



THE GOSPEL AND SEPTEMBER 11 **Job 2:1-10**

If you have His Word, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Job 2. And hopefully, when you came in tonight, you received those extra notes in addition to the normal worship guide. Over the last couple of months, knowing that September 11th was falling on a Sunday, I had thought about kind of adjusting where we were going to be in the text in 1 Timothy and coming aside to spend time thinking about how Scripture helps us understand an event like this. But then a few weeks ago, when Heather's mom passed away, we rearranged our schedule in 1 Timothy, and so I decided, "All right, we're probably just going to need to plow through 1 Timothy on this Sunday." So this last week I worked, studying 1 Timothy 3 and 4, preparing for that, turned in an outline for that that you see in your worship guide, late Thursday night. And then just Friday and Saturday was just freshly convicted with a sense that it would good for us to think through together from the Word how the gospel uniquely answers some of the questions that arise from events like September 11th and some of the thoughts and emotions that are associated with events like September 11th. And so, that's what I want to do tonight. We'll dive back into 1 Timothy next week and pick back up, but I want us to think tonight about the gospel and September 11th. And you can tell we've got a lot of ground to cover, so let's dive in.

What do we do when 19 terrorists, in the name of their religion, coordinate a series of four suicide attacks on two major cities, killing approximately 3,000 people in a matter of a couple of hours? What do you think when you watch people deliberately fly planes into buildings in order to kill others? When you watch on TV one of the deadliest attacks ever carried out in our country... How do you process that? And not just that event, though, even think broader than that. Broader than even our country. You consider evil and hatred that caused millions of Jews to be exterminated in a Holocaust. Or millions of Chinese to die under Chairman Mao. Or millions of Soviet Ukrainians to die under Stalin. For a million Hutus and Tutsis who were slaughtered in Rwanda. You see things like this in the world, and all of a sudden you start asking and others start asking some serious questions about God. Questions that we all have. The reality is, if we don't wrestle with some of these questions we're going to talk about tonight at some level, when we see evil like this in the world, we should be wrestling with them.

Two Historic (and Personal) Questions

Now it's interesting how our questions play out, particularly in the aftermath of something like September 11th. At first, we turn...many people turn to God. Right after September 11th there was a brief but clear increase in attendance in church. You had Congress gathering together in Washington to pray. You have people talking all the time about how our thoughts and prayers are with families of victims. So you've got people, in one sense, at least on the outside, turning to God, but in the other sense, on the inside, you have people asking real questions about whether or not God even exists and what kind of God allows

things like this to happen. And in the middle of tragic evil, we start to ask two historic and personal questions. Historic because these questions have been asked for centuries and personal because these questions strike deep at the core of who God is and who we are, for that matter.

Questioning God's Greatness: Can He Prevent Evil?

On one hand, people begin questioning God's greatness: can He prevent evil? Is God able to stop things like this from happening? Maybe this question... Vocalized really clearly in bestselling book years ago by Rabbi Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. He had lost his son tragically to death early in his life—and in his son's life—and his grief drove him to start questioning his entire faith. Though he was a rabbi, Kushner came to believe that God simply did not have power to prevent his son's death. He wrote and I quote, "I can worship a god who hates suffering but cannot eliminate it more easily than I can worship a god who chooses to make children suffer and die." And he basically said, "God is doing the best He can under the circumstances, but in the end, God lacks the power to change what happens in this life."

A similar idea promoted by a process and open theologians today who say that God hates evil but unfortunately does not have the power to do anything about it. He is limited. So that's one question about God's greatness. Can He prevent evil? But even that question is driven in a sense by another.

Questioning God's Goodness: Why does He Permit Evil?

Questioning God's goodness: why does He permit evil? In other words, if God has the power to prevent evil, then why doesn't He do it? If God had the power to stop these terrorist attacks, then why did He let them happen? A larger scale, why would a good God let millions of Jews or Chinese or Soviets or whoever be systematically killed as they were? And maybe on a smaller scale, why would a good God allow some of the horrible things that maybe you have experienced in your life? Why would a good God allow the abuse and the hurt and the pain that has happened to you if He is good?

