

Dialogue 3 - Jesus and Mary and the Raising of Lazarus

Introduction: (Read John 11:28-44) - Shortly after her confession of faith in the Lord, Martha returned home to Mary and the mourners. She approached her sister secretly, to tell her that the Lord (“the teacher”) had come and wanted to see her. Jesus remained in the place outside of Bethany where he and Martha spoke. Mary immediately got up and hurried to meet him. The Jews who were consoling her saw her get up and leave quickly and believing that she was going to the tomb to weep there, they followed her.

In Jesus’ dialogue with Martha, the nature of God’s love in Jesus as fully in act was defended within a statement of theology. Here, in Jesus’ interaction with Mary, the character of God’s love fully in act is given a face, if you will, that is to say, it is on display in Jesus. Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, who is fully God and fully man, tangibly displays the emotions of divine love.

When Mary sees Jesus, though what she says is almost identical to what Martha said, the tone and significance are different. As was said in the previous section, *in His interaction with Martha*, theological substance and definition are given to Jesus’ actions of love and to His sign miracle. *In His interaction with Mary*, the veil is pulled back from the heart of God and John reveals the passion compelling and surrounding Jesus’ actions of love. The distinction is clear in the details. The particulars of Mary’s meeting and interaction with Jesus are intentionally recounted in such a way as to emphasize the emotion of the encounter. In Jesus’ dialogue with Martha, the glory of Jesus’ love is carried in the theology of the incarnation and the cross. Jesus’ interaction with Mary is almost without words; indeed it is beyond words. Mary will understand Jesus’ love for her, Martha, and Lazarus, as well as for all who are his own, by His emotion in response to their circumstances. Therefore, John places a remarkable stress on Jesus’ state of mind in response to what he encounters and he puts God’s glory on display in the passions of Jesus.

**Jesus’ 3rd Dialogue/Exchange Begins with Mary’s Statement to or Question of Him – 11:32*

A. When Mary approached and saw Jesus she fell at His feet weeping (11:32-33). The Jews who accompanied her to Jesus were also weeping. It was while Mary lay clinging to Jesus feet and weeping that she spoke for the only time, κύριε, εἰ ἦς ὧδε οὐκ ἄν μου ἀπέθανεν ὁ ἀδελφός. It was a scene saturated with grief.

B. Mary’s words to Jesus held the same confusion and grief and reflected the same crisis of faith as Martha’s. However, given how John has structured this interaction, so as to be almost wordless, and given Jesus reaction to Mary, it seems that Mary was not asking for answers or clarity of understanding as much as reassurance. Martha may have needed to understand what happened and what it all meant. It seems Mary needed to know his heart.ⁱ Schneiders seems to capture the essence of Mary’s statement making application to all believers who have known her grief:

Mary’s statement is that of every believing Christian in history who is overcome with sorrow at the death of a loved one, who believes firmly that God could have prevented that death, and yet who clings in bewildered grief to the source of all consolation *who is, paradoxically, the one who permitted the death.* (emphasis mine)ⁱⁱ

As a generalization, Schneiders' observation is accurate. Therefore, what happens next is incredibly reassuring to one who hurts too much to think and needs to know the nature of God's love, which is fully in act and the character the God of love who is eternally present in love. In the end, at the tomb of Lazarus', both needs are satisfied, for Lazarus' sisters, as well as for John's readers. Martha will come to understand the heart of the Lord which gives life to the truth he spoke to her and Mary will know the truth of the Lord that gives substance to the emotions she saw in him.

***Jesus' Initial Response to Mary** – 11:33-35 - Unlike Jesus dialogue with Martha, he initially says nothing in response to Mary. John records only Jesus' reaction, Ἰησοῦς οὖν ὡς εἶδεν αὐτὴν κλαίουσαν καὶ τοὺς συνελθόντας αὐτῇ Ἰουδαίους κλαίοντας, ἐνεβριμήσατο τῷ πνεύματι καὶ ἐτάραξεν ἑαυτὸν.

A. What immediately stands out in this sentence is the inferential οὖν used with the temporal ὡς. John is telling his readers that what they are about to see in Jesus is in direct response to what he was witnessing in Mary, Martha and those who were present consoling them. This statement is very similar to 11:6 ὡς οὖν ἤκουσεν ὅτι ἀσθενεῖ, τότε μὲν ἔμεινεν. This enigmatic statement was juxtaposed with John's statement affirming Jesus' love (11:5) thereby creating the very tension which permeates this narrative. It may be that John intentionally structured this passage in such a way as to bring his readers full circle from what appeared to be a contradiction of love to this poignant moment of Jesus love and passion on display.

