

A Gospel-Centered Approach to the Problem of Evil

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Bible Text: Isaiah 45:1-8; Job 1:2:7-10

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Turn to Isaiah chapter number 45. We will take a break from the book of Mark for two Sundays.

All right, preacher, what in the world do you have a disclaimer on the screen for? Why would you need to issue a disclaimer?

In just a few minutes, as we begin to broach the topic that the text forces us to address, all of us collectively are going to jump into the deep end of the pool. We are going to go into the 14 foot section. We are going to jump off of the high board and fully submerge ourselves in hopefully what will be cool, refreshing water. But often times when you jump into a pool like that or something deep, there is an initial shock. And I am afraid that this morning there may be that same type of shock. And I want to tell you that I may be guilty of presenting more questions than answers, but we have got to broach this topic this morning. We have got to deal with it. We have got to be aware of it. We want to be able to give an answer when somebody asks us about the problem of evil. When evil confronts society (and it seems like it is confronting it every single day), when it confronts the body of Christ, when a tornado comes, when a hurricane comes, when thousands die in a moment of time because of a tsunami, we want to say, "Why are they dying?"

When an innocent, or maybe from our perspective an innocent girl, like Courtney Wilkes who is 15 years old gets murdered by a young man in a moment of time when they are on vacation, these things bother us. When we open the newspaper in the morning and we see murder after murder and brutal murders, evil bothers us. We hear about genocide occurring and it is not just a World War II thing. It is happening right now even on the continent of Africa; genocide is happening right now.

The Arminians are being executed at an incredible rate. And you say, "Where are you God?" When the twin towers collapse and 3,000 die in one day we wonder, "What is going on? Why is there evil?" When it seems to us that somebody gets over on the justice system we say, "What is going on?"

We wonder to ourselves how can a soldier be so brutal as to kill somebody who is defenseless and shielding their child. Yet that is the world in which we are living.

That phone ringing is a good reminder for us to silence our cell phones so that we will have no distractions this morning for we are going to jump into the deep end of the pool. And I am going to need you to think with me this morning.

Three presuppositions: Presupposition number one: There is a God. We are not debating whether there is a God. There is a God who has revealed himself to us in these sixty-six canonical books that we call the Bible, more specifically in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Presupposition number two, all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. We don't have a scenario in which we get into our text and wonder, "Well, maybe these aren't really God's words." We believe beyond a shadow of a doubt that God has preserved his Word and we are reading the Word of God this morning, all of it.

And then, Presupposition number three: we believe that the gospel of Jesus Christ should guide our world view, that the message of redemption beginning in Genesis 3:15 and working through the entire book of Genesis, culminating in Genesis 50:20, moving into Exodus and the story of redemption and then culminating in the gospel of Jesus Christ. We believe that this message should guide our world view.

So what is the problem, then, preacher? What is the problem with evil? What should we be discussing this morning? To what do we need to pay attention? And here is the question. This is a reasonable question. It goes something like this.

If your God is as powerful as you say he is and if your God is as loving as you say he is, then why doesn't this all powerful, all loving God take care of evil?

This is the exact question that Martin Bashir asked Rob Bell in an interview that was on nationwide television, and you can watch it for yourself on YouTube. And after the tsunami in Japan, Martin asked Rob Bell. And I am sad to say that Rob Bell squirmed in his seat and was not able to provide an answer. And from that moment of watching that interview for the very first time I thought, "Well, what answer would you give, preacher?"

That is a reasonable question. If you were put on the spot, would you squirm in your seat or would you have any kind of an answer? That is a reasonable question.

It could be that you have a co-worker; it could be that you have a friend; it could be you have a relative, and they want to know. You Christians believe in an all powerful God and you say your all powerful God is all loving, so work it out for me. And I promise you, when you are put on the spot like that, you don't want to be squirming in your seat.

So my responsibility according to Ephesians 4:11-12 is to equip you, and I am going to try to do my very best to equip you.

Now to our guests and visitors I am going to tell you that we don't jump into the deep end of the pool every Sunday, but in July it seems like a great Sunday in the hot summer to get into the deep end of the pool. So here is where we are.

Would you stand in honor of the reading of God's Word and let's work through these seven verses in Isaiah and then we will preach from Job one in a little bit.

“Thus says the Lord to his anointed.”

