

John 11:20 – 44

⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister [Mary] and [their brother] Lazarus... [But Lazarus died and was buried]...
²⁰ Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet him, but Mary stayed at the house. ²¹
Martha then said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² Even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you.' ²³ Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' ²⁴ Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' ²⁵ Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me will live even if he dies, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' ²⁷ She said to him, 'Yes, Lord; I have believed that you are the Christ, the Son of God, even he who comes into the world.' ²⁸ When she had said this, she went away and called Mary her sister, saying secretly, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.' ²⁹ And when she heard it, she got up quickly and was coming to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha met him. ³¹ Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and consoling her, when they saw that Mary got up quickly and went out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³² Therefore, when Mary came where Jesus was, she saw him, and fell at his feet, saying to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.'
³³ When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, ³⁴ and said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' ³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ So the Jews were saying, 'See how he loved him!' ³⁷ But some of them said, 'Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind man, have kept this man also from dying?' ³⁸ So Jesus, again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, 'Remove the stone.' Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to him, 'Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days.' ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, 'Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?' ⁴¹ So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised his eyes, and said, 'Father, I thank You that You have heard me. ⁴² I knew that You always hear me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent me.'
⁴³ When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come forth.' ⁴⁴ The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'

Historical and Cultural Background

- *Jesus' Emotion:* When the Greek word for 'deeply moved' was used for animal sounds, it denoted the loud, angry snorting of horses. When used for humans, it emphasized a mixture of anguish and rage.¹ ⁴³³ When Jesus saw her weeping and saw the other people wailing with her, *a deep anger* welled up within him, and he was deeply troubled... ³⁸ Jesus *was still angry* as he arrived at the tomb... (New Living Translation; the version I printed in full is the New American Standard Bible)
- In Jewish funerals, the family hired professional mourners to cry loudly, so the family could cry and be covered. Jesus cries visibly in a way that people are surprised.

¹ G. Walter Hansen, 'The Emotions of Jesus and Why We Need to Experience Them', *Christianity Today*, Feb. 3, 1997; <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1997/february3/7t2042.html>; last accessed October 14, 2014

Questions

1. What emotion is Jesus having and showing?
 - a. Have you read this before with only looking at Jesus' sorrow? Take people's responses of having heard that.
 - b. Are you comfortable with Jesus showing anger and anguish?
 - c. Reformed theologian B.B. Warfield said, 'But the emotion which tore his breast and clamored for utterance was just rage. The expression even of this rage, however, was strongly curbed. The term which John employs to describe it is, as we have seen, a definitely external term. "He raged." But John modifies its external sense by annexed qualifications: "He raged in spirit," "raging in himself" He thus interiorizes the term and gives us to understand that the ebullition of Jesus' anger expended itself within him. Not that there was no manifestation of it: it must have been observable to be observed and recorded; it formed a marked feature of the occurrence as seen and heard. But John gives us to understand that the external expression of our Lord's fury was markedly restrained: its manifestation fell far short of its real intensity. He even traces for us the movements of his inward struggle: "Jesus, therefore, when he saw her wailing, and the Jews that had come with her wailing, was enraged in spirit and troubled himself" . . . and wept. His inwardly restrained fury produced a profound agitation of his whole being, one of the manifestations of which was tears.' (<http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/emotionallife.html>); note that I disagree with Warfield when he says in his very last paragraph, 'It is not germane to the present inquiry to enter into the debate as to whether, in assuming flesh, our Lord assumed the flesh of fallen or of unfallen man. The right answer, beyond doubt, is that he assumed the flesh of unfallen man'. See my website and all the resources on 'atonement' and on 'desires'. If Christ did not assume fallen humanity, then he did not connect with us at the depth of our need. Nor did he actually heal the deepest wound we have. Nor could he share his normative human emotions with us.)
2. Even though I included Martha's interaction with Jesus, that's mostly just to compare with Mary's interaction with Jesus. Notice that they say the same thing to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' But they seem to mean very different things by it. What does Mary mean when she says this?
 - a. Martha seems to have a functional orientation. She seems to believe that Jesus can and will do the miracle of raising her brother Lazarus. But Jesus wants to draw out the meaning of resurrection as a symbol of ultimate resurrection. So Jesus wants to expand her faith.
 - b. Mary seems to have an emotional orientation. Is she accusing Jesus of not being there? Maybe. Is Mary just hurt by Jesus' delay? That seems possible, too.
 - c. It's important to see that Mary is not having a lack of faith. And correspondingly, Jesus is not angry at her lack of faith. He is angry at something else.
3. How is Jesus' emotion his response to Mary?
 - a. He empathizes with what Mary felt because her brother died. Notice that empathy is commanded in Romans 12:15 when Paul says, 'Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.' It would be really weird if empathy was an aspect of love that Jesus himself did not share.
 - b. Can you imagine if Jesus had no emotion with Mary, or over Lazarus? What if he was only functional, robotic, or even narcissistic?
 - i. 'Well, Mary, I don't see why you're so upset. Just believe in me. I can do whatever I want. And your emotion doesn't affect *anything* in me.' Jesus would be a bit detached.
 - ii. Or if he said, 'No matter what you're feeling, I feel happy, oh so happy! Why don't you feel what I feel?' That would be cruel!
 - iii. The idea that God/Jesus is impassible (unfeeling or unmoved by feeling) is wrong. Justin Martyr said God is impassible in contrast with the Greek gods who were whimsical and arbitrary. But probably Justin Martyr meant that God is not carried away by feeling into arbitrariness, although proving that is far outside the scope of this study. We inherit some of the Greek tendency to idealize being unemotional. That comes from Stoicism. However, clearly in Scripture, the ideal is to have healthy and appropriate emotions! It would not be loving to walk happily along, meet a friend in grief, and not be emotionally moved.

