DEUS EX MACHINA
Psalm 44

MAIN IDEA
Sometimes we suffer because of our sinful behaviors and attitudes; sometimes we are blessed for our righteous behaviors and attitudes. Other times we may suffer unjustly and receive blessings we clearly don’t deserve.

I. BLESSINGS FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS (VS 1-8)

*God often rewards righteous attitudes and behaviors.*

A. FAITHFULNESS IN THE CONTEXT OF WORSHIP (1)
B. GOD’S FAITHFULNESS TO US (2-3)
C. OUR FAITHFULNESS TO GOD (4-8)

II. CURSES FOR UNRIGHTEOUSNESS (VS 9-16)

*God sometimes punishes sinful attitudes and behaviors.*

A. THE SUFFERING SIN CAUSES (9-12)
B. THE ALIENATION SIN CAUSES (13-14)
C. THE HUMILIATION SIN CAUSES (15-16)

III. NO APPARENT CAUSE AND EFFECT RELATIONSHIP (VS 17-26)

*Many times there is no direct cause and effect relationship between righteousness and blessings; sin and suffering.*

A. CONFUSED AS TO THE CAUSE AND EFFECT RELATIONSHIP (17-18)
B. SUFFERING FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS (19-22)
C. GOD IS PRESENT IN ALL SITUATIONS (23-26)
Deus Ex Machina
Psalm 44

I titled this Psalm, “Deus Ex Machina” because I think we tend to believe in this kind of a God. It all started in the Greek theatre. The author of the play would write the actors into an impossible situation. It appeared to the audience that the players were doomed with no possible way out. At just that point, they would put another actor into a machine and lower him down by crane into the scene. This actor represented a god and magically he or she would deliver the actors from their dangerous dilemma.

Let me try to give you an example from modern day movies. It happens a lot. When I was little and television just came out, a group of soldiers or cowboys would be surrounded by outlaws. They were down to the last bullets in their guns. Everything looked bleak and they looked doomed. All of a sudden you would hear a bugle blowing the charge. Da da da da da dá da da da da da da da. Then a whole regiment of soldiers would ride over the hill to drive out the outlaws and rescue the remaining soldiers and lawmen.

In the movie the “Raiders of the Lost Ark” the two heroes, Indiana Jones and his girlfriend stand tied up on a post and the Nazis have captured the Ark of the Covenant. That seems to be the end. Indiana Jones and the girl will die in the desert and the Germans possess perhaps the most powerful historical artifact. That would seem to be the end; except for the fact the Germans decide to open the Ark. Indiana Jones and the girl close their eyes because Indiana seems to have some knowledge as to how the Ark should work. Angelic beings come out of the Ark and horrifically wipe out all the Germans and Indiana Jones and the girl are safe.

That’s how the concept of Deus Ex Machina works. The Jews throughout much of their history and many modern day believers somehow have come to view our God as this Deus Ex Machina. We have come to think that blessings from God come as a reward for our obedience and suffering as a result of our sin. Although that is true sometimes; it is not always the case. I can’t speak for any of you but I have been incredibly blessed. These blessings cannot be directly tied to my righteous thoughts, words, and behaviors. In reality if I was blessed according to my faithfulness to God; I would be a pitiful wreck, lying in a gutter, with absolutely no hope. If God punished me for all my unrighteousness; I would long be dead and gone. By that I would conclude that there is more often not a direct correlation between obedience and blessing; disobedience and suffering. We can see that in our world the wicked often prosper and the righteous often suffer.

However there are times when God blesses us because of obedience and He does send suffering our way because of disobedience. However, even the rewards and sufferings are based on God’s blessings for those He calls children. The Apostle Paul said this:

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:28 / Today’s New International Version

We have seen through our study on the Sermon on the Mount that we who have been saved by Jesus and adopted into His family try to do good because we love Him and we love others. To be
sure there will be rewards but even that system is a little crazy. We are saved by grace. All the
good we do is as a direct result of God’s resources, God’s encouragement, and God’s
empowerment. We are saved by grace and we will be rewarded by grace. The main idea of this
morning’s text tries to put this all in some perspective. SOMETIMES WE SUFFER BECAUSE OF
OUR SINFUL BEHAVIORS AND ATTITUDES; SOMETIMES WE ARE BLESSED FOR OUR RIGHTEOUS
BEHAVIORS AND ATTITUDES. OTHER TIMES WE MAY SUFFER UNJUSTLY AND RECEIVE
BLESSINGS WE CLEARLY DON’T DESERVE.

