

## **In tragedy trust in the purposes of God**

Every one of us has experienced a tragedy or hardships in our lives. In fact, probably most have experienced both. When these times come, they can threaten to derail our walk with the Lord. How do you stay the course when tragedy strikes? In this passage where Jesus hears about the sickness and death of Lazarus, Jesus teaches His disciples, both then and now, that when difficult times come it is important to follow the will of God and trust in His purposes above all else.

This morning, we are going to look at three areas in our lives where we need to trust in the purposes of God

### **Prayer**

- a. The first area is our worries.

Jesus had a special relationship with this family. He cared for them deeply. We are told that when the sisters of Lazarus sent the message to Jesus they said, “him whom you **love** is sick” not “Lazarus is sick”, or “Your disciple Lazarus is sick”, but “him whom you **love**”. Later in verse 5 we read “now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus”. Now we know that Jesus loves everyone, but interestingly there are only four people that are specifically mentioned in Scripture as being people that “Jesus loved”- Martha, Mary, Lazarus, and the Disciple John. From this we can conclude that while Jesus loved all, He had a special bond with these people.

Because of this special bond, you would expect that Jesus would be concerned about the family in Bethany. You would expect that Jesus would have set off straight away to be by

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the bedside of poor Lazarus. But Jesus did not worry and remained where he was for another couple of days. Now this does not mean that Jesus was uncaring what towards this family. Rather He recognised that the Father had a purpose for this hardship the family was going to go through and He trusted in this plan **vs 4**.

While emotions can make our experience of life truly wonderful, there is the danger that they can take over our life and make it a misery. Many people have stopped living their lives because they have fallen under the control of fear, worry and sorrow. The antidote to worry and grief is to trust in God and His plan for our life.

<sup>25</sup> "And which of you by worrying can add a *single* <sup>1a</sup>hour to his life's span?

<sup>26</sup> "If then you cannot do even a very little thing, why do you worry about other matters?

<sup>27</sup> "Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these.

<sup>28</sup> "But if God so clothes the grass in the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, how much more *will He clothe* you? You men of little faith!

Luke 12:25-28

<sup>26</sup> In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for <sup>a</sup>we do not know how to pray as we should, but <sup>b</sup>the Spirit Himself intercedes for *us* with groanings too deep for words;

<sup>27</sup> and <sup>a</sup>He who searches the hearts knows what <sup>b</sup>the mind of the Spirit is, because He <sup>c</sup>intercedes for the <sup>1</sup>saints according to *the will of God*.

<sup>28</sup> And we know that <sup>1</sup>God causes <sup>a</sup>all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are <sup>b</sup>called according to *His purpose*.

(Rom 8:26-28 NAU)

Sometimes you can be no way out, that no-one cares, that you will never escape. In those times it essential that you trust in the Lord because He is the only one who can rescue you.

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<sup>18</sup> The LORD is near to the brokenhearted And saves those who are <sup>1c</sup>crushed in spirit.

<sup>19</sup> Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all.

Psalm 34:18-19

b. above personal loss.

Later on, in this passage Jesus becomes aware, by Divine means, that His dear friend Lazarus had died **vs 11-14**. It might have appeared to the disciples that Jesus' earlier prediction that Lazarus' sickness wouldn't end in death was wrong. But despite this loss Jesus continued to trust in the plan and purpose of God **vs 15**.

There is an old saying that says that there are only two certainties in the world- death and taxes, and interestingly they both involve loss. Everything we have in this world is temporal, that is they are only temporarily a part of our lives, this includes our relationship with others. Over the course of time, we will all suffer the loss of these things, one after another. It is the sad result of living in a world cursed by sin. The loss of those things we treasure can be incredibly painful, especially if what we lose are relationships. Now I am not going to suggest to you that God will miraculously give you back that which you have lost, but what can help us deal with personal loss is the understanding that this loss can be used to fulfil a purpose of God, and possibly the only way this purpose can be fulfilled in our lives.

Personal loss can teach us to value Christ above everything else. The greater the value we place on things, or people, the greater the grief. But when we place the greatest value on Jesus, we have the assurance that we can never lose what is

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most precious to us, for nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ.

When we experience the pain of loss it can remind us that we can rely in nothing else but Christ. Everything that we might trust in from this world will fail us, even people. If they don't fail us in their actions they will fail us in their absence. Christ will not fail us in either way In Him we can enjoy things that are everlasting.

The pain of personal loss can draw us into a closer relationship with Jesus. While others can be an incredible help in our grief, no-one truly understands what we are going through but Christ, who suffered more than anyone who ever existed. In Him we find a confidante that really understands us, who will always be there for us, and most importantly can provide the strength to not only endure, but to overcome.

The Apostle Paul, who had experienced so much loss in his life but continued to trust in the plan of God wrote, <sup>17</sup> For momentary, <sup>a</sup>light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,

<sup>18</sup> while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

(2Co 4:17-1 NAU)

### c. above personal safety.

When Jesus decided to travel to Bethany, the disciples were concerned. They understood going back into this region was a real threat to Jesus and to themselves **vs 8**. Thomas saw it as a suicide mission but was willing to go to his death to follow the Master **vs16**. Jesus' response in vs 9-10 told the disciples that they could trust in God despite the danger in

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going back to Jerusalem. Why? Because it was according to God's will and plan (**vs9-10**). Here Jesus is saying that going to Bethany is walking in the light of the Father's will, or in other words, they are going there to do what He wants them to do, for this reason the Father will preserve them. *Now if they were not doing the will of God then they would be walking in darkness and they would be in danger of stumbling.*

Now we have never been promised that being a Christian would be a piece of cake. And serving Christ could put us in some very difficult and dangerous situations, many Christians in North Korea can attest to that. Yet no matter how scary or deadly position we find ourselves in when following Jesus, there are 2 things we can trust God for,

1. He will be with us always, no matter what we face, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age".
2. He will preserve us until we complete what He has called us to do in this life

<sup>21</sup> For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

<sup>22</sup> <sup>1</sup>But if *I am* to live *on* in the flesh, this *will mean* fruitful labor for me; and I do not know <sup>2</sup>which to choose.

(Phi 1:21-22 NAU)

Jesus stated that there were 2 purposes in what took place with Lazarus and his sisters 1. glorification of God and Christ. **Vs 4** 2. To help the disciples believe that Jesus was the Son of God by the demonstration that Jesus had authority over life and death. **Vs 15**

Today God uses hardships for the same purposes

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God is **glorified** in our hardships. When we trust in the Lord during suffering, when we cling on to His hope, when we receive His strength to endure, when we have the peace that passes all understanding, when His power helps us overcome, He is glorified in us the overcoming and in the enduring (power of Christ displayed in our lives)

Hardships help the faith of disciples- in hardships we learn to lean on Christ more, we learn to trust Him more, we come to know Him more.

While tragedy might befall us, the real tragedy would be if it was for no reason, no purpose. But anything you have gone through, or are going through, or might go through in the future, I'm telling you It's not for nothing. If you trust in Him, God will turn your tragedy into triumph. Keep following His will. Keep trusting in Him. Though the storms of life might blow you about, you will still know that it is well with your soul.

Song: It is well with my soul

### **Benediction Romans 5:3-5**

<sup>3</sup> And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance;

<sup>4</sup> and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope;

<sup>5</sup> and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

(Rom 5:3-5 NAU)