Lecture 5 – Faith in Tragedy

The Christian Passion story sits at the foundation of Western culture because it encapsulates the ultimate tragedy: the unjust suffering of the innocent. Carl Jung described it as an archetypal tragedy—one that everyone must confront. The story parallels that of Job: a man whom even God deems good, yet who is subjected to profound suffering through a wager between God and Satan. Job is stripped of everything, and still refuses to curse God or abandon his sense of intrinsic worth.

This narrative matters because tragedy is not just when something terrible happens—it's when something terrible happens to someone who doesn't deserve it. That's the kind of tragedy every person will face, either directly or through witnessing others, especially their children, suffer.

The Descent Into Hell

The Passion story doesn't end with the crucifixion—it includes the Harrowing of Hell. Christ descends into hell after death. Psychologically, this represents the confrontation with malevolence itself—not just suffering, but evil. The ultimate hell isn't pain. It's betrayal, especially betrayal of the innocent by those who should protect them. For example, the trauma of a child molested by a trusted family member is less about the physical act and more about the confrontation with pure evil—evil so profound it shatters the psyche.

Clinically, many people can bear unjust suffering. What is harder to recover from is betrayal, especially when one is complicit. Soldiers with PTSD often suffer not from what was done to them, but from what they did themselves.

Ordinary Evil

Books like *Ordinary Men* show how easy it is for regular people to become perpetrators of evil. Most people think they'd be heroes in a Nazi regime—saving Jews, resisting totalitarianism. But history and psychology suggest otherwise. Evil proceeds incrementally, and often under the guise of loyalty, duty, and even virtue. Understanding that *you* could be that person is essential. It's the first step toward transformation. You must integrate the capacity for evil within yourself, so it doesn't rule you unconsciously. Only then can you be *formidable* instead of dangerous.

"You’re not going to be dangerous until you know you can be."

To be *good*, you must first be capable of evil and then choose against it.

Tragedy Without Faith Is Hell

People suffer, and they often conclude that they deserve it. They begin to doubt their own worth. They believe they are so flawed that it would be better if they never existed. Job refuses this conclusion. He maintains his own worth despite everything. He also maintains faith in *being* itself. That’s hard. When suffering comes, the temptation is to curse life, to curse God, to shake your fist at the sky. But what’s the alternative?

“Are you going to open another hell up underneath the hell you're already in?”

You have to assume that you have *some worth*, despite your flaws. Treat yourself the way you would treat someone you cared about. Many people are not selfish—they’re self-neglectful. If you value others, you must learn to value yourself in the same way.

Vision and the Benefit of the Doubt

You can't form a vision for your life if you assume you’re unworthy of having a good one. So give yourself the benefit of the doubt. What if things could work out for you? That idea alone might be enough to pull you back from despair.

You also need a *vision of heaven*—something so compelling that it justifies the suffering of life. This is not naïve optimism, but *courage*. You must risk believing in the possibility of a meaningful life. The alternative is nihilism, resentment, and the false adventure of self-destruction.

False Adventure vs. Real Risk

When people have no meaningful goal, they often seek thrill in drugs, alcohol, and chaos. These are false adventures—pseudo-spirits that replace real spiritual purpose. Alcohol, for instance, is a Dionysian spirit. People become addicted not just to the substance, but to the *escape* it offers.

"The reliable cure for addiction is a better spirit."

You need something *more dangerous* than your addiction—an adventure that's worth the risk. Something meaningful enough to justify discipline and sacrifice. Abraham was called out of his comfort zone and into chaos—but that's what made him the father of nations.

A Call to Courage

Every romantic adventure contains risk, danger, challenge, and transformation. That's what a *life worth living* looks like. You're going to lose everything anyway, so why not lose it in pursuit of something *worthy*?

> *"Taking a risk on what's worthwhile—that's not a risk. Not taking that risk **is** the risk."*

Dimensions of Identity

You do not define your identity by your desires alone. You negotiate it. You're a son, daughter, friend, spouse, parent, citizen. Your identity is *socially embedded*. Mental health comes from harmony across these layers of identity—from the personal to the universal.

True identity is *earned* through participation, not declared by fiat. Real transformation comes through relationships, sacrifice, and meaningful responsibility.

If you want a meaningful life, you must be willing to:

- Confront tragedy
- Face malevolence
- Integrate your own capacity for evil
- Dare something great
- Give yourself the benefit of the doubt
- Serve something higher than yourself

That is faith in the face of tragedy. Not belief without evidence, but trust in the possibility of redemption through responsibility, love, and sacrifice.

> *"You might be full of snakes, but maybe it's still okay to treat yourself as if you have worth."*

This is the hard road upward.