

Tears at the Tomb – John 20

I love hearing y'all sing "It Is Well With My Soul". What a great song and you were really singing it. It made me believe that you believed what you were singing. Did you? The very first words of that song are, *When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,*

Can you just picture that kind of peace? Can you see a big, lazy river with green grass on both sides and maybe a young kid with a fishing pole? Ahh...so peaceful. Don't you wish we could just stay right there for a while? But then that very next sentence says, *When sorrows like sea billows roll;*

Some of you can relate to that better than a lazy river. Your troubles and trials and sorrows are overwhelming you like the waves of the ocean, one after the other with no land or safety in sight. And yet look at what the author says next:

*Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,  
It is well, it is well with my soul.*

Can you honestly say that? Can you honestly sing to God that whatever happens to you, in whatever state you find yourself, no matter how difficult, you have peace? You say, "Preacher, it's just a song. Nobody can do that!" Some of you may have heard the story behind the words to that song. It was written by Horatio G. Spafford. Spafford was a successful lawyer around Chicago in the 1870's. He had a thriving law business, a wife, four beautiful daughters and a young son.

Tragically, in 1871, their son died and the family was greatly grieved. It was a horrible loss. Then the Chicago fire consumed most of all their possessions. Not long after, Mr. Spafford decided to take his family on vacation to Europe where his friend D.L. Moody was preaching a revival. Due to some last-minute business, Spafford had to send his family on ahead to Europe without him. Midway across the Atlantic the steamship the family was on collided with another ship and was sunk killing all four of Spafford's girls. His wife was the only one saved.

Spafford then sailed to England, going over the exact location of his daughters' deaths and it was on that ship that he penned the words to the song, "It Is Well With My Soul". I can't comprehend going through that kind of tragedy but I can picture him on the side of the

boat going across the water watching the waves crashing all around him and feeling the words, *"When sorrows like sea billows roll."*

What would your song be at that moment? Would it be similar to Spafford's; words that would encourage others from a hymnal for 150 years after you die? Or would they be words of bitterness not suitable for anybody to hear? How do you get peace like Spafford had? How do you get to that point in your life that you can honestly sing to God, "It Is Well With My Soul"? Do you have to have a peaceful life to have peace? Do you have to live a life free of problems?

A woman was walking along the beach when she stumbled upon a **Genie's lamp**. She picked it up and rubbed it, and lo-and-behold a Genie appeared. The amazed woman asked if she was going to receive the usual three wishes. The Genie said, *"Nope ... due to inflation, constant downsizing, low wages in third-world countries, and fierce global competition, I can only grant you one wish. So ... what will it be?"* The woman didn't hesitate. She said, *"I want peace in the Middle East. See this map? I want these countries to stop fighting with each other."* The Genie looked at the map and exclaimed, *"Good grief, lady! These countries have been at war for thousands of years. I'm good, but not THAT good! I don't think it can be done. Make another wish."* The woman thought for a minute and said, *"Well, I've never been able to find the right man. You know, one that's considerate and fun, likes to cook and helps with the housecleaning, who also gets along with my family, doesn't watch sports all the time, and is faithful. That's what I wish for ... a great mate."* The Genie let out a long sigh and said, **"Let me see that stinking map lady!"**

Just like the Middle East, you are always going to have problems. Everybody has problems. The best of people and the worst of people have problems that are similar. The question is: How do we have peace in a world that knows no peace? I know you came here this morning expecting to hear about how Jesus was killed on a cross, buried in a tomb and rose again on the third day and lives today in Heaven and in our hearts. That's what Easter is about, right?

Well, I promise I will get there but I'm going to start all the way back in the book of Genesis. Let's look briefly at what happened to Joseph in the Old Testament. You remember Joseph. He was one of twelve sons of Jacob and was Jacob's favorite son. So, he got the designer jacket to wear to show all the brothers he was the favorite. We now know that did not set well with the other brothers and in **Genesis 37** it says that Joseph went looking for his brothers who were tending sheep and they saw him coming.

In **verse 19** the brothers say, *“Here comes that dreamer! Come now, let’s kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we will see what happens to his dreams.”* Thankfully, they decided instead to just sell him to some vendors heading to Egypt. But it gets way worse. He spent years in prison in Egypt and was lied about and forgotten and abused.

Let me ask you a question. Was that fair to Joseph. I mean, yea, he was kind of bragging about being the favorite and he was kind of immature, but did he deserve that? Also, we now know that he wound up becoming second in command there in Egypt and ultimately saved the lives of his whole family. So, did that mean it was okay with Joseph what his brothers did to him? Did that make it okay? Did that mean it didn’t hurt? Just think about that for a minute.