These are questions that, like I said, go back centuries. It was Epicurus, fourth century philosopher, who made the famous statement, "Either God wants to abolish evil and cannot, or He can but does not want to. If He wants to but cannot, then He is impotent. If He can and does not want to, He is wicked. But if God both can and wants to abolish evil, then why do we have evil in the world?" That sums it up from the fourth century.

Now, I want to be really clear here from the beginning. I am not presuming to come on the stage of human history tonight with the answer to these age old questions, like you are lucky that you are here on this evening—that it will be solved. So that is not my... That is not my presumption tonight. At the same time, when it comes to these age old questions, I do want to show you four age old truths the Bible gives us to help us think through questions like these. Four truths that will lead us to action in a few different ways.

Four Biblical (and Universal) Truths

So let's start with the truths. Four biblical and universal truths. Job 2 is where I want us to start. Job 2:1-10. It's going to be kind of a foundation for us tonight. And then, we're going to be all over the rest of Scripture. And we're not going to have time to turn to all these other places. So maybe you got your pen ready and write down all these other places in Scripture that we're not going to have time to turn to tonight. But I want you to see this as

kind of a foundational example and some truths here that are reiterated all over Scripture. So let's start with Job 2:1. You remember in Job 1, Job experiences major suffering. Property gone. Children—all of his children die. As a result of a conversation between God and Satan... Which then leads to Job 2:1:

Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. And the LORD said to Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason." Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life."

So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. And he took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes.

Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die." But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips (Job 2:1-10).

Let me pray for us. God, we pray that you would indeed help us tonight to understand how good and how evil relate to you. We know that these are not just philosophical or theological questions, but these are real questions that strike at the core of who we are and who we understand you to be. And so we pray that your Spirit through your Word would transform our perspectives on these questions, especially on this day when we remember tragedy ten years ago. So we pray this with anticipation tonight. In Jesus' name, amen.

Evil is Tragically Real

Okay. Four truths. Biblical, universal truths. Truth number one: evil is tragically real. Evil is tragically real. That seems basic, almost too obvious to even need pointing out, but this is key. I want to show you from the very beginning, the Bible does not gloss over the tragic reality of evil. All over this book and even these first two chapters in Job, we see evil on a multiplicity of levels. We see natural evil—so like natural disasters: hurricanes, tornadoes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions. Sometimes these things bring catastrophic losses of life. Disease like cancer, AIDS. Natural evil would be evil that is not directly attributed to what one person does to another person. So you got natural evil and it's here in Job. Job 2—natural evil. Sores all over his body. In Job 1 you've got a strong wind that comes, brings a house crashing down on his children and all of his children die. Natural evil.

You also have moral evil. Moral evil would be the category where we would put crimes, wars, offenses, terrorist attacks, things that people do to one another. And you've got moral evil in Job 1. You got foreign armies who come and plundered Job's property and steal it away. So you've got here in just these two chapters, both pictures, and it's all over Scripture. And I want us to see that Scripture is not addressing these kind of questions in

some trite fashion, as if the world is not all that bad. Scripture is saying yes, there is tragic evil all over the world. Tragically real.

Now, it's worth noting at this point—this is a side note and what we're going to... At a couple of different points get pretty heady tonight, but follow with me because these are key truths. Sometimes when people see evil in the world, they start to say, "Well, if there's so much evil in the world then there's no way there could be a god." And people begin to question the existence of God based on the existence of evil. But what I want to show you... The reality is the existence of evil actually points us to the existence of God.

One of the classic proofs for understanding the existence of God is based on the differentiation between good and evil. Follow with me here: if evil exists, then good exists. And we know it. They both exist. Evil and good. We have both good and evil in the world. And if we realize there is both good and evil, then we would also realize there is a moral law, a transcendent basis for understanding things—some things to be good and some things to be evil. This whole sense of morality, right and wrong, good and evil, is in our hearts because God put it there. Romans 2:12-16 makes clear that across cultures, regardless of where they are on the planet, what knowledge they have of God's Word, all people have a law written on their hearts that helps them understand—identify—good and evil. Differentiate between good and evil. And that is there because a moral Law Giver (i.e. God) has put it there. If there is no God, then there is no transcendent basis for understanding good and evil. Everything is by random chance.

