

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FROM JOEL (4/4/20)¹

Q: Some of our students will remember that I brought to their attention last year a magazine article, in which an editor of a national magazine asked the question of prominent ministers, rabbis, and priests: “If there is a God, why is there so much sin, disease, death, and war on earth? If there is such a God as is taught in the churches, why do we have crippled children, stillborn children, moronic children, and other innocent victims?”

A: Answers came from three very prominent men—one a rabbi, one a minister, and one a priest. They were all in agreement that nobody knows why. [They said that] Maybe God in his goodness was punishing us, or maybe God was leading us home. But in God’s inscrutable wisdom, that’s how He was treating us.

Now of course, it wouldn’t take much serious study of the Bible to know that none of those things are true. We **do** know why there is sin, disease, and death. We **do** know why innocent children are victims of something or other that brings them into the world sick, deformed, or helpless. We know why. We know why because Scripture has revealed it. We could start with the New Testament and go all the way back into the Old Testament, and we would find the answer. The Master, Christ Jesus, tells us that *“If we abide in the Word, and let the Word abide in us, we will bear fruit richly,”*² because it is God’s good pleasure that we bear fruit richly. Paul tells us, *“If so be the Spirit of God dwell in you, then you become the children of God, heirs of God, joint-heirs with Christ in God.”*³ But notice that he says “if” – if, if, if – *“If so be the Spirit of God dwell in you.”*

Paul didn’t say that you could go around as a mortal, as a human being, saying, “I am spiritual. I am a child of God.” Neither did the Master. No, he said, “If so be the Spirit of God dwell in you, then you can say, ‘I am a child of God, heir of God, joint-heir with Christ in God.’” The Master didn’t say that you will bear fruit richly. He said that **if** you abide in the Spirit and **if** that Spirit abides in you; **if** you dwell in the Word and let the Word dwell in you; then and only then will you show forth spiritual harmony, spiritual health, eternity, immortality.

Paul goes a step further: *“If you sow to the flesh, you will reap corruption. If you sow to the Spirit, you will reap life everlasting.”*⁴ Do you think that we sow to the Spirit when we plan almost universal destruction of our fellow man, or when we build our own safety and security on the degree in which we are able to wipe out the rest of the world? Do you think that we sow to the Spirit and reap life everlasting by refusing to share our surpluses with those who are in want? I’m not speaking only of the United States now, I’m speaking of we as people on earth, whether we as a United States of America do these things, or whether we as Great Britain or France or India. I’m speaking of “we” now as the human race. If we are sowing to atomic bombs and other modes of destruction; if we are refusing each other the necessities of life

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² John 15:7

³ See Romans 8:9

⁴ Galatians 6:8

despite the tremendous abundance that some nations have; do you wonder then that we reap corruption? That we find that we are not children of God? That we are not joint-heirs?

The Hebrew prophet saw that, too. In the 91st Psalm we are told that those who dwell in the secret place of the Most High, unto them none of these evils will come nigh their dwelling place. You see, that isn't speaking of mankind as a whole. That is speaking only to those who **dwell** in the secret place, who **live** in the secret place. Not just on Sundays – you can't "live" any place just on Sundays. If you **live** there, you are living seven days a week and seven nights a week. So if you are living seven days a week and seven nights a week in the secret place of the Most High, none of these things will come nigh your dwelling place—none of these evils of the world.

Now, this is Scripture, and we either have to take our stand on Scripture, or we have to look around for some other philosophy of life—probably just the law of the claw and the hammer. Oh, no. No, as a people who have come down through several thousands of years of religious instruction, we must take our stand on Scripture, if we are to seek the life harmonious. Whether we take the Scripture of what we call the Old Testament and the New Testament—our Holy Bible—or whether we search the scriptures of the Orient, of India, of China, or of Japan, you will find the same revelation. You will find the same teaching—that in proportion as you abide in Me and let My word abide in you; in proportion as you search for Me, seek Me, find Me—that is, the Spirit of God, the consciousness of God—all of these other evils fall away.

Tonight I was led to this in my meditation: *“Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine, the labor of the olive shall fail, and the field shall yield no meat. The flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls, yet, I will rejoice in the Lord. I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hind’s feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places.”*⁵

In spite of passages like that from the Old Testament, and in spite of passages from the New Testament like those of the Master: *“Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, or wherewithal ye shall be clothed,”*⁶ we continue to sow to the flesh. We seek to demonstrate what we shall eat, or what we shall drink, or wherewithal we shall be clothed, or where we shall live, or what transportation we shall have. We are busy demonstrating things, in spite of the fact that Scripture all the way through says, *“Take no thought, for your life, what ye shall eat, what ye shall drink. Take thought for Me. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and these things will be added unto you. For it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”*⁷

And so, you see that these men were all wrong when they said, “We don’t know why humans are suffering on earth.” We **do** know why, but some are afraid to face it. The world is suffering only because of its own sense of separation from God; because it hasn’t accepted a God “closer than breathing, nearer than hands and feet;” a God that is not only able, but willing and desirous of our bearing fruit richly.

⁵ Habakkuk 3:17-19

⁶ Matthew 6:25

⁷ Matthew 6:25, 33; Luke 12:32