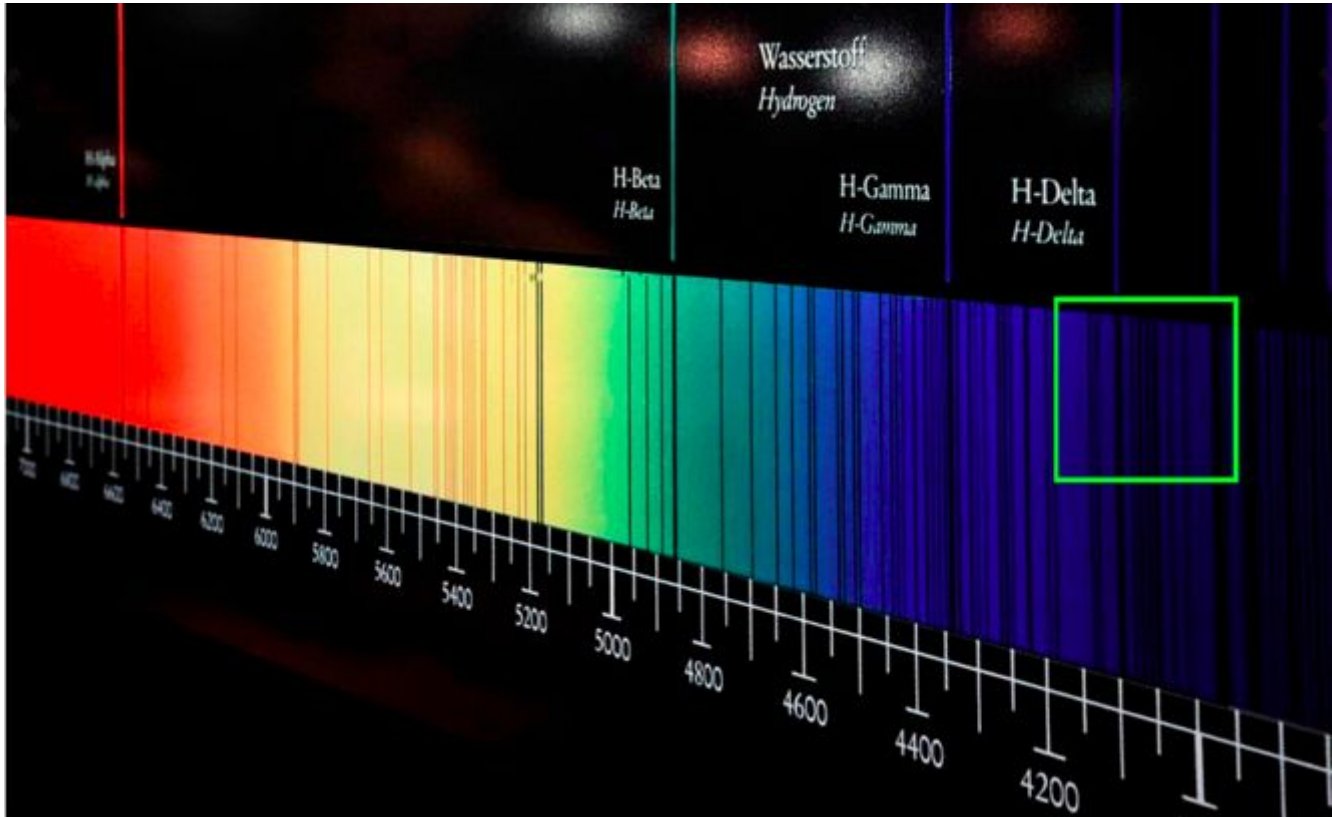


LIGHT GOD, DARK GOD ¹

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We all know that when light is passed through a prism or a spectroscope that we get the colours of the rainbow. Now, take a good look at these two images of the colours of the rainbow ... What do you see?

