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If Only You'd Been Here!

1100-B

**Series: Why Do You Run When I'm Crying
(The Caring Church in a Hurting World)**



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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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I- THE ONE YOU LOVE IS SICK

Now there was a certain man who was sick, named Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. It was the same Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. The sisters therefore sent word to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, the one You love is sick."

"The one you love is sick..." And so begins one of the most moving stories in all of the New Testament. It is a story in which we are reminded graphically that God has emotions. It is a story in which we are reminded as well that He, living in man, will respond to the hurts and grief of others in a very real and personal way. So as we continue our look at how God deals with hurting people, we venture to Bethany where a life-like photo looms on the horizon of the Creator of Heaven and Earth and two hurting hearts.

"The one you love is sick." How often you and I have heard those words and how often you and I have recoiled at the thought of them. Because how often our first thought has been how their sickness will affect us. How seldom do our thoughts race to that loved one's side and with no selfish motives at all, our only desire is to give ourselves unreservedly to make them comfortable, no matter how long it takes!

Now be honest. How often has your wife or husband called to say they were sick and instead of grieving over their pain, you have thought to yourself, "That means cold hot dogs for supper tonight." Or, "There goes my trip to the coast." Or, "Not that: I-don't-feel-good-enough-to-go-see-your-folks' routine again." Oh, the self-centeredness that surfaces from sickness. Nothing in life seems to test people's real ability to love like sickness does. Lazarus was sick. Really sick. In fact, Jesus was the only one there who knew just how sick Lazarus really was. And so we have the beginning of the unfolding of a story of the love of God

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unparalleled in the New Testament except for the story of Calvary.

Sickness, remember, is the thermometer God places on the church to test the temperature of our love for one another. You can take the test yourself. Ask yourself, "How deeply concerned am I when I read the names of someone in the church bulletin who is sick? If it's someone I don't know, do I dismiss it as someone else's job to pray?" If I were to take the last four weeks of your church's weekly program, and read the names of the people who were listed as sick, how many would you have prayed for faithfully?

Those are interesting questions. God might well ask us, "Why do you think they were listed? To get their names in print? To let their families know they were sick? To fill in necessary space in the bulletin? No, they were listed so everyone in their larger family, the body of Christ, particularly that local body of Christ, would pray without ceasing, not only for their health, but for their spiritual well-being, for their ministry to others through their sickness, and for the strength and witness of their loved ones."

That's just one facet of the mind of God where sickness is concerned. Have you ever thought seriously about why God allows men and women in the body of Christ to get sick and to suffer? Have you ever thought seriously about how God uses sickness or affliction to test us, to grow us, to reveal Himself to us? When you or those you love are sick or in trouble, God has a plan. The sickness was not His doing, but He allowed it. He allowed it with a divine purpose in mind. You or those you love may or may not get well quickly. You may or may not be delivered from your difficulties quickly. But whether or not you do, look for these things to transpire and your sickness or affliction or persecution will have been for the glory of God. Here are some of the things that happen when sickness or affliction strikes one of God's children:

1- God uses it to develop His character in those who are suffering. You and I do not develop the likeness of God so long as we, in our own strength, can handle our own problems. The dependence that comes when we are ill changes all that. Paul thus said:

And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most

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gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of
Christ may rest upon me. (II Corinthians 12:9 NKJV)

In other words, as long as we can, we will. As soon as we can't, He can. Unfortunately, it is only when you and I have had our strength taken from us that we appropriate His strength for His glory. The greatest spiritual fruit in my life has been borne in the shadow of pain. And it is true of many of you as well. I Peter 4:12-13 reminds us:

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you;

but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. (I Peter 4:12,13 NKJV)

The nature of God floods the soul of man, when man, suffering pain he cannot endure, appropriates the nature of God to endure it.

2- God often uses sickness and affliction to strengthen the bond that exists between believers. "Lord, make them one as we are one," was in essence, what Jesus prayed in John 17:11. How could He do that? What could He use as the super glue that would serve as an adhesive to form one out of many? He used the bond of unity that comes from adversity. And is it not deep, deep trouble that causes the body of Christ, even today, to forget its petty differences and join hands in earnest prayer? Of course, it is. He uses affliction to unify the body of Christ.

