

The Pain of Love
Introduction

When grief comes or any kind of BAD NEWS it FEELS like a sledge-hammer hitting solid rock; blasting more and more until we crack, possibly shatter.

- We think grief should be more like the strokes of the sculptor carefully forming us into the image of Christ.
- Maybe if we could JUST see the hand of God removing what prevents us from being like Christ, it wouldn't seem so painful?

Faith is hard when God doesn't do what we expect.

- What do we do when God doesn't do what we expect (or were taught) He would do?
- How should we feel when we think God is out-of-line?
- How should we react when God does not act the way we think He should?

People want us to think the answer is in the resurrection of Lazarus

- We have read this story many times...
- We have no problem with WHAT Jesus did.
- Our problem is with HOW He did it.
- They tell us Lazarus represents our first birth—the natural man and the natural man must die so the new creation can begin.
- They tell us to trust God. That He ALWAYS knows what He is doing.
- **In other words, they want us to believe the pain and suffering Mary and Martha went through was for their own good—for our good.**

Their logic goes like this:

Apart from His own resurrection, this is His greatest miracle: restoring life to the dead.

John's gospel has been built around three great miracles:

1. The healing of the lame at Bethesda's pool
2. The healing of the man born blind
3. The raising of Lazarus from the dead

These are three of the proofs of His Messiahship as recorded in Matthew 11

2 And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples 3 and said to Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" 4 Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: 5 The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.

I think you have noticed: after each of these miracles many believed

- But, at the same time, opposition to Jesus grows more violent.
- True then and true now
- This of course is always man's choice: how will he respond to the gospel?

They cite Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 2:16

For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?

Paul's message is clear:

- Some people are set free, delivered from sin and death; some are healed from addiction and affliction.
- Others are resentful and therefore resistant as they fight God to suppress the truth.
- **So, let's examine Chapter 11 ourselves and determine what we think is true**

**Which brings us to Point One: What do His disciples do when Jesus does not do what His disciples expect?
Verses 1-4**

Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. 3 Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." 4 When Jesus heard that, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it." 5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was. 7 Then after this He said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."

We notice Verse 3: Lord, he whom you love is sick.

- We, here this morning, are not stranger to this truth.
- Those whom God loves still get sick; some very sick.
- **When your body that God created reacts to the sickness the fallen world has created temperature rises and faith falls. Illness tries the trust of God's people.**

Like your home, the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus was filled with love.

- Each loved each other
- Each loved Jesus
- Each was loved by Jesus
- **So, yes, illness even comes to a home filled with love.**

Does Verse 6 answer one of the questions why God doesn't do what we expect?

So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was.

- If God is a God of love then why didn't Jesus rush to Bethany?
- Since God knew Lazarus was about to die then why make Mary and Martha suffer?
- No, Verse 6 doesn't answer our question, it begs the question.
- The answer doesn't come until Verse 15: "*I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe.*"
- **God acts at the exact right time!**
- **Which fits the stated purpose of John's gospel: that we will believe John 20:30-31**
- *Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name.*

Great, so Lazarus had to die so we could believe.

- Isn't that a bit much?
- Apparently not. Only God knows what it takes for us to REALLY BELIEVE.

Let's take a closer look...

Like you, Mary and Martha were surprised Jesus didn't come immediately.

- But why wouldn't He... He loves them and they love Him
- Even so, our observations must not stop with love but continue.
- Lazarus is also just a man—human, like Mary, Martha and you
- Therefore, he is not separated from...
First, the common necessities of life: love, food and shelter
Second, illness and accidents
God's covenant of grace does not exempt us from our human frailties.
- **Jesus did not come to save our bodies; only our souls**

Like you...Lazarus is loved and will benefit from the divine uses of affliction: namely grace; Matthew 6:33 and 2 Corinthians 12:8

- **Matt 6:33-34: "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. NKJV"**

- **2 Cor 12:8-10:** *“Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.* NKJV

So, here is the hard lesson: the pain of believers brings good to others

- The pain of Mary and Martha has brought good to others
- For the last 21 centuries, Lazarus has been bringing a message of hope to others.
- The Church should gain great faith in the sorrow of past saints
- The careless maybe awakened to faith
- The converted may be comforted
- Your trust in God should increase.
- Remember, the gentle strokes of the sculptor still removes unwanted stone.
The beauty of the diamond is revealed after it is cut
The purity of gold and silver only happens after it is refined by fire
Glass is only transparent after it is heated to 3200 degrees Fahrenheit
- Ouch!