In case you are wondering are these God's words, the Word of God says, “These are God's words.” The prophet Isaiah is speaking as a mouthpiece of Jehovah. And he speaks to his anointed which is Cyrus whose right hand I have holden, whose right hand I have grasped. This is the man that I have reached down to subdue nations before him. And I will loose the loins or belts of kings and I will open before him two leaved gates or doors. I will kick in doors on his behalf. The gates shall not be shut. I will go before thee and make the crooked places straight or the elevated places level. I will break in pieces the gates of brass. I will cut asunder the bars of iron and I will give the treasure of darkness and the hidden riches of the secret places that thou mayest know that I the Lord which call thee by thy name am the God of Israel.

Let there be no mistake. There aren't two gods. There aren't three gods. There isn't a multiplicity of gods. There is one God and he has revealed himself to us in this text. Why? For Jacob my servant's sake and for Israel, mine elect.

I have even called thee by thy name. Not only that. I have surnamed thee. Your mom and dad didn't pick out your name. I have surnamed thee, thou that hast not known me. You are not even a believer. I am the Lord and there is none else. There is no God beside me. I girded thee. I equipped thee though thou hast not known me. Why? That they may know from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the Lord. There is none else. I form the light. I create darkness. I make peace. I create evil.

What? That is problematic. I don't swallow that easily. I am not even sure I want my Bible to say that. But there isn't a choice. I don't have a choice. That is the point. I don't have any choice. It says that. I can't ignore that. I can't just pretend it is not in there. I can't selectively pick and choose passages that I like. I must deal with this.

I the Lord do all these things.

Father, as we close our eyes, as we bow before you, we recognize that if you don't come, if you don't send your Holy Spirit right now, if your Spirit doesn't move between the pews and into our hearts and minds, if your Spirit doesn't fill this place, if your Spirit doesn't anoint me, if your Spirit doesn't come, then we are wasting our time, that if your Spirit doesn't come and help us stay alert and stay awake and think and work through this, if

your Spirit doesn't guard us and guide us, if your Spirit doesn't illuminate the Word that is before us, then we wonder what is the point. Come, dear God, come and deal with us for we are opening your Word and we need you to help us understand your Word in Jesus' name. Amen.

Luke 24:44 are the sunglasses that I am going to put on as I read Isaiah. I will not read Isaiah as a heathen. I will not read Isaiah as a Jew. I will read Isaiah as a believer and as a believer under the new covenant Jesus told me after his death, burial and resurrection he opened my eyes to this exact sentence right here.

“These are the words which spake unto you while I was with you. All things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses in the prophets and in the psalms.”

And BBA sophomores that are with us this morning, you know that we are talking about the seventeen prophetic books. We are talking about the five books the law. We are talking about the wisdom books of Psalms, Proverbs and Job. And what we are saying this morning is Jesus told us, “Look for me on those pages. I am there. The gospel is on those pages. The person and work of Jesus Christ is on those pages. Look for me because I am in there. I am in the law. I am in the Psalms. I am in the prophets. I am there. Study me. Look for me on those pages.”

And so when we now work through Isaiah, when we read from Job, we are going to put on our Luke 24:44 sunglasses so that we see with that world view.

So he says about 200 years before the birth of Cyrus:

“Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus.”

Now this is kind of problematic to me, because Cyrus is not a believer. Cyrus is not a good guy. Cyrus is not a wonderful, kind gentle kind of a person. Cyrus is a warrior. Cyrus is a king. Cyrus is a mean dude. And God calls him, “My anointed.”

I understand when John the Baptist is anointed. That makes sense to me. I got that piece. He is a preacher. That makes sense. Cyrus. Pontius Pilate. Herod. That doesn't compute with me. I am used to preachers being anointed. I am used to prophets being anointed. I understand that priests get anointed. I understand that kings under Israel's reign were anointed. But, Cyrus? And then he says in the text, “I am going to grab a hold of his right hand. I will lead him. I will guide him.”

When you have your child's right hand, they go where you want them to go. I will subdue nations before him. It doesn't say, “I will permit him to subdue nations.” That is not what your text says. The text says, “I will subdue nations before him. I will loose the loins of kings. That is the belt around a king. There are kings that he will defeat and he will defeat them because I ordained that he will defeat them. I will kick open doors for him.” You don't kick open doors. You understand what a door team does. You are going to rescue somebody. God kicks open the door. Jehovah kicks open the door. And at

that... it shall not be shut. I will go before him and if it is crooked I will straighten it. If it is exalted, I will level it. I will break in pieces the gates of brass and cut in sunder.