Life can often be confusing; especially when it comes to getting what we deserve, what we need, or
what want. One day a farmer was coming out of his field on his mule drawn cart; when a car came
speeding by and hit his rig. The cart went flying one way, the mule another, his dog another, and
the farmer yet another. The car sped away as they all lay in the road. A little while later, the
sheriff pulled up on the scene. The farmer thought, “Thank God. Someone is coming to help us.”

The sheriff looked over the situation at a glance. Seeing the mule had a broken leg and was
suffering, he pulled out his gun and shot it to end its misery. He walked across the road and saw
the dog was just as bad off, so he shot him to end his misery. Then he walked back over to the
farmer and asked if he was in pain. “Never felt better in my life!” the farmer said.

Being faithful doesn’t always translate into being rich, successful, healthy, and well off according to
the world’s standards. But as verses 1-8 point out, sometimes there are blessings that come as a
result of being righteous. GOD OFTEN REWARDS RIGHTEOUS ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS. In
fact, that is the general theme of the Old Testament Wisdom Literature in general:

6 in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.
7 Do not be wise in your own eyes;
fear the Lord and shun evil.
8 This will bring health to your body
and nourishment to your bones.
9 Honor the Lord with your wealth,
with the firstfruits of all your crops;
10 then your barns will be filled to overflowing,
and your vats will brim over with new wine.

Proverbs 3:6-10 / Today’s New International Version

I. BLESSINGS FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS (VS 1-8)

Verse 1 describes what faithfulness looks like in the context of worship. This Psalm like Psalm 42
and 43 was composed by the Sons of Korah. It was given to the director of music so it could be
sung in public worship. If you take time to think about it, you will notice that a lot of our hymns
and modern day music are directly taken from the Psalms. The Redemption Story is not just a
personal story. Redemption is a common theme to all who confess Jesus as Lord. We share a
common faith, a common salvation, and a common Lord. God’s story encompasses us all. Part of
worship is to sing about the faithfulness of God. The congregation affirms that they have heard the
redemption story and how God blessed them in a mighty way.

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A big part of our worship ought to be dedicated to acknowledging God’s faithfulness to us as individuals, to us as a local church, to us as the universal church, and to us as the historical church, Israel, and all of human history. God has been faithfully working throughout history to gather together a group of redeemed people as He continues the redemption process until that day when Jesus shall return and wickedness will be banished, the redeemed will be rewarded, and all of the creation will be redeemed. This glorious thought of ultimate redemption is what gives us strength for today. Recounting God’s faithfulness throughout history and recounting God’s faithfulness to individuals and this local church builds our hope for the future. Think about the beautiful song Miriam, Moses’ sister composed after they walked through the Red Sea on dry ground while the entire Egyptian Army drowned following that same path:

19 When Pharaoh’s horses, chariots and horsemen went into the sea, the Lord brought the waters of the sea back over them, but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground. 20 Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron’s sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women followed her, with timbrels and dancing.

21 Miriam sang to them:
“Sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted.
Both horse and driver
he has hurled into the sea.

Exodus 15:19-21 / Today’s New International Version

We are called to remind ourselves of God’s faithfulness throughout all generations. We are to pass down the history to the next generation. Over and over God has commanded us to do this:

9 But watch out! Be careful never to forget what you yourself have seen. Do not let these memories escape from your mind as long as you live! And be sure to pass them on to your children and grandchildren.

Deuteronomy 4:9 / New Living Translation

We too should sing of the mercies of our God forever. In verses 2-3 the song tells of God’s faithfulness to us. The song makes it clear that the saints of old did not win victories because they were so skilled in battle, so intelligent, or so righteous. They won all their victories because of God’s incredible love and faithfulness towards them. Let’s review just a couple of these. On the eve of the great battle of Jericho, this is the battle plan God gave to Joshua. Joshua would then have to pass this plan on to his generals, the priests, and the people:
Now the gates of Jericho were tightly shut because the people were afraid of the Israelites. No one was allowed to go out or in. 2 But the LORD said to Joshua, “I have given you Jericho, its king, and all its strong warriors. 3 You and your fighting men should march around the town once a day for six days. 4 Seven priests will walk ahead of the Ark, each carrying a ram’s horn. On the seventh day you are to march around the town seven times, with the priests blowing the horns. 5 When you hear the priests give one long blast on the rams’ horns, have all the people shout as loud as they can. Then the walls of the town will collapse, and the people can charge straight into the town.

