

Date: July 1, 2012

Subject: This Sickness is Not unto Death

"Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. (It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.) Therefore his sisters sent unto Him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick. When Jesus heard that, He said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." John 11:1-4

We just read that a man named Lazarus became very sick, and how his sisters went to find Jesus to tell Him about their brother. We can feel their urgency and conclude that their brother Lazarus was seriously sick, and was ^{even} near the point of death.

Mary and Martha cut straight to the heart of the matter and sought Jesus' immediate help. Notice how they didn't ask Jesus to heal Lazarus because of how much they loved him, but they directly told Jesus, "he whom Thou lovest is sick."

It's as if someone were taking their dying relative to the Emergency Room and saying to the surgeon, "My beloved is dying and needeth thy help - fix him, heal him; thou canst not fail, for though I lovest him dearly, thou lovest him too. Tend to him - I beseech thee - ~~and~~ for in this thing my love is bound, mine hands are tied; so I trusteth in thee and am comforted in thy love to him, for thou lovest him as thine own soul and so will heal him without fail, 'behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick'."

Upon hearing this, what did Jesus do? Did he drop everything ^{he was doing} and go rushing towards Lazarus? No, not at all; in fact, Jesus didn't even have to go to Lazarus to heal him, He could have just spoke the Word and Lazarus would have been healed. This is what Jesus did for the centurion's servant in Matthew chapter 8, remember that?

After Jesus told the centurion that He would go to his house and heal his servant, the centurion said,

"Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the Word only, and my servant shall be healed."

Our Lord commends his faith and says,

"Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee."

Matthew 8:8, 13

Jesus could have done the same thing with Lazarus, He could've just spoke the Word and Lazarus would have been healed immediately.

We are going to read what Jesus actually did in John 11:6, but we must read verse 5 first, and I think you will see why.

"Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus."

There is no misunderstanding this, Jesus loved Lazarus, and He loved his sisters who came begging Jesus for help. Now, let's read verse 6,

"When He [i.e. Jesus] had heard therefore that he was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was."

If Jesus didn't tell us that He loved them in verses 5, we might think He didn't. Do you understand what Jesus is doing?

Lazarus - a man whom Jesus loves - is dying, Mary and Martha pleaded with Jesus to heal their brother; Jesus loves all three of them, but it's as if He ignored them all... Jesus allowed Lazarus, to die.

"Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead." John 11:14

O imagine the pain Mary and Martha had, their beloved brother dying in their arms; and that, ~~after~~ they besought Jesus' help. How could Jesus ignore the request of two dear sisters - they weren't asking for a new house, or money, or anything like that. All they wanted, was for their brother to live, and now... he's dead.

How many of us have experienced the death of a loved one? How many of us have dear relatives who are seriously sick now? Or even ourselves??

We feel like our prayers fall upon "deaf ears," that we are ignored, "Has God forgotten us? Doesn't He love me? Doesn't He love my sick husband, or wife, or uncle, or mother, or father, or sibling, relative, neighbour, friend ????"

"Why do bad things happen to good people?" Have you ever been asked that question? Have you ever wondered it yourself?

Well if someone does ever ask you that, don't pull out a theological revolver and start firing off about ^{how} we are no good sinners and deserve what evils befall us. While it's true that we are very wicked sinners and are born under the wrath of God; this question, "Why do bad things happen to good people" stems from a tender heart touched by grief, and sincere love for their beloved friend. So put your theological revolver away, show some heartfelt sympathy, and speak "the truth in love." (Eph. 4:15)

In the Beginning

To understand why "bad things happen to good people" we must go back, all the way back to the beginning. The very first book of our Bibles is called, "Genesis"; which actually means, "beginning." We read in the very first verse, Genesis chapter one, verse one,

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

No evolution, no accidental "Big Bang" that started this whole world, "In the beginning God..." God created all of this, and the rest of Genesis chapter one details what God did on each of ~~the~~ six days; and we read in the last verse of Genesis chapter one,

"And God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day." (Gen. 1:31)

God made everything perfect and, "it was very good." There ~~was~~^{were} no deaths, no sicknesses, no

sufferings, not even any crying... because there was no sin.

A world with no sin, we can't even grasp that because we were born into sin (cf. Ps. 51:5), our thinking, our attitudes, our innate rebellion towards God - this has become our depraved humanity; so a time of this world's existence without sin, is something we can only come to know from reading the Bible. "In the beginning" when God first created the heaven and the earth, there was no sin. Adam and his wife Eve, lived among the animals and tended the earth in total peace, in the absence of sin; that is, until...