As you do, consider the Jewish people who were enslaved by the Egyptians after that. In **Exodus 1** it says, *“Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died,<sup>7</sup> but the Israelites were exceedingly fruitful; they multiplied greatly, increased in numbers and became so numerous that the land was filled with them.<sup>8</sup> Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt.<sup>9</sup> “Look,” he said to his people, “the Israelites have become far too numerous for us.” So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and worked them ruthlessly.<sup>14</sup> They made their lives bitter with harsh labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their harsh labor the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly.*

Of course, we now know that after about 430 years the pharaoh let the people go and they walked across the Red Sea on dry land and they still celebrate all that even today. So, does that make up for 430 years of slavery? Does that make it okay? Does that mean it was no big deal?

Let’s move on to the book of Ruth. Aw, Ruth! You ladies love the book of Ruth, don’t you? It’s so romantic! That hunky Boaz becomes Ruth’s kinsman-redeemer and makes her his wife. What a great story! But remember where the story began. It began with Ruth’s first husband dying and she is left with her mother-in-law and not much else. So, does the ending of the book mean the beginning didn’t hurt? Ruth probably deserved it anyway, right?

I’m going to ask you to consider one more. And I’m breaking out the big guns with this. Consider Job, or, as God called him, “my servant Job.” You know the story of Job. He did nothing wrong and lost everything including his ten children and all his wealth and left with

nothing but a nagging old wife, sores all over his body and some friends who had good intentions but didn't help a single thing for ol' Job.

Again, we know that after 42 agonizing chapters, Job is restored and given back twice of everything he had so...again I ask...does that mean that everything that happened to him was okay with Job? Did Job say, *“Oh, God, that’s okay. It was no big deal. It didn’t hurt much. I don’t even remember those kids.”?*

I am going to make the case that if we can learn the lesson that Job learned that we can have peace with God through His Son Jesus and peace in this life even when the waves of sorrow overwhelm us. I'm also going to ask you to make a decision based on what you hear this morning from Joseph to the Jews to Ruth to Job all the way to the empty tomb.

Have you ever wanted to ask God a question? Have you ever wondered why something happened to you and just wished you can ask God why and then know you heard from Him? Maybe you want to know why bad things happen to good people or at least why they happen to you.

But this week I want to ask you a question. It is a question that is answered plainly in the book of Job and other scriptures but I believe if we can answer this question it will literally change everything! It will either change everything for all of us here or it will just change everything for me because if I don't make the case you will probably fire me for heresy.

So, here goes. My question is: was it God's will that Joseph, the Jewish people, Ruth, Job...and you suffer? I'll even go a step further and ask: Did God cause that suffering? Do you understand the implications of my questions? I'm asking if all-loving God causes bad things and if so, how can we still call Him all-loving?

Now, I know what most of you are going to say. It is the same thing I was taught in Sunday School since I was a little kid. God *causes* **good** things and *allows* **bad** things, right? Well, is God sovereign? Of course He is and if God is sovereign then that means He is in control of everything. If God is in control of everything, then to say He causes some things and allows others is simply a play in semantics so that...we don't hurt God's feelings.

Well, I don't believe that should be a problem here. I don't believe it because I believe God is okay taking credit and / or blame for whatever is going on. In fact, I think He wants you to know it. Turn in your Bibles to **Isaiah 45:6-7**. I think it's important for you to see this and not just take my word for it. **Isaiah 45:6-7** says, *“That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun That there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no*

other, *The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these.*”

Does that sound like somebody who is going to get their feelings hurt if they are blamed for something? No! In fact, I believe it is somebody that wants you to know He is the cause and I believe Job understood that. I don't know if the others did or not but I want you to understand it too. If you turned to the Book of Job and read **verses 20 and 21** it describes what happened after Job learned he had lost everything he owned including his kids. *At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship<sup>21</sup> and said: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. **The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.**”*

The very first thing Job did was worship God and he did it while admitting that it was God that caused it. God gave...and God took away. He didn't say Satan took it away. He didn't say it was karma or bad luck or even that God allowed it to be taken away. God took it away and Job was ok with that. In fact, that word used here and translated worship means to worship truly and in great peace. Job had peace! He truly worshiped. He wasn't just going through the motions and he had peace while he was doing it. He knew God caused his pain and even scolds his wife in the next chapter when she tells him to give up. He says in **2:10**, *“Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?”* How do we get to that point in our own lives where we can accept bad things from God in peace? Todd, how do I do that?

Well, let's fast-forward maybe as much as 2000 years after Job and let's see Mary Magdalene at the tomb in **John chapter 20 verses 10-16**. This is the worst day of Mary's life. She has just seen not only her friend but her Savior die a cruel death on a cross. She watched as all her hopes and dreams died. Maybe you can relate to the feelings she is going through right now. But not only all that but now she gets to the tomb of Jesus to anoint His body with spices and now His body is even gone.