B. The other outstanding feature of this sentence, which has already been mentioned, is Jesus' response to the intense grief he is observing at the death of Lazarus.

1. The first of the two phrases (ἐνεβριμήσατο τῷ πνεύματι) has occasioned much discussion. The verb ἐμβριμάομαι is translated differently and understood in context differently by the scholars. Keener says of this verb that it, “. . . depicts his emotion in the strongest possible terms . . . an unusually strong term, usually denoting anger, agitation, and typically some physical expression accompanying it.”ⁱⁱⁱ Carson writes, “In extra-biblical Greek, it can refer to the *snorting* of horses; as applied to human beings, it invariably suggests anger, outrage or emotional indignation.”^{iv} When Jesus looked around him and saw the intense grief he was visibly angered. The source of Jesus' anger has been the focus of much discussion. It seems best to understand that Jesus was angry with sin and the ruination and death it caused. As B. B. Warfield wrote, “It is death that is the object of his wrath, and behind death him who has the power of death, and whom he has come into the world to destroy.”^v This is consistent with the theological foundations set for this study by which we understand and have described the nature of God and His love. Weinandy gives clarity to His anger under the rubric of His love.

Here we see that sadness, and even anger, are realities within God, not as passible emotional states (and so are predicated, in this sense, metaphorically of God), but as subsumed within the reality of God's providential love. But it is this love that bears upon the reality and truth of God's anger, mercy, and sadness. The notion then of God's fully actualized love as containing all the various facets and expressions of love provides theological depth and philosophical precision to the patristic understanding which equally subsumed God's anger under the rubric of God's love.^{vi}

The anger Jesus felt and displayed because of sin and the suffering and death it caused, is a facet of the perfect love of God fully actualized.

1. But John also says of Jesus ἐτάραξεν ἑαυτὸν. The majority of times ταραύσσω (“to disturb, to stir up, to unsettle”)^{vii} is used in the New Testament it appears in the passive voice. When it appears in the active, the subject of the verb is acting on an object outside of itself. This is an unusual use of the active voice of this verb with the reflexive pronoun, where the subject is apparently acting on himself, understood literally, “he troubled himself.” Some insight into what this might mean is found in John 12:27 where Jesus, considering His impending death, says of himself, Νῦν ἡ ψυχὴ μου τετάρακται, καὶ τί εἶπω; πατέρ, σῶσόν με ἐκ τῆς ὥρας ταύτης; ἀλλὰ διὰ τοῦτο ἦλθον εἰς τὴν ὥραν ταύτην. Jesus speaks of the trouble within his soul as he faced the “hour” of his death. As Jesus looked around and saw the harsh and brutal reality of death, he was angered with the ruin sin had brought to humanity. Perhaps, at the same time, the magnitude of the suffering caused within him a disquieting sense that His hour was near. The unique, reflexive nature of John’s statement, “he troubled himself” depicts an inner turmoil which may indicate that as he approached the tomb he was consciously embracing the cross, entering into solidarity with those who are traveling through the valley of the shadow of death.^{viii}

Note: Weinandy writes of God’s mercy and compassion, that it is seen when His love “. . . moves him to dispel evil which is the cause of suffering. It is in the dispelling of the evil and so the suffering that God properly manifests his love and compassion.”^{ix} Jesus, in love, and moved with compassion, was advancing to the cross, where He alone could “dispel the evil” and do away with the suffering and death it caused, finally and completely.^x

3. The only thing Jesus says in response to Mary’s tearful plea for understanding, is to ask those who were present consoling her and her sister, ποῦ θεείκατε αὐτόν; Although Jesus’ response was terse and had the appearance of indifference, it is clear, in context, that Jesus was not uncaring and unresponsive to Mary’s grief. One cannot be certain from the text, but it is possible that He was too moved to speak. That speculation finds support in the fact that immediately upon the answer of Jewish mourners’, John reports those most powerful words, ἐδάκρυσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς. These tears are manifestly human tears but they reflect the love of God in act toward His own who are suffering.^{xi} Mary and Martha and those with them saw what few others have ever seen, they saw the tears of God. They saw the love of God on display in Jesus. However, because He is the resurrection and the life, there will come a day when all who believe in Him will look upon His unveiled face, and see the ineffable glory of His inscrutable love. He went from anger over the ruin of sin and death, to the recognition that his hour was near, to a conscious embracing of his own death in solidarity with those facing death, then finally with deepest compassion, to weeping with those who weep. The glory of an unfathomable love, which compelled a profound and mysterious presence, and an ultimate and costly work of healing, is on full display.

