

Where is God? (3) Weak or Mighty?

I spoke in part 1 about God being far away and unable to help us, or nearby and unwilling to help us - so however we think of God, we can make ourselves disappointed.

And that actually what we are doing in fact, is making God in our image, and then knocking him down as he's not able to save us.

When what we should be doing is looking to see what the real image of God is, not our projections on to him. But that is hard - to get over our prejudices and learnt wrong behaviour, and of course, leaves lots open to interpretation.

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So I wanted to think finally this week about whether God is weak or mighty?

People ask - if there's a God, why hasn't he done something about this.. and it could be Corona, or it could be a tidal wave, or it could be cancer, or world hunger, or whatever.

If God is all knowing - he knows about it

And if he's all powerful - then he could do something about it, but he chooses not to.

So is God Mighty - but mean

or is he in fact weak (like the God portrayed in Philip Pullman's - His Dark Materials - barely more than a whisp of wool) - in which case why should I believe in him?

We do seem very good at making God like this or that and then giving ourselves a reason not to believe in him or trust him?! But we're only hurting ourselves. We are the ones missing out on God's love, his goodness, the peace that passes all understanding.

We're like someone with ice cream - when its hard its too cold so we won't eat it, when its melted we won't try it because it's too soft - when all we should do is put it in our mouth and taste it - and see how yummy it is!

(That's probably the first time that God has been compared to ice cream, but its valid. Beyond all the doubts and uncertainties and mysteries, and beyond all the questions and seeking understanding - which is all good - there is the - just experience God - taste and see that the Lord is Good - just try it!).

So the thing about God's power - is he mighty or weak - is that we think about power in human terms. We think a racing car is powerful - its loud and goes fast. A tank is powerful - nothing can stop it or hurt it. A ruler is powerful who is able to control their people. Money is power because it can give you things, make things happen, and make people do what you want.

But that is only way of looking at power.

There is also power in a dandelion that can break through concrete - just look at those weeds.

There is power in the love of a mother who has to give up her child to help it survive - did you see Pru Leith talking about her adopted daughter - whose mother in war torn Cambodia had to do just that. There is a power that is about allowing yourself to be vulnerable, to be hurt.

Instead philosophers have tried to play with this idea of God's omnipotence. They invent questions like

"Can God make a wall so high that he can't jump over it?"

Its a trick. We think the answer should be yes - because he can do anything, or is "no" because he can do anything?! But really the answer is both - yes and no - because he's God! Because if God was so small that we could understand him and trap him with our little logic word game - he wouldn't be much of a God, would he?

But God can limit himself - he can choose when to act. Which we don't understand, because if we were omnipotent we'd be interfering all the time!

But God sometimes chooses not to act - because he wants us to have freedom.

We don't understand how free we are. Animals don't have freedom. A baby animal learns to walk in hours, no-one teaches it, it just does it. Animals can feed, and hunt. Some animals leave their

young because they know what to do without any help. I have some caterpillars, No-one told them to turn into chrysalides, they just did. Scientists are always testing for this - to see how much is inbred in animals, but very few choices are made in the animal kingdom. As I watch the pigeons mating - they are not choosing when to do so - they just do it! We marvel at the natural world and rightly so - but it happens by instinct, not choice.

We have choice. We are free, and we are aware that we are free. Its an incredible gift.

We talk about Artificial Intelligence and robots and we feel quite threatened by them, yet that's what they don't have - free will. They do what we program them to do.

God gives us freedom out of love - and to allow us to do as we please, as we see best.

And why? we have to speculate. Is it the only way we'll truly know what is best?

Is it a consequence of the fall - that we wanted to be like God knowing Good and evil, and now we do?

Is it a gift, that when we were given this earth to rule over, we assumed the role of God's ambassador - this earth is ours to look after - to be "gods" over?

Is it because that's the only way love can truly be - if its free?

But that is the pay off it seems - that we live in a broken world, where people are free to do bad things which causes suffering, where even the natural world is broken and so earthquakes and volcanoes cause suffering - and yet we are free to live how we choose.

Or we give all that up - to be not free, like animals or robots, and the world is ordered like a clock, or a machine. Nothing bad happens, because nothing is allowed to happen - but can anything good be said to happen either??

Prisoners will tell you they'd rather have freedom any day, than the order of being locked up.

There is a parallel to the lockdown - we are safe, we are secure, but we are not free - and I think most of us would rather be free.

God is mighty - but not like we think.

The strength of Jesus to not take control at his crucifixion.

The power of Jesus to hold us in his arms in love

The might of Jesus to bear our wrongs and throw them away.

The power of God's holy spirit to change our lives completely.

God's might is to give us freedom, to choose to love him or reject him, and all that that entails.

Where is God in all this - he is near and he is mighty!