

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 XV

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Jesus: The Only Answer Bigger Than the Questions

- ⊙ **The Cross: Where God's Suffering Conquered Evil**
 - **The Cross is God's answer to the question "Why don't you do something about evil?"**
 - ⊙ Bart Ehrman writes, "I came to think that there is not a God who is actively involved with this world of pain and misery—if he is, why doesn't he do something about it?"
 - ⊙ But what if God *did* do something about it? What if what he did was so great and unprecedented that it shook the angelic realm's foundation, and ripped in half, from the top down, not only the temple curtain but the fabric of the universe itself?
 - ⊙ A powerful moment in the movie *The Passion of the Christ* occurs when Jesus, overwhelmed with the pain and exhaustion, lies on the ground as guards kick, mock, and spit on him. A horrified woman, her hand outstretched, pleads, "Someone, stop this!"
 - ⊙ The great irony is that "Someone," God's Son, was doing something unspeakably great that required it *not* be stopped.

- ⊙ **The Cross: Where God's Suffering Conquered Evil**
 - **God allowed Jesus' temporary suffering so he could prevent our eternal suffering.**
 - ⊙ Consider God's history of reaching down to men. He sent angels and prophets.

◎ **2 Chronicles 36:15-16 (NLT)**

¹⁵ The LORD, the God of their ancestors, repeatedly sent his prophets to warn them, for he had compassion on his people and his Temple.

¹⁶ But the people mocked these messengers of God and despised their words. They scoffed at the prophets until the LORD's anger could no longer be restrained and nothing could be done.

◎ **The Cross: Where God's Suffering Conquered Evil**

- When men would not listen to angels or prophets, God sent his Son.
- ¹ Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. ² And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son he created the universe. ³ The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God, and he sustains everything by the mighty power of his command. When he had cleansed us from our sins, he sat down in the place of honor at the right hand of the majestic God in heaven. ⁴ This shows that the Son is far greater than the angels, just as the name God gave him is greater than their names.

Hebrews 1:1-4 (NLT)

◎ **The Cross: Where God's Suffering Conquered Evil**

- ◎ He came in humiliation; many imagined him conceived out of wedlock, a shameful thing in that era. He grew up in a town of ill repute:
 - ⁴⁶ "Nazareth!" exclaimed Nathanael. "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" "Come and see for yourself," Philip replied.
- John 1:46 (NLT)**
- ◎ "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him" Isa 53:2
- ◎ He worked as a humble carpenter, which made many people rule him out as the Messiah.

◎ **The Cross: Where God's Suffering Conquered Evil**

- ◎ He lived in relative poverty:
 - ²⁰ But Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place even to lay his head."
- Matthew 8:20 (NLT)**
- ◎ They called him a liar:

- ¹² There was a lot of grumbling about him among the crowds. Some argued, “He’s a good man,” but others said, “He’s nothing but a fraud who deceives the people.” John 7:12 (NLT)
- ◎ Long before his crucifixion, he endured these indignities and much more.

◎ **The Cross: Where God’s Suffering Conquered Evil**

◎ **Christ’s atonement guarantees the final end of evil and suffering.**

- Sometimes our familiarity with the gospel story prevents us from understanding its breathtaking nature.
- The drama of evil and suffering in Christ’s sacrifice addresses the very heart of the problem of evil and suffering. One day it will prove to have been the final answer.

◎ **The Cross: God’s Plan From the Beginning**

◎ **Jesus is the perfect and permanent intermediary between God and man.**

- In the midst of his suffering, Job cried out for someone who could understand, someone who could bridge the apparently infinite gap between God and man.
 - ◎ He lamented, ³² “God is not a mortal like me, so I cannot argue with him or take him to trial. ³³ If only there were a mediator between us, someone who could bring us together. ³⁴ The mediator could make God stop beating me, and I would no longer live in terror of his punishment. **Job 9:32-34 (NLT)**
- But who could lay his hand upon both God and man, to connect them in loving relationship? Only the God-man, the One who would take God’s rod upon himself to pay for the sins of mankind:
 - ◎ ⁵ For there is only one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus. **1 Timothy 2:5 (NLT)**

◎ **The Cross: God’s Plan From the Beginning**

◎ **Every reference to “Good Friday” should remind us that the greatest good in human history came out of the greatest evil.**

- In his book *The Cross Center Life*, C. J. Mahaney sees the Cross as the heart of the gospel, and the gospel as the heart of everything else:
 - ◎ “If there’s anything in life that we should be passionate about, it’s the gospel. And I don’t mean passionate only about sharing it with others. I mean passionate about

thinking about it, dwelling on it, rejoicing in it, allowing it to color the way we look at the world. Only one thing can be of first importance to each of us. And only the gospel ought to be.”

☉ **The Cross: God’s Plan From the Beginning**

- The Cross exposes us for what we are.
- The punishment our evil warrants answers the question “How evil are we?”
- The Cross is a mirror showing us the heart stopping magnitude of our depravity and offers a terrible glimpse of Hell’s misery.
- The Cross is also a lens showing us God’s uncompromising holiness and wrath that demand such a price for sin.
- It’s also a magnifying glass showing us the sweeping vastness of God’s grace and love, that he would be willing to pay a price he knew would be so horrific.
- Everything before the Cross points forward to it. Everything since the cross points back to it. Everything that will last was purchased on it. Everything that matters hinges on it.

