"How could a good God allow suffering?"[1]
Why I'm Not a Christian, Msg. 2
John 11:1–46

Announcement: We're in a series called *"Why I'm not a Christian"* (website, q&a time) *We're trying to address some of the biggest questions people have about belief in God and Christianity. By so doing we're hoping to meet one of the major spiritual needs in our community which is to show people why you don't have to check your brain at the door to believe in Jesus, that there is a rational basis for belief in Jesus. But let me point out here… in the announcements today you heard about the first meeting of our church planting training center tomorrow night… we believe the best way to meet the spiritual needs (like, answering these questions) and physical needs (like relieving poverty, education) of any community is to plant a church, so we are dedicating ourselves to raising up church planters. The first meeting is tomorrow night… it's not just for prospective pastors, but for people who just want to know, how do you reach people? How do you be a part of leading a church to reach its community? How do you teach the Bible in a way that connects with people outside the church? That's tomorrow night… it's ministry training, and some of you may want to check it out…*

Alright… one of the big ideas behind this message series: It is normal and OK to have questions and doubts about Christianity. Doubt happens when faith encounters the real world… many of us grew up being taught the Bible, and then you get out into the world and encounter a difficult question, and we wonder… "Has anyone else really thought about this before?" And you start to doubt…

What has happened when we doubt, usually, is just that the superficialities of our faith have been exposed. And that actually is a good thing. I've heard it said that faith without doubt is like a human without antibodies.

I believe that it's only when we ask the hard questions that we can ever really grow deep with God. The truth of God is deep enough to sustain the doubt. I'd say if anything, the greater danger is in having a cultural, unquestioned, untested, superficial faith… the kind of faith that exists because it's what mom and dad believed, or because it makes us feel safe or nostalgic. The kind of faith that lives off of cheesy platitudes like, "You just gotta have faith; and, brother, just let go and let God." God can handle our doubts. Our doubts drive us deeper with God.

- People make the mistake of thinking that mature Christians don't have doubts. I'm a pretty avid reader of biographies, one of the things you notice is that for many of the greatest spiritual leaders … Billy Graham… Spurgeon: A foot poised.

One of the things that causes people the most doubt today is that question you saw Dr. Ehrman address at the beginning… *"How could there be a good God and still be so much suffering in the world?"* (Bart Ehrman at one point was a church pastor, and now he's one of the 5 most famous skeptics in the world—he teaches a class now at UNC where he tries to demonstrate why the Bible couldn't possibly be the word of God. The thing that caused him to lose his faith, however, was this question (as he says in that interview): If God loves us as much as He says, why wouldn't he step in and do something about all the suffering in the world? Where is God when a child is being raped and murdered? Why would God allow a tsunami to wipe out 250,000 people around the Indian Ocean?)

The actual argument goes like this: If God were all powerful, He could stop suffering. If he were all loving, He *would* stop suffering. The fact that suffering exists means that God is either not all-loving or not all-powerful, and thus the Christian God cannot be real. That's it. Logical.

For many of you, though, this question is not so much an intellectual problem, it's an intensely personal one. ***You*** have gone through a

[1] We are studying along with Tim Keller in his *Reason for God.* This sermon is not based on that chapter, but does draw on some of Keller's insights throughout. It is a good complementary study to do along with the message.

time where you have felt personally abandoned by God. Some of you have buried a child this year. Some of you have been diagnosed with cancer or some other incurable disease; I've talked to some of you because your spouse has left you really for no fault of yours; or maybe one of your parents has abandoned you—and you have looked at heaven and screamed, "God, where are you? Why wouldn't you do something? I know you could, God. Why don't you?"

- **Lee's miracle**. Some of you hear that and say, 'But why? Why doesn't God do that for me?' Maybe you aren't really there.

Incredible story… John 11… Before we dive in… Our Summit Life Groups are going to be studying a parallel passage in 1 Peter 3 written by Tim Keller (not 1 Peter 3)… In this passage and others Peter points out that our pain and suffering is not supposed to be a detriment to our faith… it's supposed to strengthen it.

Listen, in the face of evil and suffering abandoning your faith in God doesn't help you at all. It won't help you understand pain or deal with it. Let me explain that.

