Lazarus Raised (vv 38-44)

38 Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. 39 Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, by this time he smells bad; he has been dead four days.” 40 Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?” 41 “So they took away the stone,” Jesus said. And after Jesus had lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me.” 42 “I knew that you always hear me,” he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” 43 “The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

When Jesus told the people to remove the stone covering the cave where Lazarus had been laid four days before, even Martha’s faith seemed to falter in spite of the fact that she seemed to indicate that Jesus could raise her brother from the dead. Jesus reminds Martha of what he had told his disciples most recently, that through faith, the incorruptible is raised. He pointed out that the body normally decays in four days, and his body was not there, so that you may believe. For us to become everything he created us to be, faith is required. Jesus’ power redeems our suffering and makes us as comfortable as possible is little more than the prosperity gospel, which is no gospel at all. So while God’s perfect love for us does allow for our suffering, his power redeems our suffering in ways that bring him the most glory and us the most growth.

Three, when God allows us to suffer, but then delivers us and brings glory to himself, it builds our faith.

Four, just as God spoke all things into existence in the beginning, he will one day speak again and our physical bodies will be raised from the dead just like Lazarus. Genesis 1:1 says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” God spoke, “let there be... and there was.” In a strange turn of prophetic events, God led the prophet Ezekiel to speak to the valley of dry bones. Ezekiel 37:4-6 says, “Then the Lord said to me, ‘Prophecy these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord.’” When Ezekiel prophesied to the bones, verses 7-8, and 10 say, “So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them...”

In John 5:25, 28 Jesus says, “ Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.” Death is foreign to the world God created. We sometimes normalize it and to some extent that’s healthy, but spiritually and biblically speaking, death is not a part of life. In fact, in 1Corinthians 15:26, Paul says death is the last enemy to be destroyed. John recounts God sitting on the great white throne and judging all mankind. And once they have been judged, Revelation 20:14 says, “Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.”

Conclusions

So what can we conclude from this passage of Scripture? One, God’s perfect love for us does not prevent him from allowing us to suffer. When we suffer, we naturally ask why. And when we ask why, it’s easy to doubt either God’s love or God’s power. We do that because our view of love leads us to think that if we love someone, we would never allow them to suffer if it was in our power to prevent it. And that makes perfect sense... until you spend about 30 seconds thinking about it. If you prevent your child from any sort of suffering at all, you’ll ruin them. They become weak and self-absorbed and you make it impossible for them to become everything they could have become otherwise. God’s perfect love for us does not prevent him from allowing us to suffer.

Two, while God’s perfect love for us does allow for our suffering, his power redeems our suffering and makes us as comfortable as possible. It builds our faith. God’s love or God’s self-topriority is to keep us from suffering and bring glory to himself, it builds our faith. As we suffer, we naturally ask why. And when we ask why, it’s easy to doubt either God’s love or God’s power. We do that because our view of love leads us to think that if we love someone, we would never allow them to suffer if it was in our power to prevent it. And that makes perfect sense... until you spend about 30 seconds thinking about it. If you prevent your child from any sort of suffering at all, you’ll ruin them. They become weak and self-absorbed and you make it impossible for them to become everything they could have become otherwise. God’s perfect love for us does not prevent him from allowing us to suffer.

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God would use the sickness of Lazarus for his glory, and for the glory of his son, Jesus. No doubt when the disciples heard Jesus say, “this sickness will not end in death,” they thought it was a temporary sickness. However, Jesus thought of it as a temporal death. Verses five and six seem to stand in tension with each other. Jesus loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus, but in spite of his love, he remained where he was two more days, which makes no sense to us. Verses five and six, then, simply acknowledge the question we’re all thinking anyway: how could Jesus both love this family and knowingly allow Lazarus to die?

