
We started a series last week I'm calling "The Bible Doesn't Say That?!" We are looking at things that so many people believe the Bible teaches that it doesn't - things that have become such an ingrained part of our culture that we sometimes believe them to be a part of who we are as Christians.

This morning we’re going to be examining a belief that is common to every religion on earth. So many people, in so many religions, believe it because it seems to make so much sense. Even Christians believe it. But it is not only not in the Bible, it is contrary to what we believe.

This false belief can be summed up by the proverb: “What goes around comes around”. Or another way of saying it is: “You get what you deserve.” Sometimes it's called “Karma,” which is a Buddhist teaching.

Karma essentially teaches that all people do bad things. Who can argue with that?
Those bad deeds cause suffering and no one wants to suffer. Absolutely true.
So, in order to undo the damage of those bad deeds, people need to do “good deeds” to balance out the damage in our lives.

It's like a scale. On one side of the scales are your bad deeds and on the other side are your good deeds. If your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds, you have good Karma and you will be blessed. If your bad deeds outweigh the good you’ll have bad Karma… and you will be cursed.

Now the thing about “Karma” is that it actually sounds Biblical (other than the word itself). In Galatians 6:7 we’re told “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.”

Sounds like Karma to me! But there is a difference in mindset between Karma and what Jesus taught.

To the Karma mindset, you can usually tell when another person’s karma is good. If life is treating them right, if they have good health, if they have a good job and lots of money: they've got “good karma”. With good karma they avoid suffering and experience blessings. That's how it works.

On the other side of the coin, if life has gone south… if their relationships tank, their finances are a mess - - if they are depressed all the time, … that’s because they have bad Karma. They've done bad things and now they are suffering.... In either case – you deserve what you get.

Ravi Zacharias, a famous apologist, once told of a group of missionaries and their families who had been killed in a bus accident near a village in a Buddhist country. Within minutes, the bus was ransacked and the bodies pillaged for loot. The reason? Those who died were only receiving their karma, and there is nothing wrong in taking what is left from people who are paying their dues. (“Jesus Among Other Gods: The Absolute Claims of the Christian Message”, p. 122)

Now, before you think – “Well, that’s just dumb”, you need to realize, a lot of religious people tend to think very much like that. They think: it makes sense. After all, good people deserve blessings and bad people don’t. Therefore, if you’re in trouble, the fault is probably yours.

God knew how appealing this karma thing would be to people, so He shared the story of man named Job with the world. Like last week, it's a story you all know. In the first chapter of the book we are introduced to a truly good man, a good husband and father. A man who could be counted on to do the right thing every time. And he is exceedingly blessed by God.
But before long everything starts going wrong for him.

- His riches disappeared.
- His children die.
- His health deteriorates.
- And his wife turns into a bitter shrew of a woman.

And if that isn't bad enough… his friends come over to “comfort him” but end up making him feel even worse. They believed in karma. They told Job that he MUST have done something terribly wrong. To deny it is most certainly another lie.

They tell Job the truth as they know it:

1. All suffering is a result of sin.
2. The greater the suffering the greater the sin.
3. Thus Job, you deserve what you’re getting, and you need to repent.
4. When you get right with God, God will again bless you.

In other words: it’s YOUR fault, Job. You’ve sinned, and that’s the reason you’re suffering. BUT… if you’d just put away that sin, if you’d just allow no evil in your life, THEN, you’d be OK!

Now, of course, from the beginning of the story WE, the readers, know that’s not true. That’s NOT why Job is suffering. It is NOT Karma. But these 3 friends don’t know THAT part of the story so they’re allowing their Karma kind of theory to guide them in their advice:
"You got what you deserved Job. That's the way it works. What goes around, comes around."

So, they judge Job and condemn him without ever knowing the REAL reason he is suffering. All Job knows is that he can't think of ANYTHING he's done wrong...

The moral of the story: you don’t always know why people suffer… so cut them some slack. Instead, find ways of ministering to people, helping them in their time of sorrow and trouble. None of us have a full understanding of why anyone is suffering. So God calls us to reach out.

We all make these kinds of judgments. We see a man on the street with a sign that says “will work for food” and we just know he won’t work and the money won’t go for food.

We see a person living out under a bridge and presume to know how they got there – bad choices.

We see a woman pushing a shopping cart down the street and we know her story. Little ambition, wrong decisions, drugs.

Now, we may be right. Maybe that money WILL go to buy liquor. Maybe that man under the bridge DID make some very bad choices… And it makes sense to be cautious on how we help people like these. We don't want to contribute to more degradation. But we need to remember that God places a high priority on our helping the poor and destitute. When we give to them -- even if they misuse our charity -- God notices.