- MLK said the only way we could know that a current law is unjust is if conflicts with a higher law. He said current racist laws in America were unjust, even though the majority of Americans supported them, because they violated the law of God.
- In the same way, the only way we can declare an event unjust is if we appeal to a higher vision of the way things ought to be. We look at suffering and say, "It's not ***supposed*** to be like this."
- You see, if there is no God, then we really can't complain about violence and destruction. It's just how things are. In fact, according to the laws of evolution, the only reason our species is here because they violently beat out all the others. That's survival of the fittest, and it's just how things are in the universe. So, you really can't complain.
- Thus, when you complain that violence and death aren't right, you are admitting there has to be a transcendent, good purpose for the universe, which means, what you're saying is that there is a good God behind the universe whose purpose is being messed up. In other words, to say there's a problem with pain is to admit there is a God.
- Does that make sense? **C. S. Lewis** explained that the thing that first kept him from faith was observing the cruelty of life. How could there be a good God with all this pain. In the end, however, he realized that evil was more of a problem for him as an atheist: *My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of "just" and "unjust"? . . . What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust? . . .* (I'll paraphrase this next part: *If the evolutionary process was solely responsible for life, it meant that there was no such thing as universal justice, only things that were personally beneficial for me.) But if I did that, then my argument against God collapsed too – for the argument depended on saying that the world was really unjust, not simply that it did not happen to please my private fancies . . . Consequently atheism turns out to be too simple.*[2] So again, if you look at the world and say, "that's unjust" you are assuming a standard of justice higher than survival of the fittest, which implies that God exists.
- I realize it is difficult to conceive of a good God and a suffering world. But it is even more difficult to try and explain why evil is a problem if there is no overarching meaning to life given by the Creator. Dostoevsky once wrote, "If God does not exist everything is permitted." Nothing is evil. Deep down we know that there is evil. So, *evil is a problem for belief in God; it is even more of a problem for not believing in God.* And so you won't fix the dilemma by abandoning faith in God.

That's the end of your philosophy lesson for the day… (If I lost you for the last 4 minutes, come on back in...we're about to get to some touchy feely stuff.) In John 11, two very good friends of Jesus', Mary and Martha, send messengers to Jesus to tell him that their brother

[2] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 31.

Lazarus, who was also a close friend of Jesus, was very sick, to the point of death. (It's kind of obvious that they want Jesus, who has healed so many other people, to come and heal his good friend Lazarus.) Oddly, however, when Jesus gets the news, he does nothing. He just stays where he is.

And in that time where He does nothing, Lazarus dies. And it's then, after Lazarus dies, that Jesus decides to go. As He gets there, He is met by Martha, and all she can choke out through her tears is this statement, (v 21, 32) *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."*

There is a question that is screaming out through her statement, and it's the question that every person who believes in God has asked when they were have undergone some painful loss… *"Lord, Why didn't you come?* You could have come. You could have changed this situation. Where were you?"

(I will warn you up front. What's about to happen in this story does not answer all the questions, but it does tell you some significant things God wants you to know about suffering.)

1. Your suffering does not indicate a lack of love on Jesus' part.

- V 33 it says that "when Jesus saw her weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit..." the word implies grief to the point of anger. He was so moved with grief he was angry… anyone who has been through grief knows what that means. The word implies a rage. Jesus looks at their suffering and gets angry: "This is not how it is supposed to be. It is not how I created it to be."
- And then v. 35, one of the shortest, and most wonderful, verses in the Bible, says "Jesus wept." He wept—even though He knew He was about to raise Lazarus from the dead, He felt their pain so acutely that He wept with them. Even outsiders remarked, vs. 36, "See how He loved him!"
- **The point is that The fact that Jesus did not come had nothing to do with any lack of love for Mary, Martha, or Lazarus.** You see, when people go through a hard time, they'll start to ask, Lord, is it me? Is it something I've done? Have I not been good enough for you to love and bless? No. That's not what you are ever supposed to question.
- Notice how they pray (when they go to Jesus to tell Him about Lazarus being sick, it is essentially a prayer)? V. 3, "Lord, the one whom you love is sick." They have no question there about Jesus' love. Do you pray like that? (***Allie:*** *"come and wipe me."* She doesn't ask that question… she just knows it.) Now, I don't mean to be crude… but she never doubts my love for her. **In the midst of a crisis the last thing we need is to doubt Jesus' love for us**.