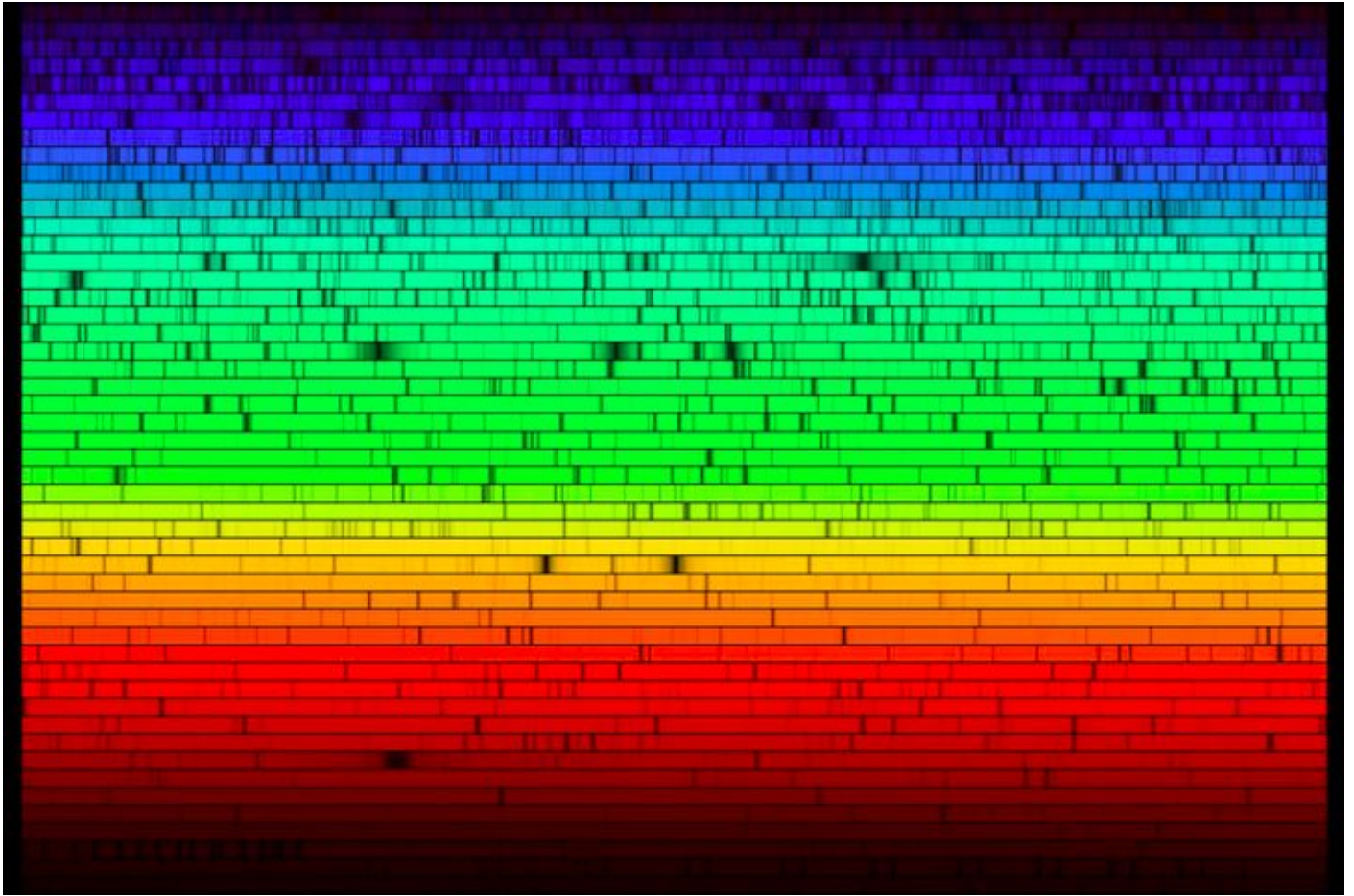


Right! Black lines! However, not many of us are aware of the hundreds and hundreds of intersecting black lines you can see running horizontally and vertically (in the next image) through the rainbow. They are called ...

