

# Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church

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## Pastor's Bible Study

# If God Is Good

A Bible Study Series  
Based on the book  
"If God Is Good" by Randy Alcorn

## Part XVI

March 6, 2012

## Jesus: The Only Answer Bigger Than the Questions

### ☉ The Cross: God's Empathy Demonstrated

- Whenever you feel tempted to ask God, "Why did you do this *to* me?" look at the Cross and ask, "Why did you do that *for* me?"
  - History's worst event happened to history's best person.
  - God knows what it's like to watch his Son die. Handing over your child to executioners to save others is a far greater sacrifice than losing your child to death when you have no choice.

### ☉ The Cross: God's Empathy Demonstrated

- As Dorothy Sayers wrote in *Christian Letters to a Post-Christian World*:
  - *For whatever reason God chose to make people as they are - limited and suffering and subject to sorrows and death - he had the honesty and courage to take his own medicine. Whatever game he is playing with his creation, he has kept his own rules and played fair. He can exact nothing from us that he has not exacted from himself. He has himself gone through the whole human experience, from the trivial irritations of family life and the cramping restrictions of hard work and lack of money to the worst horrors of pain and humiliation, defeat, despair, and death. When*

*he was man, he played the man. He was born in poverty and died in disgrace and thought it all worthwhile.*

### ☉ The Cross: God's Empathy Demonstrated

- That God did this willingly, with ancient premeditation, is all the more remarkable.
  - <sup>15</sup> just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep.

**John 10:15 (NLT)**

<sup>18</sup> No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded."

**John 10:18 (NLT)**

- Some people can't believe God would create a world in which people would suffer so much. Isn't it more remarkable that God would create a world in which no one would suffer more than he?

### ☉ The Cross: God's Empathy Demonstrated

- In some remarkable way, when Jesus hung on the cross he was taking on his own shoulders the consequences of the evil of the human race.
- This is the amazing centerpiece of the gospel story. The God who gave us the dignity of freedom of choice, now takes upon himself the consequences for our wrong choices. **"Christ died once for our sins. An innocent person died for those who are guilty. Christ did this to bring you to God"** (1 Peter 3:18).
- God suffered at the point of our greatest need. And that, for him, meant the greatest possible suffering.

### ☉ The Cross: God's Empathy Demonstrated

- **In his haunting cry, "Why have you forsaken me?" Christ identifies with our despair.**
  - Some believe Jesus' cry showed he didn't know why his Father had poured out his wrath on him. But Scripture says otherwise. Speaking of his death, Jesus said,

☉ <sup>27</sup> “Now My soul is troubled. What should I say—Father, save Me from this hour? But that is why I came to this hour. <sup>28</sup> Father, glorify Your name!” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again!” **John 12:27-28 (HCSB)**

- Jesus knew why he had to die. He cried out because any separation from his Father constituted an infinite horror.

### ☉ **The Cross: God’s Empathy Demonstrated**

- Tim Keller in his book *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* states:
  - “The death of Jesus was qualitatively different from any other death. The physical pain was nothing compared to the spiritual experiences of cosmic abandonment. Christianity alone among the world religions claims that God became uniquely and fully human in Jesus Christ and therefore knows firsthand despair, rejection, loneliness, poverty, bereavement, torture, and imprisonment. On the cross he went beyond even the worst human suffering and experienced cosmic rejection and pain that exceeds ours as infinitely as his knowledge and power excels ours. In his death, God suffers in love, identifying with the abandoned and godforsaken

### ☉ **The Cross: God’s Empathy Demonstrated**

- **If God can use the horror of Christ’s crucifixion for good, then surely he can use our suffering for good.**
  - Christ foresaw the good even as he faced the bad, and that helped him to endure the bad: <sup>2</sup> keeping our eyes on Jesus, the source and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that lay before Him endured a cross and despised the shame and has sat down at the right hand of God’s throne.” *Hebrews 12:2 (HCSB)*

### ☉ **The Christ of the Cross: Our Best Answer**

- **The answer to the problem of evil and suffering is not a philosophy, but a Person; not words, but the Word.**
  - John Stott writes in his book *The Cross of Christ* : “I could never myself believe in God, if it were not for the cross. ... In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it? I have entered many Buddhist temples in different Asian countries and stood

respectfully before the statue of the Buddha, his legs crossed, arms folded, eyes closed, the ghost of a smile playing round his mouth, a remote look on his face, detached from the agonies of the world. But each time after a while I have had to turn away. And in imagination I have turned instead to that lonely, twisted, tortured figure on the cross, nails through hands and feet, back lacerated, limbs wrenched, brow bleeding from thorn-pricks, mouth dry and intolerably thirsty, plunged in Godforsaken darkness. That is the God for me! He laid aside his immunity to pain. He entered our world of flesh and blood, tears and death. He suffered for us. Our sufferings become more manageable in the light of his.”