**Which brings us to Point Two: Does your faith increase when Jesus does not do what His enemies expect?
Verses 8-12**

8 The disciples said to Him, “Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?” 9 Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. 10 But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.” 11 These things He said, and after that He said to them, “Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.” 12 Then His disciples said, “Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.”

Like Mary and Martha, keep talking to God...don’t stop praying.

- It is a great relief to know Jesus is our confidant, our advocate our friend
- It is a great comfort to know Jesus will hear our plea for help
- However, in our grief, we are prone to believe the world:
He either doesn’t care or He is powerless to help
- Therefore, we expect Jesus to act now!

We know Jesus is not afraid of His enemies.

- Though they sought to stone Him, Verse 8, He went to Bethany anyway
- Though our enemy seeks to destroy us; He will come to us anyway.
- But His timing and not ours!

When we become angry when Jesus does not act like we expect we reveal our lack of faith

- To what extent do we rely upon faith alone for healing.
- Do we refuse to shop for food or clothing and expect God to supply?
- Then, should we refuse the doctor and expect God to heal?
- Can God not feed us through the grocer and heal us through the physician?
- **Or do we stone Jesus because He will not comply to our demands?**

Therefore, we must remember His words: There are 12-hours in a day...

Lesson One from 12-hours in a day

- The work of the God of Light is done in The Light
- This is the significance of His reference to day-time hours
- When the darkness of the great tribulation our ability to work for God will be cut short

Lesson Two: Those who remain in disobedience can expect a shorter life span

- In Ephesians 6, Paul explains the Fifth Commandment: Exodus 20:
"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.
- Ephesians 6:1-3: *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: 3 "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth."*
- This is one of our most treasured goals of our fellowship: to give our children good reasons to honor and obey their parents!
- So, if a long life comes through obedience, can we expect a shorter life to those who will not repent of their sinful ways before God?

Which brings us to Point Three: Isn't it true that Jesus rarely does what we expect?

Verses 13-16

13 However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. 14 Then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. 15 And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him." 16 Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

Perhaps Mary and Martha expected Lazarus to simply recover

- For Jesus could heal from a great distance.
- He did not need to be present to heal!
- God is love; so why wouldn't Jesus just make Lazarus better?

The love of God is difficult to understand.

First, Perhaps, because we have contrasting views of death.

- We see death as final; irreversible.
- God sees death as sleep and easily reversed

Second, perhaps we have contrasting views of pain and suffering

- We see illness as punishment or worse, the result of an uncaring powerless God
- God sees loneliness, sorrow and pain as gifts; the chance to grow in our faith

Third, we view love as a feeling; something we can fall in or out of

- So our action or non-action is often based upon how we feel at that moment
- God is love...for Him there is no other option; so God is consistent; no shadow of turning.

Which brings us to the hard questions:

1. Do you believe God loves you and is working in your best interest?
2. Are the circumstances of your loved ones' proof that God does not love them or you?
3. Can you remain faithful to God even though you think He has abandoned you?

Perhaps Verse 16 has YOUR answer

"Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

- Thomas was willing to go to Bethany and die with Jesus.
- Jesus wasn't asking him to die for Him—for 'the cause'
- Jesus only asks us to die to ourselves—to humble ourselves in faith and trust God

The name Thomas means twin; probably because he was a twin.

- So, where was his twin?
- Since we are not told maybe it isn't important.
- But, as one person suggested, "look in the mirror"
- Or, better yet, look into the Word of God...**James 1:22-25**
- But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. Verse 25: **But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.**