That’s one of the major contrasts between Karma and Christ. Karma says: you’re getting what you deserve… and so I’m not obligated to help you. Christ says – do unto others as you’d have them do to you.

Now, of course, there is the other side of the Karma coin: people who are “successful” and lead a “charmed life” are blessed by God. I mean, God wouldn't allow bad people to be blessed, that just doesn't make any sense! So, logically… if bad people should not be blessed and good people should be blessed, THEN all successful people MUST BE… blessed!

Sounds kind of reasonable doesn't it?
That kind of reasoning was rampant during the days Jesus. We’re told the story of a rich young ruler who comes to Jesus and asks Him what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus tells him to sell all that he has and come follow Him. But the rich man loved his riches and walked away.

Then Jesus turned to His disciples and said: "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. It is probably easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

When the disciples heard this, they were "ASTONISHED," it says.

Why would they have been ASTONISHED that the rich would have a hard time getting into heaven? It’s because they accepted that idea of "what goes around comes around." If ANYBODY is going to make it into heaven, it should be successful people… surely. Obviously God had already judged them worthy of His blessings. So IF anybody is going to make into heaven it ought to be them. We need them on our side!

We all learned this kind of thinking from childhood. Remember when you were kids and you’d be with your friends and they’d want to play a game? You’d have two captains, and everyone else would line up, waiting to be picked.

And who were the first kids to be picked? The attractive, athletic, intelligent. If you were a geek or a gangly loser, you were always last.

But why were those other kids picked first?

Because they were winners!!! You always want the winners on your team!

Even the early church had the problem. James wrote: “My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don’t show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here’s a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court?” (James 2:1-6)

The temptation was to honor the rich.
They were successful, they were blessed.
They were winners… and many in the early church wanted to be winners too.

We’re all prone to it. We love to have successful people in our church. We love it when we have doctors and lawyers and business owners join... They represent success and that reflects on us...

James tells us – that’s not how God thinks. (James 2:5) “Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?”

Just because some people come from the nice side of town and wear nice clothes and drive nice cars… doesn’t make them any better in the sight of God than anyone else.

Let me read our morning’s text for you again: “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of faith.” (Galatians 6:7-10)

You reap what you sow. That’s what it says. If you sow sinful behavior, you’ll reap destruction BUT if you don’t grow weary in doing good… in proper time… you will be blessed.
What goes around comes around. Sounds almost like Karma, doesn’t it?

But again, here’s the difference:
Karma-kind of thinking believes that the only way to overcome the bad consequences or bad actions is to do good actions to outweigh them on the scale.

By contrast, the Bible tells us that none of us are worthy - no not one. We've all sinned. We've all been found wanting. Unlike in the Karma thinking –we can’t do enough good to offset the evil we've done in our lives. We can’t do enough good to be worthy of God’s blessings.

Karma is all about tallying up enough brownie points so that you just MIGHT get blessings. Bad deeds can only be offset by doing enough good deeds to balance things out. BUT no matter how many good deeds you do you can never be sure you've done enough to undo the damage of your past. Thus there’s no joy, no real hope, no sense of freedom... just a continuous sense of doubt... and fear that you haven't measured up.

You can tell when a Christian has bought into the Karma mindset. You ask a them if they are sure they’re going to heaven. They'll reply: “I hope I've been good enough…”

What they’re saying is Karma speak. "I hope my good deed have outweighed my bad. That way I can go into the presence of God and DESERVE heaven."

You can't. No one can ever DESERVE heaven. It is a gift from God. Our sins are paid for by the blood of Christ on the cross. THAT'S how we get to heaven. It has nothing to do with doing good (although doing good is certainly good).

Karma is the reason so many people reject Jesus. They sense the rightness of doing enough good to offset the bad they've done. They’d rather do it themselves, and they think they can… given enough time and enough chances to do good things. The very idea that Jesus would have to do it for them, offends them and offends their sensibilities. They feel THEY have to do the good things to deserve God’s blessing.

But in their heart of hearts, they know they aren't doing enough. They know they are no Mother Theresa. They know they are going to fall short. They understand that what goes around comes around… They’re not quite sure what’s coming around but are afraid of it.

Karma says: “you’re getting what you deserve. You've slipped and fell and now there’s a price you have to pay.”.
Jesus says: “You've messed up… let me pay the price. You can’t do it on your own. Let me help you.”

That's really the good news of the gospel. Jesus took the Karma out of life and installed forgiveness and renewal and peace no matter what we've done. What goes around comes around may work out on an earthly level - what we sow we reap - but on the heavenly plane, Jesus has changed all that and given us hope.