

You Asked For It! **Help! Life's Not Fair**

While I was on Sabbatical the world's madness reared its ugly head at the movies.

On July 20 100's of people's lives changed because of dead and wounded loved ones.

I read the following thoughts on-line shortly after the shooting spree.

"The recent shootings in Colorado have left many feeling uncertain and afraid. Television stations have been covering the massacre in great detail. Images of people mourning the loss of loved ones. Innocent people suffering from gunshot wounds. These images become embedded on our minds. Many of our children and teenagers have seen the headlines. They silently wrestle with unanswered questions. Why do random acts of evil happen? And why does God allow it? Am I safe, and how should I make sense of my world?"

It is obvious isn't it?

The world wants answers.

People want to know why life isn't fair.

While contemplating that I also had in front of me a slip of yellow paper.

It was one of your replies to the "You Asked For It" sermon series.

I read the request and shook my head.

"When bad things happen to good people - with no reason or answer."

If anyone has an answer to that question it should be the disciple of Jesus.

Jesus told His disciples, and anyone willing to listen, "life isn't fair."

His statement is tucked away in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:10-11).

Jesus makes the point then drives it home with a bunch of illustrations.

You are going to have to walk the second mile - is that fair?

You are going to have to turn the other cheek - is that fair?

You are going to have to stand out from the world around you.

Is that fair?

You have to be flavourful salt in adverse conditions.

You have to be visible light in darkness.

Is that fair?

You are going to have to give more than what is expected.

Is that fair?

You are going to have to be humble - is that fair?

You are not going to get any special privileges - is that fair?

You won't get more rain or sunshine than the unjust do.

Is that fair?

You must love your neighbor and your enemy equally.

Where is the justice and fairness in any of that?

Jesus tells us there is never a shortage of enemies.

Enemies come in all shapes, sizes, and forms.

Why shouldn't I give and expect to get something in return?

If a Christian asks that who can blame an unbeliever for their questions?

Stanley Hauerwas bravely prayed before one of his ethics classes, "God of justice and might, we often pray that you will shelter us, protect us - from what we are not sure. After all, when you are people as nice as we are, it is hard to remember that as your people we are meant to have enemies. Your Scripture even suggests we are going to be hated. We confess that seems a little extreme. Can't we just be "mildly disliked"? (p. 96).

Max Lucado writes, "Your enemies still figure into God's plan. Their pulse is proof: God hasn't given up on them. They may be out of God's will but not out of

His reach. You honor God when you see them not as His failures but as His projects." (Max On Life, page 48)

Max is simply echoing the words of Jesus.

"But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:44-45a)

So how are we blessed by the hardships and struggles of life?

And perhaps more importantly, how do we help others find God's blessing?

How can we live in the reality of the prophet Habakkuk?

He closed his prophecy with this amazing conclusion.

"Though the fig tree do not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; He makes my feet like hinds' feet, He makes me tread upon my high places." (Habakkuk 3:17-19)

It might sound hollow or shallow but we are not living for this world.

Think about all the "why" questions you have asked or heard.

They all have something in common.

"Why?" is a question that is entrenched in this world!

When we are immersed in this life that will dictate what is deemed fair.

Habakkuk was not confined to the resources of this world.

He saw that God was greater than his slight momentary afflictions.

Jesus wants to elevate our gaze to something beyond this world.

"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven".

James had the same goal in mind.

"Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing." (James 1:2-4)

Paul gives amazing words of encouragement.

Too often we miss God's impact on our lives.

These words have become too familiar.

Could you listen to them with fresh ears?

"We know that in everything God works for good with those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose." (RSV)

That is slightly different from some other translations that say, **"And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them."** (Romans 8:28)

Does that mean God can bring good out of cancer and illness, even in a child?

Does that mean God can redeem the atrocities of social and domestic violence?

Does that mean there is another chapter after hunger and poverty?

We can hear the Voice that speaks "good" into the grave.

God causes everything to work together for the good.

I didn't make that up.

That is God's commitment for those who are following and loving Him.

We cannot love Him until we recognize His enduring love for us through Jesus.

When we are confident of God's love for us we love and trust Him.

Yes horrible things happen to people who don't deserve it.

Job didn't deserve all the loss and hardship he experienced.

But God is orchestrating all things to work together around the horrible.

You and I are part of the all things.

You and I are part of the good that comes from the Cross of Jesus.

Did Jesus deserve to die on the cross?

Was He not innocent and sinless?

Yet He died on that cross with confidence that good would result.

He was confident that people's lives would be made new by His death.

Our Communion Table tells us horrible things happen in this world.

That's what the Table tells us.

By our receiving the bread and cup we are saying - God brings good from evil.

I identify with Jesus and give myself to Him for good to spread.

Before we partake of Communion I share one more thought from Max Lucado.

"Suffering, loneliness, disease, holocausts, martyrdom; if we assume this world exists just for pregrave happiness, these atrocities disqualify it from doing so. But what if this earth is the womb? Might these challenges, severe as they are, serve to prepare us, equip us for the world to come? As Paul wrote, 'These little troubles are getting us ready for an eternal glory that will make all our troubles seem like nothing. (2 Corinthians 4:17)" (Max Lucado, Max On Life, p. 40)

Communion Song - I Surrender