

Where Was God?

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46)

In tragedy, such as the Virginia Tech massacre on the morning of April 16, 2007, among many responses, we hear the cry “Where was God?” I’m almost ashamed to tackle such a big question – one so much bigger than I and my limited experience. Yet, I think it is a question we *must* ask, one that every time tragedy occurs (Indonesian tsunami, Columbine, 9/11...) we *must* revisit. A question that should shake up our routines and send us searching. It is a question of suffering, and fundamentally a question of God. A question that should get us out of our tidy, neat Christianity, and comfortable platitudes.

Where was God?

When a deranged student walked into Norris Hall during class, chained the main doors for escape shut, and began to gun down students and faculty, where was God?

He was there. He was there hiding under desks with the students. He was there holding the victims as they died. He was there giving comfort and hope to the wounded. He was there with Professor Liviu Librescu as he held the door of his classroom shut while his students escaped out the window. He was there, giving peace to the desperate prayers being offered. He was there crying, weeping for the pain and the innocent suffering. He is the God of the poor, the widow, the suffering, the oppressed, the weak, and the martyr (Psalm 9:9, 103:6, Matthew 5:3-12).

Why did God allow it to happen?

If He was there why didn’t He stop it? Is our God too weak? Could He not have stopped it? [Didn’t Lazarus’ sisters ask the same question?] But our God, who created the heavens and the earth, and all that is in it (Acts 17:24-27) is not too weak.

But if He could have stopped it, why didn’t He? Who is this God we follow?

“Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. With that, one of Jesus’ companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. ‘Put your sword back in its place,’ Jesus said to him, ‘for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?’” (Matthew 26:50-53)

[Note: legion = ~4200-6200 soldiers]

“Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, ‘Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?’ But Jesus remained silent.” (Matthew 26:62-63)

“When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate asked him, ‘Don’t you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?’ But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the amazement of the governor.” (Matthew 27:12-14)

“But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified. Then the governor’s soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. ‘Hail, king of the Jews!’ they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again.” (Matthew 26:62-63)

“Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’ And they divided up this clothes by casting lots. The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, ‘He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.’ The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine and vinegar and said, ‘If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.’ ... One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: ‘Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!’” (Luke 23:32-37,39)

“About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’—which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.” (Matthew 27:46,50)

The crucifixion was the ultimate act of injustice, the only innocent human to walk on earth, God himself in human form, beaten, mocked, and killed. And He was God, with thousands of angels at his disposal. He was the God who performed miracle after miracle during his ministry. He could have stopped the suffering, the crucifixion, the shedding of innocent blood. But He didn't. Why?

Why doesn't Jesus resist evil? (Matthew 5:38, 5:43-48, Romans 12:17-21)

How is God's plan for humanity carried out? (Hebrews 2:9-10, 5:7-9, 10:14)

If redemption was carried out through suffering and sacrifice, what is God's call/plan for us? (II Corinthians 4:7-18)

Does that seem depressing? Unfair?

Where is the hope in this worldview? (Hebrews 11:1-12:11, I Corinthians 15:12-19 esp v.19, Romans 8:18-25)

Final Thoughts

I cannot help but think that God wants us to search, to journey after big questions and big truths, leading us ultimately to Him.

More Questions for Discussion

Is there a time in your life when you questioned God? (Where were you? Why did you let this happen to me?)

Do we have a God who needs to allow suffering in order to show His mercy, healing, restoration and forgiveness?

Does that seem a bit twisted?

Or are we a stubborn people who will not turn to God unless confronted with trials and suffering? A people who could not be happier doing without God, and going on our merry way?