

Talk 7 : How can I resist evil?

Evil and Personal Responsibility

In the early part of the 20th century, there was some correspondence in *The Times* about the state of the world and the mess it was in. Each writer offered his pet theory for the ills of the world.

Then the Editor published a very short letter that cut through the theories:

Dear Sir,

I am,

Yours faithfully,
GK Chesterton.

The Christian analysis of evil in the world is that most of it arises from the human heart. Let's face it: if people were less selfish, more truthful, more caring and less greedy the world would be a better place. But we're not like that!

We can resist evil by a dose of honesty and practical responsibility!

Evil and Social Structures

But evil is a bit more than just me and my bad temper or me and my little white lies, or my competitive ruthlessness. Evil can shape societies and become embedded in the structures of society.

Some of us are not angry enough about the things that really matter. We squander the God-given energy of anger on traffic jams, and watch impassively while millions die of war or starvation.

How do we resist the evil of our own apathy to the real evils of the world?

Jesus of Nazareth was not apathetic about evil. He could become angry at evil in its different guises:

- when he healed a leper disfigured by that dreadful disease, there was fire in his belly;
- when he stood at the grave of his friend Lazarus, he raged at the power of death;
- when he walked into the Temple at Jerusalem and found that pilgrims were being ripped off by Temple traders, he lost his temper because evil was blocking the path of the pilgrims to God.

Evil and the Spiritual Source

Jesus saw the effects of evil on the lives of people, but he saw more than the effects. He saw the source. The New Testament describes Jesus in a battle with evil - and that battle is personalised into a battle between Jesus as the Son of God and Satan as the Enemy of God.

This worldview suggests that evil is not simply the sum of our worst actions and attitudes, nor even of the regimes and social structures that oppress people. This worldview suggests that in some sense "evil" is an intelligent personalised force that actively opposes all that is good in the world. Evil has a spiritual source. For some people today it is easier to believe in the devil than to believe in God. As somebody has said - his advertising is better!

Evil in Many Guises

"Evil" in this personalised sense turns up throughout the Bible under a number of aliases. Each name that is used illustrates a facet of evil.

Satan means God's opponent. His strategy is to undo the good that God is doing, and to oppose every good initiative.

Devil comes from a Greek word *diabolos* meaning to throw apart or to slander. His tactics are "Divide and Destroy". His chief method is to give God a bad name and give us a bad conscience - so that we feel that God will have nothing to do with people like us.

Belial is a Hebrew word meaning the "worthless one". In a society where child abuse and domestic abuse are at epidemic proportions, I see *Belial* building shame into the lives of thousands.

The Father of Lies reminds us of how many lies we swallow day-by-day about what really matters in life.

The Destroyer. Think of the ruination of young lives as suicide bombers, or through drug addiction. Or think of the workaholic who destroys a marriage to feed his ego with achievement. The Destroyer has more weaponry than the USA and Iraq combined!

So... How can I resist evil?

Jesus' brother, James, makes a simple suggestion:

Submit to God.. Resist the Devil and he will flee from you.

Say "yes" to God. Say "no" to Satan. A simple strategy.

That was certainly Jesus' strategy:

- in the wilderness, he could suss out the core temptation and say "yes" to God and "no" to Satan;
- through his life, he kept up the battle like a pioneer cutting a path through the jungle for us to follow;
- on the cross he took the full force of evil on himself, and came through to victory in the resurrection.

"Yes" to God and "no" to Satan.

Resistance begins by taking that stand. Whose side are we on?

The point is simple

We must resist evil - in ourselves, in the world, and at its source.

We can resist evil - if we choose to be for God and against evil.

We will need all the help we can get - and Jesus Christ is that help.

There is only one question. Where will we make a start?