- c. In fact, Jesus has MORE emotion than Mary. That's fascinating. Mary was more emotional than her sister Martha about their brother Lazarus' death. But Jesus was more emotional than Mary. Something in him perceives a greater problem than they do.
4. Let's look at this theologically.
- a. What is Jesus revealing about God the Father?
 - i. Notice that in v.40, Jesus says that if we believe we will see the glory of God. The glory of God means the revealing of God. And it's not just in the raising of Lazarus! God doesn't just have a functional response to our suffering and brokenness. He has a personal, emotional response.
 - ii. Illus: In the movie *The Shadowlands*, C.S. Lewis marries Helen Joy Davidman. It's a very touching story because at first, they get married just so Joy can stay in England. But they wind up falling deeply in love. Joy dies of cancer. And her son Douglas, who had now become C.S. Lewis' stepson, was a young teenager, and was very torn up. So when he cries, it's really touching that C.S. Lewis cries also.
 - iii. In many ways, Jesus reveals that God HAS ALWAYS BEEN GRIEVING AND ANGRY at the brokenness and suffering that has fallen on us. Jesus has his own personal relationship with Lazarus. So he's grieved there. But he also feels how this affects Mary. And he grieves for her. But since Jesus always reveals God the Father, we know that these emotions have actually existed in God even before Jesus revealed them to us.
 - iv. STATE: Sometimes Christians think that if you just have 'the right perspective' on life, that you won't feel sorrow or anger. THAT IS SO WRONG. It's as if you can be Stoic, unaffected, and unemotional. The opposite is true. If you have 'the right perspective,' YOU WILL FEEL SORROW AND ANGER. Because that is God's perspective.
 - b. Jesus also reveals the proper human response to human brokenness and the consequences of sin and death.
 - i. Jesus covers Mary's emotion as if he were like one of the professional mourners, but his mourning is real.
 - ii. Jesus shares in Mary's emotion, and he carries it to the Father on her behalf. The Epistle to the Hebrews calls Jesus our high priest, the one who is human on our behalf to the Father. This is an emotion that the Father treasures.
 - c. STATE: The words 'participate' and 'sharing in' are really important here. Our grieving of sin and anger at sin and death is part of God. It's how we share in the image of God and participate in God's own anger on our behalf.
 - i. Illus: When I began the journey of spiritual and emotional healing, I was a junior in college. I read a book called *Inside Out* by a Christian counselor named Larry Crabb. Dr. Crabb said that it was okay for me to wish things had been different for me as a child. That was the first time I had heard that. Being from a Japanese family, I had internalized the sense that you don't wish that for yourself, because that involves criticizing your parents. But I began to feel God's anger on my behalf, His anger at the sin in my parents' lives, His anger at the sin involved in the Japanese-American internment during World War II which shaped my dad as a young boy, and so on. I still forgave my parents with the love of Jesus, but I understood better how to view them and their own struggles and their own sin.
 - ii. That is really important for you, to feel God's anger directed at the sinfulness of people, the root cause of human brokenness. Paul said in Ephesians 4:26, 'Be angry, but do not sin...' That also has to include your own sinfulness in order to have a proper perspective.
 - iii. Is it wise to try to suffer alone, without Jesus? I don't think so. I think there is an element of pride in believing that you can suffer apart from Jesus, or in a way that He does not share in. I think there's a danger in doing that. But that's a subject for another time.
 - iv. Also, Mary shows in the next chapter that Jesus has to go to the cross into death. She anoints him with perfume for burial, because that's what you do to a dead body. So she knows that his response to human brokenness is more than words. It's action. Jesus will go to his death on the cross and into resurrection life to heal the human nature in himself, so he can share himself with us by his Spirit. These are things that aren't just words.