Joshua 6:1-5 / New Living Translation

Does that sound like a well thought out battle plan? Not really until you stop to think about the fact this is God’s plan and God will ensure the victory.

God’s plan of salvation was to have Jesus take on human flesh, suffer, die, rise from the dead, and ascend back to heaven; leaving the disciples and us responsible to carry on the plan of salvation? Does leaving salvation and redemption in our hands seem like a good plan; especially since Jesus gave up His life in the most horrific way? No, unless we take time to think about the fact this is God’s plan.

Verses 4-8 go on to explain that this is the reason we are to be faithful to God. How many times do we say things like, “I’m not good at evangelism? I can’t do evangelism?” We all have excuses for not following through with God’s plan. Listen, the fact is that the success of God’s plans do not depend on our abilities, our power, or anything else we think we may or may not have. Let me just read you some of God’s answers to these excuses:

37 Because he loved your ancestors, he chose to bless their descendants, and he personally brought you out of Egypt with a great display of power. 38 He drove out nations far greater than you, so he could bring you in and give you their land as your special possession, as it is today.

Deuteronomy 4:37-38 / New Living Translation

7 The LORD did not set his heart on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other nations, for you were the smallest of all nations! 8 Rather, it was simply that the LORD loves you, and he was keeping the oath he had sworn to your ancestors. That is why the LORD rescued you with such a strong hand from your slavery and from the oppressive hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

Deuteronomy 7:7-8 / New Living Translation

4 After the LORD your God has done this for you, don’t say in your hearts, ‘The LORD has given us this land because we are such good people!’ No, it is because of the wickedness of the other nations that he is pushing them out of your way. 5 It is not because you are so good or have such integrity that you are about to occupy their land. The LORD your God will drive these nations out ahead of you only because of their wickedness, and to fulfill the oath he swore to your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. 6 You must recognize that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land because you are good, for you are not—you are a stubborn people.

Deuteronomy 9:4-6 / New Living Translation
We advance God’s Kingdom by living for the Kingdom every day. We advance the Kingdom by being forgiving, merciful, graceful, and generous. We let go of anger, the need to retaliate, contempt, and lusts of all kinds. We show people Who the God we serve is by our actions and our words. By the way we think, speak, and act; how would people describe our God? God will definitely reward us with an abundance of love, joy, peace, and contentment. From time to time He will also add tangible blessings as well. GOD OFTEN REWARDS RIGHTEOUS ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS.

On the other hand, the Bible is equally as clear that sometimes God sends curses for unrighteous behavior. GOD SOMETIMES PUNISHES SINFUL ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS.

II. CURSES FOR UNRIGHTEOUSNESS (VS 9-16)

Verses 9-12 explore the fact that sin causes suffering. In other words, there are definite consequences to sinful behavior. We can see our world on fire with war and rumors of war. People are starving all over the world because of war and the disease war brings with it. The song takes an ominous turn and describes what happens when we reject God and His standards. I firmly believe that our country has so far been spared because of the remnant of faithful believers. Let me make clear what I do not believe. This is certainly not a Christian country. There are plenty of people who give lip service to being Christian but I suspect the number of true believers is few. Our country is not a theocracy so I don't believe God judges us as one. However, with all the immorality that goes on in our country; God would be justified in wiping us off the face of the earth. Christians, by faithfully following Christ, have held back God’s hand of judgment.

It’s interesting that this Psalm was composed by the sons of Korah. We already talked about the history of Korah. Korah and some others decided they did not want to follow Moses and Aaron, God’s chosen leaders. They started a rebellion and God ended it quickly by judging Korah and his followers by splitting open the ground where they were standing and had them swallowed up by the earth; never to be seen or heard from again. That was some pretty swift and severe judgment.