Keep going in your notes there. If God does not exist, then good and evil do not exist. So here's where... Let's play out practical atheism for a minute. If there is no God, there is no transcendent basis for understanding good and evil. We are simply products of chance. No rhyme, no reason, no ultimate meaning and no transcendent basis—definition—for what is good and evil. Listen to this quote from Richard Dawkins. So here's an avowed atheist from Oxford University speaking about practical atheism in chilling words. Listen to this. He says, "In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication," in other words, in a Godless universe, "some people are going to get hurt. Other people are going to get lucky. And you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is at the bottom no design, no purpose, no evil and no other good. There is nothing but blind, pitiless indifference. DNA neither knows nor cares. DNA just is and we dance to its music."

Do you hear how empty the atheistic worldview is here? It's as if he would say, "These terrorists who attacked these buildings on September 11th, killing these people, these terrorists were neither evil nor good, they were simply dancing to their DNA." No rhyme, reason, meaning, good, evil in that. The atheist does not have a basis—transcendent understanding—for differentiating between good and evil. Someone might be here tonight... You might be here tonight and say, "Well, I'm an atheist. I believe there is no God. And I believe in good and evil." Then I would just ask the follow up question, on what basis? On what basis do you have this law written on your heart that helps you understand good and evil? That transcends all cultures? It's not a cultural thing.

So, all this to say, some people begin to question God's very existence in light of evil in the world, when the reality is evil and good in the world actually are part of what help point us to the reality of God's existence. So God is real. He is there. And evil is also tragically real. It is there. So that's first truth.

God is Supremely Great

Second truth. Now we get in the truths about God. Second truth: God is supremely great. He is supremely great. Is God able to prevent evil? Does God have power and authority over evil? That's the question here. Or are we in like a Star Wars universe where there's good and evil and they're battling against one another in a kind of dualism? Neither one greater than the other. Or is God powerful over evil? Is God supreme over evil? We mention this question... People questioning God's greatness. So is God great? And Scripture resounds with one answer to that question. Absolutely God is great. God is supremely great. It's here in Job and it's all over Scripture.

I've just got a list of things here... This is where we're just going to start peppering off verses. Scripture makes clear that God is sovereign. Meaning, He has power and authority over evil nations and rulers. God has power and authority. He is sovereign over evil nations and rulers. Daniel 2:20-21. *"Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them..."* (NIV). He sets them up and deposes them. That's His power, His authority. Proverbs 21:1 says, *"The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will."* King's heart, in God's hand.

You look at Isaiah 37:23-29. God is speaking to the Assyrians, and He says, "You think you are indestructible. You think that you've won all these battles and conquered all these nations when the reality is I hold you in my hands and you can do nothing apart from my sustenance of you." God holds all nations and all rulers in His hands. Gaddafi—in His hands. Netanyahu—in His hands. Karzai—in His hands. Barak Obama—in God's hands. He holds them all, ultimately, in His hands. He is sovereign over nations and rulers, including the most evil of them.

Second, He is sovereign over the devil and demonic spirits. You notice here, in Job 2, that Satan is only able to do that which God gives him permission to do, right? So this is not in your notes but please remember, the power of Satan is limited by the prerogative of God. Don't forget that: power of Satan limited by the prerogative of God. Satan can only do that which is under God's sovereign power and authority. And we see this, not just in God with Satan, we see this with Christ. Remember Mark 5:6-10? One of many stories in the New Testament where we see demonic spirits bowing down before Christ, submitting to Christ. He says, "Go into a herd of pigs." They go into a herd of pigs. He speaks; they obey. He has authority—power—over them. So God is sovereign over the devil and demonic spirits.