When the Jews who were with Martha and Mary saw the emotion of Jesus they immediately and rightly inferred it to be a result of His love. John closes out the *inclusio* of love with the Jews’ recognition of the great love of Jesus as seen in his tears (11:36). However, these tears did not resolve the tension, they exacerbated it (11:37) because Lazarus remained in his tomb and grief remained strong. And so the true nature of the love of God as eternally, perfectly and fully in act, has been theologically declared and made palpable in Jesus. John will now take his readers, with the entire entourage, to the tomb. It is there where those who have faith will see the glory of God’s love in Jesus as He calls Lazarus back to life.

***The Raising of Lazarus - 11:38-44**

A. The tone of Jesus' approach to the tomb is telling . As Jesus approached the tomb, John again notes His visible anger, Ἰησοῦς οὖν πάλιν ἐμβριμώμενος ἐν ἑαυτῷ ἔρχεται εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον. The present participle is probably temporal in nature giving the sense that his anger was visibly rising as he approached the tomb. Consistent with the tone of this section of the narrative, John wants the reader to know that, as Ridderbos writes, “He strides to the tomb, not in sovereign apathy of the great Outsider, but as the One sent into the world by the Father, as the Advocate who has entered human flesh and blood.”^{xii} Again Morris quotes Warfield on this moment:

His soul is held by rage: and he advances to the tomb, in Calvin's words again, ‘as a champion who prepares for conflict.’ The raising of Lazarus thus becomes, not an isolated marvel, but – as indeed it is presented throughout the whole narrative . . . a decisive instance and open symbol of Jesus' conquest of death and hell. What John does for us in this particular statement is to uncover to us the heart of Jesus, as he wins for us our salvation.^{xiii}

B. As Jesus stands before the tomb facing the enemy which is death, and contemplating what it will cost him to destroy that enemy, He stands in love presenting Himself as the resurrection and the life.

1. However, the glory being manifest at that moment in the love and resolve of this one who is God incarnate, remained veiled to those present. This is evident in the shock Martha displayed when Jesus commanded, ἄρατε τὸν λίθον. The harsh and very tangible reality of death and decay was too great, too powerful, for her to see the glory set before her. Love and glory were on magnificent display in the person of the incarnate God who stood before the very death he had come to conquer.

2. Martha's shocked response (κύριε, ἤδη ὄζει, τεταρταῖος γὰρ ἐστίν) brought from Jesus what may have been a gentle rebuke,^{xiv} certainly a prescient statement^{xv} (οὐκ εἶπόν σοι ὅτι ἐὰν πιστεύσῃς ὄψῃ τὴν δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ;) – 11:39-40. Jesus is referring to the affirmation of faith she made when they met on the road outside of Bethany (11:26-27). Now He stood before her as the one who is the self-existent one, who, by the authority of His word, called into existence all that is, who alone is life and the source of all life (1:1-4; 5:21, 26; 14:6). Yet she did not know the comfort and hope of His presence. It is by faith alone that one may enter into the existential reality of the glory of His love. With Jesus' statement to Martha, John closes the *inclusio* of glory.

C. Jesus' prayer with its implications – 11:41-42. As the Jews were taking away the stone which covered the mouth of the tomb, Jesus lifted his eyes toward heaven and prayed. There are several significant implications of this prayer.

1. First Jesus emphasizes in His prayer that He is sent by the Father for this very moment. This is a theme that pervades John's Gospel and affirms Jesus' pre-existence (1:1-2) and the fact that He is serving purposes established before the foundations of the world (cf. 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25). Jesus has been sent by the Father from before the foundations of the world, for this specific moment, to address this specific grief, but to do so not superficially, but ultimately and exhaustively, by his own incarnation and death.

2. In addition the overt nature of this prayer has as its stated purpose (cf. 11:42) to assure that this “illness,” as indicated in 11:4, does indeed result in the glory of the Father in His Son. The glory on display in this moment is the glory of the Father's love in His Son. The prayer of the Son to His Father

was not a prayer to convince Him to actualize a dormant love that existed, to this point, in potential only. His prayer was an overt acknowledgement that He was sent by His Father to accomplish His Father's purposes and thereby manifest His Father's glory, in this case the glory of His love.

3. Moreover, He prayed in this manner to illicit faith in those who would witness what He was about to do (ἵνα πιστεύσωσιν ὅτι σὺ με ἀπέστειλας). Carson is insightful in his assertion that, “. . . the prayer seeks to draw his hearers into the intimacy of Jesus' own relationship with the Father . . . ,”^{xvi} which is the outcome of the faith for which Jesus prays. This is a consistent theme of this narrative (11:15, 25b-26, 40, 45), the practical purpose of Jesus' coming (17:1-3), and John's purpose for his Gospel (20:30-31).

