

“Why Doesn’t God Do Something?”

John 11:1-45
Romans 8:6-11
Ezekiel 37:1-14
March 9, 2008

Life has been good to me. We all know life is not fair (whatever that means!) Why are there people who don’t have enough, and people who have more than the income of some countries? Why are some born with handicaps? Why does sickness happen? Why is humankind allowed to build bombs, while there are people with no food? Why is there hatred? Why is there war and fighting? Why does God allow suffering? Here is the way the question sometimes comes ... “Why doesn’t God do something?”

God is supposed to be so loving and caring and so involved in the world. In the Bible Jesus did all those miracles and wonderful healings and provided for the needs of people. Why aren’t there miracles anymore? How can God be so loving and yet allow all of this to go on? Faced with all of this, the human spirit has seemed to always cry out - why doesn’t God do something?

This is just the issue that jumps out at us from the story of Lazarus, and Mary, and Martha. It is the exact question with which Martha confronts Jesus. She had just enough faith to call for Jesus when her brother became terribly sick. But Jesus didn’t come. Jesus never went far, so she knew it would not take long for Him to come. (verse 18 suggests he was only a couple of miles away.) And when He didn’t come, she probably grew angry.

Word was sent that Lazarus was sick – but he stayed 2 more days. (v. 6)

-when Jesus got there (v. 17) Lazarus had already been buried 4 days

-both sisters say to Jesus ... “If you had been here my brother would not have died.” It was said (and is written) so nicely. But you know what it means. WHERE WERE YOU? Why didn’t you come when we called? Why didn’t you do something?

Let me do a quick side road. There is something to learn. When Jesus got to the edge of town, there were a lot of people rushing to Him. As in everywhere He went. There was a lot of talking, dealing with all those people. His next stop was at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. At the home there was not much talking. Only a question: “Where have they laid him?” The third scene is near the place where Lazarus’ body was buried. Now there are not words at all. Only the shortest verse in the Bible. Did you catch it? “Jesus wept.” No words spoken. Only the eternal God in flesh standing there weeping with his friends.

Some of you actually stay away from funeral homes, because you don’t know what to say. (or you are afraid to face your own mortality.) Think about this story. Some of you – men especially – don’t know how to handle your emotions when someone dies. You have been taught from childhood that men don’t cry. Remember the Beatles’ song where a voice whispered over and over in the background, “big boys don’t cry, big boys don’t cry, big boys don’t cry.” So there you stand by the casket of your brother, or father, or best friend with your hands shoving the bottoms of your pockets clear down to the tops of your shoes. Holding back the tears. “Jesus wept.”

The images of the Gospel lesson and Ezekial's dry bones parable are so stark, and so powerful. And the ties of the 3 scriptures are wonderful. Death is around us in so many forms. The death of the body of loved ones. The death of seeing possibility for our living bodies. The death of not seeing alternatives to problems around us. The death of broken relationships. The death of wondering what to do with mounting society problems. What can we do with all this trash? The death of churches with no vision, and being turned into stores or a new bed & breakfast. The death of tragedies and brokenness all around our globe.

Paul says that "to be controlled by human nature results in death, but to be controlled by the Spirit results in life and peace." (v. 6) and "BUT you do not have to live by your human nature" (v. 9) and finally the word of hope and direction - "if Christ lives in you, the spirit is life for you" (v. 10). **God DOES do something!** He puts His spirit in those who will give their lives to Him, and thus spreads His life throughout all creation!

Have you decided to no longer live by human nature, but by the Spirit of God? This is the only way to a life that never ends, and that is eternal in quality in THIS world too!

There is nothing much more honest than Romans 8:10, "But if Christ lives in you, the Spirit is life for you because you have been put right with God, even though your bodies are going to die because of sin." That's honest. Our bodies are going to die. But God's Spirit is in us to give us eternal life.

Christian physician and writer Paul Brand was once asked – Where is God when it hurts? Dr. Brand responded, "God is in YOU, the one hurting, not in it – the thing that hurts."

We have talked recently of great miracles Jesus did. The astonishing thing is – that at the conclusion of those stories and miracles, when the great miracles have happened, when the healing has occurred, when the life has been transformed – there is no one found celebrating. When a broken woman had her life transformed, no one celebrated. When a blind man was made to see, no one celebrated. Even when a man who was dead was brought to life, no one celebrated.

Why does God not intervene more directly today and save us from abuse and hurt? Phil Yancey has an answer: "Some Christians long for a world well-stocked with miracles and spectacular signs of God's presence. I hear wistful sermons on the parting of the Red Sea and the 10 plagues and the daily manna in the wilderness, as if the speaker yearns for God to unleash His power like that today. But the follow-the-dots journey of the Israelites should give us pause. **Would a burst of miracles nourish faith? Not the kind of faith God seems interested in, evidently. The Israelites give ample proof that signs may only addict us to signs, not to God.**"

(Phil Yancey, *Disappointment With God*)

Faith that is already there sees what God is doing. Believing is seeing. Faith sees the hand of God moving in the common places of life. These great miracles show us the love, care, power, of God. But in no way should we conclude that if these same kinds of miracles don't happen in our life our faith is weak. Or if these same miracles aren't seen on a daily basis, that God no longer works.

I remember the Glory Barn days of Kosciusko Country (where Warsaw is located.) Days that aren't gone. It came to be known as the Faith Assembly. Your faith was the key to everything. True believers would give up their glasses because God had already healed them if they would only believe. True believers would give up their medications because God had already healed them. They had to have faith to believe it. The problem with that is that it is the person who is glorified because of their faith – not God.

I think of all kinds of miracles I have seen. I remember the guy who said there was no singles group at his church. I told him that maybe God was getting someone ready at that very moment. There soon came the day when he asked if I would help him get a group started. There's a miracle. What greater miracle is there than a transformed life?

I have some bad news for you. There came a day when Lazarus again experienced physical death. But in this moment and this event, God was glorified and God's power to change lives was demonstrated so that we might believe and believing we might have life.

Jesus wanted the woman at the well to know how important she was and why He wanted her in the Kingdom of God. He wanted a man who was blind to be able to SEE how valuable he was to God. And Jesus wanted people to know that not even death of the body can hold God back. Martha was among the group that believed in life after death, although not all Jews did. But Jesus put personal meaning on it. I can just see Jesus taking Mary by the shoulders and squaring her around toward Him. He looked her in the eye and said, **"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me WILL NEVER DIE. DO YOU BELIEVE THIS?"**

My friends, we are faced with the same question – thousands of years later. Do you believe?

We began with a question – "Why doesn't God do something?" And we end with a mystery. For there at the side of a grieving family is the Son of God, God made flesh, the eternal creator, weeping with them. Somehow in the wonder of the nearness of God, the question seems empty. It no longer seems important. We go from a question to a mystery. Mysteries don't answer questions. They create new situations in which questions no longer matter.

God is there. God is here! And if God is here, that's all we need to know.

But even more, teaching them that in God is life that never ends. Do you believe?

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.