FRAUNHOFER Lines ... because they were first discovered by **Josef Von Fraunhofer** who pioneered this fascinating area roughly 150 years ago. To this day science has *no idea* what these black lines are or why they are there! And although the rainbow has in recent times been hijacked by the Gay & Lesbian community as their symbol, we remember that the rainbow is God's bow! But *why* these dark "Fraunhofer lines"? Hmm.

I think the rainbow is a kind of parable of our lives. It reflects how we all experience life. Life is full of the colours of various experiences. There is the warmth, the joy, the beauty of life, and yet we can't seem to escape the fact there is the dark side of life with black lines criss-crossing our lives; disasters, depression, desperation and yes, death always interrupting, intersecting, upsetting. There is the light of day *and* the dark of the night.

¹ This is the second sermon delivered at Papamoa Family Camp in New Zealand, February 2019. Once again I ask the reader to make allowances for the hortatory nature of the notes.



Today, in the third of our series, *Big God, Little God; Near God, Far God* we are talking about *Light God, Dark God*.

RICHARD DAWKINS in *River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life*, pp 132-133 writes,

The total amount of suffering per year in the natural world is beyond all decent contemplation ... In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, 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 bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference."

C.S.LEWIS for years also rejected the existence of God because he thought a good and all-powerful God could not allow evil and suffering in His world. If such a God exists, then He has a moral obligation to stop suffering. So, suffering in this world proved God did not exist.

But eventually Lewis came to see the flaw in his own reason for rejecting God. Indeed, he came to see that evil & suffering in this world actually make the existence of God *more* likely! His book *Christian Reflections* concluded that awareness of moral evil in the world is a bigger problem for the atheist than the believer in God. How so? Well, his reasoning worked like this: If there is no God, then Lewis' outrage over suffering was based on his own private feelings:

The defiance of the good atheist hurled at an apparently ruthless and idiotic cosmos is really an unconscious homage to something in or behind that cosmos which he recognizes as infinitely valuable and authoritative: for if mercy and justice were really only private whims of his own with no objective and impersonal roots, and if he realized this, he could not go on being indignant. The fact he arraigns heaven itself for disregarding them means that at some level of his mind he knows they are enthroned in a higher heaven still. (pp 69-70).

That's profound! Lewis came to recognize that our awareness of evil & suffering in this world is the clue that subconsciously we cry out for God to exist, to put things right. To talk about justice you have to talk about objective morality, a standard outside our own private values. And that means talk about God!

As Christians we do not deny there is suffering, *real* suffering in this world.

As Christians we know that, like Joseph it's possible to be sold into slavery and betrayed by loved ones who may be jealous of godly character, or just plain unthinking and mean.

As Christians we know that, like Jonah we too can get swallowed up by the storms of life because of our own selfish, wilful and wicked choices.

As Christians we know that, like Job we can sometimes suffer for no apparent reason other than that God in His wisdom allows it to be so.

So yes, sometimes the reasons for a Christian's sufferings can be mystifying because they are hidden in the purposes of God. But of course, at the end of the day, Job received one of the most profound revelations of God's Sovereignty. He learned that God is the light God, dark God having His own wise purposes.

There are many reasons behind our suffering, but we do not have such a fatalistic view as Dawkins of this world. We know that at the bottom of it all, at the heart of this universe, is not Dawkin's "pitiless indifference", but that in the unfathomable depths of hidden darkness, there is the light of God's all-wise and loving heart --- revealed to us in the life and atoning death of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Repeat. Suffering is real. But we can be honest like our Saviour who said, **My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow even to the point of death (Mk. 14:34)**. It's perfectly permitted for the disciple of Jesus to be in anguish and fall to the ground, and to feel as though our suffering is unfair, disproportionate and unjust, and to pray, **"Father, if it's possible take this cup from me!"** Of all people, the upright and loving Jesus deserved a good life on the basis of his good moral life. But all he got was the cross. Certainly Jesus experienced the light God, dark God we do.