How could God be so cruel? Mary didn't do anything to deserve this. She had been obedient. She had been loving and kind. She was just doing what she knew to do. But this is just too much. Let's read it in **John 20:10-16**.

*Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.<sup>11</sup> Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb<sup>12</sup> and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.<sup>13</sup> They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?” “They have taken my Lord away,” she*

said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.”<sup>14</sup> At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.<sup>15</sup> He asked her, “*Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?*” Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”<sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, “*Mary.*” She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “*Rabboni!*” (which means “Teacher”).

So...was it God’s will that Mary – an innocent woman – have such grief? Did God cause the grief? Well, let’s look at it this way. Was it God’s will that Jesus die on the cross? Of course it was. Paul says in **2 Corinthians 5:21**, “*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*” God did it. It was His idea before the dawn of time that Jesus would leave Heaven, go to earth and die on the cross to pay for our sins and then rise again on the third day.

So, was it God’s will that Job suffer? Yes. Did God cause his suffering? Yes. He used Satan as a tool to do it but ultimately God caused it for Job’s sake and for the sake of God’s Kingdom. In fact, at the end of the book of Job it says in **Job 42:10-11**, “**10** *After Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before. 11 All his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him before came and ate with him in his house. They comforted and consoled him over **all the trouble the LORD had brought upon him**, and each one gave him a piece of silver and a gold ring.*”

Now, I know what some of you are thinking at this point. If you are a thinking person you may be thinking that this doesn’t explain how sin plays a part. God gives us free will and for that we are grateful. But does this mean that it is God’s will that we sin when it is sin that leads to suffering? Joseph’s brothers sinned when they threw him in the cistern. The Egyptians sinned when they enslaved the Jews. The people that stole Job’s cattle and sheep sinned when they did that. The people who crucified Jesus sinned when they did that. So, was it God’s will that those people sin? Of course not.

I wish I could explain how God – who hates sin and it is most definitely not His will that we sin – can yet use sin and the consequences of it to facilitate His perfect will being done. I can’t explain that. I do know that God sees our lives from beginning to end and He knows how things are going to happen before they ever do. David wrote in **Psalms 139:16**, “*all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.*”

So, God gives us free will and allows us to sin if we choose to. He doesn't want us to sin. That would go against His perfect nature and yet when we do, He is able to use that to accomplish His perfect will. Wow! I wish I could explain that. You know what? No, I don't wish I could explain that. In fact, if I could explain that; if I could explain what Plato and Aristotle never could; if I could explain how God does that then He wouldn't be much of a God, would He? If Todd can understand and explain God then God is no smarter than Todd. And that's scary.

But **Isaiah 55** says, *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. 9"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts...."*

Do you know what? I'm ok with that. In fact, it brings me great peace. Do you know why I'm ok with that? Do you know why Job was ok with that and why Mary was and Jesus was and Paul and David and so many others were ok with that? It's ok because God is love. **1 John 4:8** says, *"Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."* John 3:16 says, *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."* Was it God's will that Jesus die on the cross? Yes.

Was that fair to Jesus? No. Did Jesus deserve that? No. Because it was God's will, did that keep it from hurting Jesus? No. Job never said it didn't hurt or that it was ok because he deserved it. Neither did Joseph or Mary Magdalene. It was ok because God is love. **Romans 5:8** says, *"but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* So, if God is love and we know He would never do anything just to hurt us or just to be mean, then we know that all things – even the bad things - work together for our good as it says in **Romans 8**.

So, fast forward another 2000 years or so. Here you sit in Christ Fellowship wondering what you have to do to have the kind of peace that Horatio Spafford wrote about; the kind of peace that says, *"Even when the sorrows like sea billows roll, I can trust Him."* Even when, like Joseph, your family turns on you, like Ruth, your family dies, like Job, you lose everything you have; even when a child dies, the doctor gives bad news, you lose your wife, your job, your church and your friends, even though you can't understand it, it's not fair, you don't deserve it and you wouldn't wish it on your worst enemy...still you have peace.

Todd, what do I have to do to get that? I'm going to tell you and then I'm going to ask you to do it right here and right now. You first have to repent of your sins. Sin is anything that displeases God and the word repent means to turn away from that. When I was a kid and a new driver I drove downtown one night and went down a street the wrong way. When I realized it, I quickly turned around and went the other way. That is repentance. Turn away from your sin and go the way God wants you to.

**\*Music\***

Secondly, you put your faith and trust in the crucified and risen Jesus Christ truly believing that what He did on the cross was enough to pay the price you couldn't pay for your sins. Thirdly, you must commit your life to being obedient to God including confessing Him publicly and living biblically the best that you know how. Don't wait another minute. Do it now as the music plays.