



”What kind of answer is that?”

What would I, or even could I, say to the grieving families of those who had relatives murdered by the Nova Scotia shooter? Or to those who wonder why God would allow such a horrible thing to happen? And what would I say to my kids too, or to anybody’s children for that matter, why the God I believe in allows good people to be killed? Where’s the “good news” we preach in all this?

What a dilemma, because if I can’t answer those questions as a Christian, people have a right to ask, “Well, what’s the point of Christianity, then?” If Christians can’t come up with decent answers to these pressing questions, then why turn to Christians for answers to anything?

But even C.S. Lewis had trouble answering why his wife had to die from cancer at age 45 after only four years of marriage, leaving him with her two young boys to bring up as well. None of it made sense to him. So he went looking for answers, and there’s a poignant scene in the movie *Shadowlands* (starring Joss Ackland as C. S. Lewis, not Anthony Hopkins), when Lewis storms out after his wife’s funeral and shouts at Harry the vicar who’s just said, “it’s only faith that makes sense of times like these,” to which Lewis replies, “No, I’m sorry, Harry, but it won’t do. This is a mess, and that’s all there is to it.”

But what kind of answer is that? Imagine saying that at a funeral: “Let’s just face it, folks, what happened in this person’s death is a mess, and that’s all there is to it.” But if that’s all that Lewis - with his immense brain power and knowledge of Scripture and the resurrection - could come up with in answer to why God allows premature death and horrible things to happen to good people, where does that leave the rest of us in what we say to the bereaved?

We probably feel some pressing need to say something comforting and meaningful, but what? So I’ve been wondering of late how Jesus would answer the inevitable and justifiable questions raised by a premature or shocking death that doesn’t make any sense to people either?

And that’s when Luke 24 came to my rescue, because to two despondent disciples shuffling along the road to Emmaus, Jesus’ shocking premature death did not make sense either. He wasn’t supposed to die (verse 21). Everything about Jesus had raised the hope “that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel” (verse 21). And even the news that Jesus had been seen alive again wasn’t enough to settle their minds. It was all so frustratingly confusing. In Lewis’s words “it was a mess, and that’s all there was to it.”

So what did Jesus do? Well, here he was, freshly resurrected from the dead, the most dramatic event in the history of humanity, he’s just been given total authority over everything in the entire universe by his Father, and he’s just celebrated a victory parade in heaven over all his adversaries. And what does he do? He joins two men on their walk. And he doesn’t swoop down in a fiery chariot with an army of angels either; he’s dressed as a fellow traveller, and he asks a couple of questions that get the two men to voice their troubles while he listens attentively.

We see Jesus, then, zooming in on these two men with their inevitable and justifiable questions in a clear demonstration of what his resurrection had now opened up to us humans. It was exactly what Jesus had promised to do too, when he told his disciples in John 14:18, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

But look how he came to them. In all the billion things he could have done, now that he’d been resurrected and had the power to shake the world to its roots, he focuses on two men having trouble finding answers to questions troubling them, by being there for them, because this is where he wanted to be. Not up in heaven chucking lightning bolts, but down here again in the mess of life with us.

And there was my answer to those deeply troubled by shocking and premature death. It’s not talking about the resurrection coming in the future, but what the resurrected Jesus will do for us now. He will come to us, and in such a way he draws out our questions and provides us with answers. And all we need do is see him in that light, exactly as revealed in Luke 24, that Jesus is at his resurrected happiest settling our minds personally.

He loves being with us, happily knocking on our door every morning looking forward to spending the day with us, and answering any questions we may have, because he promised that too: “You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.” And what better than being able to ask for answers to deeply troubling questions?

It doesn’t change the obvious, that life now really is a mess and that’s all there is to it, but we now have the resurrected Jesus doing what he loves most. It’s travelling along our road with us, knowing what we’re thinking, and settling our troubled thoughts. And to those who say, “Yeah, but, what kind of answer is that?” I can only say, “Try him and see.”

Jonathan Buck