Third, He is sovereign over trials and temptations. First Corinthians 10:13 says that God is able to keep you from being tempted beyond what you can bear. So the trials that come your way—the temptations that come your way just like with Job—our temptations and trials exist under the authority and power of God. And it's not just Job. Remember in Luke 22 when Jesus says to Simon Peter? "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat." He's asked for permission, "But I've prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail." Don't miss this. Satan is not sovereign over the trials and temptations of Job. Satan is not sovereign over the trials and temptations of Peter. And Satan is not sovereign over the trials and temptations of your life. God is sovereign over the trials and temptations that you face in your life.

He is sovereign over suffering and persecution. One of my favorite parts of Acts 4 is verse 24 when the early church is experiencing persecution. In Acts 4:24 says they came together and prayed and the first words out of their mouth: they said, "Sovereign Lord." The word is literally *despot*. Saying, to the one—they're surrounded by people who are persecuting

them, coming at them, and he says, "You reign"—they say, "You reign over them all." He is sovereign over suffering and persecution.

He is sovereign over moral atrocities and natural disasters. Moral evil. Natural evil. He is sovereign over them both. We see that here in Job 1 and 2. You go later. You might write down Job 37:10-14. This is one powerful image. Listen to this. Job 37:10-14. Listen to the Book of Job describe God's authority over the weather, specifically storms, *"The breath of God produces ice, and the broad waters become frozen. He loads the clouds with moisture; he scatters his lightning through them. At his direction they swirl around over the face of the whole earth to do whatever he commands them. He brings the clouds to punish men, or to water his earth and show his love. Listen to this, Job; stop and consider God's wonders"* (Job 37:10-14).

Oh, what a text! What a picture! That'll change the way you watch The Weather Channel. You see radar—these clouds going all over the map—you realize God is controlling the weather. This is not just natural stuff that's happening on there. This is supernatural activity. This is God loading the clouds with moisture, directing them over the face of the earth to do whatever He commands them. God, not Satan, is the ruler of the wind and the waves.

And ultimately, God is sovereign over disease and death. Obviously, in healing passages both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, Jesus would heal people of disease and sickness, show His power and authority. Acts 10:38 says, *"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil..."* showing—asserting His power—over those who were under the power of the devil. So God is sovereign over disease. God is sovereign over cancer, not Satan. Satan is not sovereign over cancer. Satan is not sovereign over disease, God is.

And God is ultimately sovereign over death. Remember Deuteronomy 32:39. God says, *"...there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive..."* Scripture is clear. If the Lord wills, we will live and if He doesn't, we will die. You have breath at this moment because the Lord wills that you have breath. And there is coming a day when you and I may not have breath. And it'll be because the Lord wills. Satan will not make that call. God will make that call. Ultimately our lives are in His hands, not in Satan's hands.

So you see the testimony of Scripture. It is clear. God is supremely great. You cannot believe God's Word and disbelieve God's power and authority, His sovereign reign and rule over all things. He is supremely great. So go back to the question we talked about earlier. Let's answer it. Is God great? Can God prevent evil? What's the answer? Yes, absolutely. He is sovereign over all evil. That's why Job says, *"Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?"* God is sovereign over both. He has authority over both.

God is Absolutely Good

Now this leads to the second question. Is God good? And Scripture is just as clear on the answer to that question. God is absolutely good. Now, how can God be good and at the same time, to use Job's words, we receive evil from His hand? Think about this. I want you to think about how God relates to sin and evil and good in Scripture. Keep plowing through with me here. I know it's heavy truths. It's going to lead us to massive conclusions for our lives.

God relates to sin in many ways in Scripture. At times, we see that God prevents sin. There are passages in the Bible where God stops sin from happening, keeps sin from happening. Genesis 20:6. God tells Abimelek—He says, *"...it was I who kept you from sinning against*

me." The psalmist prays in Psalm 19:13, "Keep your servant from willful sins." It's a prayer for God to prevent sin and God does that. 1 Corinthians 10:13, we talked about earlier, says that God provides a way out from under sin. So, Scripture talks about how He prevents sin.