One Man's Disobedience

We read in Romans 5:19

"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners,..."

This is referring to the very first man, Adam, and because he disobeyed God one time, every ~~man~~ child born after him (and we all came from him), are born sinners.

Again, we have to go back to the beginning, to the book of Genesis, this time, to chapter two. God gave Adam just one commandment, and He told Adam the serious consequences if he disobeyed.

"And the LORD God commanded the man [i.e. Adam], saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the Knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

Genesis 2:16-17

Adam had it all, wouldn't you say? Anything he wanted - anything at all - he could, freely eat; he could have as much as he wanted, when he wanted, where he wanted. There was only one tree that God told Adam not to eat from - just one, out of all the trees in the garden - God forbid him from only one ^{tree} and what did Adam do?

We must turn to Genesis chapter three for the answer; we will start in verse one and read to verse 6.

"Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, has God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: for God does know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat."

This is what is referred to as "The Fall" or "The Fall of Mankind" because when Adam disobeyed God, we all fell; that is, we all died.

"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." 1 Cor. 15:22

Adam's sin brought death into the world in two ways that would affect each and every person born thereafter (except Jesus, of course).

First it brought about a spiritual death by which we lost our fellowship with God, and our minds became wholly set against God and His law.

"Because the carnal mind is enmity [i.e. hatred] against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."
Romans 8:7

Second, Adam's sin brought physical death into the world. Remember in Genesis 2:17 we read,

"But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

That last phrase, "thou shalt surely die" is literally translated, "dying thou shalt die."

Its as if God told Adam, "Don't eat of that tree, for in the day you eat of it, you will begin dying, until you finally die." So as soon as Adam ate of that fruit, its like an hourglass was flipped, and the sand began to fall. ~~With~~ With every grain of "sand" that falls, the more we age and deteriorate away, until we finally die, "dying thou shalt die." You see beloved, we are not born to die - as some may think - but because of Adam's sin, we are all born, "dying."

A little later in Genesis chapter three, God brings judgments upon the serpent (who represents Satan), the woman (Eve), the man (Adam); and even the ground did God curse,

"And unto Adam He said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow

"Shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ~~earth~~ ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." Genesis 3:17-19

Our every disease, sickness, sorrow, and death, originates with our sin in Adam. Our skin, our muscles, our bones, our hearts - everything, is slowly dying away as a result of Adam's sin. It is so important for us to understand the serious effects Adam's sin had over all humanity that the Bible makes constant reference to it. Look at Romans chapter five for example, look at all of the references to Adam's sin (and this is only from one chapter):

"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (vs. 12)... For if through the offence of one many be dead, ¹⁵(vs) ... And not as it was by one that sinned... for the judgment was by one to condemnation (vs. 16)... For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; (vs. 17)...

"Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; (vs. 18)... For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, (vs 19)..."

Every one of these passages is referring to that one major event that affected all of mankind - the day when Adam ate of that forbidden fruit, and died spiritually, and began dying physically.

"Why do bad things happen to good people?" It all began with Adam, we must never point our finger at God (that certainly won't help things at all); rather, we must remember Satan's subtility, and Adam's sin - and ultimately, point the finger at ourselves; because not only would we have done what Adam did, ~~but~~ ^{but} none of us can say (honestly) that we haven't sinned in our life either, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23).

The Bible uses many figures to represent the weaknesses of our body: "houses of clay" (Job 4:19), "earthly house" (2 Cor. 5:1), "earthen vessels" (2 Cor. 4:7), "tabernacle" (meaning "tent" 2 Pet. 1:13-14), "temple" (1 Cor. 6:19); which all illustrate their weakness and how they all wear away; and like the apostle Paul writes in 2 Cor. 4:16, "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish,..." this

all just reinforces what we read in Genesis 2:17 "dying thou shalt die." We are all in a constant state of ~~being~~^{dying} outwardly, this is something that we cannot stop. God has given good medicines and advanced technology; but inevitably, we will all die (unless our Lord Jesus Christ Returns in our lifetime). Old or young, rich or poor, man or woman; the "sand" in each of our hourglasses is running out, and there is nothing we can do to stop it. But...

Is this the end of all mankind? Are we without any hope? Has Satan defeated God and won the victory over His people?? Although it may appear so, let's return to see what happened to Lazarus.