### ☉ The Christ of the Cross: Our Best Answer

- **The Cross perpetually establishes God’s close relationship to his children.**
  - Many people imagine that though God once suffered on the cross. He’s now remote and distant from suffering. Not so! After his ascension, Jesus says to the Pharisee on the Damascus road,... “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”<sup>5</sup> “Who are You, Lord?” he said. “I am Jesus, the One you are persecuting,” He replied. *Acts 9:4-5 (HCSB)*
  - Note the present tense—although Christ’s atoning sacrifice occurred in the past, he continues to identify with and participate in his people’s suffering until he returns to end all suffering.

### ☉ The Christ of the Cross: Our Best Answer

- Christ made it clear that to persecute his people is to persecute him. Whatever others do to his people, positively or negatively, he regards as being done to him.

☉ <sup>40</sup> “And the King will say, ‘I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!’ *Matthew 25:40 (NLT)*

<sup>45</sup> “And he will answer, ‘I tell you the truth, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.’ *Matthew 25:45 (NLT)*

- Christ no longer suffers on the cross, but he suffers with his suffering people.

☉ **The Christ of the Cross: Our Best Answer**

☉ **When we feel upset with God and tempted to blame him, we should look at the outstretched arms of Jesus and focus on his wounds, not ours.**

- When we lock our eyes on our cancer, arthritis, diabetes, or disability, self-pity and bitterness can creep in.
- When we spend our days rehearsing the tragic death of a loved one, we will interpret all life through the darkness of our suffering.
- How much better when we focus upon Jesus!
- <sup>2</sup> We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. <sup>3</sup> Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up. *Hebrews 12:2-3 (NLT)*

☉ **The Christ of the Cross: Our Best Answer**

- ☉ Tim Keller writes, *"If we again ask the question: "Why does God allow evil and suffering to continue?" and we look at the cross of Jesus, we still do not know what the answer is. However, we know what the answer isn't. It can't be that he doesn't love us. It can't be that he is indifferent or detached from our condition. God takes our misery and suffering so seriously that he was willing to take it on himself.... So, if we embrace the Christian teaching that Jesus is God and that he went to the Cross, then we have deep consolation and strength to face the brutal realities of life on earth."*

☉ **The Christ of the Cross: Our Best Answer**

- ☉ If you know Jesus, then the hand holding yours bears the calluses of a carpenter who worked with wood and carried a cross for you. When he opens his hand, you see the gnarled flesh of the nail scars on his wrists. And when you think he doesn't understand your pain, realize that you don't understand the extent of his pain. Love him or not, he has proven he loves you.
- ☉ If you hate suffering, does it make sense to choose eternal suffering when God has already suffered so much to deliver you from it?

☉ In your most troubled moments, when you cry out to God, “Why have you let this happen?” picture the outstretched hands of Christ, forever scarred... for you.

☉ Do those look like the hands of a God who does not care?

☉ **The Christ of the Cross: Our Best Answer**

- Does Jesus care when my heart is pained  
Too deeply for mirth or song,  
As the burdens press, and the cares distress,  
And the way grows weary and long? Refrain:
- Does Jesus care when my way is dark  
With a nameless dread and fear?  
As the daylight fades into deep night shades,  
Does He care enough to be near?
- Does Jesus care when I’ve tried and failed  
To resist some temptation strong;  
When for my deep grief there is no relief,  
Though my tears flow all the night long?
- Does Jesus care when I’ve said “goodbye”  
To the dearest on earth to me,  
And my sad heart aches till it nearly breaks—  
Is it aught to Him? Does He see?

☉ **Oh, yes, He cares, I know He cares,  
His heart is touched with my grief;  
When the days are weary, the long nights dreary,  
I know my Savior cares.**