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“WHY THIS?”
John 11:1-53

△ O God, if you love me, why this?
Most of us have wondered this, haven't we? Some of us have voiced it aloud.

O God, if you love me, why can't I find a job? Why must my body be wracked by pain? Why is my marriage falling apart? Why is my child self-destructing? Why is my best friend dying?

O God, if you love me, why this? It is the kind of question we ask when we are up to our necks in illness, injustice, evil and death.

(Truth be told, the circumstances don't have to be *that* serious. Sometimes a malfunctioning appliance or a slow check-out line is enough to set us off!)

Still, there is plenty of real trouble in this life. It afflicts devout Christ Followers and degenerate disbelievers alike.

Now and then we might well find ourselves asking: O God, if you love me, why this? That question is all over John chapter 11 {p 1094}.

□ In Jn 11:1-6 Lazarus is seriously ill. Martha and Mary are confident Jesus is able to heal their brother, so they send word to him: {11:3} **“Lord, the one you love is sick.”**

What does Jesus do? {11: 6}, **“When he [hears] that Lazarus [is ill], he [stays] where he [is] two more days.”**

Try to visualize the interchange:

“Lord, the one you love is sick. The prognosis is not good.”

“OK. We will wait a few days and then go to him.”

It is an “O God, if you love me, why this?” moment.

□ John 11:7-16.

After delaying their departure for two days Jesus says to the Twelve, {11:7} **“Let's go back to Judea.”** (That's where Lazarus' home is.)

{11:8} **“But Rabbi,”** they protest, **“a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?”**

It is a fair question. A short time before this in Jerusalem Jesus had declared, {Jn 10:30} **“I and the Father are one,”** and a mob had tried to stone him.

In response He said, {10:38-39} **“The Father is in me, and I in the Father.’ Again they tried to seize him, but”** his time had not yet come, and **“he escaped their grasp.”**

Judea is a dangerous place, not only for Jesus but also his followers. Should their Master be killed it is likely the disciples will suffer the same fate, and they know it.

So when Jesus announces that they are going to Bethany in Judea, Thomas says to the others: {11:16} **“Let us also go, that we may die with him.”** His courage and resolve are admirable; nevertheless, he has to wonder why Jesus is putting him and his friends in harm's way.

It is an “O God, if you love me, why this?” moment.

□ John 11:17-21 and 28-32.

Jesus arrives in Bethany, and Martha comes out to meet him. At this point Lazarus has {11:17} **“already been in the tomb for four days.”** {11:21} **“Lord,”** Martha says, **“if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”**

She goes back to the house and informs her sister that Jesus has finally made it. Mary hurries out, falls at his feet, and says {11:32} **“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”**

These are “O God, if you love me, why this?” moments.

Why am I sick? Why aren't you protecting me from danger? Why is my loved one dead?

There is more to these questions than meets the eye, isn't there?

△ 1st, When we ask “If you love me, why this?” aren't we asking, Do you know what's happening? Do you see the trouble I am in? Do you understand my situation?

Does Jesus understand?

Working our way through John 11, Jesus knows Lazarus is fatally ill. He knows his friend is dead even before they leave for Bethany. Likewise, He knows that Judea is a dangerous place

◆ Christ knew these things during his incarnation, even though He submitted to voluntary limits on his knowledge. How much more clearly can He see our struggles *now*, when He has no such limits!

△ 2nd, When we ask “If you love me?” aren't we asking, Does this matter to you? Are you concerned about my problems? Do you care about me?

Does Jesus care?

What does the text say? V 5: “**Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.**” In v 33 Jesus is “**deeply moved in spirit and troubled.**” In v 35 He weeps. And in v 38 the Lord is “**once more deeply moved.**”

◆ Christ was amazingly compassionate during his incarnation, even while He faced unimaginable stress. How much more does He care, now that He has passed through suffering into glory!