4. Finally, Jesus is confirming, in the hearing of witnesses, that this moment is not an acute reaction to a particular temporal need or request. This was indeed an eternal sending. In the context of the overall Gospel, it signifies the love of the God, who is *ipsum esse* and pure act, is eternally, perfectly, and fully actualized in Jesus toward the greater need of humanity for a Savior, one who, through His own death, becomes for them resurrection and life. At the very same time it is beyond “sign.” It is the very personal and tender love of this same God, eternally, perfectly, and fully in act directed to the acute need of these specific individuals, in this very moment. This is the hour of His coming, of His glory, of His cross.

D. Jesus called Lazarus out of the grave – 11:43-44. When Jesus finished praying, John says of Him, φωνῆ μεγάλης ἐκραύγασεν· Λάζαρε, δεῦρο ἕξω. Thus Jesus fulfilled the prophetic statements he made earlier in John 5:25 ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ἔρχεται ὥρα καὶ νῦν ἐστὶν ὅτε οἱ νεκροὶ ἀκούσουσιν τῆς φωνῆς τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ οἱ ἀκούσαντες ζήσουσιν.

1. This cry to Lazarus was in anticipation of that final day, the one to which Martha alluded while being so woefully unaffected by its reality. The φωνῆ μεγάλης with which he cried out was the voice of the one who has authority over death and the power to give life, the one who is Himself “life” (1:4; 11:25; 14:6).

2. That power and authority is innate to the one who is the ground of all existence, who is life. And yet, ironically and wonderfully, the act of giving life to Lazarus is a tacit submission to His own death. In order for Him to be the resurrection and the life for anyone He must first die for all. It is based in His own death that He would give life. Moreover, it is His raising of Lazarus that would expedite His death (cf. 11:47-53).^{xvii}

Conclusion: Once Lazarus was freed from his grave cloths it would have been evident to Lazarus and his sisters that even while Jesus delayed, he loved them perfectly; even while He appeared to be absent, He was gloriously and mysteriously present. They were never outside the scope of God's perfect love, eternally and fully actualized in Jesus. And as they learned, in his love-compelled presence, and by his own death, he conquered death and truly became for them, and for all who believe, “the resurrection and the life.”

ⁱThese statements are admittedly speculative and border on the psychological explanations against which Ridderbos warns. However, it is appropriate here in that John has intentionally taken the reader into the emotion and psychology of Mary, the Jewish mourners, and Jesus.

ⁱⁱSchneiders, “Death in the Community of Eternal Life,” 54.

ⁱⁱⁱKeener, *John*, 845-846; also Kostenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, (Grand Rapids Michigan, Zondervan, 2009), 339; Ridderbos, *John*, 401-402; contra Morris, *John*, 494; see Beasley-Murray, *John*, 192-193 for very good discussion.

^{iv}Carson, *John*, 415.

^vB. B. Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ* (Philadelphia, 1950), 117. Cited in Morris, *John*, 493, note 72.

^{vi}Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, 166.

^{vii}William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: a Translation and Adaptation of the Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch Zu Den Schriften Des Neuen Testaments Und der Übrigen Urchristlichen Literatur*, 2d ed. (Chicago: The University Of Chicago Press, 1979), 805.

^{viii}Kostenberger, *John*, 339; Ridderbos, *John*, 402.

^{ix}Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, 167.

^x *Ibid.*, 206. He writes, "The eternal, almighty, all-perfect, unchangeable, and impassible divine Son, he who is equal to the Father in all ways, actually experienced, as a weak human being, the full reality of human suffering and death."

^{xi} *Ibid.*, 164-165. Again quoting Weinandy, "God truly grieves over sin and actually is sorrowful over injustice not because he has lost some good (which would imply a self-centered grief and sorrow) and so suffers, but rather because, in his love, he knows that the one he loves is suffering due to the absence of some good. Sadness and grief do not spring from or manifest suffering within God, but rather they spring from, manifest and express the fullness of his completely altruistic, all-consuming and perfect love for his creatures."

^{xii}Kostenberger, *John*, 342, quoting Ridderbos, *John*, 403.

^{xiii}Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ* (Philadelphia, 1950), 117. Cited in Morris, *John*, 493, note 72.

^{xiv}Kostenberger, *John*, 343.

^{xv}The response of many of the Jews and their leaders defies reason except to say glory is perceptible only to the eyes of faith.

^{xvi}Carson, *John*, 418.

^{xvii}Kostenberger, *John*, 345.