King David disobeyed God and took a census. Listen to how people suffered because of David:

13 I'm in a desperate situation!” David replied to Gad. “But let me fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is very great. Do not let me fall into human hands.’ 14 So the LORD sent a plague upon Israel, and 70,000 people died as a result’.

1 Chronicles 21:13-14 / New Living Translation

As a direct cause and effect of David’s sin, 70,000 people suffered and died. Let’s look at one more instance. Before the battle of Jericho, God warned the Israelites not to keep anything; rather they should burn everything up. However, a man named Achan kept an expensive robe and some jewelry. Listen to what happened as a result of his sin:

2 Joshua sent some of his men from Jericho to spy out the town of Ai, east of Bethel, near Bethaven. 3 When they returned, they told Joshua, “There's no need for all of us to go up there; it won't take more than two or three thousand men to attack Ai. Since there are so few of them, don’t make all our people struggle to go up there.” 4 So approximately 3,000 warriors were sent, but they were soundly defeated. The men of Ai 5 chased the Israelites from the town gate as far as the
quarries, and they killed about thirty-six who were retreating down the slope. The Israelites were paralyzed with fear at this turn of events, and their courage melted away.

Joshua 7:2-5 / New Living Translation

Thirty-six women were now widows. Thirty-six homes with children in them were now fatherless. Achan and his family were executed. Disobeying God has serious consequences.

In the early church, a couple named Ananias and Sapphira sinned by pretending to give more money to the church than they actually gave. Here is the death sentence pronounced on them by Peter and carried out by the Holy Spirit:

3 Then Peter said, ‘Ananias, why have you let Satan fill your heart? You lied to the Holy Spirit, and you kept some of the money for yourself. 4 The property was yours to sell or not sell, as you wished. And after selling it, the money was also yours to give away. How could you do a thing like this? You weren’t lying to us but to God!’

5 As soon as Ananias heard these words, he fell to the floor and died. ... 7 About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8 Peter asked her, ‘Was this the price you and your husband received for your land?’

‘Yes,’ she replied, ‘that was the price.’

9 And Peter said, ‘How could the two of you even think of conspiring to test the Spirit of the Lord like this? The young men who buried your husband are just outside the door, and they will carry you out, too.’

10 Instantly, she fell to the floor and died. When the young men came in and saw that she was dead, they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.

Acts 5:3-10 / New Living Translation

Dead; for exaggerating, for lying, and for trying to look better than they really were. How many of us could and should be dead for lying, exaggerating, and being religious hypocrites?

God does punish us for sins. He obviously doesn’t give us the full punishment we deserve or none of us would be alive. However, think about how many people we have hurt because of our sins? Think about the unkind things we have said to or about others. Think about how we have spoken and acted out of anger. Think about how many unwanted pregnancies there are every year, how many abortions to erase our sin, and how many sexually transmitted diseases are passed on every day. Think about the souls we destroy in premarital or extramarital sex we engage in. Sin has consequences and unfortunately others often suffer for our sin. Sin causes suffering.

As verses 13-14 point out sin also causes alienation. When a spouse commits adultery, he or she alienates themselves from their spouse and the children are usually alienated from both parents and from each other. Think about how divorce alienates children. Addictions are the great alienator because the person is so in love with the addiction to drugs, alcohol, sex, pornography, etc. that they can’t love anyone else. The sins of self-absorption, self-centeredness, and selfishness alienate us from one another. But most of all, sin alienates us from God. The movement of
alienation from God is always on the sinner’s part. When Adam sinned, he hid. God was the One Who called out to Adam, “Where are you?” When we sin, Satan always encourages us to become isolated and alienated from others. It is only through sorrow, confession, repentance, and restitution that we can break through the alienation and enjoy a restored relationship with God and others.

As verses 15-16 point out sin also causes humiliation. How many religious leaders have we seen fall into immoral behavior of one sort or the other. They are publicly humiliated. However, we as fellow Christians suffer humiliation as people identify that person and their immorality to us and our relationship to God. Prominent Christian leaders who commit grievous sins, and are caught; bring disgrace to themselves, their families, to the church, and to God. People mocked King David as he had to flee from Jerusalem in disgrace. They threw rocks at him, spit at him, and taunted him. If we claim to be followers of Christ, then we ought to be living lives that are consistent with the nature, character, and person of Jesus Christ. Otherwise we too will cause His Name to suffer humiliation. In these cases, God’s punishment is actually an act of grace towards the sinner. GOD SOMETIMES PUNISHES SINFUL ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS.

