**Curious Faith** – **Why Did God let it happen?** 052624 (Give me Faith – Worship)

Mike - Joy in the Park

Yard Sale 6/1 and youth bake sale

Josh and Sherry and Natalee – cook out and send off

Memorial Day give away!

What a great message last week from Bob Magan! Mike and I were away for a conference on preaching and teaching – do you know we are always learning? Always getting better at communicating I hope and working at bringing the word to you in a biblical and relatable way. We want you to be challenged and growing in your walk with Jesus. Bob did such a great job with that last week – I loved how he challenged us all to take a mental report card – How are we doing in trusting God. Being rooted in Jesus will help us get better and help us trust Him with our whole lives.

There is something familiar in the Christian world where when we say "God is good." And You say, "All the time," I say, "All the time," you say, "God is good." Let's try it.

God is good. All the time.

And all the time. God is good.

Let's try it again. God is good. All the time.

And all the time. God is good.

Fun right? But here is a question: have you ever doubted that? Have you ever doubted the goodness of God? I know as a Christian, we think we are not supposed to ever doubt. We should always have faith in the goodness of God, but I wonder if any of you, like me, have ever doubted when you're experiencing something that didn't seem fair, that didn't seem right, and you thought, "God doesn't really feel good right now." It might have been when you lost a job, or maybe when your parents divorced or you found yourself facing divorce yourself like me 27 years ago. It could have been when a spouse betrayed you and left or maybe when someone died. It might have been when you asked the question, "Why, God, won't you take away these migraines?" Or, "Why am I still battling with depression?" Or, "God, why won't you take this temptation away from me?"

Maybe it's just an ordinary, everyday moment when you're thinking, "God, I'm trying to do what's right. "I go to church. "I read my Bible, "I give. "I try to help people. "I'm trying to do what's right, but God, I'm just not happy. "I just thought by this point in my life, "at this point with you, God, I'd be so much more happy." Or if it's not one of those issues, maybe when you look at the world today, sometimes you just say, "God, where are you? "What's going on with all of the wars? " young people trying to buy their first home or just get ahead, God, why do the innocent suffer?"

If you've ever questioned, even a little, the goodness of God, today's message is for you. Today we are starting a new series and calling it Curious faith and we are going to walk through some of the tough questions beginning with a question most of us have asked at one time or another… "Why Did God Let It Happen?"

Father, we pray that as we open up your Word today, that your Holy Spirit would do a work in our lives. God, do a work in the hearts of those of us who are questioning and those who are struggling and those who are hurting. Even in the middle of pain and disappointment, God, help us to see your goodness. We pray this in the name of Jesus,

Amen.

Why did God let it happen? This is a question that's been asked probably since the beginning of time. If you go way back 300 years before the birth of Jesus, there was a Greek philosopher named Epicurus who came to these conclusions about the nature of God concerning good and evil. He had two statements and a question. The first statement, he said, is this. He said, "If God is not able to prevent evil, "if he can't stop bad things from happening, "then God must not be all-powerful." His second big statement was this: "If God's not willing to prevent evil, "then he must not be all good." That led him to ask this question: "If God is both willing and able "to prevent evil, then why does evil exist?" In your life and in mine - Why did God let it happen?

Today as we look at scripture, we are going to see that evil and suffering are actually not opposite or contrary to the story of the Bible. What we will see is that evil and suffering are actually central to the story of the Bible. Through scripture, I want to show us this big point/thought/idea: that following Jesus, which is Christianity, right – that it (Christianity) makes sense of it, gives meaning to, and it offers a solution for the evil and suffering that we experience.

Let me say that again - Christianity makes sense of, gives meaning to, and offers a solution for the evil and suffering that we experience in our lives. The Bible doesn't avoid pain, evil, and suffering. As we read through all the stories of the Bible, we see see more anguish and confusion, rage, suffering, and pain than we can count.

Let’s start with Jeremiah the prophet, he's known as "the weeping prophet," and he's wailing out to God in grief because of the unrepentance of the people. "God, why won't they turn to you?" If you look at David in the Old Testament, a man described as a man "after God's own heart," so in love with God, he worships God, trusts God again and again, yet, even a guy after God's own heart cries out to God, and asks "Are you listening, God? "Do you even care? "Why don't you come to my defense when I'm in trouble?"