At the same time, there are moments in Scripture where we see that God permits sin. The way this is often used, the language of Scripture, is that God gives people over to their sin. So you've got Psalm 81:11 where God says, "*My people would not listen to me; Israel would not submit to me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices.*" Permits it and He gives them over to themselves. Romans 1:24, "*Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity...*" God gave them over to a depraved mind. It ought not to be done. God gave them over to shameful lusts. It is a frightening thing when God gives sinful people what they want. When He gives sinful people over to themselves. It's frightening verses. So He permits sin in that way.

At the same time, God also limits sin. Obviously, even here in Job 1 and 2, He's limiting evil, putting a limit on what the devil and his demons can do and can't do to Job. And then, God uses sin. Meaning that, there is a very real sense in which God uses sin to bring about good. Classic example: Genesis 50:19-20, right? Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery. Sin. And you get to the very end of Genesis. Genesis 50:19 Joseph says to his brothers, "*You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*" God intended temporary sin for ultimate good. And in some sense, even ordained this to save many lives.

Now we have to be really careful here. All of this... To realize... Follow this. That God never sins. He never directly causes sin and is never blamed for sin in Scripture. Never. And so that means... That's clear all over Scripture, but it's probably summarized best in James 1:13, "*When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone...*" This is huge. Though God is sovereign over even evil deeds, Scripture nowhere shows God as directly doing anything evil. We're going to unpack that in a second. But just don't miss this. The character of God is never, ever, ever stained by evil in any way. That's why I say He's absolutely good. He is holy, always holy. Even when He is using sin, He is holy.

John Calvin put it this way: "God so uses the works of the ungodly and so bends their minds to carry out His judgment, that He remains pure from every stain." This is key because if we're not careful at this point, we can fall off the threshold of Scripture really, really, really quickly. If we say that God Himself is evil, then obviously we deny His goodness and His holiness and His righteousness that are perfectly displayed all over Scripture. At the same time, if we say that God is so removed from evil that He's not in control of it, then we would be saying that there is evil in the universe that is not under His control and in this way, God doesn't have all power and authority and so, His purposes may or may not be fulfilled. So we know we don't want to go there or here. So we want to be careful here.

And that leaves us to think through how do we understand God's relationship to both good and evil. Okay? Keep going with me. We're about to get to the beauty of the gospel. Just keep going with me. Scripture is clear that God relates to good and evil in different ways. When it comes to good, as we've seen, everything that's good is under His sovereignty. Psalm 107 is a great example of that. A whole psalm, but particularly verse one. Ezekiel 33:11 even talks about how God doesn't take pleasure in the death of the wicked but He calls people to renounce evil. He doesn't take pleasure in death of the wicked and evil because He is good. Everything that is good is under His sovereignty and everything that is good is morally attributed to Him. He is the source of everything that is good. James 1:17, "*Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly*

lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." Everything that's good is morally attributed to Him, not us. Us, on the other hand, Romans 3:10-12, *"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."*

Not one of us. That pretty much covers it. No one who does good, not even one. So when we see good, that is attributed to God. Everything that's good comes from God. You say, "Well, don't even evil people do good things every once in a while?" Yes, but those good things are evidence, clear evidence, of God's goodness to them, in them, through them, attributed to God. We're secondary agents in this thing. God is the primary agent in everything that is good. So everything that is good is under His sovereignty and is morally attributed to Him.

On the other hand, evil... Well, first of all, just a reminder, everything that's evil is under His sovereignty. We just talked about that. So Job says, *"Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?"* So we know it's under His sovereignty. But while everything that is evil is under His sovereignty, nothing that is evil is morally attributed to Him. Meaning very simply that Scripture never charges God with evil. This is evident right here in Job. Look at Job 2:10. It's the last verse we read. Right after Job says, *"Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?"* Listen to what it says: *"In all this Job did not sin with his lips."* So it was not sinful to say, *"Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?"* So it's not sinful to acknowledge, Yes, He has sovereignty over good and evil". Authority over good and evil.