- And listen, you'll never be able to think that way if you think that God's love for you is contingent on anything about you. If you think God loves you because you've been worthy of that love… you'll always be second guessing yourself: Have I been done enough? Have I been good enough? **The confidence you need in a crisis comes only in the Gospel.** The Gospel that says God's love for you is not conditioned on you at all; it's like the unconditional love of a Father for a child, and that God has settled forever His acceptance of us in the cross of Christ.
- **You never have to doubt His love**. And that's important, because you'll do one of two things: You'll either judge Jesus' love through the filter of your circumstances, or you'll judge your circumstances through the filter of Jesus' love.

2. For those in Christ, your suffering does not *end* in death

11:4 *But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness does not lead to death.*

- On the surface that statement looks false, because this illness most certainly led to Lazarus' death. But Jesus saw beyond

that event and said "Ultimately this story will not end with Lazarus dead."

- Look at this little exchange in vs. 23, between Martha and Jesus… Martha comes up to him and says, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."Jesus' response, ***11:23*** *"Your brother will rise again."*(On the surface, that seems very insensitive, doesn't it? Imagine being at a funeral where somebody tragically lost a family member and you slap them on the back and said, "What you crying for? Haven't you read the *Left Behind* books? It's called the rapture, sister. Deal with it.") 11:24, Martha responds, ***24*** *Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." **25** Jesus said, "That's not what I'm talking about." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,**26** and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"* He means something different than that one day Lazarus will be in heaven. He says, "Ultimately, you don't have to be afraid of death. Yes, you'll die. **But death is not the final verdict."**
    - ((There is something very important that's sort of hidden in Jesus' statement, "I am the resurrection." To a Jewish person, "the resurrection" did not just mean "afterlife," it also meant "judgment day." In the OT, the two were always simultaneous, because you would be resurrected to stand before God's judgment. And that, of course, was one of the things everyone feared about death. So, when Jesus says, "I am the resurrection," He is saying to her, "I am also the judgment day. I'll be judged for Lazarus. I'm going to take the judgment and pain and the finality of death. If you believe in me, you have nothing to fear. I've removed anything fearful from death and all that awaits you is the time you (your actual body the real you) is resurrected to live with God and each other for eternity.
    - **Illus. *Shadow or truck?*** Even though we die, there's no permanence. Jesus took the full impact of death and pain and suffering so only a shadow to me and I have nothing to fear. The finality, the sting is gone.
- **So, death is not the final verdict.** Yes, we die, but it's only temporary, just for a moment.

So, the 2nd thing we are to remember is that our suffering does not *end* in death. (And perhaps this is a good place to point out a perspective we are supposed to keep in all of this: we usually assume in our suffering that we don't deserve it. "This bad world is worse than we good people deserve. How could a God of love sit by while we suffer?" **The Bible actually takes a completely opposite viewpoint.** The world is under a curse of death that we brought on by our sin. As a result, catastrophic things happen. And every day we sin we confirm God's rightful judgment on us. **Tower.** But God, in His mercy, has taken our death into Himself. Rather than being confounded at why we suffer, we should be amazed at the mercy and love of God in sending Christ to rescue us.) **The mindset of Dr. Ehrman (and most people, really) is they doubt God's goodness and believe in our virtue; the Bible says we should believe in God's goodness and doubt our virtue. That's when you'll begin to understand (the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom).**

3. Our suffering is a part of the grand beautiful story God is telling

v. 4: It is for the glory of God*, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."* God through our pain and our sicknesses is weaving a story about His glory. Sometimes we can't see where that story is going or how our pain fits into it from our perspective, but that is what He is doing.

- Like a tapestry…ever seen one of those in Europe? In the Middle Ages these things would take decades to make…from one side… beautiful pattern, and on the other… chaos. God is weaving out a beautiful picture, but from our side it can tend to look rather chaotic.