He says, hey folks. I am in charge. I am sovereign. I am omnipotent. I am all powerful. There is no doubt about it. That is me. That is what he is communicating there. There is no question about it. And here is the kingdom.

And those of you that had your Western Civilization class, you know that he was an incredible king for many, many years and that this empire, the Persian Empire was unbelievable in its size, in its scope and its dominion. And they weren't known to be choir boys. People got killed. Evil occurred under his reign. It was not a pretty thing.

And I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hidden riches of the secret places that thou mayest know that I the Lord which all thee by thy name am the God of Israel.

Now, folks, I understand when good things happen and I say, "God, you are awesome." But I am not so quick to say you are evil, God. That is not how I think. I like to separate it. I like to say, "Oh, good God, evil Satan." I like to deal with that. It seems so much easier just to compartmentalize it like that. But the text doesn't permit me to do that.

In verse number four it says, "For Jacob, for Jacob my servant's sake. I am doing this for Jacob's sake. I am doing this for Israel's sake. I am doing all of this through Cyrus for mine elect."

Hold your place in Isaiah and please turn over Ephesians. Let me remind you about another elect and another decision that was made before the foundation of the world so that you can get the parallel.

Now please notice verse number three of chapter number one of the letter to the church at Ephesus.

"Blessed be the God and Father..." reading from verse number three. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ according as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world."

What are you doing, preacher? What are you doing? I am drawing a parallel for you. What is the parallel you are drawing?

I want you to notice the comparison of Jacob my servant to Jesus my servant. I want you to draw the parallel between Israel mine elect to the Church mine elect.

Do you remember what I told you? I said I am going to use my Luke 24:44 glasses. I am going to look for Christ on the pages of the Old Testament.

Isaiah says very clearly that Jesus is the servant of God. Matthew picks that up and says, "This is Jesus in fulfillment of the prophet Isaiah."

So there is clearly a connection here. I am afraid sometimes we think about the gospel as God's reaction to sin.

"Oh, no, plan B."

Verse five.

"I am the Lord. There is none else. There is no God beside me. I girded thee, though thou hast not known me."

God's girding someone. God's using someone that doesn't even know him. Why? Why, God? Why did you do that with Cyrus?

That they may know from the rising of the sun and from the west. The rising of the sun: Where does the sun rise? It rises in the east. Where does it set? It sets to the west. Is that the whole world, folks? Sure it is.

Why, God? Why do you do these kinds of things? Why do you use men like Cyrus? Why do these things happen?

Because I want the world to know that I am the Lord and there is none else. I need you to know that God is there. God is in charge. When your world gets rocked like the Wilkes family got rocked and a police officer comes knocking up to your door and says, "Are you...?" And he says "I am sorry to inform you..."

Can you imagine that moment of time when they found out that news? Can you imagine? Their world got rocked, and your world may get rocked in the future when you are told that you have a deadly cancer and there is no cure for that cancer. Your world will get rocked.

I need to know that God is in charge. I need to know that he hasn't gone anywhere. I need to know that the all powerful, all sovereign, all loving God is still there. I don't need to be wondering in my mind, is Satan winning right now?

So he says, "I form the light."

God, I love the fact that you form the light.

I create darkness.

Really, God, I wasn't sure you created darkness. I kind of thought darkness was the opposite of light. But the Word of God says, "I create darkness."

And that is the exact same Hebrew word that is found in Genesis 1:1 so that there is no doubt about what we mean by create.

And then he says, “I make peace and create evil.”

Well, I am ok with God making peace. I love a God who makes peace. I love a God who blesses. I love a God who makes well being, but I am not sure I like that other part. I would much prefer evil being just the opposite of good. That seems like it would be so much easier for me. But the text doesn't say that. The exact same word for create is used.

I do all of these things. I create light. I create darkness. I make peace. I make well being. I create evil. I create calamities. I do all of these things.

You say, “Well, preacher, what does he mean by the word evil? And couldn't you just tell us the Hebrew word? That will help us.”

The Hebrew word is רָעָה (ra'ah), and it is found 600 times in the Old Testament and, quite frankly, I don't get a lot of help, because it is translated many different ways: evil, wickedness, soreness, grievous, trouble, bad, hurt . . .

