God, and everybody needs to repent. If you don't repent, you're going to perish. That's why Matthew three, the text tells us, that John came preaching repentance in the kingdom of heaven. And in chapter 4 Verse 17, the text tells us that Jesus came preaching repentance in the kingdom of heaven. Why? Repentance. Change. Choice. Mindset. What are you going to do?

I'm not suggesting this morning that we don't have questions. I get that. I have questions but the more I study some of the questions I have I reach the same conclusion. I don't know. And he didn't tell me, and I don't think that I ought to worry about it if he didn't tell me. But I think I need to repent. That's what Luke 13 teaches me. It shows me Jesus saying to them unless you repent, you're going to perish too. You're going to perish just like they perish. Forget who's the worst sinner, there's no such thing. But you need to repent.

So, the bottom line, I think this morning is this. God had had a plan. And in that plan, he said, I'm going to give you the choice. Now understand that, given the choice, I want you with me. And one of those choices that you can make is: I want to be with you. And if you want to be with me, I've not only given you my plan, but I've given you a plan whereby you can be saved. You can be with me, I've given you that too, but that's your choice you're going to have to make. And I've given you the ability and I'm even giving you the responsibility to make that choice. To choose Jesus over evil and to choose repentance over rebellion. God sent His Son to suffer like we suffer to demonstrate His love for us and to bring us to God. So, we may have all these questions about evil and all the things like that, but he's made a provision, and he hasn't given us just, I was going to say a boatload of answers, but he hasn't given us a canoe load of answers. He just says, I've solved it. And I've shown you that suffering is something that I'm willing to do, just like I'm asking you to do. The sin is what brought the suffering and the sin was by our choice. Every one of us have sinned, by our choice. But he demonstrates his love for us to bring us to God. But God will not force you to be with Him. God will not force you to do that. He doesn't make demands of you unless you're willing to accept the demand. Unless you're willing to accept what he says about that. That's a great thing about God. See? I suppose he could have saved everybody. But that's not what he did. That's not what he chose to do. He wanted to demonstrate His love for us by showing what his son did. And he wanted us, remember Matthew 16, he wanted us to take up our cross daily and follow him. He wanted us to do what he was willing to do. That's the choice. It's really pretty simple. It's not hard. Maybe hard to do, but it's not really hard to see. So, this morning, you have that choice. Not just at 10:40 on Sunday morning, April the seventh. It's not just that this is the time that you have to do you have this, you have this choice all the time every day. 24/7. You always have this choice. And God wants you to choose him over the devil. He wants you to choose Him because He wants you and me with him. That's a wonderful thing. That's one of the that's maybe the greatest thing

that I think about on a regular basis. That God wants me with him, he's not trying to get rid of me. He's not trying to condemn me. And if you get weary of me saying that, well just hang in there because you are going to stay weary because I'm going to keep saying it. I'm so thankful that God wants me with him. And that he's made provision for that through his son. And this morning, as strongly as I know how, if you've never accepted what Jesus is asking you to do to be with him then I would strongly suggest that you do that. You may have other opportunities. You may. But you may not. So, this would be a wonderful time. We can help you with your obedience to Jesus this morning we ask you to come as we stand and as we sing.