

**Abstract** (do not redistribute without permission from Chris Altrock ([chris.altrock@highlandcc.org](mailto:chris.altrock@highlandcc.org); 901.312.3495))

1. File: R:\chris.altrock\preach-worship\messages2007\WhySM\LessonWhyMessFinal.doc
2. Date: 9/30/07 – Sunday morning
3. Verbal Focus: Though human rebellion put the world in a mess, God is working in the midst of the mess.
4. Visual Focus: None
5. Function: Inspire listeners to trust in and participate in God's work in the midst of our mess.
6. Outline:
  - a. The world is filled with moral and physical mess.
  - b. This mess is the result of human rebellion.
  - c. Nonetheless, God has created a community to minister in the midst of the mess.
  - d. God is bringing good out of the mess.
  - e. God is walking with us in the midst of the mess.
  - f. God is bringing an end to this mess.

## **PP Why...Is The World So Messed Up?**

### **Gen. 3**

Good news: Adult Bruce baptized last Sunday at RCC; church website; me gone next Sunday; Go MAD at FIT; Steve Guinn; Larry McKenzie

#### **1L.1**

Let me give you two downtown addresses. Tell me if you know what's at them. The first address is 201 Poplar. It's the county jail. There, you'll find about 2,500 inmates.<sup>1</sup> The other address is 332 N. Lauderdale. It's Saint Jude Children's Research Hospital. There, you'll find about 260 children and adolescents each day with cancer; HIV infections; or certain hematologic, immunologic, or genetic diseases.<sup>2</sup> The inmates at 201 Poplar have caused suffering. They've stolen from others, they've abused others, and they've violated others. They've caused suffering. The patients at 332 N. Lauderdale have experienced suffering. For months we followed the trials of Raimen as he was treated at Saint Jude. For months, we've followed the struggles of Ethan Powell, another patient at Saint Jude.

#### **1L.2**

And if you are the victim of someone at 201 Poplar or a patient or love a patient at 332 N. Lauderdale, it's easy to ask the question of this morning's sermon: Why is the world so messed up? Why did that criminal at 201 Poplar do this? Why did my loved one at 332 N. Lauderdale have to endure this? Why is the world so messed up?

#### **1T.1**

It hasn't always been this way—at least if you listen to the Bible. The opening chapters of Genesis describe a world in which everything is called “good” by God (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). At one point it's all called “very good” by God (Gen. 1:31). There is no disease. There is no sickness. There is no violence. There is no crime. There is no mess. It was a world with no 201 Poplar and no 332 N. Lauderdale.

#### **2T.2**

But it wasn't long before things changed. And what we struggle with today are two different things which mess up our world. **PP** One is called moral evil. The other is called physical evil.<sup>3</sup> Moral evil is the result of human action or inaction. It's the suffering experienced by the victims of some of those in 201 Poplar—those who were shot, those who were stolen from, those who were abused. That's moral evil. Physical evil is the result of natural forces. It's the suffering experienced by some of the patients at 332 N. Lauderdale—cancer, infection, disease. And all this moral evil and all this physical evil has made a pretty messed up world.

#### **2T.1**

And the question is, Where did this evil come from? Why is the world so messed up? **PP** The Bible states that both moral and physical evil have one source: human rebellion from God. The Bible states that human rebellion from God not only led to a broken relationship between God and people, it led to violence, crime, and corruption (moral evil), and it led to the natural world becoming corrupted (physical evil). This is illustrated in [Gen. 3](#). Adam and Eve decide that they want to live independently from God—they eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They decide they will define what is good and what is evil. As a result, they experience a separation from God—they are physically ejected from the Garden of Eden. Thus, their souls have been affected by their sin. But there's more. Their rebellion affects not just their soul, but their bodies—for example childbearing will now be painful for the woman. And there are effects upon nature—thorns and thistles will now grow up and the land will require great labor to produce food. Adam's and Eve's rebellion affected soul, body, and nature. One Christian philosopher, Peter Kreeft, illustrates in this way: imagine a large magnet holding three iron rings.<sup>4</sup> **[VISUAL AID]** The ring closest to the magnet represents the human soul. The next ring represents the human body. The final ring represents nature. As long as ring 1 is aligned with the magnet, the magnetic life flows to ring 2 and ring 3, to the human body and to nature. But if the soul declares independence from God, if ring 1 is separated from the magnet, rings 2 and 3 are impacted, body and nature fall apart.

