

unexpected, unforeseen events that seem to occur almost at random. No one was to blame. It happened in a town called Siloam where 18 people had been crushed when a tower collapsed on them.

So with these two national tragedies, in view, what does Jesus say? “Those 18 who died, do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you too will all perish.” (Luke 13:4-5)

Jesus does not say: ‘They deserved it.’ These deaths were not specific punishment meted out by God for particular sins these people had committed. Neither does Jesus not talk about innocent victims. Instead he asks the question: “Do you think they were worse sinners. Do you think they were more guilty”. These were tough words spoken to suffering people. But they were spoken by a man who had suffered – betrayal by his friends, alienation from his family, torture, gossip, hunger and thirst, religious persecution, unfair condemnation at a rigged trial, extreme loneliness, and much more. He knows and understands the suffering in the world.

He wept, just as we do, when he witnessed suffering. And so great was his compassion that he gave up his own life to do something definite about it. At the cross, he demonstrated God’s desire to forgive each one of us for our wilful rebellion against him. He didn’t have to do it, and it was not something we deserved.

At the cross we see a suffering God, suffering for his own people, because he loves them and wants to free them from all suffering in eternity.

All that remains for us to do is to turn back to God.



Why does God not just do a miracle?

We think to ourselves: “Just one miracle would make it so much easier to believe”.

But during his life, in spite of all the miracles that Jesus carried out, not everyone put their faith in Jesus. Even after repeated and spectacularly public miracles, which could not be explained away, even by those who opposed him, this was often the response to Jesus: Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous doings in their presence, they still would not believe in him” (John 12:37). On first hearing it sounds incredible – they see all this and they walk away unchanged. But also, even after seeing the feeding of the 5000, we discover that many of his own disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

That being the case, can we be sure that if God were to work a miracle for us now, right in front of our very eyes, we would automatically believe in him?

Not according to Jesus. He insists that miracles in themselves are not enough, because miracles only point us towards a truth that not all of us are willing to accept. On hearing it, many of his disciples said, ‘This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it.’ (John 6:60). They had seen the miracle. But they still walked away.

Why? For the same reason people walk away today. Not because they lack evidence, but because they don’t like the implications of Jesus’ teaching. They simply are not willing to submit to God as the one who gives them life. They don’t trust that He wants what is best for them.

The truth is that we don’t need a miraculous sign to make us a follower of Jesus. We simply need to trust him.

ST. MARTIN'S CHURCH BRAMPTON

Exploring Common Questions...

(Part 2)



Vicar: Richard Tulloch

Email: rjatlulloch@gmail.com

Website: www.stmartinsbrampton.org.uk

Isn't the Bible just a bunch of made up stories?

As far as Jesus is concerned, one thing holds true: the Bible comes from God, and its authority is unquestionable. 'Scripture can't be broken', he says in John 10:35.

The question to ask is why is Jesus' view of scripture so important? Well... some opinions are worth more than others. Take the Titanic. Even after it struck an iceberg, some said the ship was unsinkable. But when the creator of this ship inspected the damage, he knew that the ship would sink within an hour. Words spoken by a man of his authority carried tremendous weight.

Jesus is the creator of the universe – and his words carry tremendous weight. Also, Jesus never questioned the authority of the Old Testament. He considered it so authoritative that he used it to demolish the arguments of his opponents by simply drawing their attention to the tense of a verb (Mark 12:26).

Jesus also treated the Bible's history as completely reliable. He affirmed that we did not just develop out of nowhere; we are the creation of a Creator. Far from being full of errors, Jesus insisted that the Bible is the only way to keep ourselves from error.

So Jesus trusted the Old Testament. Why should we trust the New Testament? According to Jesus, God himself made sure of what was written in it: "*The Holy Spirit will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said*" (John 14:26). That is an important promise.

The writers of the New Testament write with the assurance and conviction of men who are writing about real events that actually happened. They are not fabricating fond tales from the depths of their imaginations.

Basically, God has made sure that the Bible can be trusted. If God is there, isn't it reasonable to suppose that he could have done such a thing if he wanted. And if he had done such a thing, you would expect the Bible to be quiet unlike any other book.

And it is. Despite the fact it contains 66 different books written by dozens of different writers over 1500 years, the Bible has a *single* unifying theme. It makes hundreds of remarkable predictions that are then fulfilled years later.

And then if you choose to take the Bible at its word, you will discover that the Bible is the divinely powerful word of God with the authority to transform lives. Jesus said: "If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own." (John 7:17)

How can anyone be sure there is life after death?

Many of us have been close to those who have stared death in the face. And then what are we to think when we attend a funeral of someone we loved?

There are three words spoken towards the end of Matthew's gospel with such far reaching implications that no-one on earth is unaffected by them. Here they are: "*He is risen*".

They don't sound earth shattering but the historical event that lies behind those three words changes our lives forever. To read of Jesus' death and resurrection is to fix our eyes on the first and only person who has ever gone through death, and overcome it completely, never to die again.

If we are following him, death no longer holds any fear because we have seen him go through it unscathed.

Why does God allow suffering?

The need for an explanation for suffering echoes throughout the Bible – and in the lives of people across the world. Whether it is the face of a starving child on the news, or the face of a loved one in a cancer hospice, when we meet suffering ourselves, the thought sometimes whispers to us: "there is no God ruling the universe at all". And sometime we feel that God has a whole lot of explaining to do!

If God exists, and suffering exists, the question we ask is 'what exactly is He going to do about it?' Jesus answers by likening the situation to a field full of wheat and weeds. The servants come and ask if the owner wants them to pull the weeds up. Seems reasonable enough. Why not intervene and put an immediate end to these death bringing parasites? 'No' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let them grow together until the harvest'. That, says Jesus is the way of the world: good and bad existing together, inseparably linked – until the day the owner decides it is time for the harvest. At that point, what is good will be brought into the owner's glorious presence and what is bad will be rejected.

Considering how much evil there is in the world, and considering the wilful disobedience and contempt that we continue to show our Creator day after day, God's delay in judging men and women - and bringing all suffering to an end - is evidence of his extraordinary patience and love.

Some of Jesus' listeners bring up a recent event that had horrified the nation: in an act of terrorism, Pontius Pilate had ordered a group of Galilean Jews to be murdered. They ask Jesus – 'what exactly is God saying to us though this evil act – and the countless others that have followed it since?' As he answers, Jesus brings up another incident. It was not the obvious result of human evil. It was one of those