

“Answering Difficult Questions”

John 9:1-7

Many of us have had experiences like that.

- *In an earlier message, I told you about a **lady I prayed with to receive Christ**. Feeling **quite confident**, I wanted to **reach even more people**.*
- **Story of Gregg.**

At this point, I realized I needed to better prepare myself.

2 Timothy 2:15 (NKJV): “Be diligent to present **yourself approved to God**, a worker **who does not need to be ashamed**, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

1 Peter 3:15 (NIV): “Always **be prepared to give an answer** to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.”

Apologetics comes from the root word “*apologia*,” which means to present a verbal defense to everyone who asks you for a logical explanation.

Contrary to what some think, Christianity is a very *logical* belief.

Isaiah 1:18 (NIV): “Come let us **reason together**,’ says the Lord.”

In the New Living Translation, it says, “Come now, **let us argue this out**,’ says the LORD. ‘No matter how deep the stain of your sins, I can remove it. I can make you as clean as freshly fallen snow.’”

That is not to say there is a place for faith, but we don’t have to “check our brains at the door.”
*It was when I believed in **Jesus and His Word**, the Bible, that the **world made sense to me**.
Now I could understand why **people did what they did** and **how lives could be changed**.*

Apologia speaks of giving a legal defense, as in a court of law. Having said that, we are not a **prosecuting attorney, but a witness**.

Our goal is to build a bridge, not burn one.

We’re to speak in a loving, winsome, and graceful but bold way to engage people.

2 Timothy 2:24-26 (NLT): “The Lord’s servants **must not quarrel** but must be **kind to everyone**. They must be able to teach effectively and be patient with difficult people. They should **gently teach those who oppose the truth**. Perhaps God will change those people’s

hearts, and they will believe the truth. **Then they will come to their senses** and escape from the Devil's trap. For they have been held captive by him to do whatever he wants."

We saw Jesus do this masterfully in our last message, "What's Your Story."

We looked at the Lord and how **He effectively engaged this woman and won her over.** She tried to get Him off on rabbit trails, but **He reeled her back in.**

All of us most likely know what it's like to share the gospel with someone and be barraged with a bunch of arguments and questions that are very difficult to answer.

We can decide to either **never confront a person again with the gospel**—which would be **disobedience**—or we can **seek to find the answers.**

There are people who do have honest questions and when they are given an answer, it is like you "rolled away the stone" for them to come out of their tomb of unbelief.

But others are off to their next question or reason they don't come to Christ before you even finish answering the one they just asked.

- **So, armed with a working knowledge of the gospel, we want to engage the nonbeliever.**

Let me say something I said last time.

- **In our evangelistic conversations with nonbelievers, the goal is not to win the argument but the soul.**
- **Remember, Jesus never dealt with any two people in the same way.**
- **There is not a "one-size-fits-all" approach to evangelism.**

Jesus adapted. His conversation with the woman at the well is quite different than the one with Nicodemus.

1 Corinthians 9:19-22 (NLT): "I have become a servant of everyone so that I can bring them to Christ. When I am **with the Jews**, I became one of them so that I can bring them to Christ. . . . When I am with **those who are oppressed**, I share their oppression so that I might bring them to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone so that I might bring them to Christ."

It is interesting to note how He often asked questions. In fact, Jesus often answered a question with a question.

The rich young ruler came to Jesus with the question, "**Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?**" (Mark 10:17 NIV)

Now this guy would have been a “great catch” for the cause of Christ. It was one thing to have **fishermen, tax collectors, and the like**. But a rich, influential man with authority could **open some doors** and perhaps even **add some credibility**. Not to mention, helping to **underwrite the ministry**.

Jesus could have said, “Just sign this card, pray this prayer, and attend our service.”

But He does not even give this man the gospel initially.

Instead, He asks him a probing question, “Why do you **call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.**” (Mark 10:18 NKJV).

Jesus could see this was not a completely sincere question, so He was **drawing him out and giving him an opportunity to believe**.

In the same way, asking questions is a great way to dialogue with people.

Remember, we want to **dialogue, not monologue**.

For instance, someone might ask:

- “Do you think **Jesus** was more than a **great moral teacher?**”
- Instead of immediately answering, try to **find common ground**. Answer a **question with a question**.