WHY IS THERE DARKNESS AND SUFFERING AND EVIL IN THIS WORLD?

The question of why there is suffering in the world has exercised every culture and every philosophy and religion in all generations. And as we've already hinted at the presence of evil & suffering in the world is a serious challenge to our Christian minds too. But we work within a general framework that informs our faith.

1. CREATION & THE FALL.²

The Bible tells us God originally placed humans into a world without suffering and death. Everything was harmonious and peaceful --- until the day Adam & Eve took matters into their own hands and rebelled.

The evil we experience today was not originally meant to be a part in God's world for us. That means, that even what we may euphemistically call "a peaceful death in sleep" at a ripe old age is **not** the way things were originally meant to be. The Bible says --- and deep within our own hearts we know it --- death is just plain wrong, it's our enemy in fact. We were **not** meant for mortality, **not** meant to say goodbye to our loved-ones.

This is why it's not exactly right to say, "Death is a perfectly natural part of life!" Originally it was not. To say such a thing is asking us to repress our original created sense --- we were not made for the dust and love's relationships were meant to last!

The Christian doctrine of the rebellion of man helps us understand why evil & suffering have entered our world. The Bible says, **By one man's sin death entered (invaded!) into the world ... and so death spread to all ... (Rom. 5: 12)**. Death is an alien, a hostile invader to this planet! Death is the great usurper.

² I acknowledge my indebtedness to Timothy Keller's **Walking with God Through Pain & Suffering** for the following outline and closing illustrations. Highly recommended reading on the question!

We may properly say therefore, that evil & suffering are a part of God's system of justice upon the planet. As **Romans 1** says, **even though humans knew God, they did not honour Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man, and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over ... to degrading passions ... and to a depraved mind... (Vs. 18-28).** *A world in rebellion cannot enjoy God's unlimited favour. In a moral universe you cannot have implacable rebels living in eternal bliss! The doctrine of the Fall of man teaches that our world's suffering is a part of God's corrective justice.*

This does **not** mean that individual instances of suffering are necessarily the result of that person's sin(s). It does **not** mean that if I get sick, or you suffer an accident, or if a loved one dies that God is punishing you or me for a particular sin. You only have to look at Job's suffering to know that is the case.

Job's "miserable comforters" thought Job was suffering because of some sin in his life. But Job's friends forgot the other half of the equation: while it is true that overall suffering of mankind is due to our rebellion, nevertheless it is not dished out in a proportionate or fair way. Bad people may not suffer more than good people. Sometimes the most godly saints have experienced the worst kind of suffering. Jesus is the ultimate example of that kind of suffering --- he suffered hostility and rejection and injustice precisely because he lived right before God and spoke the truth always.

The Christian doctrine of the Fall then, gives us a finely nuanced understanding of the suffering in our world. As members of the human condition even we Christians inherit the brokenness of the entire human race. Jesus said, **the sun shines and the rain falls on both the just and the unjust (Matt. 5: 45).** Logically then, the storms hit Christians as well as atheists. Tornadoes destroy good peoples homes as well as the homes of the godless.

The doctrine of the Creation & the Fall tells us this world has a moral order to it, and that although much suffering & evil appears unjust and unfair, nevertheless there is an underlying moral fabric to the world. Behind it all there is the justice of God, the righteousness of God.

2. FINAL JUDGMENT & RENEWAL OF THE WORLD.

The second Christian doctrine that helps us understand the evil & suffering in our world is the final judgment & restoration of the world.

Our society today has lost its sense that there is a day of reckoning coming. A day when the Almighty is going to put everything that's wrong, right. In fact, for a lot of modern folks, the idea that there is a holy God who is going to judge evil and punish injustice, is a repugnant thought. But the degree to which our post-Christian society has lost the sense that God is going to judge the world, and is the degree to which sin is running rampant.