- **Part of that beauty is something He is weaving into us…** in our suffering we see more of His glory. We learn how much better He is than any earthly gift, how He alone has power over death, and how He can sustain us in pain. Because of these things we experience a part of God we may not otherwise know.
    - 1 Cor 15 Paul describes , "Death is *swallowed up* in victory." Swallowed up… it becomes a part of me. Tim Keller uses an illustration… talks about a terrible dream that he had in which all of his family were slaughtered. That dream has become a part of him… God is doing something in our lives which is part of His beauty… **Gold cracks in pot…**
    - I'm not just talking about some pie in the sky recompense, but God taking our pain and turning it into beauty.
    - C. S. Lewis, *"They say of some temporal suffering, 'No future bliss can make up for it,' not knowing that Heaven, once attained, will work backwards and turn even that agony into glory.'"*[3] Sam Gamji, book 3 of *Lord of the Rings,* discovering Gandalf is actually live. "Is everything sad going to become untrue?" God will take even our pain and turn it into everlasting beauty.
    - So, our suffering is not because God doesn't love us. In fact, ***11:5*** *Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.* ***6*** *So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was*. See that, "so that he waited." Does that make sense! He loved them so much He DIDN'T come to rescue them. It's so counter-intuitive, that the NIV doesn't have the guts to translate it. It says "yet." But that's not what the Greek means.[4] It means that Jesus' delay, His not answering their prayer was BECAUSE He loved them. God loves us so much… that our story will include suffering because it is all **part of a story He is writing that will lead to His glory and our good**.
- **In addition to that, He's using our pain to teach others about His glory.** vs. 45 "Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him…" Often through our pain, others come to know God. Maybe they see God work; maybe they see how we respond to it, and God writes into them another part of His story. Here's the question… "are you willing to undergo pain if it meant other people could know God?" **CARBOARD TESTIMONIES**: **Veronica's friend… the pastor's wife… cardboard testimonies** of life before and after Christ**: "diagnosed with MS"** and the guy next to hers said, "I was the doctor who diagnosed the disease. I was an atheist." He flipped his over and it said, "through knowing this lady, came to know Christ, baptized last month," she flipped hers over and it said, "**worth it."**
- **Joseph:** I think of the Joseph story here… several times it looked like the story would make "sense"… but then "back to the dungeon." Ultimately it ends with him on the throne of Egypt… and his had a resolution in this world. But the point of the Joseph story is Christ… and the meaning is that even when our story ends "back in the dungeon," ultimately, in Christ, the story will weave together, and the tapestry will be complete.

What He's asking us to do is trust Him, trust that He is good, and believe that He's weaving a story of His glory and for our good. But you're like: **"I don't see the story."** Of course not, you're in the midst of the tapestry. You say, but why can't I see it?

- Let me go back to our original argument… If God is a God infinite in love and power would it not also make sense that He be infinite in wisdom? And if His wisdom is infinite compared to mine, does it not follow that there are some things that I won't always be able to perceive? Think about how much greater God's power is than mine. I enjoy watching these universe shows on the Discovery Channel… I get overwhelmed as to how big the universe is. **Space… 93 billion**

[3] C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, 64.
[4] Gr., "*uhn*."

light years across. That means if you were travelling at the speed of light, 186,282.2 mps, then it would take you more than a billion of your lifetimes just to get from one side to the next. And now astronomers have developed the "bubble theory" which says that our universe may be only one among many… a string of them… God created all this with a word from His mouth. **Even if you hold to evolution it had to start somewhere, right?**

- If that's how much greater God's power is than mine… wouldn't His wisdom also be much greater than ours?

Dr. Ehrman, whom I quoted earlier, and others like him, assume that there is so much pointless evil in the world that a loving and powerful God could not exist because otherwise He'd so something about it. Ehrman has said, "I could understand evil if it had a point." But what he's assuming is this… that if God did have a purpose in evil, then he would be able to perceive it. In other words, they say that evil is pointless if I can't see a point in it. But if God's wisdom is infinitely beyond ours, would that be true?

