

Sermon Title: What's Theodicy Got To Do With It?

Text: *Deuteronomy 31:7–8*

Theme: Trusting God's love and presence through suffering

Robert Toney 2024

“Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, ‘Be strong and bold, for you are the one who will go with this people into the land that the Lord has sworn to their ancestors to give them, and you will put them in possession of it. It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.’”

Deuteronomy 31:7–8, NRSV

Introduction

Nature has struck again. Hurricane Helene devastated the Florida coastline, only to be followed—just two weeks later—by the ferocity of Hurricane Milton. Hundreds of lives were lost. Homes leveled. Hearts shattered. The damage is in the hundreds of millions, but the emotional toll is immeasurable.

For those in recovery—physically, emotionally, and spiritually—know that I am praying for your strength, endurance, and healing. But in moments like these, a question rises from the rubble: **Why?**

Why do we suffer?

Why do the innocent weep while the storms rage?

Why do we keep crying out to God—**and what do we believe we’re going to hear back?**

Wrestling with Theodicy

We’ve been taught from childhood that God is omnipotent—that God has all power. We’ve read of God parting seas, toppling walls, calming lions, and walking into furnaces. We’ve heard the testimonies. We’ve sung the songs. We believe that God is love.

So when storms come—literal and figurative—how do we make sense of it?

Why do “good” Christian families suffer loss?
Did we sin too greatly? Did we not pray hard enough?
Is God being selective with blessings? Are some more “highly favored” than others?
Or worse: Is God really who we say God is?

Let’s pray.

Prayer

Holy God, show up. Show up in the storm, in the struggle, in the silence. Let this be less about my words and more about your voice. Let hearts be comforted, minds be calmed, and spirits be stirred. In Jesus’ name—Amen.

So, what’s theodicy got to do with it?

Let’s define that big word up front. **Theodicy** is the attempt to reconcile belief in a good, powerful God with the existence of evil and suffering. The theologian Stephen T. Davis frames it this way:

- God is all-powerful.
- God is perfectly good.
- And yet, evil and suffering exist.

As the young people say: **Make it make sense.**

Now, I won’t pretend to have all the answers. I’m not here to explain suffering away with theology like a band-aid. But I hope that wherever you are—cleaning up from hurricanes or surviving some personal storm—you’ll find comfort, reassurance, and maybe even a sliver of holy perspective.

A Word From the Wilderness

In Deuteronomy 31, Moses stands before the people, his leadership at an end. He’s brought them through the wilderness, but he won’t go with them into the Promised Land. Instead, he passes the mantle to Joshua. Imagine the fear, the uncertainty. And yet, Moses says:

“Do not be afraid or dismayed... for the Lord goes before you. He will never fail you nor forsake you.”

In other words: **Don't let your circumstances define your confidence in God.**

Don't let the storm outside rob you of the calm within.

Forget trying to map it all out. Forget trying to solve the problem of evil like a math equation.
Just trust that God will not leave you. That's enough.

Tina Turner Had a Point

Tina Turner asked in her 1984 hit: *"What's love got to do with it?"*

Well, I'm flipping the question: **What's theodicy got to do with it?**

Tina said love was just a second-hand emotion. I say: **God's love is our first and final foundation.**

Can you feel it?

Right now, wherever you are—place your hand over your chest.

Feel that breath rise and fall? That's grace. That's life. That's divine love flowing through you.

Look around—at nature, at people, at anything good or beautiful. That's God showing up again.

Even in your grief, your anger, your exhaustion—you are still loved.

A Suffering God Who Walks With Us

Arthur Peacocke says if Jesus is God's self-expression in human form, then the suffering of Jesus pulls back the curtain. It reveals a God **who does not watch suffering from a throne—but enters it with us.**

Our God does not hover above pain but **walks through it, feels it, bleeds in it, dies in it, and rises from it.**

That's love. That's power. That's presence.

Romans 5 Reminds Us

"We boast in our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope..."

Our suffering isn't meaningless—it's transformative.

It doesn't cancel our grace—it deepens it.

Community: God's Hands and Feet

Galatians 6:2 tells us to “bear one another’s burdens.”

When one suffers, we all suffer. When one rejoices, we all rejoice.

That’s church. That’s family. That’s what God intends for us.

Don’t look for a superhero God to swoop in every time. Look around.

God shows up in the helping hands, the listening ears, the shared meals, the neighbor who shows up.

As theologian Elizabeth Johnson reminds us: we need **all** of God’s creation—human and non-human—to survive and thrive together.

Final Word: Love’s in Need of Love Today

Let’s take a cue from Stevie Wonder:

“Love’s in need of love today

Don’t delay

Send yours in right away...

Hate’s goin’ round breaking many hearts

Stop it, please, before it’s gone too far.”

Beloved, this world is aching.

Not for more arguments about theodicy...

But for more love.

Love in action. Love with skin on. Love that shows up when the floodwaters rise.

Invitation

So I invite you—stop chasing answers. Start chasing presence.

Go meet God—not just in your questions, but in your neighbor.

Help somebody. Let somebody help you.

There God is. There peace is.

There healing begins.

Amen.