I sure wish there were two words for evil in the Old Testament. That would be so much easier for me if God were to put two in there, but he didn't. He only put one word.

So the context forces me to deal with it, and the context is peace and evil, well being and calamities. So here is evil, morally reprehensible.

All right, let's look at the fact of suffering, misfortune and wrong doing. Oh, I am getting a little better understanding of this: suffering, affliction, premature death of your child. Would that be evil? Sure. It is a cosmic evil force, something that brings sorrow and distress.

Here are calamities. If you have an ESV in your lap, then your Bible says calamities. It is the same concept: disaster, judgment, and suffering.

So here is what I need you to understand. I want you to make sure that you are clear on this if you are part of Berean Baptist Church. If you are a guest, I want to make sure that you understand that what we do not have is a cosmic struggle between good and evil. We do not have a cosmic struggle between good and evil. We don't have an army navy game and army is good and navy is evil—that is appropriate, isn't it? And we are going back and forth in the score. That is not what we have. We don't have a scenario whereby at half time it is tied up and we are wondering, “Is good going to win or is evil going to win?”

And we go, “We read the play book. We know that good wins in the end, but right now it looks like evil is winning.”

God is always winning. There is never a moment when God is losing. Why? The answer is that God is the only uncaused cause. There aren't two uncaused causes. There can only be one uncaused cause and after that it is all God, all God.

Counselors, you cannot have a scenario whereby evil is operating outside of the umbrella of God. You can't have that. The moment that happens, Joe, he is no longer sovereign. You should throw in the towel the moment at which he is no longer sovereign.

“What are you saying, preacher?” I am saying that God's Traveler's umbrella is huge. And nothing happens that he doesn't either permit or cause.

Look at Job chapter number one with me. Allow yourself to get into the story. Wives, would you hit your husband on the side, please? Just kind of give him a little jab and I will try to get a little bit more excited so he can stay awake.

Job one, please. Go back to Psalms and when you find Psalms you know you are getting really close. Keep flipping back and then you will find Job.

Now, I am afraid that sometimes we read this chapter anew we say, “Yeah, ok.” And we really don't understand the complexity of this chapter. We don't get into it. We don't think about it. So I am going to do my very best to dramatize it so that you can get into the chapter, so that you can immerse yourself into what it must have been like to live in Job's shoes for just a moment.

There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was perfect. That man was upright. That man is one who feared God and eschewed evil. This is a great guy. You want him as the chairman of your deacons. And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters. So he has got a full quiver. Does anybody here have ten children?

His substance was seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels. That is a right many. Five hundred yoke of oxen, 500 donkeys, and a great household so that this man was the greatest of all the men in east and their sons went and feasted in the houses. Every one in his day sent and called for their sisters. They are having a grand old party.

Verse five. And it was so that when the days of their feasting were gone about, Job sent and sanctified them, rose up early in the morning, offered burnt offerings according to the number of them for Job said, “It may be that my sons have cursed God in their hearts.” And Job did this on a regular basis.

I mean, we are dealing with a great guy right here, folks. We are not dealing with a guy, with some sin in his life and God must be punishing that sin. That is not what the text says. This is an awesome father. This father gets up in the morning and he prays for the salvation of his children. This father goes to bed at night and prays for the salvation of

his children. He prays that the gospel will become real to his children. This is who we are dealing with right here. This is a great guy.

All right, stay with me.

And there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord and Satan came also. And the Lord said unto Satan, "Hey, where do you cometh from?"

And Satan answered, "Oh, I am coming from the earth, been going to and fro checking things out."

And the Lord said unto Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? Have you noticed my servant Job? There is none like unto him on the earth, a perfect man, upright, eschews evil, fears God."

And Satan said unto him, "Oh, does God fear you? Does he really fear you? Come on, God. Don't kid me."

Does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not put a hedge about him? Isn't there a hedge about him and his household? Isn't that really why he serves you, God? In other words, he has ten kids, all these servants, lots of animals. Isn't it really, God, because you protect him? That is why he serves you.

But look at verse number 11, please. But put forth thine hand now.

He doesn't say, "Pull back the hedge." That is not what he says. Notice the text very clearly. Look at your Bible.

He says, "You, Jehovah, you put forth your hand."

It doesn't say Jehovah pull back your hand. It says, "You put forth your hand."

"And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand."

So Satan becomes an instrument of God.

All right, so let's look at verse 13.