That's when he shows his full participation and sharing in human brokenness, in order to bring about our healing.

5. (optional) At what is Jesus angry?
 - a. Well, what killed Lazarus? Of course, Jesus is not angry at Lazarus as a person. He's angry at what killed Lazarus.
 - b. In John's Gospel, physical 'death' is the end result of spiritual death, or resistance to God and separation from God. So Lazarus' condition of being dead is a symptom of something deeper and more problematic. That is the problem that Jesus needs to solve. It's the corruption of sin within each person. If you want more explanation of that, read my notes on John 1 and John 3.
 - c. Illus: John teasing Zoe, me feeling angry at him
 - d. Illus: Being angry at someone you love and still believe in, who you still are rooting for.
 - e. Illus: Imagine that you don't know me at all. You just saw my picture in a newspaper. 'Mako Nagasawa beat up a guy...in his home ...and robbed him of his most valuable things...and his identity stuff, like credit cards, social security number, bank account numbers and driver's license.' What if I stole hundreds of thousands of dollars. What do you think I deserve?
 - i. Then imagine that I did that to your neighbor... What do you think I deserve?
 - ii. Then imagine that I did that to your brother, or your father... What do you think I deserve?
 - iii. Then imagine that I am your brother, and did that to someone else. What do you think I deserve?
 - iv. Imagine that I am your brother, and did that to someone else, yet you know my full story and know that I was unemployed and desperate, that I had tried to find a job, that I could work hard and was willing to, and that I still had some goodness in my heart despite what I had just done. What do you think I deserve?
 - v. Imagine that I am your brother, and that I stole from you. What do you think I deserve?
 - vi. The reason I have you step through that reflection is because I want to point out one tendency. The more you personally know someone, the harder it is to only punish them for something. You might feel that tough consequences are absolutely necessary, but you might also want there to be guidance offered, some program like TeenChallenge or a community service group that will offer structure and an opportunity to reactivate the better parts of my nature. The less you personally know someone, the easier it is to only think about giving punishment. The closer someone is to you, the more you want a restorative justice. The farther someone is from you, the more you want retributive justice. The question for us is this: Is God's feeling of anger and wrath fit into a restorative justice framework? Or a retributive justice framework? I am going to argue straight up that God's justice is restorative.
6. Note that Jesus' anger and sorrow is directed at the corruption of sin within Lazarus and within all of us because that is the underlying reason for human death in general.
 - a. That's true in the Old Testament. Circumcision in Moses, Jeremiah.
 - b. It's also true in Paul's letter to the Romans. God has always wanted to circumcise the human heart (Rom.2:28 – 29), that is, to cut the corruption of sin away from people. He has done this now in Jesus. What the Law could not do, weakened as it was through the flesh of Israel, God did, by condemning sin in the flesh of Jesus (Rom.8:3). So Jesus put to death the old self, and raised a new self within himself, to share with us by his Spirit, which constitutes a dying and rising with him on our part (Rom.6:6). This squares nicely with everything else in Romans. God's wrath is against the unrighteousness and ungodliness of people, but not against the people themselves (Rom.1:18). God then allows people to taste the bitter consequences of their own decisions, desires, and actions (Rom.1:21 – 32), so that people might realize that something is going wrong within themselves. Then, God wants them to feel the full weight of their own moral hypocrisy as they judge others and implicitly judge themselves (Rom.2:1 – 16) even if they are Jewish and claim to live up to the Sinai Law but don't (Rom.2:17 – 3:8). The reality is revealed that all human beings are infected with the corruption of sin (Rom.3:9 – 20). But God demonstrates His faithfulness to His covenant with Israel and His condemnation of sin through the faithfulness of Jesus (Rom.3:21 – 26). Abraham discovered that righteousness in covenant relation with God means trusting that God can bring forth life out of death, in his own and in Sarah's own

reproductively dead bodies. His faith anticipated God bringing forth life out of death in Jesus' totally dead body (Rom.4:1 – 5:21).