### 2T.2

In other words, both moral evil and physical evil are caused by the human separation from God. Moral evil is the result of the actions we take or do not take because we rebel against God. We decide to shoot someone and they suffer. We decide to hoard wealth and people starve. The vast majority of pain and suffering are the consequences of humans refusing to act in ways that are godly. But in addition, the Bible is saying that much physical evil stems from our separation from God. Because, as a human race, we have decided to live independently from God, nature itself is out of alignment. Nature itself causes some suffering.

### 2T.3

And all of this human rebellion, this separation of the soul from the magnet, is the result of human free-will. God has created humans with the ability to freely love him (which is his greatest hope) or to freely leave him. And when we leave him, when that soul separates from the magnet, its effects ripple across the earth. We not only end up acting in ways that lead to pain and suffering for others. We bring nature out of harmony and make it more inhospitable.

### 3T.1

What then are we to make of such a messed up world? What is God doing about it? Scripture states at least these four things regarding God's action in this messy world. **PP** First, God has created a community of people devoted to ending the mess and comforting others in the midst of the mess. That community is called the "church." Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, recorded in [Matt. 5-7](#) is the charter of that community. It calls the church to put an end not only to murder, but to anger; to not only cease adultery, but lust; to halt divorce and lying; to love enemies, to alleviate the suffering of the poor, to put money to work for godly purposes, and to end discrimination and judgment. In other words, the church is a community devoted to ending behaviors that lead to human suffering.

### 3T.2

And it is a community devoted to ministry in the midst of that suffering. In [Acts 2:42-47](#) we find the church providing physical resources to all who had need. In [Romans 12:15](#) we find the church mourning with those who mourn. The church ministers in the midst of the mess.

**3L.1**

There's another address downtown I'll call your attention to: 576 Vance Avenue. That's the location of the Downtown Church of Christ. Nestled in among the County Jail and Saint Jude, it is a physical reminder of this aspect of God's solution to the messed up world. There at the Downtown Church, women who have been prostitutes and men who have dealt drugs have turned their painful lives around. That community gives away turkeys to the poor each Thanksgiving and offers low-priced toys for the poor each Christmas. For the last fifteen years that little community has been slowly but surely bringing an end to some of the mess and ministering in the midst of it. God has created a community of people devoted to ending the mess and comforting others in the midst of the mess.

**4T.1**

**PP** Second, God is bringing good out of the mess. One of the sobering truths about suffering is that God is able to redeem it; he is able to produce good from it. For example, God can use suffering to benefit us. Peter, an apostle familiar with suffering, wrote these words: *6 In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.* (1 Pet. 1:6-7 TNIV) James, another person familiar with suffering, wrote this: *2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.* (Jas. 1:2-4 TNIV) God uses discomfort to make us mature and complete. Suffering becomes the sculptor's knife carving off anything of us that does not resemble Christ. God can use our suffering to benefit us. And, God can use our suffering to benefit others. Paul states that God *"comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God"* (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). Any time we suffer, we become better equipped to comfort others who suffer. God is bringing good out of the mess.

**4L.1**

Rex and his wife were members at Highland a few years ago. Their first child died while still an infant. It was a devastating blow to this young couple. I once heard Rex speak about that loss. One of the things he talked about was the way in which God had used the experience to shape his character. He had become more deeply spiritual and more compassionate because of that intense suffering. And, he and his wife had devoted themselves to ministering to other couples who have lost children—something they never would have done having not gone through their own loss. It may be the most difficult reality to face. But the pains of life can result in some of the greatest good of life. God is bringing good out of the mess.

**5T.1**

**PP** Third, God is walking with us in the midst of the mess. Jesus was God in the flesh and thus experienced all of life, the good and the bad (John 1:14). Jesus faced sorrow and trouble (Matthew 26:37). Jesus faced fatigue (Luke 8:23). Jesus was distraught (Matthew 27:46). Jesus experienced moral evil its worst—he was murdered. And he experienced physical evil—he was out on the lake when a powerful storm rose; he was approached by a woman suffering with a disease that no doctor could cure. God knows what we feel like in the tough times of life because, in Jesus, God walked with us in those tough times. And not only did he walk with us in the midst of the mess back then, he continues to be with us in the midst of the mess now. David puts it famously: *Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are*

*with me* (Ps. 23:4). The Psalms are full of confident proclamations regarding the way in which God continues to be present with us in the midst of the mess.