Then in the New Testament, one of the more troubling crazy stories is John the Baptist, the guy whose sole purpose was to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. "I'm not even worthy to untie his sandals. "I just want to let everyone know that he's coming. "Jesus is coming. "Jesus is coming!" And then John the Baptist, whose whole ministry and life was devoted to the Lord Jesus, is wrongly arrested, awaits potential execution. Jesus could have come and saved him, but He did not, and John was beheaded. And I can just imagine he sat in that prison cell going, "Where in the world are you, God?"

A very interesting and powerful example from the Old Testament, comes from a prophet named Asaph. Has anybody ever heard of Asaph before? Anybody heard of Asaph? There are actually 12 different psalms – Psalm 50 and Psalm 73 thru 83 that are attributed to Asaph. He was a poet, and he was also a prophet, and he was the leader of the choir tabernacle. So if he were at Joy Church, he'd be working with maybe even leading Jocelyn, Matt, Kevin and the team. By the way – don’t we have the most incredible worship team! They are all so faithful and talented and they choose to volunteer their time here at Joy Church….we are so blessed!

This guy was a great worship leader. And so, this is what Asaph did. He was very close to God, but yet, he said, "I was starting to stumble." He was complaining that the wicked, those who did wrong, seemed to get all the blessings, (anybody relate) and he didn't understand where God was. So in Psalm 73 verse 11, he said, "What does God know?, "Does the Most High even know what's happening?" Is God out to lunch? Have you ever felt like that before? God, do you even see this, do you see what is going on here? Then he says, "Look at these wicked people "enjoying a life of ease while their riches multiply." Then he asks, "Did I keep my heart pure for nothing? "Did I keep myself innocent for no reason? "I get nothing but trouble all day long. "Every morning brings me pain." The worship leader wonders, "Where's God? "Why are you letting this happen?"

These are some very heavy questions, and I want to tell you up front, I'm not going to have clear, clean-cut answers to all of them. But I want to get into these questions, and I want to challenge us all to think. If you're willing to think, say "I'm willing to think." Are you willing to think?

Let’s take our questions to God, because God can handle our doubts.

One of the most common questions that you may have asked or you're going to hear asked is this: “If God is a good God, if God is loving, then why would he allow suffering? If God is a good God, then why would he let someone who didn't do anything wrong go through what they're going through? Why would God allow this to happen? If God is loving, why would he allow suffering. What is the answer? Why would God allow suffering? If God is loving, why would he allow suffering?

The answer is, if love is a choice, suffering is a possibility. If it's possible to love, it's also possible to hurt, why? We have to understand that the only way that love is possible is to have a choice - to choose love. Free will. What does that mean? Free will is simply the ability to choose. If you have the ability to choose love, you also have the ability to choose hate. If you have the ability to choose what's right, you also have the ability to choose what's wrong. And that's what makes evil and suffering possible.

So, why did God give us free will, then? Because that is the only way that love is possible. If he didn't give us the ability to choose, then we couldn't choose to love him.

He didn't want a rock or a robot. What he wanted was a relationship. God is love. He wants us to receive his love, and he wants us to choose, everyone say choose, to love him back for who he is. He wants to be loved. And in order **to be** loved, we have to be able **to choose** love.

The challenge though is this: in order for us to have the freedom to choose love, we also have the freedom to choose evil. And when we choose evil, we choose what the Bible calls sin. And sin leads to pain and suffering. So, for God to remove evil and suffering, what he has to do is he either has to remove our freedom to choose, or he has to remove us.

Now, here is a question that most of us probably don't ask, but we really should ask, is this question: if there is **no** God, then who decides there's evil? If there is no God, who's going to decide, that's right and that's wrong?

