



Romans 8: 6-11 and John 11:1-44

Any problem or trouble that believers face can ultimately bring glory to God, because God can always bring good out of a bad situation. When they come, do you grumble and complain, or do you see your problems and troubles as opportunities to honour Him?

God's timing, especially the delays, may make us think He is not answering or is not answering the way we want. But He will meet all our needs, as Romans 8:28 tells us: *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him...* **So, we all need to learn to faithfully wait patiently.** Psalm 40 notes both responses:

Verse 17 tells us: *Yet I am poor and needy; may the Lord think of me. You are my help and deliverer; O my God, do not delay.*

But there is often a delay however fervent or persistent our prayers.

Whilst verses 1-2 tell us: *I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; He set my feet upon a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.*

It is true to say that often blessings cannot be received unless we go through the trial of waiting as Romans 5:2-5 tell us:

And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;

perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Mary and Martha had been waiting for Jesus for four days; mourning the passing of their brother Lazarus who had been dead for four days.

They had sent word to Jesus that Lazarus was ill, but there had been no reply and their brother had died.

We're not told, but it's fair to assume that both sisters offered fervent and persistent prayers for their brother's healing and for Jesus to come soon in response to their message.

But there had been a delay, prayers seemingly unanswered, Jesus seemingly not coming or at least not in time...

and so Lazarus died.

When prayers are answered, even if the answer is no, it's often the case (in my own experience at least) that with the answer comes a sense of understanding why the answer took the time it did...

As one theologian put it about this passage: 'God doesn't play games with us. His ways are not our ways. His timing is not timing. He is about fulfilling His purpose in our lives individually and communally. This chapter is about ways in which Jesus surprises people and overturns their expectations.' Here in the Gospel reading, Jesus tells His disciples why the delay in this particular situation:

"This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory, so that God's Son may be glorified through it."

When Jesus does arrive, both sisters separately make the same statement to Him:

"If you had been here, my brother would not have died."

I'm reminded of a line from a poem, though not its name nor the poet: *Of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these, 'It might have been.'*

And that deep sense of regret accompanied by tears so moved Jesus that He too wept. Wept alongside women of faith.

That He too wept. God cried.

It's interesting to contrast Jesus' emotional response to what was the standard view of the time that God had no emotion nor involvement with human beings and that the supreme being was above all that sort of thing...

Yet Jesus wept...

The stone is rolled away from the tomb and Lazarus emerges alive. He is resurrected. Fervent and persistent prayers answered. I'm certain had Jesus actually been there in Bethany while Lazarus was ill, that Jesus would have healed him, but that wasn't the primary purpose here. It was as Jesus says:

"...that they may believe that You sent me..."

It is quite easy to see this event as echoing what would later happen to Jesus. His resurrection from the dead. The stone would be rolled away from His tomb. He would encounter a weeping woman of faith whose grief turns to joy.

There is also another Lazarus in the New Testament, a character in one of Jesus' parables. It's a story of an unnamed rich man and a beggar named Lazarus. When both die, the rich man goes to Hell and implores Abraham to send Lazarus from his side in Heaven to warn the rich man's family from sharing his fate. Abraham replies, *"If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."*

It is reasonable to assume that all those who witnessed Lazarus' resurrection would have as written in verse 45 *"...put their faith in Him..."*

Yet had we read on to verses 46 and 47 we would find that some who witnessed this went to report this to the religious authorities who were so disturbed by this that they plotted Jesus's death. They were not convinced indeed they were more concerned about the possible loss of their comfortable status in society rather than someone fulfilling the Law of Moses and the words of the Prophets... which they should have been doing.

I started by saying that any problem or trouble that believers face can ultimately bring glory to God, because God can always bring good out of a bad situation.

So when problems and troubles come, and they have and they will, will you still grumble and complain, or will you see your problems and troubles as opportunities to honour Him and so come to Him in prayer and in faith?

Jesus raised someone from the dead and later was Himself raised. Ask God now for faith and patience in prayer and believe that if He can raise someone from the dead in answer to faithful prayer, He will answer your faithful prayer.

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