And yet, you go back one chapter. Go back to the end of Job 1:20. This is right after Job has found out that all of his children are dead. *"Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. And he said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD'"* (Job 1:20-21). See sovereignty there? The Lord gave; Lord takes away. The Lord did it all. Even the worse things that just happened, the Lord has done this. Verse 22. *"In all this Job did not sin or charge God with..."* what? This is the audience participation part of our program. Job did not sin or charge God with *"wrong."* He didn't charge God with wrong. He acknowledged evil was under the sovereignty of God but he confessed that it did not impugn the goodness of God. He's not attributing—crediting—evil to God. And this is all over Scripture: evil existing under His sovereignty, being charged not to God, attributed not to God, but to... Not to the Creator but to creatures, to men, women, fallen angels, attributed with evil. Summarized maybe at best in Isaiah 66:4 where God says, *"...They did evil in my sight and chose what displeases me."* That's key. They did this. Morally attributed to them.

Now, you might start to think at this point, "That's just not fair that I'm charged with evil when God is sovereign over evil and He gets credit for all good." But don't miss it. Now we're getting to the core of the gospel, right? We are evil. We're sinful at the core of who we are. Genesis 8:21 says, *"...every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood."* We read Romans 3:12, *"There is no one righteous, not even one..."* Not one.

So here's the picture we have in Scripture. God is sovereign over all sin. He's absolutely sovereign over sin. At the same time, we are responsible for sin. Now, there's mystery here. There's clear mystery. How does this work? How can God be in control of everything I do and at the same time, I be making choices? God in control; I make choices. Real choices with real responsibility and real consequences. There's mystery how that comes together,

but both are there in Scripture. God absolutely, utterly sovereign. Man completely, totally responsible.

So, was God sovereign over what was happening when planes were flown into the World Trade Center? Absolutely He was sovereign. At the same time, 19 terrorists and the entire network of terrorists behind them were responsible. Both-and. Evil, real. God, great. And God, good. All three in one.

And you say, "Well, where does that leave us? Is there any hope here?" And this is where... Okay now, see it. This is where the gospel strikes at the core, the heart of these questions that we ask in light of September 11th. Evil, tragically real. God, supremely great, absolutely good.

The Cross is Shockingly Glorious

Fourth truth: the cross is shockingly glorious. Oh, I want you to see how all of these truths intersect. They just collide. In a shockingly, glorious way at the cross. Tragic evil, great God, good God. They're all there. The implications are huge. You think about this. Look at the cross. You see the cross, and as you do, see the goodness of God. He is present amidst evil. Oh, the wonder of this! God Himself enters an evil, sin-sick world and lives among evil, sin-sick people. People who reject Him, who reject Christ, God in the flesh, and nail Him to a cross in the most despicable act of evil in all of human history. Taking the Creator in the flesh and crucifying Him. And God Himself in His Son takes all the payment and the punishment due sin and evil in your life and in my life upon Himself. That's shocking. Where else in any religious system is it even thought of, of a creator, who is all good, taking upon Himself the payment due evil creatures? That's love. That's mercy. That's goodness.

Turn over here to Acts 2. Let me show you this to you. Acts 2. Let me show you this collision. Acts 2:22. Okay? I want to show you how all of this comes together. God's greatness, God's goodness, tragic evil, God's sovereignty, our responsibility, God's relationship to good and God's relationship to evil. I want you to see them all collide right here. Acts 2:22. Peter is preaching at Pentecost, the first Christian sermon. Listen to what he says. *"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—[Listen to verse 23]—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men"* (Acts 2:22-23). This statement makes clear (and you've got this in your notes) God has ordained the murder of His Son to be the means of our salvation.