“What makes you think Jesus was a great moral teacher?”

- “Have you **read his teachings?**”
- “What do you think is the **most important thing He said?**”

Their usual answer would be that they **had never read His teachings** and you have an opening to **point some of them out**.

Someone might ask, “What about the person who has never heard the gospel? Will God send them to hell?”

You could respond with:

- “Why **do you ask that?**”
- “Do you **believe in Hell?** Do you think **ANYONE** deserves to go there? If not, why?”
- “You mentioned **the gospel**. Have you **heard it?** Do you believe it?”

There was the time the religious leaders tried to trap him with the tax issue, asking, “**Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?**” (Matthew 22:17 NKJV)

If He said it was, the **people would turn on Him** as they were **overtaxed**.

If He said it was not, the **government would turn on Him** as that would be **rebellion**.

Instead, Jesus asks for a Roman coin.

Again, He answers a question with a question, “*Whose image is on this coin?*”

They reply, “*Caesar!*”

“Then give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s!”

Talk about turning a situation around!

That is why we must *listen* carefully and pray for wisdom.

So, let’s get to some of those *difficult questions unbelievers ask*.

1. How do you know that the Bible is the Word of God?

It was written by Men! And it’s full of contradictions!

2. If God is so good and loving why does He allow Evil?”

Why are babies born with disabilities? Why did God allow the Holocaust?

Why 9/11?

1. How do you know the Bible is the Word of God?

- *Hold up your Bible right now. You hold in your hands the most **amazing book ever written**. It is literally **God’s message to you**.*
- *Technically speaking, it is not **one book** but actually **66 written over a 1,500-year span**. Its words were written by more than **40 authors** from every walk of life, including kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, poets, statesmen, and scholars.*
- *Yet **ALL** the authors of the Bible write about **one theme**—**God’s redemption of mankind**. Each one of these men was inspired by God to write these words.*

2 Peter 1:20 (NLT): “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophets themselves or because they wanted to prophesy. **It was the Holy Spirit who moved the prophets to speak from God.**”

But how can we know the Bible is TRUE?

—I know it is true because it gave me the **experience it claims it will give me**.

Now that is not the **only reason I believe it**, and perhaps not the **most convincing** to the skeptic out there but it certainly **helped me to personally believe**.

For example, the Bible says God will forgive my sins (1 John 1:9). *One day I chose to believe that. I accepted God’s forgiveness and you know what? That sense of **guilt and the heavy burden** I had been carrying **was taken away**.*

The Bible also said that if I came to Jesus, I would become a different person (2 Corinthians 5:17)." I came to Christ and that **has happened to me.** Now, I am still a **work in progress, but the change has happened.**

The Bible said God would give me His peace and joy if I trusted Christ. That too has happened.

The Bible said God would answer my prayers, if I prayed properly. I did that and my prayers have been answered.

—I know the Bible is true because it is confirmed by SCIENCE.

Now, you might be thinking, "No, the **Bible and science contradict each other!**" That is not necessarily true. **There are many who have scoffed at the Bible, saying how unscientific it is, and yet . . .**

It was the Bible that first said that the number of the stars is beyond counting.

Scripture said that God "*stretched forth the heavens*" (Isaiah 51:13 KJV) into a limitless expanse that can never be measured, and filled it with stars which are *as numerous as the sands upon the seashore* (see Genesis 22:17).

To your average observer looking into the sky, even with the latest telescope technology, the visible stars are not uncountable. They are vast, but they do not seem impossible to count. But the Bible flatly states that **the number of the stars can be compared, literally, to the number of the grains of sand upon the seashore.** Modern science has now established this to be true. Man cannot possibly begin to assess the number of the stars.

It was the Bible that said that "By faith we understand that the entire universe was formed at God's command, that what we now see did not come from anything that can be seen" (Hebrews 11:3 NLT).

This predates, by many centuries, the discoveries of modern science that all matter is made up of invisible energy—protons, neutrons, and electrons.

I don't believe in the Bible because science proves it's true. Rather, I believe in the science that the Bible proves is true.

Having said all that, let me point out **something that is very important** for us to **know about the Bible.**

It is not the intention of the Bible to be a textbook on science, per se.

If it were, the book would be much **thicker and much less comprehensible**. When it addresses **scientific or historical fact**, it is always accurate.

