

Thoughts from Bishopswood – January 2021

I remember someone telling me that he couldn't believe in a God, who while being able to do something about it, allowed so much suffering in the world. He raises a very good question for which there are no totally satisfactory answers.

When Jesus was born a number of what we call wise men visited him. We assume there were three as three gifts are mentioned but we are not told the number in the retinue. They had been to see Herod the king to ask where the Messiah was to be born. I can't see why a baby should be a threat to an adult king but Herod was ever fearful and protected his position with extreme measures. The wise men were warned by God not to go back and inform Herod as to where the baby was and, when they didn't return, he had all the boys under the age of two slaughtered. Why didn't God intervene to save them? He can and did intervene in that he used a dream to prevent the wise men going back to Herod but he did nothing to protect those young children from Herod.

Many if not most Christians expect God to be one that will intervene on their behalf. They pray for healing and safety amongst other things and expect God to grant their requests. There is even a section of the church that preaches a health wealth and prosperity gospel. Their message is 'become a Christian and health and wealth will be yours.'

What is called the slaughter of the innocents demonstrates that God may and sometimes does intervene but not necessarily so. Health, wealth and prosperity won't necessarily be yours if you become a Christian. That is because Christianity isn't a 'tick the box' religion. Someone who decides to say the things that Christians say, and do the things that Christians do in order to gain something for himself isn't a Christian. Christianity is about being sorry for the wrong you have done, it's about realising that God gets angry about sin, it's about the need to get right with him in order to find forgiveness and it is about trusting that Jesus Christ has done everything necessary to purchase that forgiveness. It's an offer that he makes and you only need to mean it when you say, "Thank you Jesus for dying for me."

Health, wealth and prosperity do not come with Jesus. Probably all his disciples except John died for their faith. It wasn't long after the launch of Christianity that Steven was killed. Even after planting many churches and spreading the message of peace with God so widely the great apostle Paul was probably beheaded. The church has seen many, many martyrs all of which have put their trust in Jesus Christ considering that forgiveness and the peace it brings is worth it.

I haven't answered the question I posed at the beginning. I don't know why God chooses to intervene sometimes and not others. I'll have to ask him when I see him face to face but I suspect it won't matter. I do know that he holds us responsible for what we do but always holds out the offer of forgiveness through Jesus.

Nyall