3- God uses affliction to teach His children to pray. So often we must be driven to our knees by storm clouds, for we will not fall to our knees in the sunshine. The following verse explains it all:

"In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me."

(Hosea 5:15 NKJV)

4- God uses sickness and affliction, to drive men to His Word.

It is good for me that I have been afflicted; That I may learn
Your statutes. (Psalm 119:71 NKJV)

Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your
word. (Psalm 119: 67 NKJV)

So often we will, individually, and corporately, exist without spiritual nourishment until we have been physically afflicted.

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Then, and only then, are we driven to the Word.

5- God uses sickness and affliction to remind us of His Sovereignty. The Psalmist reminds us:

The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears, And delivers them out of all their troubles.

Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all. (Psalm 34:17,19 NKJV)

It is often when the winds howl, and the saints cry, and the doctor calls, that the Christian is reminded of who his God is. His God is Sovereign.

6- God uses sickness and affliction to remind the saints of eternity. You and I live in a world that does not recognize eternity as a reality until sickness or death awakens us to its song. Not until astronauts perish in a grievous mishap, or a huge airliner falls to earth carrying hundreds, do people talk about a hereafter. And not until a loved one is suffering a lingering illness in the hospital, do many families begin to talk about whether or not heaven or hell is real. It takes sickness and affliction to equip us to think about glory.

7- God, perhaps more than any other thing, uses sickness and trouble and even death in the life of the Christian to glorify His name. That principle will surface more and more in this lesson, but if you want to see it clearly, examine the lives of Ruth, Stephen, Paul and even Jesus. It is as God works through us, either to deliver us from, or deliver us through, these sieges of pain, that His name is exalted and His purposes revealed.

8- God uses suffering and pain to teach Christians how to love. Here is the crux of today's study. You and I often do not know either how to reach out and give or open up and receive the love of God through others until either we or they have been laid low by the circumstances of life. At that point pride vanishes, and the hurts of the heart overwhelm our self-centeredness and we begin to become the kind of saints we were meant to be. So before you complain about an increase in pain or suffering or sickness in your life or in your family or in your church, check that checklist. God may be trying to reveal His character to you in a whole new way or He may be trying to solidify a struggling body of believers. He may be attempting to teach His children to pray or drive them to His Word or remind them of His sovereignty or equip them for eternity. One thing is for sure. He desires to use

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that crisis to teach His children how to love. He did that while He was clothed in our humanity on planet earth. But oh, what slow learners we are.

With that backdrop we must remember that Satan may well have thought he had inflicted a wound on Jesus' ministry when Lazarus took sick. But Jesus understood the deeper work of God. He understood that His Father had a plan, a rich, wonderful plan to use that illness for His glory. And so the story unfolds.

That phrase, "the one whom you love" is an interesting phrase because up until now, nothing in Scripture had been written to indicate that Jesus had such a special affection for this family. But the bond of friendship between God and man is so demonstrated in this story, that to miss it is to miss perhaps the greatest point of the story. Let's continue reading:

Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love 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 may be glorified through it."
(John 11:3,4 NKJV)

II- NOT UNTO DEATH

Yes, Lazarus was sick. But this particular sickness was not unto death. Now Jesus knew that Lazarus was already dead. But He also knew that the final result of this illness would not be death, but the glory of God. There are times when God is glorified, and man is blessed by death, even unexpected death. This was not the case here. God's plan for Lazarus was not finished. Part of that plan was to be executed by God while Lazarus was in the grave. This is a perfect picture of how the Master can do His best work in us and through us without our stealing His glory when we are dead to self. Nothing Lazarus could do now could rob God of the glory that was His. That was because Lazarus could do nothing. And neither can you. And neither can I. Oh, that we could learn that one lesson from this lesson. Lazarus was dead, for the glory of God.