Now I want you to think about that statement, what we just read, and then this statement. I want you to see the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man in the crucifixion of Christ—in the murder of Christ. Is God sovereign over Christ's murder? Yes. Greatest act of evil, worst act of evil in all of human history. God sovereign over it. God is not just allowing this, God plans this. He ordains this. God doesn't just permit murder here, He plans murder. And He sovereignly brings it about. God, sovereign. But who is responsible? Verse 23, "you crucified and you killed him," Peter says. Both true: God, sovereign— man, responsible. Sinful men chose to crucify Christ under the sovereign plan of God. Mystery, right?

And God planned it this way for the salvation of sinful men. Think about this, okay? Just let this soak in. Think about this. The very people who are crucifying Christ in their sin, the very people who are crucifying Christ are providing for their own salvation. Ha! You put that together. Little did they know that in the murder of Christ, they were providing the means of their own salvation. What a wonder. That's why I say "shockingly glorious." That God is

present amidst evil. That Christ takes the payment due sin and evil upon Himself. That's love. That's goodness.

But don't stop there. See greatness. He's not only present amidst evil, good; He's also great. He is victorious over evil. Verse 24 says, "*God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.*" Yes. Jesus overcomes the price of sin through the power of resurrection. 1 Corinthians 15, Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting? "*The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Cor. 15:55-56). Don't miss it. God has taken the very worst thing that has ever happened in the history of the world—the death of His Son—God has taken the very worst thing that has ever happened in the history of the world and He has turned it into the very best thing that has ever happened in the history of the world because He is great and He is good. And He is present amidst evil and victorious over evil. Evil is real, but God is good and God is great.

Three Practical (and Inevitable) Conclusions

Now this leads us to three practical and inevitable conclusions when we think about September 11th. These are three conclusions that I pray will resound in your heart and your mind when you watch news specials, when you read news stories, when you talk about September 11th, when you think about September 11th, all the questions about God in our lives and the world that come with tragedies like this, let these three conclusions just dominate your thinking and your speaking and your living.

Our Gospel is True

Number one, our gospel is true. Now that word is key—true. And I use that word intentionally here in light of the relationship between Islam, specifically, and this gospel. And I want to be really careful to in no way contribute to the ideas that these terrorists who attacked our country represent all of Islam. That is decidedly not true. And we need to be careful not to associate all Muslims with terrorists. That is grossly inaccurate and unjust. If you think Muslim... When you think Muslim you think terrorist, then there's work that needs to be done in your heart and your mind.

At the same time, I do want to point out that what we've just seen in the gospel, in God's Word, is diametrically different from what Islam teaches. And Christianity and Islam cannot both be true. We live in a world that would say, "Well, they're both religions and they both have the truth." But that is not the case. Now, at this moment, I'm not even trying to persuade you which one is true or which one is not, I'm just saying they both can't be true. Christianity says that Jesus is God in the flesh. Islam categorically denies Jesus is God in the flesh. Christianity says that Jesus died on a cross. Islam says Jesus definitely didn't die on the cross. Christianity says Jesus rose from the grave. Islam says Jesus did not rise from the grave.

So I'm not saying decide which one is true. I'm just saying, realize they're not both true. Either He died or He didn't die. Either He rose from the grave or He didn't rise from the grave. The very idea that, "Well, all religions... These two major religions in the world, they're fundamentally the same, just superficially different" is wrong. Both of these espousing (over a billion adherents apiece)... Both of these cannot be true.

And this is really key here because, if Jesus is not God, if Jesus did not die on a cross and if Jesus did not rise from the grave, then we are fools in this room. To be pitied, 1 Corinthians 15 says, to be pitied among men. World—feel sorry for us. We've based our lives on a lie.

On the other hand, if Jesus is God, and if He did die on the cross, and if He did rise from the grave, then this changes everything. If this gospel is true—which obviously this Word is saying it is—then Jesus deserves our praise. Not just our praise, but the praise of all peoples everywhere. And He not only deserves our praise but Jesus demands our lives. We are decidedly not in a religious game here. In this room where we practice our religion by going to church on Sundays and participating in Christian traditions and customs, Jesus does not call us merely to church attendance or nominal adherence. Jesus calls us to total abandonment. This is big. This is very big. People look at what happened on September 11th and they say, "Well, that's what happens when people get too zealous about their religion. You shouldn't get too carried away with what you believe about religion. It's dangerous to do that." And it's not just the culture that thinks this way. It's people in the church that think this way. We think, "We need to make sure not to get too extreme in our belief in Jesus."