I don’t think this is so hard to understand or to accept. It seems right that God rewards righteous behavior and punishes sinful behavior. That seems to be in line with our idea of justice. However, it seems to me that it is more often the case that we see the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer.

III. NO APPARENT CAUSE AND EFFECT RELATIONSHIP (VS 17-26)

Verses 17-26 explore the idea that there often is no apparent cause and effect relationship between these. MANY TIMES THERE IS NO DIRECT CAUSE AND EFFECT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RIGHTEOUSNESS AND BLESSINGS; SIN AND SUFFERING.

The song now moves into a state of confusion. In verses 17-18 the songwriter admits he is confused as to the cause and effect relationship between righteousness and suffering. If they were reading through the book of Judges, they would point out that when Israel forgot God and started worshiping false gods; God would have them defeated and punished by a foreign nation. However, when they repented; God would raise up a judge from among them to lead them into battle to defeat these foreign invaders. Their equation became; obey God and prosper, disobey god and suffer. But at this point in the song, the poet recalls a time when the people seemed to do everything right. They worshiped God alone, they cared for the poor, and they faithfully participated in worship. However, they found themselves suffering. It appears that suffering had now shown up in their lives for no reason. All of a sudden God seems to have left them and was no longer blessing them. Innocent suffering has a long history. In fact, Isaiah 53 lays out the undeserved sufferings of Jesus.

Today, and throughout history, Jews and Christians have been persecuted. Today in Muslim countries, Christians are being kidnapped, tortured, beheaded, and executed in many ways. Take note of this. The United Nations is unmoved by the blood of Jews and Christians. The United States government is unmoved by the blood of innocent Jews and Christians. There is no outrage in the world concerning the innocent blood of Christians and Jews around the world. People know that I am a practicing serious Christian and no one has expressed outrage at the loss of my
brothers and sisters throughout the world. Have you heard any outrage over the loss of our brothers and sisters? My guess is that you too have not heard any. I don’t say this because I want sympathy. We should expect this because Jesus said that as His return gets closer, the world will step up its persecution of Jews and Christians. Suffering should build up our anticipation and hope for the return of Jesus.

As verses 19-22 go on to suggest, perhaps the innocent are suffering for righteousness. We know that to be the case of the Old Testament prophets who were marginalized, tortured, and killed for preaching the message of God. Jesus Christ, the most holy and righteous One Who never sinned, suffered and died in the most horrific way. All the disciples were arrested, tortured, and all but one killed. Christians throughout the ages have suffered for the faith. Let us too fall into this category. I am a Christian. I proudly wear the Name of my Lord Jesus Christ. If I am arrested, tortured, and killed for doing good; for loving God and loving others, then so be it.

The point is that God is present in all situations as inferred in verses 23-26. If one is going to cry out to God; one needs to believe that God is in hearing distance. We have already stated this many times in our study through the Psalms and our study through the Sermon on the Mount. God is omnipresent. That means there is no place that exists where God is not. God is everywhere. When we suffer for righteousness; God is there. When we suffer simply because we are fallen human beings living with other fallen human beings in a fallen world; God is there. When people harm us for no reason; God is there. When sickness and death come; God is there. God has promised to never leave us or forsake us. MANY TIMES THERE IS NO DIRECT CAUSE AND EFFECT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RIGHTEOUSNESS AND BLESSINGS; SIN AND SUFFERING.

The point I want us to keep in mind is that there are times that we will experience immediate blessings for righteous behavior and there will be times we experience immediate suffering because of sinful behavior. However, for those of us who have given our lives to Christ; all of life is a blessing. No one can steal our blessings. We enjoy undeserved love, joy, peace and contentment; all because Jesus loves us. He even blesses us when we are suffering. SOMETIMES WE SUFFER BECAUSE OF OUR SINFUL BEHAVIORS AND ATTITUDES; SOMETIMES WE ARE BLESSED FOR OUR RIGHTEOUS BEHAVIORS AND ATTITUDES. OTHER TIMES WE MAY SUFFER UNJUSTLY AND RECEIVE BLESSINGS WE CLEARLY DON'T DESERVE.

**Lectio Divina**

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