△ 3rd, When we ask “If you love me, why this?” aren't we asking, Are you able to help me? Can you make a difference? Do you have power to intervene?

Does Jesus have the power?

As Martha says in v 21, “**Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.**” Jesus has the

power to heal the illness, but He does not. But then in vv 38-44 He goes on to raise Lazarus from the dead.

◆ Christ demonstrated a degree of divine power during his incarnation, even though He was subject to certain limits. How much more able is He now, since He received his glorified body!

O God, do you understand my circumstances? Do you care about me? Do you have the power to help? The answer is a resounding “Yes” on all counts.

Still, this doesn't exhaust the “if you love me” question, does it? Christ Jesus knows and cares and He is entirely able to intervene in dramatic ways. But often, He does not. Why doesn't He spare his children from trouble and pain?

✦ Take a look at v 4: Speaking of Lazarus' impending death, Jesus says “**it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it.**”

👉 This is about the glory of God. Lazarus' sickness and death contribute to God's glory.

✦ Vv 8-10: When the disciples remind Jesus of the danger in Judea, He gives this cryptic reply: “**Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk in the daytime will not stumble.**” In other words, his Father expects him to complete his mission on his timetable. Bold and prompt obedience will lead to success, but a cautious delay would cause Jesus to stumble (to fail).

👉 This is about the mission of Jesus. Facing the danger in Judea is essential to fulfilling his mission.

✦ Vv 14-15: Jesus says, “**Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe.**” He speaks of belief again in vv 40-42.

👉 This is about the faith of Christ Followers. Losing Lazarus is going to strengthen their trust.

☞ Christ's decisions to delay the journey, expose the Twelve to danger, and allow Lazarus' death glorify God, serve his mission, and build faith. How?

† Through his display of life-giving power in raising Lazarus from the dead.

○ V 45: **"Therefore many of the Jews ...put their faith in him."** Another healing of a sick man would not have had the same impact.

† More importantly, these decisions glorify God, serve Christ's mission, and build faith **by** advancing his fundamental agenda: death and resurrection.

○ Take a look at v 46: **"Some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done."** Consequently, v 53, **"from that day on they plotted to take his life."** Their motive was evil; yet the Lord used their sin to bring about the salvation of the world!

Doubtless, the believers who experienced these things praised God for allowing Lazarus to die. The circumstances that caused them to ask, "If you love me, why this?" became for them, and us, and the whole world, a source of unlimited goodness.

What does this mean in our "O God, if you love me, why this" moments? It means the Lord can redeem our struggles for good. He can transform our suffering into blessing for us and the world. He can take our otherwise pointless pain and give it profound meaning by using it for his perfect purpose.

✚ 1st, God glorifies himself in our trouble by deepening our intimacy with him. Philippians 3:10-11 speaks to this point: **"I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death..."**

○ This is not the abstract knowledge of ideas alone; it is the concrete knowledge of true ideas combined with

practical experience. To know Christ is to participate in his suffering, death and resurrection.

✚ 2nd, God glorifies himself in our trouble by making us like Jesus. Romans 8:28: **"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."**

Many believers misunderstand this verse as God's promise that everything will turn out well in the end (my unemployment will inevitably end in a better job, my illness will inevitably end in healing, my broken marriage will inevitably be put back together, etc.). But that is not what it means. Romans 8:29 explains: **"For"** (that means because) **"those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters."**

○ This **"good"** in Romans 8:28 is not the lesser good of situational ease and worldly comfort; it *is the infinitely greater good of sanctification*, of becoming like Jesus.

⊙ A word of caution: this is not inevitable. Self-pity, pride and un-belief can limit God's redemptive work in our struggles.

But if we surrender to him in trusting obedience, God will miraculously use our "if you love me, why this" moments to glorify his Name, bless our neighbors, and accomplish his perfect purpose in the world!

△ Who knows? Seen in this light we might even find ourselves saying, O God, since you love me, why not this?