Ladies and gentlemen, extreme is the only option for those who believe in Jesus. If your desire is a casual, nominal, comfortable, easy religion then stay far away from Jesus, because He calls you to radical sacrifice and complete surrender of all that you are and all that you have to His purposes. And you cannot follow Jesus and not be extreme—zealous. Not an option for followers of Jesus. Not if this gospel is true. Not if He died on the cross and rose from the grave. He deserves all our praise and He demands all our lives, which leads to a second conclusion.

Our Mission is Urgent

Our mission is urgent. If this gospel is true, and there are billions of people in the world who don't know it, if there are over a billion Muslims in the world who don't know it, who are believing a lie, if there are over a billion and half people who have never even heard this gospel in the world, most of whom are Muslim people groups, if these things are true, then we don't have time to waste. We don't have time to waste our lives living out a nice, comfortable Christian... Spending the American dream in Birmingham. We have a mission to accomplish, brothers and sisters. Church at Brook Hills, don't grow cold. Don't grow numb. Resist the temptation at every turn to shrink back into Christian materialism and church consumerism where everything revolves around your priorities and your preferences and your comforts and what you would most like for you and your family to be safe. No, we are surrendered to something much, much greater than that.

We want this gospel to go to the ends of the earth. And we need to act swiftly. People are perishing today for all of eternity. Yes, ten years ago, 3,000 people died on one day on September 11th. It was tragic. Yet, 150,000 people will die today in the world, the majority of whom, if this gospel is true (which it is), the majority of whom will go to hell. And many of them are in places that have never even heard this gospel. And most of those places are opposed to us spreading the gospel to them.

So we need to act swiftly and we want to love sacrificially. Key word: love. The sacrifice love. Don't miss it. This is the difference between the kind of godly zeal that we're talking about and the kind of demonic zeal that drove terrorists into the World Trade Center. We act zealously not because we hate but because we love. That in our hearts we are not opposed to Muslims, or anybody else for that matter... That we desire their salvation and we are willing to give our lives so they know His love...

And give our lives is not dramatic overstatement. It's true. It will involve our lives whether it's physically, emotionally, financially, relationally, it will be costly if we want to spread the gospel in the world. It will be particularly costly if we want to spread the gospel to the Muslim world. I heard of one brother who was living in the heart of the Muslim world in Central Asia on September 11th and he said, "People started wondering if we should leave because it was dangerous for us to stay." And he responded, "It wasn't safe for us to come in the first place. We're not here because it's safe. We're here because we've been commanded to go, regardless of safety."

So may God bless this church for the spread of the gospel in Birmingham and the spread of the gospel across the world, particularly the Muslim world. May God raise up men and women, singles and families who will take the risk and pay the price. May God turn our lives upside down. May He reorient our budgets and our plans and our priorities and our dreams and our ambitions and the way we raise our kids all around the urgency of this mission, knowing that it will be costly but in the end it will be worth it.

Our Hope is Sure

It will be worth it because we know, keep going, we know that our hope is sure. We know that our hope is sure. We don't have time to turn there. We end up there a lot anyway. You know what it is. Revelation 21 and 22. Amidst all the evil in the world and the frailty of our lives, we know that no matter what happens to us in this world, there is coming a day when we will forever worship God in His greatness. We will behold... He is supremely great and we'll see it. And we will forever enjoy God in His goodness. We will see His goodness face to face. We will know His goodness in intimacy. And there is coming a day when Christ will return and establish His Kingdom and we will be with Him and He will be with us and we will never experience evil again. So lay down your lives and your families and your finances and everything you have to make this gospel known to the ends of the earth so that every nation, tribe, tongue and people experiences that hope.

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