There was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house. They were having a great party. This is fine. This is good. This is a legitimate time of celebrating, enjoying the riches that God has provided.

And there came a messenger unto Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them and the Sabeans fell upon them and took them away and they have slain the servants and the edge of the sword and I, only I, am alone to tell you."

So the servant comes running up, tearing up to Job, crashing into the house and says, “The Sabeans have attacked us and they have destroyed the servants and they have killed the donkeys and they have killed the oxen.”

And that is evil.

And while he was yet speaking, out of nowhere comes another guy running up. This is like... you don't expect it. One tragedy in the day is more than sufficient. He comes running up. While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, “The fire of God is fallen from heaven and hath burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them and I only alive am escaped to tell thee.”

And now Job is ready to take a seat. My goodness! How much evil in one day, God? I am not sure I can take much more.

And while he was yet speaking, there came another and said, “The Chaldeans made up of three bands conducted an ambush and they fell upon the camels and they have carried all away.”

And right now Job is saying, “Praise the Lord. My children are still alive.”

Don't allow yourself to think of Job as some super human guy that doesn't have emotions like you would have emotions. Don't do that. Don't check out right now. Stay with me right now, please. You know that running through his mind right now is the fact that at least my kids are still alive. Because right now it has just been servants and animals, and he is saying, “I can get more servants. We can rebuild the livestock. We can do that.”

You know he is going through that, folks. Don't kid yourself. He is a human just like you, and he is wrestling through this incredible tragedy that is happening.

And verse 18.

And while he was yet speaking, there came also another and said, “Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking and behold there came a great wind.”

And we have seen the destruction that wind can do. We saw it in our own city here in Fayetteville. We drive down the All-American and we see where wind just ripped through trees. It looks like a giant went walking through there, just knocking things down like toothpicks. We have driven down Riley Road, and we have seen the destruction that wind can cause. We have seen the photography and the images on the television of the destruction that tornadoes render.

And behold there came a great wind from the wilderness and smote the four corners of the house and fell upon the young men and they are dead and I only am alive escaped to tell thee.

Can you imagine the heartache? All of us in this room that are parents don't expect to bury our children. We expect to go before them. We expect our children to live long lives. We don't expect to lose ten children in a single moment of time.

I think that we are guilty of removing ourselves from this event and saying "Oh, that is so far away. Oh, that is old. Surely that couldn't happen today."

And yet if you know anything about life, it happens. It happens. A missionary family, I can't think of their name, but somebody knows the name of the family that lost all their children in that van accident. It happens. So please notice.

Job, what are you going to do?

And then Job arose and he rent his clothes and he shaved his head and he fell down upon the ground and worshipped.

Hey, Brother Darren, I am not expecting that. That is not the reaction that I am expecting. I am not expecting that your instinct is to fall down before God and bow to worship. Dear God. I am not expecting that. That is not what I am expecting. I am expecting why. I am expecting something other than worship. Your first response is worship.

What an example for me! What an amazing example, Jeremy. Worship is how you are going to respond.

And then please notice his statement. Underline this in your Bible because this is a glorious, helpful statement. Underline it. Take your pen out and underline these good words.

"Naked came I out of my mother's womb and naked shall I return thither. The Lord gave and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. And I am to respond at all times with blessed be the name of the Lord. I have got good health. Blessed be the name of the Lord. My legs are falling out from under me. I am losing my mind. My heart is failing. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

I have got five healthy kids. I don't have any children. Blessed be the name of the Lord. I have a beautiful home that we spent twenty years working on. I have nothing but the shingles on the ground. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

I must confess to you. My first instinct is why. My first instinct is not to fall before the King and worship. I want to get there, J R. But I am flesh. Why, God?

And then please notice how instructional verse 22 is for us.

In all this, Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly. May we be careful in the body of Christ not to charge God foolishly! May we be careful in the body of Christ when evil comes into our lives that we not charge God foolishly! May we guard ourselves against charging God foolishly! May we keep our thought life in check lest we charge God foolishly! May we be well grounded Christians who know that a sovereign God is ruling and reigning and he doesn't allow anything into our lives but for good. May we refresh ourselves on Romans 8:28 over and over again. We should run to Proverbs 3:4-6 and trust in the Lord. Those words should be real in our lives, not clever songs that we sing when everything is going well.