FYODOR DOSTOYEVSKY famously wrote:- **"Without God and the future life ... everything is permitted, one can do anything."** This quote makes the modern secularist bristle because it implies that people without faith in God are necessarily less good and less moral than those who do. This is not true! Because the NT teaches that all persons, regardless of their belief, are created by God with a moral conscience. So, even on the premise of Christian doctrine it is wrong to imply that you can't be good without God.

To take Dostoyevsky that way is to miss his challenge. Dostoyevsky is saying that without God there is no moral *obligation*. Everything is "permitted" or allowed. Without God morality is relative. Without God, your truth is not necessarily my truth. But if morality is grounded in the will of the Almighty God, then cosmic order is restored. Moral absolutes are grounded in the character of the Living God.

This is no longer the general consensus in our modern secular society.

TELOS. Before the 18th Century, people generally understood that morality was important because the world is heading towards an end game where God's judgement awaits. The whole point of ethics was to prepare men to pass from this present world to his true end.

The Bible word for this truth is *telos* ... meaning end, consummation, arrival, the goal. The world and our lives are going somewhere ... we are going to meet God and righteousness and justice when all things will be put to rights. There is an Age beyond this present world order.

But this prevailing worldview changed from the 18th Century. So-called Enlightenment thinkers became committed to the belief that human reason and science, apart from ancient revelation or tradition are sufficient to give us the knowledge we need to live in this world.

So, the basis was laid to stop thinking about what human beings were made *for*. That became the wrong question. We were told there is no design, no purpose, no end, no *telos*. Rather than being told we humans were made by God and for God and to be His accountable stewards in this world, we were told we were no different than the fish or tadpoles. Thus, our modern society supposedly based on reason and science alone has rejected any notion of a Divine purpose and answerability for human beings. Now think about that!

If there is no Judgment Day then in the end, it makes absolutely no difference whether you live a kind and righteous life or whether you live a life of selfishness & cruelty and oppression of others, because at the end of the day there is no such thing as objective, universal justice. So just come to grips with the fact you live in an amoral Universe and stop looking for justice. Resign yourself to the fact that evil & injustice & tyranny are never going to be redressed. Or ...

If there is no Judgment Day then we have to be the judges. We have to take up our weapons and we seek revenge and take justice into our own hands. We must hunt the baddies down now! We better saddle up our horses and ride our own possie! We are the lynch mob!

From a Christian perspective, the doctrine of the Judgment Day is not a gloomy prospect. If I know that God has promised to finally mete justice out according to His fair and holy character, according to all the motives and facts of the case that only He could possibly know, then I can live with both hope and grace in the meantime. If I know justice will finally and fully be administered, then I don't have to live with vengeance on my mind and unforgiveness in my heart. God has said, **Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, saith the LORD.**

The Bible says that when Jesus was being tried and tormented and strung up on that cross so unfairly, that **while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting himself to Him who judges righteously (I Pet. 2: 21-24).** And God did vindicate Jesus. God's justice shone through ... He raised him up and declared to the world that this indeed is His Son and he is now Lord of the world.

So, the doctrine of the judgment means my case is in God's hands. But this still tends to be more on the negative side. It still doesn't give a completely satisfying answer to why God allows evil to continue in the world. Surely there is something more? What lies on the other side of Judgment Day?

Ah, this is where the implications of the resurrection of Jesus Christ must be worked out. Since we know that when Jesus Christ appears he is going to **transform these bodies of weakness to be like his glorious body**, then we are going to inherit the lives we always longed for but could never achieve in this present age. We are going to receive renewed bodies that radiate glory and health and eternal vigor to enjoy a renewed material world!

Although God does not show us everything yet, although we can only peer through a cloudy glass, I get the impression that the eventual joy and transformation we are going to receive at Jesus' Coming, is going to be infinitely greater than it would have been if there was no suffering this side.