The Bible is intended to be a book of REDEMPTION.

- **Its primary purpose** is not to tell us how the heavens go, but **how to go to heaven**.

It tells us how to how to know God, and how to live in this **troubled and confused human race**. It is the only book that speaks **with authority in this realm**.

—The Bible is true because it is confirmed by ARCHEOLOGY.

Over the years, **countless critics** have challenged the **teachings of the Bible**. But recent **archeological findings** have **confirmed** Scripture's teaching time and time again.

- **Critics over the years** have doubted the Bible because of what it said about **crucifixion**.

They contended that crucifixion did not take place, as Scripture suggests. You can see how such a criticism strikes at **the very heart of our faith**, as so much is said specifically about the **crucifixion of Jesus**.

But this criticism was silenced **in 1968** when **the remains of a man, crucified in his mid 30s**, were discovered north of Jerusalem with **a seven-inch iron nail still embedded in his heel**. **The state of the bones** indicated that the condemned man's **arms were outstretched** and that his feet had been **placed sideways**, with the nail driven first through a small block of wood and then through both **heels into the cross**.

Once again, the Bible gave the information before the "Experts" had it.

- **Critics have doubted the Bible** because they could find no historical record of a Roman governor named **Pontius Pilate**.

But in **1961**, an inscription found at **Caesarea Maritima** confirmed that **Pontius Pilate** was the **Roman governor** in Judea at the time of **Jesus' crucifixion**.

- **Critics doubted Scripture's authority** because no record of a High Priest named **Caiaphas** existed.

But in 1990 the **tomb of the High Priest Caiaphas** was discovered.

Jewish historian Nelson Glueck has said, "*It may be stated categorically that no **archeological discovery** has ever controverted a biblical reference. Scores of archeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or exact detail the historical statements made in the Bible.*"

—The Bible is true because it is the one book that predicts the future accurately.

We are not talking about **some psychic or some tabloid's prediction here**. We are talking about very **specific prophecies that have been fulfilled**. No other **world religions** have books that do this.

Why?

If they were to do it, it would be evident that they are not inspired by God as the Bible is.

God can speak of the future with absolute certainty because He knows it as well as we would know the past (even better because we often forget what actually happened).

The basic test of the true God, the true faith, the true Prophet, and the true belief lies in this: “Can they predict the future?”

The Bible is the one book that does so **not once, or twice, but hundreds of times!**

The present conflict in the Middle East?

It was predicted in the Bible that the **Jews would regather in their land, be surrounded by enemies**, and that the final conflict would revolved around the **city of Jerusalem**.

One half of the Bible's prophecies have already come to take place.

Therefore if **one half** of them **have happened** as He has said, should I have any reason to doubt that the **remaining ones will happen exactly as God has said?**

This helps us to see that when God says something is going to happen, you can take it to the bank.

A scientist figured out the odds of just eight prophecies regarding Jesus being fulfilled by coincidence. Among the prophecies were these:

- **The chance that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem—1 in 280,000.**
- **The chances that He would have a forerunner announcing his coming—1 in 1,000.**
- **The chances that He would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver—1 in 10,000.**
- **The chances that He would have His hands wounded—1 in 10,000.**
- **The chances that He would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey—1 in 1,000.**

Put all eight together and what are the chances that Jesus did all these things coincidentally?

- **1 in 10 to the 28th power.**

If you were to cover the entire state of Texas with silver dollars two feet high and mark one. Then blindfold someone and have them walk across the state and randomly reach

down and pick up a silver dollar. The chances of that person picking up the silver dollar you marked is the same as the chances of Jesus fulfilling all eight prophecies by chance.

And the fact is, Jesus fulfilled many, many prophecies, including ones fulfilled in other parts of the Bible!

*You can see why **this book has been so attacked over the years.***

Ultimately, the issue of believing the Bible comes down to faith.

(Tell story of **young girl sharing the gospel and challenged by atheist**)

We have time for one more question today

2. How could a God of love allow suffering?

Why is there **sickness, even death? Why are there tragedies like the Holocaust or 9/11?**

John 9:1-7 (NKJV)

“Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.’ When He had said these things, He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. And He said to him, ‘Go, wash in the pool of Siloam’ (which is translated, Sent). So he went and washed, and came back seeing.”