So Satan's objective was to use the evil to drive Job from loving and worshiping and serving God. That was Satan's legitimate objective. But when we look at Job, we find out that nothing comes into my life, but that God has not caused or permitted it. Nothing! Nothing comes into my life; death doesn't come into my life; cancer doesn't come into my life: nothing comes into my life but that God doesn't either cause or permit.

Number two, that which is seen as evil should cause me to worship God. That which is seen as evil should cause me to worship God.

Hey, John, I am really good with good causing me to worship God. I love that concept. But I have a little struggle with evil causing me to worship God. I am not to charge God foolishly, for that would be sin. So I ask the question this morning and I think it is a little legitimate question: God, why didn't you just crush evil? Why don't you just crush evil? You had a chance, God. Why didn't you just crush evil when you had a chance? Why, God?

And this is only one answer. This is not the whole answer. And I don't have all the answers. This is just a little bit of an answer. This is a tiny one of many choices. This is one little component.

I want to ask you: How do you redeem a people if they are not sinners? If the lake goes dry, there is no need for lifeguards. If the lake is dry, you guys don't have to sit out on the pier and be ready to rescue somebody from drowning.

But you say, "There wouldn't be a need to be saved."

You are right. There wouldn't be a need to be saved. That is absolutely correct. There would not be a need to be saved. And my response to you is: Only when someone is rescued do I fully appreciate the life saving attributes of the lifeguard. I am guilty of taking for granted lifeguards. I don't think about lifeguards when everything is going well. I don't think about lifeguards when I am swimming well. Do you know when I think about lifeguards? I think about them when I am not doing so well. Now I am saying when the undercurrent is grabbing me, when waves are on me, I am exhausted. I am looking around saying, "Is there a lifeguard paying attention?"

What are you saying, preacher?

Here is what I am telling you. You don't appreciate mercy until you need mercy. You don't appreciate grace until you need grace. You don't think about anticipating grace. You don't think about the fact that ten years from now there is going to be a state trooper which will give you grace when you get pulled over for speeding. You don't think about anticipated grace. Do you know when you really appreciate grace? When he says, "Hey, buddy, slow it down and just be ok today."

That is so good. This is just between me and the boys, right. This is just between us, guys. Mom does not need to know that Daddy was pulled over. Then one of the kids says "Mommy, mommy, did you hear what happened?"

All right, let's move on.

Hey, folks. God's mercy, God's grace, God's loving kindness: they are magnified in evil. I am sorry. I wish it was otherwise, but the fact of the matter is the attributes that I love the most about my God when I turn to Exodus 34:6-7, are about the God who is long suffering, the God who is patient, the God who is gracious, the God who is merciful and I love that God, but the reason I love that God is because I am a sinner.

So my question is: How do you demonstrate the power of the gospel to save people from sinning without sin? How can there be sin without the potential presence of evil? That is a reasonable question.

Next week I am going to address: Did God cause sin? You need to be ready to give an answer for that question. That is a reasonable question. We cannot just stick our heads in the sand and pretend like people don't have those questions, because they do have good questions out there and we need to be ready to answer them.

You say, "So, how can there be sin without the potential presence of evil?"

May I remind you that there was a tree planted in the garden, and the tree was of good and evil? May I also remind you, Joe, that Satan didn't put that tree in the garden, that there wasn't anything in that garden but that God did not put in the garden? Every single thing in that garden was there because God ordained that it could be in there. We don't have a scenario whereby God gave Satan a corner of the garden and said, "Do what you want in that corner." That is not what happened.

Are you telling me that God created the potential?

Yes, I am. No question about it. God didn't have to do that, but he chose to do that.

So what is my response? Here is my thought. Here is just one thought, take it or leave it. Every act of evil should cause me to think of the evil that was inflicted upon the Son of God as a demonstration of his love for the world.

We sang a beautiful song this morning, and we talked about that and it is easy to think about God when we are singing in a worship service. That is easy. I am asking you to think about that when you open the newspaper. I am asking you to think about that when you are watching Fox news. I am asking you to think about that 24/7. It is easy to come to church and think about that. That is not a hard thing at all. Every act of evil should cause me to think of God's justice, of God's mercy, of God's grace, of God's loving kindness toward me through the gospel.

Acts 4:27-28.

“Of a truth against thy holy child Jesus whom thou hast anointed both Herod and Pontius Pilate with the Gentiles and the people of Israel were gathered together for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel had determined before to be done.”

How do you crucify a Savior without evil?