Have you ever talked to somebody who has come within a breath of dying prematurely? Perhaps they suffered at the hands of a sick psycho or a sinister terrorist who tried to senselessly take them out. Perhaps it was a young mother suddenly diagnosed with terminal cancer. But somehow, by God's intervention they were spared. And have you then heard them say, "Now I live every day as though it's a special day I was never going to have. My family is more precious to me because of that near-death experience. My work has taken on more significance than it ever had. Every minute, every hour, every day is such a precious thing and I feel as though I

am getting so much more out of life than before.” To find something you thought you had lost, makes the object even more precious!

Perhaps that captures a little of the apostles’ sentiments when he wrote, **For our momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison (2 Cor. 4: 17)**. Our experience of the glory is going to be greater for the suffering, perhaps because we will be able to make the comparison.

Now, of course, this does not make the present suffering enjoyable. It’s still dark. But the Bible doctrine of the judgment and restoration of all things proclaims that ultimately evil is going to accomplish something far greater. Certainly, apart from sin and evil we would never have known the astonishing extent of God’s love and grace towards us sinners!

For us here in this life, the thought of God’s glory is rather remote and abstract. But we must realize that the most rapturous delights you have ever had --- in the beauty of a landscape, or in the pleasure of food, or in the fulfillment of a loving embrace --- are like dewdrops compared to the bottomless ocean of joy that it will be to see God face to face (1 John 3: 1-3). That is what we are in for, nothing less. And according to the Bible, that glorious beauty, and our enjoyment of it, has been immeasurably enhanced by Christ’s redemption of us from evil and death. ³

The Bible is right all along. The way to cope with present suffering is to give people a sure and certain hope. Do you believe that when you die, you just rot? That life in this world is all the happiness you will ever get? Do you believe that some day the sun is going to die and all human civilization is going to be extinguished, and nobody is going to remember anything? Well, that’s one way to imagine your the future.

But here’s another way. The Bible way. The NT way, the Gospel way. Do you believe in the Judgment Day when every evil and rotten injustice is going to be redressed? Do you believe in the new heavens and the new earth? Do you believe in the resurrection of the body, that in Christ you will be raised to immortality and eternal healthy embodiment? Do you believe you are headed for that renewed society of endless joy and uninterrupted fellowship? Do you believe life is going to swallow up death and decay and the bad?

Yes, those are two entirely different outlooks. Two futures. And depending on which one you believe will make all the difference with how you handle your present suffering and disappointments, how you are going to handle your dungeon of darkness.

HIT BY THE SHADOW OF A TRUCK! Donald Grey Barnhouse, who was a pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia for many years, lost his wife when his daughter was a young child. Barnhouse was trying to help his little girl and himself, process the loss of his wife and her mother.

One day they were driving, and a huge truck passed them. As it passed, the shadow of the truck swept over the car. The minister had a thought. He said to his young daughter, “Would you rather be run over by a truck, or by its shadow?” His daughter replied, “By the shadow of course. That can’t hurt us at all.”

Dr Barnhouse replied, “Right. If the truck doesn’t hit you, but only its shadow, then you are fine. Well, it’s only the shadow of death that went over your mother ... And that’s because two thousand years ago, the real truck hit Jesus. And because death crushed Jesus, and we believe in him, now the only thing that can come over us is the shadow of death. To lie down in the sleep of death is but to lie down knowing that our next waking moment will be to see the King of Glory at His return.

SWALLOW ... some skeptic will question the Gospel announcement that the believer is only asleep in the earth awaiting a future glory that will be the greater for our present suffering now. They will think us crazy to think that some future bliss will be able to make up for what we go through here and now. But they forget the NT says death and evil and suffering will be “swallowed” up in victory.

³ Timothy Keller, pp 117-118

Well, to swallow up something is to completely engulf it until you see it now more. That's the word we are to lay hold on. We are going to enter a glory that is going to completely swallow up all evil & injustice. Glory is coming!

GLORY: The base root of the Hebrew word for "glory" means "weight". Good friends, Jesus is coming back with the mighty angels of God, he is coming in the clouds of glory. There is a weight of glory coming --- glory so heavy with joy and love and life --- it's going to weigh us down with goodness! Yes, final Judgment & renewal of this world helps us put our present suffering & experience of evil into that eternal perspective.