This Sickness is Not unto Death

We already read this, but do you remember what Jesus told Mary and Martha after they just told Him, "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." ? These dear sisters have just told Jesus that their brother Lazarus is about to die, and this is what Jesus says,

"This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." John 11:4

With an answer like this, we might expect Lazarus not to die, we would think this is Jesus' way of comforting his sisters, "Don't worry, I am going to take care of him, he is not going to die, This sickness is not unto death." Actually, this is exactly what Jesus meant - only not in the way we might assume.

Even if Jesus healed Lazarus here, he would have become sick again later and died - our death is certain; but when Jesus said, "This sickness is not unto death," He meant that death wouldn't be the end of Lazarus. This is why after Lazarus died, Jesus said that he was only sleeping.

"Our friend Lazarus sleeps; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep." John 11:11

Now the disciples misunderstood Jesus, because

they thought Jesus meant ~~to~~ that Lazarus was actually sleeping.

"Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that He had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead." John 11:12-14

Lazarus is dead, but remember ^{what} Jesus said, "This sickness is ~~is~~ not unto death" - listen up because here is ~~not~~ where everything will start fitting together.

The word translated "sickness" is the Greek noun, "astheneia" and is translated "weakness" in 1 Corinthians 15:43 "it is sown in weakness" ["astheneia"]. 1 Corinthians chapter fifteen is all speaking of the resurrection of our bodies when Christ returns; which is exactly what Christ is teaching us in the eleventh chapter of John by using Lazarus as an example of all His people. Let's read a few verses together from 1 Corinthians chapter 15 so you can see this all for yourself.

"So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption [meaning: we must first live in ^{these} decaying bodies of flesh]; it is raised in incorruption [meaning: when Christ Returns to collect the bodies of His people, their resurrected bodies will be incorruptable - no pains, no sicknesses, no aging throes, no more death; because they will be ~~totally~~ free from sin.]; it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness ["astheneia"]; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." 1 Cor. 15:42-44

Let's move down to verse 51 to see what the Bible says will happen to those believers who are still alive when Christ Returns,

"Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep [remember what this means, cf. "Lazarus sleepeth"], but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible,

"and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

1 Cor. 15:51-53

So back in John 11, when Jesus said,

"This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby."

Jesus never meant that he would prevent Lazarus from dying; but Jesus was teaching of Lazarus' resurrection and how all of His people... never die, for when a true believer dies, he is "present with the Lord" in his soul immediately upon leaving his body in the grave.

"Martha saith unto Him, ~~I~~ I know that he [i.e. Lazarus] shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believes in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: " John 11:25

Later in this chapter, Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, He did so to teach us of the

final Resurrection to come. Lazarus wasn't raised with a spiritual body, and would've died later on; but when Jesus Christ Returns and resurrects all His people... We will never die again.

Believest Thou This?

God created the heaven and the earth, our first parents - Adam and Eve - disobeyed God and brought God's righteous judgment upon all mankind, we are born ^{are} "dying", and in total rebellion in our heart against God by nature; and the Son of God - Jesus Christ - was resurrected from the dead and died for the forgiveness of our sins, and so promises eternal life to all who truly believe in Him.

"And whosoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Believest thou this?" John 11:26

You may be going through some very difficult times in your life, maybe you have lost all hope and are bordered by numerous physical afflictions and pains every day. You're in pain, your family is in pain, and every second that

passes, leaves that much less sand in the glass... What are you going to do? What can you do? O beloved, believe, believe in the name of the Son of God, Jesus Christ and cheer your heart for then, "this sickness" - your sickness - "is not unto death."

"Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life: he that believes in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Believest thou this?" John 11:25-26

May our Lord Jesus Christ comfort you with the peace in believing His promises. i am ever gratefully,

Your servant for Jesus' sake,

Herb. W. W.

Tell Me the Story of Jesus by Crosby 1880

Tell me the story of Jesus, write on my heart every word;
tell me the story most precious, sweetest that ever was heard.
Tell how the angels, in chorus, sang as they welcomed His birth,
"Glory to God in the highest! Peace and good tidings to earth."

Fasting alone in the desert, tell of the days that are past,
how for our sins He was tempted, yet was triumphant at last.
Tell of the years of His labour, tell of the sorrow He bore;
He was despised and afflicted, homeless, rejected, and poor.

Tell of the cross where they nailed Him, writhing in anguish and pain;
tell of the grave where they laid Him, tell how He liveth again.
Love is that story so tender, clearer than ever I see:
stay, let me weep while you whisper; love paid the ransom for me.

Tell me the story of Jesus, write on my heart every word;
tell me the story most precious, sweetest that ever was heard.