That is hard stuff to think about. It is not easy stuff. So I ask: Why does an all powerful God continue to allow evil to exist? Why does he create calamities? Why does he create suffering?

And here is my thought for you. It comes out of Luke 13. You don't need to turn there. We are running out of time, but Jesus gives us two scenarios. Scenario number one is the Galileans are being murdered. Scenario number two is eighteen men were crushed by a tower. Let me show you this on the screen. Let's look at the first one together.

There were some present that at a season of time had told him of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

Innocent people were being executed. Ok? That is what you have got there, people being executed.

And Jesus says, “Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the other Galileans because they suffered such things? I tell you no.”

And then he looks them right in the face and he says, “If you don't repent, you are going to perish.”

What are you saying, preacher? What are you suggesting to us today?

I am suggesting to you that every single evil act should cause men and women to repent and believe the gospel. Every single evil act should cause men and women to run to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Every time we hear about a murder, every time we hear about a tragedy, every time we hear of pestilence, every time we hear of someone losing their life prematurely, we should be embracing the gospel.

What about this one? Or how about these eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell and slew them? Think ye that they were sinners above all the other men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you no.

So when we as a congregation, because we are a military town, when we hear about fourteen people being on Chinook helicopter and the entire Chinook goes down and all fourteen die, how should we respond to that? How should we respond to those types of tragedies? We should expect people to run to the gospel.

If we were alive when the *Titanic* went down and saw the headlines in the *New York American* that said, "Fifteen Hundred Perish," we should pray that people would repent and believe the gospel, because every single calamity, disaster, war, pestilence, tragedy, death, suffering and abuse, all happen for the express purpose of magnifying the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Now you are going to have to take a moment to wrap your brain around that.

Genesis 50:20 provides us the perfect example. I am wrapping it up. Stay with me. We won't turn there, but let me show you.

You remember that Joseph was sold into slavery. Joseph was unjustly accused of rape. Joseph was unjustly cast into prison. Joseph was left for dead in prison. That sounds a lot like evil to me. Yes or no? Yes, and this is what the text says.

"But as for you, you meant and thought this evil against me, but God meant it unto good to bring to pass as it is this day to save much people alive."

The the reason the title of this message is "A Gospel-Centered Approach to the Problem of Evil" is that Genesis tells me that God uses evil to save people.

What? That is right. That is how powerful our God is. Our God can take the most evil event ever perpetrated against a single man which was the death of Jesus Christ and turn that into the most glorious, good thing that has ever happened in the humanity of God.

All right, we are almost done.

When we wake up in the morning we find out that the twin towers have been hit and 3,000 died; when we are out at Wednesday night's church service here four weeks ago and Debbie Smith brings to our attention that a godly family that was vacationing in Florida loses their 15 year old daughter to a 21 year old that brutally murdered her during vacation, we sit there in shock as the body of Christ. And we are very quick and I am guilty of saying, "Why?"

When we think about the small map here, there is Pensacola right there. There is highway 10 for you. That is Eglin Air Force Base. Many of us in this room have been at Eglin Air

Force Base. Many of us have swam right here in the Gulf of Mexico. We know Fort Walton Beach. We know Destin. We know this community. This isn't evil far, far away.

As a church family, that could have been us. That could have been one of our children. That could have been us. They could have been calling back to let me know and then the body of Christ know that we lost our daughter in a moment of time.

So how do I respond to that? What would a gospel centered response to that be? Preacher, what would a gospel centered response be to that? Number one, I would rejoice in the fact that Courtney is born again and that absent from the body is present with the Lord. I am often guilty of thinking as death as a bad thing, but according to Psalms 116:15, the death of his saints is a precious thing to the Lord.

So a gospel approach to evil will be, "God, thank you for the redemption of Jesus Christ that made it possible for us to have complete assurance that Courtney is with you in your presence and as we mourn for her loss, we must rejoice in the reality that she is with you."

That is a gospel centered response. We are not going to cop an attitude. We are going to rejoice in the glorious truth of the gospel. We are going to run to the gospel in our time of need. We are going to embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And then, pastor, what should we think about this punk right here who has got a smile on this face? This is Steven right here. This is the 21 year old punk who is smiling in his mug shot. I would like to knock that smile off his face.