Here is an example. How many of you have a brother or a sister? Raise your hand. How many of you love your siblings? Not as many hands. How many of you fought with your brother or sisters? And all the hands go up. I have one brother – 11 months older than me. Iris twins. I was born a month early – always trying to get ahead even back then. We love each other and have a great relationship but we are very different and were very different growing up. I remember being a little girl probably 5 or 6 or 7 and he was 6 or 7 and he was learning from his friends at school all ready and teaching me! He came home one day and said I dare you to stick up your middle finger. I had know idea what that meant so of course I did it. Then he ran to my mother and said Mom – Kathy stuck up her middle figure! Fortunately for me – she had been listening, like all good parents we are always listening even when our kids think we aren’t. She pulled him aside and he got in trouble (as I was thinking back, I am not sure what kind of trouble)

Here is the question: if there were no parents, imagine that. What if there were no parents, and there were no rules? All the kids in kids church “scream yay”! Then who would there be to say if there was right or wrong? There has to be an authority in order to have a standard. If there is no God, then there is no moral point of reference. If there is no God, then who determines what is good and what is evil? So if we're honest and we have integrity as we look at this issue, we can’t use the presence of evil and suffering as proof that God does not exist. In reality, the fact that we do believe in evil and suffering is more proof that God does exist.

It's proof that he does exist. Some people will say, "Well, if you suffer, that means God doesn't love you." We need to understand that suffering isn't evidence of the lack of love. Suffering doesn’t mean God doesn’t love you. We see it every day.

I had a surgery done on my thumb a few years ago, the only surgery I have every had. I was doing something at the gym with my feet on a box and hands on the ground and pop and my thumb was hanging. So I ended up having a cast and then surgery. My point is the surgeon did not hate me. At least, I don't think he hated me. He gave me the surgery, even though it hurt. He gave it to me with the vision that he knew something better was coming. Chiropractors hurt us sometimes. They turn our neck or crack our backs. Why? Because they believe something better is coming after the pain.

If you ever go to a counselor or a therapist, and they take you back to some more difficult time in your memory or your childhood. Is it because they're mean and they want you to relive all that trauma? No, it's because they care about you, and they believe that by going there, you can find healing, and their goal is to bring you to something better. Those of us who have children, Have you ever disciplined your child? I hope you have. Are we still allowed to do that? I don't even know. You know, maybe it’s a time out or whatever you do. Why do you do this? Is it because you hate your children? No, it's because you love your children, and you have something better for them. When our kids grow up we make them pay rent and eventually – they are getting older and older but we tell them they have to make a plan and move out. It’s painful for us sometimes, not all the time, or for certain kids, to ask them to leave when you love having them around and we think we are helping them, protecting them. We want to keep them out of jail and off of drugs and employed and in church and things like that. The presence of pain isn't a lack of love. **Often, the presence of real pain is the evidence of real love. I know that is speaking to some of us big time today.**

That raises the question. Why do bad things happen to good people? Have you ever wondered that? I have heard that statement many times and thought about it often. Why does someone who didn't do anything wrong have something so bad and so tragic happen in their life? This is difficult to answer, and you're probably not going to want to hear what I'm going to say, I don’t even like hearing it - but whenever we ask, why do bad things happen to good people, we're really not talking about ourselves.

Scripture tells us we're actually not good people. We're not good people. You may say, "Well, I got a good heart." Well, I have a bad heart, 'because my heart leads me to do some bad things a lot of times. I've hurt people. I've done sinful things. I've said things that I shouldn't have said. I've done things that I wish I hadn't done. I have some thoughts that if you knew my thoughts, you'd be like, "We're finding another church!"

Our hearts are deceitful. Scripture tells us - Every single one of us have sinned, and we fall short, of God's standard, all of us. There's not a single one of us in this place, even those watching online, not one of us is actually good. Romans 3:23. The only one who ever lived that is truly good is Jesus.

Jesus, the Son of God. So why do bad things happen to good people? Truthfully, something bad only happened to **someone good** one time, and Jesus volunteered for it. The innocent one who never did anything wrong took on the punishment for our sin. He is the only one who is good. What did God do for us? God suffered for us. He suffered for you. He surrendered the glory of heaven and was born into poverty into Jesus Christ. He was mocked as a child, born to an unwed mom. Jesus was rejected by those closest to him, his family, and abandoned by his friends. He was falsely accused when he did nothing wrong. He was wrongly imprisoned. Jesus, the only one who was good, was beaten, tortured, stripped naked, hung shamefully on a cross, and the worst of all is that the one who was good, the Lamb of God, became sin for us. The innocent one took the sins of the world to die on the cross, so that we could be forgiven. Jesus did this for us. He was separated from the Father because he became sin on our behalf. After a lifetime of perfect intimacy with the Father, Jesus was separated from that intimacy, and then he cried out the same question you might have cried out before. He said Matthew 27:46, "My God, my God, why? "Where'd you go? "Why does it feel like you've left me? "God, why have you forsaken me? "I didn't do anything wrong, God. "I've served you faithfully. "I've been obedient in every single way. "I've loved you and lived for you. "My God, my God, why?"