### 5T.2

Lee Strobel writes of his friend Marc whose young daughter was accidentally killed when his wife backed the car out of the driveway and crushed their daughter.<sup>5</sup> Marc was in such emotional pain that for a long time he could barely breathe. But over time, the experience of God's presence in the midst of that pain healed him. He told Strobel: *I've experienced God's goodness through deep pain, and no skeptic can dispute that. The God who the skeptic denies is the same God who held our hands in the deep, dark places, who strengthened our marriage, who deepened our faith, who increased our reliance on him, who gave us two more children, and who infused our lives with new purpose and meaning so that we can make a difference to others.* What made the difference was knowing that the suffering God was with them. God is walking with us in the midst of the mess.

### 6T.1

**PP** Finally, God is bringing an end to this mess. Paul once described how hostile religious leaders stoned him and whipped him. Yet Paul called such suffering "momentary" (2 Corinthians 4:17). He knew that, from the perspective of eternity, even the most miserable earthly life was like one night in a bad hotel. The last book of the Bible describes the day suffering will vanish: *"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. . . . He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death, or mourning or crying or pain. . ."* (Revelation 21:1-4). God will bring all suffering to an end. The beginning of that end was announced at the cross. On the cross Jesus became broken so that our brokenness could be healed. Because of his sacrifice on the cross, our souls can now be brought back into alignment with God. And with that alignment comes the beginning of the end for all evil, moral and physical. God will right all that is wrong.

### 6L.1

Dale Bruner writes about a man he knew who was at home working.<sup>6</sup> His daughter came in and said, "Daddy, can we play?" The father said, "I'm awfully sorry, Sweetheart. But I'm in the middle of something. In about an hour I can play." She said, "Okay, when you're finished Daddy I'm going to give you a great big hug." He said, "Thank you very much." She went to the door, and then did a U-turn and gave her Daddy a bone-breaking hug. He said to her, "You said you were going to give me a hug after I finished." She replied, "Daddy, I just wanted you to know what you have to look forward to." God, too, wants us to know what we have to look forward to. He is preparing a new creation in which all of life is back in harmony. He is preparing a future with no more mess.

### 7L.1

Testimony: Brent Ragin (EAS, ELCS), Don Nickelson (LLCS)

### 7L.2

Most of us are experiencing mess in some way. We want to provide you a convenient way to pray with someone about that mess. So, I'd like all staff members, elders, Reach Group leaders, and Sunday School teachers to step into the aisle near where you are seated. While we sing the next two songs, you can go to any of these servants in the aisle and they will pray with you about that mess. And, as you leave this morning, you'll find a handout available. It contains Lament Psalms. Lament Psalms were written by people in the midst of the mess of life. They are raw prayers to God about that mess. If you are in a mess today, I urge you to take one of those

handouts, and read and pray those Lament Psalms. They can help you deal with your emotions in a spiritually productive way.

### Power Point (Jesse)

1. Why...Is The World So Messed Up? (Gen. 3)
2. The Mess: Moral Evil & Physical Evil
3. The Mess' Source: Human Rebellion
4. What God's Doing:
  - a. God has created a community of people devoted to ending the mess and comforting in the midst of the mess
  - b. God is bringing good out of the mess
  - c. God is walking with us in the midst of the mess
  - d. God is bringing an end to this mess

### For the Link

#### *Notes:*

1. There are two kinds of evil which make up our mess: \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Both kinds of evil have the same source: human \_\_\_\_\_.
3. What God's doing:
  - a. God has created a \_\_\_\_\_ of people devoted to ending the mess and comforting in the midst of the mess
  - b. God is bringing \_\_\_\_\_ out of the mess
  - c. God is walking \_\_\_\_\_ us in the midst of the mess
  - d. God is bringing an \_\_\_\_\_ to this mess
4. Helpful resources:
  - a. Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli Pocket Handbook of Christian Apologetics (IVP 2003)
  - b. Lee Strobel, The Case for Faith (Zondervan, 2000).

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.shelby-sheriff.org/divisions/jail.asp>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.stjude.org/aboutus>.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli Pocket Handbook of Christian Apologetics (IVP 2003), 45-57.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 72-73.

<sup>6</sup> Dale Bruner, "Is Jesus Inclusive or Exclusive?" Theology, News and Notes (October 1999), 3.