Well, I have to think two ways on this one, folks. This is a little harder for me. I have got to think two ways. I am going to grab two ideas. I am going to jam them in my little pea brain. Two thoughts: one, praise God for redemption. It could be that he is going to get saved out of this. He is a sinner just like I am, and he needs to repent and believe the gospel. I have got to think that way. I have got to embrace the reality that that could be me outside the grace of God, that all of us outside the grace of God have that potential within us. I have got to guard against self righteousness. Then how else am I going to think? How else?

Well, I am going to think about God's justice. I am going to think about the same passage in Exodus 34 that talks about God's longsuffering and God's patience and God's kindness. It also says that he visits the iniquity, that he is a just God and that he will execute vengeance. So I have got to turn it over to God and in both cases I have got to run to the gospel.

I remind myself that according to Solomon, it is better to go to a funeral than to a party. Now, come on folks, in the back, right over here. Most of you all would prefer not to go to a funeral over a party. Given two choices, party or funeral on Friday night, most of you are going to pick party. Then why would I need to pick funeral? Because funerals remind me of death, and they help get my heart right. They help keep me on focused on

what is important. Parties don't help me keep me focused on what is important. Death helps me stay focused on what is important.

And so I want to show you this concluding slide. I lied. Two slides and then we are done.

Event number two. Satan shows back up and says "Hey, hey, hey, I did all you said."

God says, "Nope. Job is still a solid guy."

And Satan says, "Let me have his body and we will see. We will see if he can hold on to his integrity. Give me his body."

And so once again, God demonstrates his sovereignty and says, "You may strike his entire body, but preserve his life."

And, Aaron, I am reminded that God is in charge, that God determines the destiny in my moment of time. It is not me. It is God. God determines how long I live. God determines that.

And so Satan goes and strikes him from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head with boils. Think about the worse case of poison ivy you have ever had in your entire life, and magnify it 100 fold. Think about itching and scratching on every square inch of your body. Think about oozing and pussing all over your entire body. Think about every single body part that you have is itching and itching and you are just absolutely miserable. You are just vexing. You are ready to die. And he took him a potsherd, a scraping instrument. And he sits down amongst the ashes and sits down in some kind of fashion. And he sits down and he is just scratching, scratching, scratching, scratching, just itch. He is just miserable!

And here comes his wife. And his wife says, "Dost thou still retain thy integrity? Are you really going to stay with that world view you have? Are you really going to hold on to that philosophy? Are you really going to still claim that the Lord gives and the Lord takes away? Are you really going to hold on to that? Curse God and die."

Are you with me?

And he said unto her, "Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaks."

What? What?

"Shall we receive good at the hand of God and shall not receive evil?"

Oh, oh, oh. Don't allow yourself to skip that one. David, I am ok at receiving good. I love that. God, I will take some more good. I love the good. Send some more good, God. I am praying for good.

And Job says to me, “Sean, are you going to be so self centered, so inward, so idolatrous that you would dare say, ‘I only receive good from God?’”

Amazing! What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God and shall we not receive evil? In all this, Job did not sin with his lips.

All right, I am done. Here is my final thought for you. How in the world did he do this, preacher? What was his world view? How was Job able to hold on to his integrity? What was it about Job that let him respond this way? Here it is right here.

For I know that my Redeemer lives. I know that it is not all about life on this earth. I know that there is a future. I know that my God has redeemed me. I know that he is not dead. He is coming back. He will walk on this planet and I will walk with him. And this is exactly why I say to you, this is a gospel centered approach to the problem of evil. What is a Redeemer? It is redemption. What is redemption? Joey, it is the gospel. The gospel is one glorious story of God redeeming a people unto himself beginning where? Beginning with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and culminating with the last Christian that is going to get saved one day. It is one glorious story of redemption.

So what are you saying, Patrick? What are you saying, preacher? Here is my thought. The only way we can deal with evil is to run to the gospel, embrace the gospel and our world view, and never ever get over the gospel. The gospel never gets boring to us. The gospel never grows old to us. We never stop time. We don't grow weary of worshipping God and embracing the person and work of Jesus Christ. We run to it when things are going good. We run to it when evil is coming. We run to it every single day. We love the gospel because the gospel is the power of God to save men and women to the glory of God.

And the only way Berean Baptist Church is going to be able to deal with evil is to ground ourselves in this truth. We ground ourselves in the depth of this truth and we embrace it like Job embraced it. I know that there is more to this life than just 70 years of life and then death.

And because of the gospel, because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, I know that there is something even more.