And Jesus did that for us. He did that for you. He did that for me. And he felt more pain than we'll ever feel, and God the Father watched his innocent Son suffer.

So why does God allow that? Why would God allow suffering? And I don’t believe we can answer directly every question to every single situation. Why are you going through what you're going through? Why doesn't God do what he could do in your situation? Why did someone do what they did to you when God could have stopped it? And the answer is, I don't know what it is.

But I do know what the answer is not. And the answer is not that God doesn't love you, because scripture is ridiculously clear when it comes to the love of God. John 3:16 says this: "For God so loved the world," "for God so loved." Love is not just something that he does; it's who he is. "For God so loved the world that," what did he do? "He gave his one and only Son that whosoever believes in him "shall not perish, but have eternal life." What did God do? How much does he love us? God loves us so much, God loves you so much, that he took your misery, he took your suffering so seriously that he was willing to let his Son take it. Just think about that…..Why? Because God knew something better was coming. He knew something better was coming.

He knew that it takes a death to have a resurrection. He knew that sometimes, it takes a hurt to have a healing. Sometimes, it takes a loss to overcome the loss and find victory. Sometimes it's out of bondage that you step in and find freedom. He knew that even out of the darkness, he is so good and so powerful and so present that he can bring good even out of the bad. That's how good our God is. He knows in your life, something better is coming. The Bible doesn't say we won't have a hard time. The Bible doesn't say we will never hurt. The Bible doesn't say you won't go through something unfair. The Bible says that we will suffer, and the Bible says one day we'll die, and the Bible says one day we'll rise. Those of us who use our free will, our choice, to follow Jesus, to know Jesus, to serve Jesus, to love Jesus, will meet him in eternal glory, and one day, will suffer no more.

Something better's coming. Something better's coming. The Best is yet to come! Revelation 21:4 tells us that one day, after this earth is gone, there's a new heaven and a new earth, and Jesus reigns in every form and fashion from the throne, that God "will wipe every tear from their eyes. "There'll be no more death and no more sorrow "and no more crying and no more pain. "All of these things are gone forever," because something better is coming.

Imagine in the presence of God, no more loss. No more sickness. No more rejection. No more heartache. No more shame, no more grief, no more depression, no more abuse, no more crying yourself to sleep. No more pain. But, we're not there yet. We're not there yet. We're still in a sin-stained world, where because love is possible, so is evil.

And so, even in my own little circle of people that I know well and love, I think about a friend of my daughters who died suddenly last year with a 10 day old baby – a young vibrant woman newly married, her husband now a widow left to raise a child alone. The parents heartbroken – my daughter asked me, why mom? I can't offer anything in this moment. I have nothing to say but to pray, to cry with her, and to love her. Why? And I can't answer those questions. And sometimes we may see some reasons, or maybe not be able to even begin to understand ever. We may never know on this side. And that's why, at any given moment, a snapshot, a moment in your life, when something seems unfair, it's easy to decide, "God must not be good." But, not in just a moment, but when you walk with Jesus, you feed on his Word, you learn to trust his presence, you let him comfort you in the middle of grief, and somehow, he gives you a peace that doesn't make any sense, and you see his people, as flawed as we all are, love you and surround you. In a given moment, he may not feel good, but if you walk with him over a lifetime, you will see his faithfulness, and you will decide, "God is good." All the time. And all the time, our God is good.