Ever heard of a "no see um"? When you go camping… Little tiny insect you can't see but has a huge bite way out of proportion to its size. If you go into your pup tent looking for a zebra, and don't see one, then you can conclude he's not there. But if you're looking for a no see um, just because you can't see him doesn't mean it's not there. Dr. Ehrman assumes that any reasons for the existence of evil must be accessible to our minds, more like a Great Dane than a "no see um." But that's just a blind faith assertion, and one that has extraordinary faith in my own abilities. But I think it makes more sense to say that if God is infinite wisdom, then there may be a lot that I can't see.

Think about it this way. Since we, with limited time and a limited vantage point can already see good reasons for some of the pain in life, don't we think that with enough time and God's perspective we might see reason for all of it? If you're going to assume that God is infinite in love and power, wouldn't you also assume He's infinite in wisdom?

That's the question. ***Will you trust, as this passage teaches, that His love is not in question, that His wisdom is superior to yours, and this is all part of a glorious, beautiful tapestry He is weaving?*** At the end of the day, it's about trust. Trust is the currency of any relationship.

"It's so difficult. I just don't understand…" I know. My only counsel for you is to just to look long and hard at the tears of Jesus in this passage….

- You ever think about how strange it is that He weeps, since He knows the Lazarus is about to be raised? He has two things in the midst of pain that we would love to have… the first is the **understanding** of *why* it's happening and the knowledge of what's about to happen; the second is the **power** to change the situation. Imagine if you had that in any moment of pain. Why isn't he walking up to the tomb going "ha, ha, ha.").
- The answer is that even though he knows the outcome, He feels *your pain* very deeply. In every tear, in every broken heart, He shares a part. He weeps with you.
- A few chapters after this, Jesus is going to weep again. It's in the Garden of Gethsemane before the crucifixion where He is going to be crucified for your sin. Jesus on the eve of death is going to wait on deliverance and God would never come. He calls out to God and says, "My God, My God, why won't you come?" And He's going to die alone!
- Why did He go through all that? **Hebrews 12:2** says we were the joy set before Him for which He endured the pain. What was that joy? Some people say, "The Father's approval." But He had that before He left. Why did He leave it in the first place?

- **Isaiah 53:11** "Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied…." See what? "Those whom He is making righteous by bearing their iniquities."

I don't want to sound "glib," grasp it. Embrace it. It is the foundation of your faith. It is the one thing to hold onto when all around you is dark and chaotic and God seems absent.

- Hymn: "My hope has found a resting place, not in device or creed, it is enough that Jesus died, and that He died for me."
- *You see, If I remember His love for me in His darkest hour, I won't doubt His love for me in my darkest hour.*

So, listen: For those of you in pain, it's ok to weep, Jesus weeps with you. Don't try to be so super spiritual you fake your humanity. It's OK to ask for a miracle, Jesus might give it.

But just remember that Jesus has taken the sting out of death and suffering so that you never have to fear it… and one day *every sad thing will come untrue*. Hold tightly to His cross and resurrection in your darkest hour. In the words of the Apostle Paul, "Grieve, but don't grieve like those who have no hope."

We all go through suffering. The difference in those who have hope in suffering and those who don't is whether or not Christ is with you and you are in Christ. One day your world will fall apart, and you'll eventually face death. Sometimes suffering just reminds us of that. When that day comes, if you don't have Jesus, who saved you from the penalty and consequences of sin, death will consume you. *Receive Jesus, He is the only hope. If you're in pain, come to Jesus.*

Prayer

Transition to offering:

- Baptism story… this is what your giving creates. Atheist girl at Duke.

- Next week: Christianity is too restrictive

NOTES:

John 11…

- Chapter opens with Jesus' behaving strangely…
    - Jesus is told that Lazarus, a close personal friend, is sick to the point of death. So, the messenger asks Jesus to come and be with the family, presumably to heal him.
    - ***11:5*** *Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.* ***6*** *So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.*
    - Jesus seems to be neglectful or willfully absent when He could help their pain. See the problem? This is the problem of pain.
-

- Jesus is asking Martha to trust Him in the meantime…. "I know you wonder why I wasn't here. But I need you to believe Me!" This is an important point… **Jesus invites us to believe in the midst of our doubts and questions, not after they're put to rest**. Tapestry. in the middle ages, these tapestries took decades to produce; one day, we will see the other side, we will see this masterpiece
    - Jesus in the midst of this says, "I want to invite you to believe that this is not all there is to the picture." Can you believe that on the other side of this God will work it all out? Even when death feels so final… can you believe?