☉ **The Cross: God’s Plan From the Beginning**

- It’s one thing to suffer terribly, another to *choose* to suffer terribly.
 - ☉ ⁵³ Don’t you realize that I could ask my Father for thousands of angels to protect us, and he would send them instantly?
Matthew 26:53 (NLT)
 - ☉ Perhaps the greatest wonder is not that Jesus *went* to the cross but that he *stayed* on the it.
- What is good about “Good Friday”? Why isn’t it called “Bad Friday”? Because out of the appallingly bad came what was inexpressibly good. And the good trumps the bad, because though the bad was temporary, the good is eternal.

☉ **The Cross: God’s Plan From the Beginning**

- ☉ God’s love comes to us soaked in divine blood. One look at Jesus—at his incarnation and the redemption he provided us—should silence the argument that God has withdrawn to some far corner of the universe where he keeps his hands clean and maintains his distance from human suffering.
- ☉ God does not merely empathize with our sufferings. He actually suffers. Jesus is God. What Jesus suffered, God suffered.

- ⁶ When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. ⁷ Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. ⁸ But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. **Romans 5:6-8 (NLT)**

◎ **The Cross: God’s Love Proven**

◎ **Christ’s prophesied suffering disproves the accusations against Jesus.**

- The messianic text found in Isaiah 52:13-53:12 depicts the worst suffering any one person has ever endured.
- Remarkably, his suffering wasn’t because of his own sins:
 - ◎ ³ He was despised and rejected— a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care. ⁴ Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! ⁵ But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. ⁶ All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God’s paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the sins of us all. **Isaiah 53:3-6 (NLT)**

◎ **The Cross: God’s Love Proven**

◎ **Christ’s suffering does not mean God is weak and vulnerable.**

- Though many recent writers have spoken of God’s vulnerability and weakness demonstrated on the Cross, we must see this truth in the context of God’s sovereignty. Christ chose this “weakness.”
- Christ humbled himself. His obedient death on the cross reflects a deliberate weakness.
 - ◎ ¹⁷ This is why the Father loves Me, because I am laying down My life so I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down on My own. I have the right to lay it down, and I have the right to take it up again. I have received this command from My Father.” **John 10:17-18 (HCSB)**

◎ **The Cross: God’s Love Proven**

- Scripture portrays a God so strong he can take on weakness to overpower all opposition and accomplish his eternal purposes:
 - ◎ ²¹ He made the One who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. **2 Corinthians 5:21 (HCSB)**
 - ◎ ⁷ Instead He emptied Himself by assuming the form of a slave, taking on the likeness of men. And when He had come as a man in His external form, ⁸ He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death— even to death on a cross. **Philippians 2:7-8 (HCSB)**
 - ◎ ¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, **1 Peter 3:18 (ESV)**

◎ **The Cross: God’s Love Proven**

◎ **The proven character of Christ, demonstrated in his sacrifice on our behalf, makes him trustworthy even when evil and suffering overwhelm us.**

- When you feel God’s silence, or think him absent, look at Christ:
 - ◎ ³² The passage of Scripture he had been reading was this: “He was led like a sheep to the slaughter. And as a lamb is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth. **Acts 8:32 (NLT)**
- He shouts to us without opening his mouth: “I *do* care. Don’t you see the blood, bruises, and scars? Whatever you may think, never doubt that I care for you.”

◎ **The Cross: God’s Empathy Demonstrated**

◎ **God paid the highest price on our behalf; we have no grounds for believing he doesn’t “get it.”**

- In all human history, who has paid the highest price for evil and suffering? Poll a hundred people on this question and only a few would come up with the right answer: *God*.
- ¹⁰ This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. **1 John 4:10 (NLT)**

- Many complaints against the Creator boil down to this: “God, you don’t ‘get it.’ ” Christ’s suffering says back to us “No actually, I *do* get it. It’s *you* who don’t get it.”
- Jesus suffered the same trials and temptations we do. God understands our worst losses and heartbreaks, even our temptations:
 - ◎ ¹⁸ For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted. **Hebrews 2:18 (NKJV)**
 - ◎ ¹⁵ This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. **Hebrews 4:15 (NLT)**

◎ **The Cross: God’s Empathy Demonstrated**

- ◎ God might say to us, “I have intimate understanding of what it is to be in your place. You have no clue what it is to be in *my* place. If you’d experienced Gethsemane and the march to Golgatha and the horrors of the Cross, you’d not question for a moment either my understanding or my love.”
- ◎ And he might add, “After you’ve created a world, and seen your creatures betray you, and you’ve chosen to die for all their sins and offer them forgiveness...*then* come back and let’s talk about it.”

◎ **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?”**
 - ◎ Alas! and did my Savior bleed
And did my Sov’reign die?
Would He devote that sacred head
For such a worm as I?
 - ◎ Thy body slain, sweet Jesus, Thine—
And bathed in its own blood—
While the firm mark of wrath divine,
His soul in anguish stood.
 - ◎ Was it for crimes that I had done
He groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity! grace unknown!
And love beyond degree!
 - ◎ Well might the sun in darkness hide
And shut his glories in,

When Christ, the mighty Maker died,
For man the creature's sin.

⦿ Thus might I hide my blushing face
While His dear cross appears,
Dissolve my heart in thankfulness,
And melt my eyes to tears.

⦿ But drops of grief can ne'er repay
The debt of love I owe:
Here, Lord, I give myself away,
'Tis all that I can do.

⦿ Refrain:

At the cross, at the cross where I first saw the light,
And the burden of my heart rolled away, It was there
by faith I received my sight, And now I am happy all
the day!