- c. That's also true in John's Gospel. The Word of God came and took on human flesh (Jn.1:14). That word 'flesh' is the worst way to talk about human beings. It refers to the corruption within human nature. Paul in Romans 7:14 – 25 says, 'I know that no good thing dwells in me, that is in my *flesh*.' Same word. Other Jewish writers of the time who wrote in Greek used the word flesh in the same way, especially Philo of Alexandria. Jesus came to cleanse the corruption out of human nature.
 - d. So God's anger and wrath is a surgical anger and wrath. It's like that of a surgeon. The more he loves you, the more he must hate the corruption of sin within you. And vice versa. The more he hates the corruption of sin within you, the more he must love you.
7. How can we handle our own anger at other people?
- a. Paul says in Ephesians 4:26 – 27 to be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger. It sounds to me like anger is a legitimate emotion. It is not legitimate to overstep your place, or harbor anger and let it turn into bitterness. And I am not saying that you should always act on your anger, which is probably why James says that the anger of men does not accomplish the righteousness of God (James 1:20). Usually, it is appropriate to talk about what makes you angry, and sometimes to show some of your anger directly to another person. But that's a much bigger topic for discussion. But at the very least, you can acknowledge your anger, embrace it within yourself, and use your anger as a window of insight into God's anger. In fact, it is God's anger that will help you be more precise with your anger.
 - b. Illus: This was true with the thieves in Barcelona who stole my passports and flash drive with all my Italy pictures on it. I was able to pray, 'I pray that God will kill them in Christ, so that they might rise as new human beings in relationship with Jesus so Jesus would help them put their thievery to death.' I realized that God was angry too, but not at the personhood of the person. He was angry at the corruption of sin.
 - c. Illus: But it was also true with my parents. My parents' marriage was never very good. They never listened to my feelings either. During my junior and senior years in college, I went through a deep awakening to how angry I was, because it was the time I really asked myself how my life had been affected by them. Before that, I was a Stoic, not feeling anything, burying my emotions deep down inside myself. But when things came out, I became really angry. I wrote in my journal twice a day during some times in that 2 year period. I did try to talk to my parents about it, but I never really had the chance, because they never wanted to talk about it. But I did take my anger to Jesus. And he showed me that he was angry on my behalf. He was angry for me. For the way I had been treated. I would picture myself as a child and I felt like Jesus was furious and grieved for the way I had been treated. And Jesus' laser focused anger was against the corruption of sin in my parents, but not against their personhood. His love was for them as persons. That focused and shaped my own emotions.
 - d. Application: For you...
8. How can we handle other people's anger when it is directed at us?
- a. Sometimes when other people are mad at us, we feel shame. Or a real defensiveness. Or a desire to just hide in bed the whole day.
 - b. First, we have to discern whether there is real moral responsibility that we did not live up to. Sometimes another person's anger is unfair. But even in those cases, we can try to listen for what their perspective is, and try to talk it out.
 - c. If they are right about something, that we have done something wrong or wronged them, then you can actually ask the Lord to give you his perspective on it. He is determined to root out of you the corruption of sin. He loves you. And even though it is sometimes painful, we can let him operate on us spiritually.
9. This lines up perfectly with the conviction that God is a Triune God.
- a. If God's anger and wrath was an attribute of God on the same level as His love, then He would be indifferent between whether people chose His love or His anger. Is God indifferent? Is He like a courtroom judge, who is distant, not involved, and indifferent? Hardly!!
 - b. But if God is Triune, a relationship of love between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit, then everything He does and is towards us must be rooted and grounded in that Triune love. That includes anger and wrath. That's exactly what we see here in John 11. Jesus loves Martha, Mary,

and Lazarus, so therefore he is angry and wrathful and sorrowful about Lazarus dying, and the underlying issue is the corruption of human nature in Lazarus' own person.

10. What are all the other implications of the fact that Jesus wept in anger and sorrow at Lazarus' tomb?
 - a. Jesus is not too manly to weep.
 - b. Jesus is not detached, like Buddha. Buddha's statue – the one in my grandmother's house – was of a fat man who had his eyes closed and arms folded, with a faint smile on his face. It represented contentment, which I value, but it was a contentment based on being withdrawn from the world of suffering. He didn't see it. He didn't care. When I was in 10th grade and started to explore Jesus, I came upon John 11 and read about Jesus weeping. I noticed that this was very different from the picture of God I had, which had been influenced by Buddha. Jesus exposed himself to our suffering. Jesus suffered with us because of his love for us. Before I became a Christian, I found myself thinking, 'If there is a God, I hope he's like Jesus.'
 - c. He doesn't go somewhere in private to cry, as if it's shameful for him. Instead, he does it openly because he thinks his emotions are normal, and he wants people to share in it with him.
 - d. Because he loves us. His tears and his anger flow out of his love (11:5).
 - e. He's not crying for himself per se, but because he feels the pain of the loss even more than we do; Jesus shared in Mary's pain
 - f. As Jesus watches Mary's body convulse, wracked with sobs, maybe as she clutches the dust in one hand, is he reminded that he will be in the exact same position one lonely night atop Gethsemane clutching the dust, and one lonely day on the cross? Jesus knew how painful it was to Mary, and her suffering pierces him. Did Jesus weep here knowing that he too would lose a good friend, Judas? Or was he thinking about the tomb that awaited him? So he reaches out to her and he gives her his tears and his holy anger against the root cause of Lazarus' death and the death of all human beings to show her that she is not alone. I take great comfort in this short little verse, 'Jesus wept', because it shows that Jesus doesn't let us go through these things alone.