Watch what happens next. **11:33** When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.

- **Literally, deeply moved means He got angry…:**
- **Jesus wept: (v. 35):** Even though he waited intentionally… even though he knew the endgame. **11:36** So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" "*phileo*": more human term than *agape*.
- **11:38** Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. He "snorts": It's what you call in literature "onomatopoeia", (*Gr. enebremesato*). Word used for what a horse does when he is kicked by a rider going into battle. He paws… like David when he goes into battle with Goliath: "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine intimidating God's people? I will cut your head off and feed it to the birds." Bell rings, He snorts, comes to tomb.
- 41 Then they took away the stone *from the place* where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up *His* eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me.42 "And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said *this,* that they may believe that You sent Me." **Cocky:** (Linebacker to College quarterback: Slap you naked and hide your clothes.)
- **11:43** When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." **44** The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."
- He defeats death, strips it…
    - A few things behind the scene… What is happening behind the scene… Why? "The resurrection" means the 'judgment day,' –something that happens to everyone! To Martha: "I know my brother will rise at the last day." Jesus: "I am the judgment day, I am the end of the world."
    - Jesus is the one who waited on God and God never came… for me! Edwards and Camus
    - "Shadow or the truck?" Death "feels" so final, so alone… What you FEEL and what is reality are not always the same Jesus in the midst of this says, "I want to invite you to believe that this is not all there is to the picture." Do you believe that this is it? Is this the verdict on God? Tapestry.

- God will make everything right. Not just consolation in the sweet by and by, but he'll actually bring this dead world back to life… "Everything sad becomes untrue." "Swallowed up"… it becomes a part of you. Dream... something bad happens to a loved one.

What's going on? Why doesn't God come right now and make everything right? I can't always tell you the reasons He doesn't come. But I can tell you what that reason is NOT. It's not that he doesn't care.

- What would Lazarus say? "If God chooses not to heal you, it's not because he can't or doesn't care, it's because He has a better plan!
- There is a greater purpose
  - If God is a God infinite in love and power would it not also make sense that He be infinite in wisdom? And if His wisdom is infinite compared to mine, does it not follow that there are some things that I won't always be able to perceive?" Some parts of the tapestry?
    - Dr. Ehrman's statement is that there is so much pointless evil in the world that a loving and powerful God could not exist because He'd so something about it. **But there is a hidden premise in the assertion…** That is that if evil appears pointless *to me*, then it must be pointless. But, if you'll let me suggest this, that reasoning is fallacious. Just because I can't see a purpose doesn't mean there's not one. To say that if there were a reason, that I'd be able to perceive it is an extraordinary amount of faith in my own ability.

      Kind of like this: Ever heard of a "no see um"? When you go camping. Little tiny insect you can't see but has a huge bite way out of proportion to its size. If you go into your pup tent looking for a zebra, and don't see one, then you can conclude he's not there. But if you're looking for a no see um, just because you can't see him doesn't mean it's not there. Dr. Ehrman assumes that any reasons for the existence of evil must be accessible to our minds, more like a Great Dane than a no see um, but that is a blind faith assertion.

      Since we, with limited time and a limited vantage point can already see good reasons for some of the pain in life, don't we think that with enough time and God's perspective we might see reason for all of it? If you're going to assume that God is infinite in love and power, wouldn't you also assume He's infinite in wisdom. To say that ***if*** there is a reason for suffering we would have to be able to perceive it is an extraordinary amount of faith in our abilities to perceive. No reasoning is given for that faith in our perceptive abilities… it's just blind faith. (It's ok if people choose to have faith in their own abilities, but they should acknowledge it as a faith commitment.

  What basis do you have to believe? The cross… He weeps as we go through it!
  - In the midst of our hurts, God cares. What hurts us hurts him. Our inability to make sense of the troubles of life moves God. Not only identifies with us, enters into our pain personally.
- He wants you to believe in His wisdom. To believe that every thread is part of a larger story that God is inviting you to believe in, and become part of.
- Never doubt His compassion… Learning to trust in Him. That's the currency in relationship.