III- NOW JESUS LOVED

The story continues:

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was.
(John 11:5,6 NKJV)

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To the natural mind, that one verse is probably one of the hardest in Scripture to interpret. Well, not hard, impossible. If you are not a Christian, don't even try to understand it. You can't. But if you have the mind of Christ, try to visualize the purposes of God in sickness and suffering we outlined for you just moments ago. Then, try to understand the correlation between those two sentences. "Jesus loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus." Period. A clear statement of His affection and commitment to the three of them. The word used here meant more than affection, it meant commitment. At any rate, it is inserted here to serve as a foundation for the next sentence, for the next sentence includes a "therefore". Remember whenever we see a "therefore" we always ask what the "therefore" is "there for". It reads:

So, when He heard that he was sick, [that is, because He loved them so, here's what He did], He stayed two more days in the place where He was. (John 11:6 NKJV)

He didn't move an inch. He waited for the Father's Word to move, and the Father said don't. So He didn't. He loved them too much, and He loved the Father too much to interfere with what the Father was planning to do to them and in them and through them. So He waited. Two whole days He waited. He waited until no one but God could do anything. If you are looking for a good measuring stick for the Master's timing in your life, there's one. Whenever your moving will preempt God's glory, sit still. Whenever it is almost the end of man's ability to deliver, and if you move now, you and God together can get the applause, sit still. Not yet. The stage on which God receives glory is only big enough for one. The minute you step front and center and take your bow, He disappears. He has to. For if you share God's glory, then you are inferring that you and He are equal in worthiness. What blasphemy. Even the Son would not share the Father's glory. So He simply abode there two days.

Now, as we shall see, those could not have been easy days for Jesus. He wanted to be with those He loved. He knew that He would soon be able to relieve them of their grief and their crying. He knew they were in Bethany clothed in mourning, weeping uncontrollably. And He knew that when He arrived, that weeping would turn to rejoicing. But He also knew that to go ahead of the Father's timing was in essence the same as defying the Father's will. So instead of yielding to His emotions and hurting the ones He loved, He yielded to the Father's will and waited and waited

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and waited. The disciples were glad. The one thing they didn't want to do was to move into the net the Pharisees had set for them. Jesus was unconcerned about that net. That net would have holes in it big enough for all of them until their time had come. But they didn't understand, at least, not yet.

Eventually the two days passed.

Then after this He said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."

The disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?"

(John 11:7,8 NKJV)

His cabinet of officers were nervous in the service. "Go back to Judea? Into enemy territory? Doesn't seem appropriate, Lord." "Go where hurting friends are? Where the Father bids us go? Seems appropriate to me," Jesus answered. In summary, the next few verses say this: "Gang, there are twelve hours in every day. If you are walking in the light, you are the untouchables, surrounded by the Light of the World. It is a laser technology no man has been able to penetrate. But if you are of the night, you have not that light, and you will stumble, and you will fall. Now enough of that, let's move on to Bethany."

These things He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up."

(John 11:11 NKJV)

It may have been Peter, we don't know, but one of His outspoken helpers was quick to reply, "Lord, if he's just asleep, he's on the mend, and there's no reason for us to visit the hospital, particularly with those enemy troops surrounding it. He'll be okay. Let's stay here and pray for him, okay?" (loose translation). In other words, they interpreted the word "sleep" to mean "sleep".

Then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead.

And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him."

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

(John 11:14-16 NKJV)

Tom put on his martyr's uniform and was ready to march to his execution, rather than let Jesus go it alone. When Jesus' execution really came, however, Thomas' bravery took a different

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turn. So off they went towards Jerusalem. Verse 17 reminds us:

So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. (John 11:17 NKJV)

Now look what happens next. Jesus is on His way to Bethany, Mary and Martha are grieving as was the custom, and verse 20 reads:

Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him; but Mary sat still in the house. (John 11:20 NKJV)

What Mary did was customary. It was not natural for the bereaved to leave the house. Mary sat still. That, too, was Mary's nature. Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, bolted out of the house, and ran as fast as she could towards the Master. And before long, she found Him.

Now Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. (John 11:21 NKJV)

"Lord, if only you'd been here!" Martha bellowed, tears streaming down her face, "Lazarus would still be alive." Was it a cry of accusation, or a cry of grief? No one knows. One thing is for sure. It was still a cry of faith. For she continued:

But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.

And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

And when she had said these things, she went her way and secretly called Mary her sister, saying, "The Teacher has come and is calling for you." (John 11:22-28 NKJV)

Now Mary does that which is untypical of her. She, on hearing that Jesus is near, jumps up and runs out of the house, her curious onlookers trailing behind her. She finds Jesus, just on the outskirts of town and makes the same statement, "Lord, if only you'd been here." Some say her statement was more

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sensitive and Martha's more accusing but there is little basis for that assumption. What basis there is can be found in verse 32:

Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here..."
(John 11:32 NKJV)

Martha greeted the Master standing up. Mary greeted Him on her knees in worship. How much you read into that is up to you. Nevertheless, Jesus responded like this:

Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled.