Verses 1-2—“Who sinned, this man or his parents?”

- *This question of the disciples also brings us to the oft-asked question, “Why does God allow suffering?”*

- *“Who sinned, this man or his parents?” In other words, why is this man blind?*

C.S. Lewis wrote, “The problem of pain is atheism’s most potent weapon against the Christian faith.”

There are many who have turned against God because of a tragedy early in life.

Perhaps, **some of you did.**

Media mogul Ted Turner, founder of CNN, is a classic example of this.

As a young boy, **Ted intended to be a missionary**. But his **sister came down with lupus** and despite young **Ted's fervent prayers, she died**. *Turner has been mad at God ever since then, calling Christianity a "religion for losers" and much more.*

Turner could not reconcile a loving God and human suffering.

There might be some of you who feel you were dealt a **harsh hand** in the **game of life**. *Your parents divorced. A close loved-one died unexpectedly. You have a disability, or know someone else who does. You ask WHY?*

Our human intellect and notions of fairness reject the apparent contradiction between a loving God and a world of pain.

In the classic statement of the problem . . .

*Either **God is ALL-POWERFUL**, but not **ALL GOOD**—therefore **He DOESN'T stop evil**.*

*Or **He is ALL GOOD** but not **ALL-POWERFUL**—therefore **He CAN'T stop evil**.*

The general tendency is to **blame God for evil and suffering** and pass all of the **responsibility on to Him**.

The question that was being asked on this day was, *"Can our physical suffering on earth be the result of sin?"*

Jesus' answer was, "Neither this man or his parents sinned . . ."

That meant that in this case, there was no correlation between his condition and sin.

However, Jesus did not say, *"You've got it all wrong. Suffering is just a random event that has nothing to do with sin."*

Jesus only addressed the specifics of this particular case, in which there was no correlation.

In a broad sense, sickness, disabilities, even death are all the result of sin.

- *We must remember that **man was not created evil but perfect: unaging, innocent, never to die.***
- *He did have the ability to **choose right or wrong**, and our first parents made that choice.*

Had man never sinned, the curse of sin would not have come as a result.

Romans 5:12 (NIV): *"Therefore as **sin came into the world through one man** and death through sin, and so **death spread to all men** because all sinned."*

The point we must keep in mind is man, not God, is responsible for sin!

Some might ask, *"Why didn't God make man so he couldn't sin?"*

Because He has given us a **free will** to choose **good or evil, to do right or wrong**.

It seems it would be a **much better (and certainly safer)** world if **God did not allow us to exercise our free will.**

Free will is our greatest blessing and, in many ways, our worst curse.

- But if God did not give us **free will**, we would merely be **robots, pre-programmed.**
- **God wants to be loved and obeyed** by creatures who **voluntarily choose to do so.**
- **Love is not genuine if there is no other option.**

After the attack on the World Trade Center, the one question I was asked most was, “Why did God allow this?”

- Some even said, “This was the **judgment of God on America!**”
- For the record, I don’t **agree with that.**

Jesus told the story in Luke 13 about a tower that fell on a group of Gentiles and asked the rhetorical question, “Were they the worst sinners in Jerusalem?” His response was this: “No, I tell you again that unless you repent, you will also perish” (Luke 13:5 NLT).

So the issue Jesus was addressing was this: “Was it because these people were horrible sinners that this happened to them?”

- “No,” Jesus is saying. **“People die. Period.”**

The point Jesus was making was “You better be careful because you might die too. You are a sinner as well. It could happen to you.”

- The point is, “No, they’re not **ANY WORSE than you**”
- **It happened, and it could happen to you.**

Nobody’s exempt. It could happen to me.

It could happen to me. I could get hit by a car or die in a plane crash or die of cancer.

Or have a **tower fall on me.**

- **Everybody dies. There are no exceptions.**
- This does not mean **that God is unfair.** Death isn’t a sign of judgment. It just means **my time to leave this earth came.** And it will come to **everybody.**

The Bible says “**It is appointed unto a man to die once . . .** (Hebrews 9:27 NKJV).”

Some die young. Some die old. Some die slowly, and others quickly.

But everyone dies.

We just don’t want to deal with that.