- And in so doing to see His glory.
    - This is the hint… the picture He is weaving is about His glory and He invites you to be a part of that.
- Sometimes God shows Himself by healing. Sometimes He shows it by causing us to trust Him… and to delight in the knowledge of God, the glory of God, as the all satisfying treasure of our faith (Piper)
    - And trust Him… John 11:5… Jesus loved them "uhn" he waited (so).

Conclusion:

- This is counter-intuitive if you are a skeptic. It's only after you believe that you begin to recognize God's plan and purposes
- Where else will you turn?

Notes:

"Reason's last step," Pascal said in the *Pensées*, "is the recognition that there are an infinite number of things which are beyond it. It is merely feeble if it does not go so far as to realize that."

John 11:5… Jesus loved them "uhn" he waited (so).

My sermon:

- the Mona Lisa with a big slash on it
- Shakespeare: "Life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."
- one philosopher of the French Revolution said, "If there is a God, He is my devil."
- *mystery that opens this chapter. God seems to be neglectful or willfully absent when He could help our pain*
- In John, "glory" is associated with knowledge of God. Knowing more about Him. The reason Lazarus will die and be raised again is for the glory of God. In other words, there are things that can be seen about God through Lazarus' death that could not be understood without it. **The reason we have pain and suffering is that there are things that can be understood about God in pain and suffering that could not be understood without it.**
- v. 23–24: Jesus tells her He'll rise again. *"I know he'll rise again at the last day."* "I know that in the sweet by and by we'll be together." But that is so far away! I need relief now.
- **Anger (v. 33):** When Jesus sees Mary weeping, he "snorts": word used for what a horse does when he is kicked by a rider going into battle. It is an "onotomopeia", (*Gr. enebremesato*) like David when he goes into battle with Goliath: "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine intimidating God's people. I will cut your head off and feed it to the birds."
- **Grief (v. 35):** "Teared." (If I were to ask you what the shortest verse in all the Bible was and you said this one you would be wrong. In Greek the shortest verse is 1 Thess 5:16, "Rejoice Always." This is the 2nd shortest verse. How ironic: 2 shortest verses in the New Testament contain the message of the whole New Testament: the Son of God faced death and cried so that we could escape death and laugh)
- **Love (v. 36):** "*phileo*": more human term than *agape*.
- Bell rings, He snorts, comes to tomb. (Here comes David to meet Goliath)

v. 41–42 : 41 Then they took away the stone *from the place* where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up *His* eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me.42 "And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said *this,* that they may believe that You sent Me."

- **Authority/ Cocky:** (Linebacker to College quarterback: Slap you naked and hide your clothes.)
- **Takeaway:**
    - **In the presence of pain, Jesus feels anger, grief, and love**
    - **Jesus' possesses authority over all of life's enemies**
    - **You are never out of the range of the Good Shepherd's voice**
    - **Pain should drive you to the feet of Jesus vv. 47–48**47 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, "What shall we do? For this Man works many signs.48 "If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation." : #1 reason why people lose their faith or don't believe: pain. He's not the Messiah that we'd like. This Messiah must be grasped by faith. He's there. He has a purpose. Will you allow yourself to be molded and protected in His hand? Will you trust Him?

Lucas:

- Example of tapestry – look at the back – random strings; looks jumbled; that's how your life feels when tragedy strikes
- Trust is the currency of relationship. And we know we can trust God because He sent His son to die for us.
- The lesson of Lazarus is counter-intuitive if you're a skeptic**:** It's only after you believe that you begin to recognize God's plan and purposes
- Why doesn't Jesus come back right now and make everything right? Because he wants more people to believe; to reveal his power in imperfect lives. Every thread is part of a larger story that God is inviting you to believe in, and say, I want to be part of that story

Other:

- John 11:4… Jesus loved them "uhn" he waited (so).
- "The resurrection" means the 'judgment day,' –something that happens to everyone! To Martha: "I know my brother will rise at the last day." Jesus: "I am the judgment day, I am the end of the world."
- When Jesus is four days late He's right on time
- The Manifestation of the glory of God is the all satisfying treasure of our faith.
- "What would Lazarus say?" I was *dead*! " He might also say, "If God chooses not to heal you, it's not because he can't or doesn't care, it's because He has a better plan!
- The human brain is 46 oz. **4.6 oz.** Most of us come to a point where we can see good coming out some of the pain in our lives—pain that at the time we didn't understand and thought was senseless.