And He said, "Where have you laid him?"

Jesus wept.
(John 11:33-35 NKJV)

The word used to describe their weeping means literally "groaning or wailing." It was a typical emotional response to death. The word used for "wept" when Jesus wept meant a literal inner turmoil of the soul, a deep troubling of the spirit. Because Lazarus was dead? Of course not. He knew Lazarus was about to be raised again. He had already told that to the disciples. What troubled Jesus' soul was that those He loved were hurting. Mary was worshipping Him, but tears were flowing down her cheeks all the while. The one she loved the most was gone and Jesus had not been there. And when Jesus saw her grief, His spirit was in an upheaval, and He could not help but cry. Because her grief was eternal? No, her grief would soon turn to joy. But Jesus loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus and the circumstances of life that interrupt life because of Satan's intrusion on this earth had robbed them of their fellowship. So her heart broke, and when her heart broke so did His. You have just witnessed the mind of Christ. You have seen Romans 12:15 acted out on the stage of life:

Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

Be of the same mind toward one another.

(Romans 12:15,16a NKJV)

And you have just received the challenge of God to take the mind of God and let it control you tomorrow. And the next day. And the next. That means that you will pray as you arise in the morning, "Dear God, give me your sensitivity to those who are hurting." And as you leave the quiet place and head for the day

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you will expect to encounter hurting people. Now when you do, don't do as I do, and say, "Surely, Lord, you don't mean him. He's a nuisance. Surely, Lord, you don't mean her. She's not my kind of people." Softly, you will hear Him answer (if you'll listen), "But she's My kind of person." "His kind of people," Beloved, are all those who hurt. They are the blind, the lame, the sick, the bereaved, the rejected, the lonely, the desolate, the destitute, the angry, the anxious. All those who are crying, inside or out. All those who are asking, "Why do you run when I'm crying?"

Only if we respond to those He sends us will we be sensitized to those still to come. It is the parable of the talents made practical. Invest the sensitivity He puts in you and wants to release, and more will flow. Keep it for yourself and lose it. And don't be surprised, Beloved, if He begins with your wife or your husband or your children or your neighbor or someone you should have been listening to all along. He's simply starting where He left off the last time you prayed to be used and then said, "Lord, not here. I want to be used in Africa, or in Sunday School, or in a street ministry." He's simply taking you back to the last place you refused to listen.

Some of us need to learn to cry this week. Not over our own misfortunes, most of us know how to do that. Some of us need to learn to cry, really cry just because someone else is crying. And then we need to do whatever we can do to turn their weeping into joy.

Jesus wept. But He did not stop there. He lifted the cloud of grief that hovered over those He loved and let the sunshine of the Son shine into their lives once again. He turned death into life, darkness into light, grief into joy. No, you cannot raise someone from the dead. And you may not be able to do anything concrete to change the circumstances of the one whose tears have captured your heart. But you may be able to drive them somewhere. Or take them something. Or help them work through their grief. Or just listen. Listen without preaching. Listen without interrupting. Listen without giving them seven steps to happiness on a printed form, or handing them a tape to listen to and telling them to perk up and smile. Maybe you don't agree with their assessment of the situation. Maybe you think much of their hurt is self-inflicted. Maybe you want to lecture them on their weakness. We'll get to all that in weeks to come.

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But why not, for once in your life, just begin by asking God to grant you their perspective? Why not ask God to give you the ability to see their tears through their eyes so, at least as a beginning, you can learn to cry with them? No, that's not the answer to all their problems. But it is an answer to one. They have a need to know that somebody cares. Really cares. I challenge you to be that somebody. I know, I know. You've been taught that it's weak to cry. But, Beloved, the Word of God just painted us a portrait of the strongest man who ever lived. It simply said:

"Jesus wept."

By God's Grace, may we learn to do the same.

Let's pray.

Our gracious God, may they never say again of us, "Why do they run when we're crying?" But may they fall on their faces before God and thank You that somebody cares enough to cry too.

In Jesus name, Amen.

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