But if you are a Christian, you have hope. You know you will go into the **Presence of the Lord.**

Nothing happened to those Gentiles in Luke 13 that isn't going to happen to everybody someday. But God, in his mercy, can also take the tragedies of life and use them.

There are **three ways** that suffering can work in our lives.

It can be corrective, constructive, or allowed to bring glory to God.

—Corrective Suffering

This is the idea that **God will allow or send some pain** in our lives to **get our attention.**

C.S. Lewis wrote, *“God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains. Pain is His megaphone to arouse a deaf world.”*

Though it was not the case in our story here of the blind man, sometimes **sickness can come as a direct result of your sin.**

When Jesus healed the paralytic man in Bethesda, He said, *“See you are well again; So stop sinning or something even worse may happen to you”* (John 5:14 NLT).

So yes, sickness can come as a result of our own personal sin. That very sickness can bring us to Jesus as it did with this man.

Many come to Christ because of unexpected sickness, tragedy, death of a loved one, or personal crises like divorce, or addiction to drugs or alcohol.

But God can also use sickness, etc., as a way to correct wayward children.

- **David said,** *“Your Rod and Your Staff, they comfort me”* (Psalm 23:4 NKJV).
- *To me, it is a great comfort to know that God loves me enough to correct me. It proves that I am His very Child.*
- *I really can't correct someone else's child, but I can and should correct mine!*

So maybe you are deliberately going astray (resisting His staff).

Maybe you're going out drinking, partying, and you get pulled over and hit with a DUI.

Perhaps you are lying and you get found out.

Or you are rebelling against God, and you get sick, or fired from work.

God may be using his megaphone to speak to a deaf person!

This is what happened to Jonah. God sent a storm to get his attention!

The Psalmist wrote, *“Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word”* (Psalm 119:67 NKJV).

So when sickness, suffering, tragedy, or hardship come, you should say, “Lord, are you trying to *tell me something*? Because if you are, I am all ears!”

Having gotten your **attention**, the Lord may indeed remove that suffering.

Or there may be another reason.

—CONSTRUCTIVE Suffering

This would be a time when God is trying to do a work in your life to produce a desired result.

2 Corinthians 4:17-18 (NLT): *“For our present troubles are quite small and won’t last very long. Yet they produce for us an immeasurably great glory that will last forever! So we **don’t look at the troubles** we can see right now; rather, we **look forward** to what we have not yet seen. For the troubles we see will soon be over, but **the joys to come will last forever.**”*

Paul spoke of this physical affliction, his “thorn in the flesh,” in 2 Corinthians 12:7-9:

“I have received wonderful revelations from God. But to keep me from **getting puffed up**, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and **keep me from getting proud**. Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time he said, “**My gracious favor is all you need**. My power works best in your weakness.” So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, **so that the power of Christ may work through me.**”

It was “constructive suffering”

—Finally, there is sickness and tragedy allowed to *Glorify God*.

It can be in the **endurance of that suffering**, as in the case of Paul or in the life of someone like Joni Erickson Tada or Corrie Ten Boom or Brian Birdwell.

But there are times when God will glorify Himself by removing that suffering.

Let’s go back to John 9 and reread verses 3-4 (NKJV):

*“Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned, But that the works of God **should be revealed in him** I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work.’”*

In other words, instead of dealing with how this man ended up blind, Jesus said He would glorify himself through it.

How? He would heal this man.

- **And BTW, God is still healing people today.**

There is a promise of healing in Isaiah.

Isaiah 53:4 (NIV): “Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was **pierced for our transgressions**, he was **crushed for our iniquities**; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and **by his wounds we are healed.**”

Peter, commenting on this same verse, wrote this:

1 Peter 2:24 (NIV): “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds **you have been healed.**”

The word “healed” Peter uses is a verb that always speaks of physical healing in the New Testament, and always in connection with physical ailments.

So it is clear that God can and, when it is in His will, heal us.

- So why are **some of us still sick?**
- One reason is a **simple lack of asking.**
- You have not because **you ask not** (see James 4:2).

Jesus chose to do a miracle in this man’s life.

In our next and last message in this series, we will deal with a few more questions and point out the **only real reason people do not come to Christ. They may **hide behind excuses**, but we will discover the **reason why they do that.****