2 How Could a Good God Allow Suffering?

- John 11… Jesus… (see Lucas talk)
- "You will all likewise perish": fundamentally wrong assumption that we deserve good; and "who sinned"? God's glory is ultimate…
    - Jesus' death overcomes evil
    - Jesus' death is the comfort during evil
- Alternate:
    - Psalm 73: Eternity settles all scores; in the meantime God is enough
    - Job
    - Hebrews 12… Suffering and Supremacy of Christ (John Piper at T4G)
    - Romans 5
    - My notes on suffering in the Gospel class
    - Resurrection
- **Study: 1 Peter 1:3–12**

- Antony Flew shocked the world in 2004 by announcing that he now believed in God. His name may not mean a lot to you, but he is 81 year old British atheist whose name is synonymous with atheism in the philosophical world. The Friedrich Nietzsche of his day. At 81 years of age he has announced that he is now a believer in God. But he's not a Christian yet, and he said the reason was that he could not believe in a God that had only one way of salvation.

- Some of the things it does:
    - Makes us yearn for heaven
        - Keeps our hearts from being attached too much to this world
    - Makes us know Jesus in the present
        - We get to see His power and redemption
- Trusting in the greater sovereignty of God
    - Trust His heart; trust His wisdom

-

This one thing has caused a lot of people to lose their faith. Bart Ehrman, a professor over at CH, wrote a book recently called *God's Problem.* Dr. Ehrman has become famous for teaching people to question, "Is the Bible really the word of God?" Showing them contradictions… What makes his story so powerful is that he used to be a Christian. Went to Moody Bible Institute and studied to be a youth pastor. In this book he says something very significant. But in this new book, *God's Problem*… he says that it is not the supposed problems of the Bible that caused him to lose his faith. Rather, he says, it's the problem of so much pointless suffering in the world. In an interview about the book on NPR, he said, "*The problems of the Bible are not what led me to leave the faith. I realized that I could no longer reconcile the claims of faith with the facts of life. In particular, I could no longer explain how there can be a good and all-powerful God actively involved with this world, given the state of things. For many people who inhabit this planet, life is a cesspool of misery and suffering. I came to a point where I simply could not believe that there is a good and kindly disposed Ruler who is in charge of it. I don't "know" if there is a God; but I think that if there is one, he certainly isn't the one proclaimed by the Judeo-Christian tradition, the one who is actively and powerfully involved in this world.*[5] The basic argument goes like this… God cannot be all powerful and all loving. Because if He's loving He would stop suffering, and if He's powerful He could. The fact that suffering exists means that God is not either loving or powerful, and thus the Christian God cannot be real.

- There is an assumption… and that is that we deserve good things. Unpopular, but the Bible paints a very different picture. Are we getting what we deserve?

For the believer, Jesus has taken the sting out of death

- "I am the resurrection." Jews saw that as "judgment day." Not pie in the sky, or some kind of recompense for suffering.
- Jesus took the sting. All sad things will become untrue.
- "see how he loved him." "Loved." No, loves

I'd say that, for the most part, our doubts fall into one of three categories:

- Hang-ups – objections or questions… intellectual problems
- Habits – our habits are in conflict with the Gospel; believing is scary; we don't want to change or we don't think we can change; sinful habit we'd prefer not to give up: living with girlfriend; being generous with our money; maybe we are addicted to porn

---

[5] NPR podcast, Feb 19, 2008. http://www.npr.org/templates/rundowns/rundown.php?prgId=13

- Hurts – why was I abused? Abandoned? God, if you are there, why did you let that happen?

- It says in v. 38 that Jesus was “deeply moved” in coming to the tomb… that’s the second time that phrase “deeply moved” is used.
    - The first time, v. 33, is when he saw them weeping and he wept with them;