**Lazarus Sleeps (vv 7-16)**

Then he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.” 8 “But Rabbi,” they said, “a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?” 9 Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world’s light. 10 It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light.” 11 After he had said this, he went on to tell them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.” 12 His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.” 13 Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. 14 So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, 15 and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” 16 Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

Jesus tells his disciples that it’s time to head back to Judea, which is where Lazarus was, but also where people tried to stone him to death in the chapter before this one (John 10:31, 39). If they knew that Lazarus would die unless Jesus went back, it would at least make some sense. But since Jesus had already assured them that Lazarus’ sickness would not end in death, it made no sense to the disciples for Jesus to risk his life in a place where he just barely escaped with it not long before.

In verses 9 and 10, Jesus explains why he’s going back to Judea in spite of its risks. Just like someone who walks during the day can see the path in front of them therefore doesn’t stumble, so Jesus is walking during the daytime, that is, the time the Father has appointed for his ministry. As such, Jesus knows that he will be protected by the Father and could not be safer no matter who wanted to kill him. Truly, there is no safe place in this world than under the protection of the Father no matter how irrational it may seem to those around.

Verses 11-12 almost seem like Jesus is having a little fun with his disciples. They heard Jesus say that Lazarus would not die, which is not what Jesus said but an understandable misinterpretation. Now Jesus tells them Lazarus is asleep and he’s going to his home to wake him up. You can forget about understanding that Jesus was talking about death because Jesus had already told them that this story would not end in death. And even for Jesus’ disciples, who knew the extent of his power better than anyone else, believing that Jesus would raise Lazarus from the dead was an impossible stretch.

The discussion became muddled enough that Jesus plainly told them, “Lazarus is dead.” Verse 15 provides the context of the first time God would use death to veil his glory through the death of Lazarus: Jesus says that he’s glad he was not there, and by implication, that Lazarus died, “so that you may believe.” While this tragedy would lead Jesus not just to cry, but to weep, Jesus also recognized that God would use it to strengthen the faith of his disciples. Thomas brings the discussion to a conclusion by morosely exhorting his colleagues to join Jesus in the death that was sure to await them in Judea.

**Jesus & The Sisters (vv 17-32)**

We don’t have time to read the whole chapter, so let me summarize verses 17-32 for you. When Jesus arrived, he was met by a large group of people who had come to console Mary and Martha on the death of Lazarus. Jesus talked to both sisters, one after the other, but the conversations began with the same declaration, first by Martha and then by Mary: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died (vv 21, 32).” In a remarkable demonstration of faith, Martha added, “But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you (v 22).”

The sisters were frank with Jesus; their brother was dead because of his absence. The word that doesn’t appear but underlies the statement is why. Why was Jesus absent at the time of their greatest need? Why did things happen the way they did when they all knew that Jesus could have intervened earlier and the whole tragedy could have been avoided. Jesus engaged them in a circular discussion about resurrection intended to help them think about life and death outside the narrow constraints of their immediate grief. The point, Jesus says, is not about when he arrived, but why he was, because he himself was the resurrection and life. In other words, the resurrection was not an event, but a person. Whether Lazarus was alive or dead didn’t matter because Jesus was the source of life. He concludes by saying, “Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live; and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die (vv 25-26).” The story concludes in verses 33-44.

**More Why’s (vv 33-37)**

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” Jesus wept. So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?”

Verses 33 and 35 lay to rest the question raised in the beginning of the chapter of whether or not Jesus really loved Lazarus, Mary, and Martha as much as the text seems to say he loved them. Jesus actually loved them as much as or more than any other people, as well as this was what he had to do to comfort them, it says he was deeply moved in his spirit. This word normally describes someone who is really upset or angry about something. It’s worth noting that Jesus wept before he came to the tomb of Lazarus. Jesus was certainly moved by the death of his friend, Lazarus, but the text seems to indicate that he was moved by the sorrow and grief that death had visited upon Mary and Martha, upon all of those who came to comfort them, and more generally, upon mankind itself, which was created in God’s image and for...