3. THE CROSS & ATONEMENT.

There is another Christian doctrine that informs our minds and steadies our hearts as we consider the why's & wherefore's of evil & suffering in this world.

Put simply it is this: We will never understand our suffering until we look at Christ himself and the cross he bore.

Now of course, when God first sent His Son Jesus onto the world's stage, the Jews were blind-sided. They expected a Messiah to gloriously rescue them from their oppressors and to lead Israel to world domination. A gentle, suffering Servant Messiah was not on most radars. And of course, such a humble bloke who ended up in such a shameful way hanging on a cross did not impress the Gentile powers at all.

How could they possibly imagine they were beholding the greatest act of God's grace and salvation in the cosmos? How could they possibly discern God's ways in *that* bloody and dark mess? Even those who did hope in him challenged him, **If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross and save yourself!** They did not know that if Jesus could only save us if he did not come down and save himself.

Jesus conquered evil & injustice not by striking back, but by absorbing the blows in his own body and soul. Here is the great truth of the cross. The Lamb of God conquers, overcomes, not by revenge and calling down Twelve Legions of Angels to unleash God's wrath, but by not opening his mouth and by absorbing the worst that the darkness could hurl at him, and by saying, **Father, forgive them!**

AMISH SHOOTINGS

In October 2006, a gunman took hostages in a one-room schoolhouse of an Amish community in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. After shooting 10 victims, 5 of whom died, ages 7 to 13, he killed himself.

Within hours after the suicide-murders, members of the Amish community visited the killer's parents and expressed sympathy for their loss and support for the hard days ahead.

When the gunman was buried a few days later, his young widow and her 3 children were amazed to discover that half those attending the funeral were Amish, who showed nothing but support and concern for the murderer's family.

An entire Christian community faced their suffering with the same peace that Stephen did in Acts 7. The forgiveness and love shown by the Amish community toward the shooter and his family was the talk of the entire county. The way they handled their suffering had been a powerful testimony to the truth of their faith and to the grace and glory of their God.

Now of course, the secular world seemed unable to explain the Christian response of the Amish to their tragedy and pain. In fact, the media tried to mute it. They made a film about the incident and created a fictional character, Ida Graber, an Amish mother of one of the murdered children. In the movie, Ida is so filled with doubts and anger at God, and so unable to forgive the gunman, that she almost loses her faith.

Those who were actually involved with the Amish after the shootings countered that, despite the deep grief and pain, there was simply no one in the community who had their faith shaken or who could not forgive. So what the film ended up highlighting is the inability of our secular society to comprehend a faith in God that enables

Christians to accept mysterious providence and dispense forgiveness without bitterness toward God or the shooter.

The cross of Calvary and the doctrine of our atonement is the ultimate proof that the darkness and tragedy of our suffering in this evil world are being absorbed by the love of God.

The Fraunhofer lines in the spectrum of the colours of the rainbow surely say in this Evil Age the colours of life will be sadly interspersed with sorrow and suffering. But the Christian worldview is able to look through the prism of the great doctrines of the **Creation & the Fall, the Final Judgment & Renewal of the World at Christ's Coming, and the Cross & the Atonement** and know that at the heart of this Universe, is the Eternal God, our Heavenly Father Who is working towards gathering up, summing up all things in Christ when death will be swallowed up by glorious life! The guarantee is that He has raised His Son up from the dead! God's Kingdom is coming!

Indeed at the heart of this universe is not **pitiless indifference** as Dawkins and his ilk insist. Although our rainbow is often fractured with distressing and depressing darkness, we know that our Lord Jesus has absorbed in himself all the dreadful blows of darkness at Calvary. He has borne the curse of our sins in himself. **God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.**

Because of Jesus, the powers of darkness and death are really only a shadow soon to be swallowed up by the glory of the Kingdom of God. A weight of glorious colour is about to swallow us up in the life of God. Are you ready?