Remember Asaph, the guy who thought a lot of things we are afraid to say out loud in LifeGroup, 'cause they'll judge us? " Remember Asaph? He's the guy who said this: "Does God even know what's happening?" The guy who said, "Did I keep my heart pure for nothing, "I've got trouble all day long, "The morning brings nothing but pain," this is what he said after walking with God faithfully. He said, "When I tried to understand all this, "it troubled me deeply." I love the honesty, because it's okay sometimes that we don't like it and we don't understand. He said, "It bothered me. "It didn't seem fair. "It troubled me deeply, til I entered the sanctuary of God, "until I got in his presence, "until I experienced his goodness, "until his grace sustained me." And Asaph the prophet said, "My flesh and my heart may fail, "but God is the strength of my heart "and my portion forever." "I didn't understand it, and I didn't like it, "until I entered the sanctuary of God." Psalm 73: 16 & 17

Worship Team

So today we are realizing together that the problem of evil and suffering is not contrary to the story of the Bible. It's central to the story of the Bible. And more than anything else, Christianity makes sense of, it gives meaning to, and offers a solution for the evil and suffering that we experience. For those of you that are suffering right now, and you're hurting, I want you to know that God hurts with you. And what may feel like the worst thing in your life, and it may be the worst thing, there could come a day, weeks, months, years later, where you look back at that worst thing and you say, "I wouldn't want anybody else to go through it, "and I wouldn't ever want to go through it again, "but I did experience the presence of God through it, "and somehow, God did use it." I have been there and said just that. If you're hurting, and you're wondering, where is God, remember, you're living in the not-there-yet. But the good news is by the grace, the power, the glory, and the goodness of God, something better is coming. God is good.

All the time.

And all the time.

God is good.

Pray –

Father, today, I pray especially on behalf of those who are hurting. Here in this room or those of you watching online, if you say, "Yes, I'm experiencing something that I don't like. "I wish God would change it. "It doesn't seem fair and I may not understand. "I need God's help. "I need God's presence," would you just lift up your hand? I want to pray specifically for you right now.

Just lift up your hand. If you're watching online you can say, "Please pray for me." Just type that in the comments section. God, I cannot even imagine the weight and the pain of what your children are experiencing right now. God, my heart is heavy, and God, I know that you hurt when your children hurt. And Lord, as a human with a limited mindset, I don’t even attempt to offer a reason why, but I cry out to you, God, and so often agree and say, "I don't understand why you let this happen." But at the same time, God, we want to dwell in your sanctuary. We want to push into your presence. And I ask, God, in the name of Jesus, that in the middle of hurt and heartache and grief and pain, that you would start to reveal your goodness, if even for just a moment to allow us to sense that you're with us. Lord, I pray for miracles. I pray for provision. I pray for healing. I pray for restoration. I pray, God, for a peace from heaven that goes beyond our human ability to understand. And God, when we're asking why and we don't understand, God, we thank you that you're a God that lets us come to you. Help us to cling to you and trust in you, even when we don't understand. God, I pray that over a lifetime of walking with you, even though we may hurt in the moment, we would come to the conclusion that you are truly good. We put our trust in you. That our grade on our mental report card of trusting you would increase every day.

And right now, as we keep praying, I believe there may be those of you who would acknowledge honestly, you don't know God personally, don't know where you stand with God. God is love. And He does love you. He wants you to feel and experience his love, and he wants you to choose to love him back. What's our problem? Why is it that it's so difficult? Our problem is sin, that just like Jesus turned away from God when he became sin, God is so holy that sin separates us from God. And here's the good news. This is how much God loves you, that he sent Jesus, his Son, to become sin. The innocent, perfect sacrifice died in our place. He paid the penalty for our sins, and God raised him from the dead, because God had something better coming. The way that you're made right with God is not by you being good enough, but the fact that Jesus was good enough. He was perfect. He gave his life and he rose again so that you could know God, so you could be forgiven, so you could love God back in the way that God loves you.

When you call out to Jesus, he'll hear your prayer. God will forgive your sins right where you are. He'll make you brand new. Just pray with me, after me, and nobody prays alone at Joy Church – we are a community of believers

Heavenly Father, I give you my life. Forgive all my sins. Save me. Make me new. As you love me, I choose to love you. I give you my whole life. Fill me with your Spirit so I can know you and walk with you and know your goodness and share your goodness. Thank you for new life. Amen

For those of you who prayed that prayer for the first time or as a renewed commitment – you are beginning a brand new life. The Best ever. Let someone know next to you or come tell Mike and I. We celebrate with you! We love you and there is nothing you can do about it- The very Best is yet to come! Thanks for being at church today! We will see you next week as we continue with questions and doubts we all have – Curious Faith.

Cook out next week