

Jesus-like

A sudden gale-force wind ripped across the water, transforming the small sea within a matter of minutes into a crazy undulating nightmare of waves which broke over their boat like giant hands pushing, lifting, dashing and drowning. Initially, the men on board scrambled in semi orderly fashion to lower the sail, secure equipment and bail with anything that could hold water. Quite quickly though, it was clear that they were losing the battle and that the ship was in grave danger of being overwhelmed by the stormy waters and biting winds.

With the small vessel pitching in every conceivable direction it was a miracle no one was washed overboard, but all were becoming frantic and were in terror of perishing. Chaos and fear now gripped their hearts. The mountainous waves crashed over the boat filling it with water. Yet one man in the stern seemed oblivious to the whole debacle. As though detached from the crisis, He slept gently and apparently peacefully upon a cushion.

Some of those nearby woke Him wailing, "Master, save us!!" and,



Rembrandt

"Don't you care that we are perishing?!"

You all know the story. Perhaps you know their situation.

They knew, somehow, that Jesus could save them but His seeming separation from the fierceness of their dilemma gave rise to their cry, "Don't you care...?!"

The prisoner in Herod's filthy dungeon had lived arguably the most righteous life of Old Testament times with a devotion to God that impressed even the most dedicated of the religious elite. When he called on people to repent, he did it with genuine authority and the power of a separated life; he was a true Nazarite. In fact, as to be rumored to be the Messiah or 'the Prophet' or Elijah.

So, when he sent his followers to Jesus with the simple question, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" he undoubtedly expected a straightforward answer. Instead, Christ replied, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: the blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them." And knowing the

thoughts of every man's heart, even one as righteous as John's, He added, "And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."

You all know the story. Perhaps you know his situation.

Earlier, John had specifically pointed out Jesus with the words, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me'.... I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him... I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God."

He knew Jesus was the Messiah, the One who would save Israel, but His actions were incongruous with those John expected. Thus, the Lord declared that he is blessed, "who is not offended because of Me."

So sick he could not rise from bed, his sisters and friends feared for his life. They bustled about the home hoping to find something to distract him from his illness. 'Perhaps a bit of his favorite food' thought one or 'some encouraging word from the Teacher' thought another. They sent urgent, pleading words to the Master to come.

Hours and then days passed. No medical help, no relief for his pain, no sleep, no more tears and no Jesus. Where was He?? Finally, like the crescendo of a terrible symphony of sorrow, the sisters' wailing announced their dear brother's death. The bustling stopped. Everything stopped.

Amid the numbing shock and dashed hopes which followed, Mary and Martha fumbled with their daily chores. Others assisted with the burial duties and shared in the ceremonial weeping most of which was real for Lazarus was well loved by many. Family and friends laid him in a tomb and rolled a large stone before its opening. The ordeal was ending or was it just beginning? And still no Jesus.

Four days had passed when running excited neighbors announced to all that He was coming – the Teacher and His followers had finally arrived. Martha was outside and found the strength to approach Him. "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."

What was she thinking? Perhaps, He would pray for her brother's soul. Perhaps, He could take away their gnawing pain of grief. Perhaps, He could find someone to come and help provide for them as she and her sister were now alone.

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

Comforting words. Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

You know the story. Perhaps, you can identify with the situation.

She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the

world." Then she ran to her sister. Mary was the sensitive one; these words were perhaps too 'heavy' for Martha to handle alone. They had never doubted that Jesus was the Messiah, but their brother's agony and death had put a huge valley of darkness and despair between them and their Lord. Why hadn't He come earlier??

Then, when Mary came to where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." She was weeping profusely as she echoed her sister's crushing disappointment. Everyone was weeping. Jesus wept.

Jesus Christ – Master, Creator, Messiah and Author of the unexpected.

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD.

"For as the heavens are higher than the earth,

So are My ways higher than your ways,

And My thoughts than your thoughts." Isa 55:8,9

Can you see the common threads in each of these situations? First, these people were followers, fellow servants and friends of Christ. They had good reason to expect His help, His answer and His presence. Second, because of their relationship, they had expectations of Him specifically pertaining to what He would/should do. Third, His behavior was radically different than what they supposed.

Upon the stormy Galilean waters, facing disaster, the disciples perceived that He didn't care. They clearly had confidence that He could do something to help. That's why they asked – perhaps they expected Him to bail water or take charge and calm their chaos. This is the case when we face fearful situations without faith. The natural man within us can look to Jesus if you would for help but will at the same time frame that anticipated help within 'natural' parameters. The followers of Christ are 'naturally' inclined to underestimate Him. We also misjudge Him as disinterested because He doesn't share our fears.

But He said to them, *"Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?" Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. So the men marveled, saying, "Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"*

With open jaws, bulging eyes and perhaps nervous knees, they watched as the natural elements over which the natural man has no control submitted to the Lord of creation.

Dungeons are dark places – no restrooms, no microwaves and no cable TV. Seriously, they are generally the deepest pit available with an abundance of whatever naturally seeks the lowest hole. Dear John who had lived the 'cleanest' life possible for a sinful man was caged in a very dirty place.

To answer his question, Jesus pointed John back to the scripture and required him to base his faith on all that it said about the Messiah,

not just the part(s) that he desired or expected. It was an answer but probably not the one he expected.

In his wonderful book, "The Prisoner in the Third Cell" author Gene Edwards describes what may have been in Christ's mind: *"Never before in all his thirty-one years, nor in all his preexistence in eternity, had he ever longed so intensely to answer the cry and the question of someone struggling to understand the mysterious ways of his God."*

"If ever there was a time for him to give a clear answer, if ever there was a person to whom he should speak clearly, surely the time was now and the person, John. If any

man ever lived who had a right to have an explanation given to him, that man was his own flesh and blood, his only cousin."

"John, your pain is great. I feel it. Tonight you so desperately need to understand me, to fathom my ways, to peer into the riddle of my sovereignty. Your heart is breaking. But, John, you are not the first to have this need. You are but one in a long train of humankind stretching across all the centuries of man who have called out to me with questions and doubts. You are but one voice among so many who wonder, who agonize over my ways."

"A day like that which awaited John awaits us all. It is unavoidable because every believer imagines his God to be a certain way, and is quite sure his Lord will do certain things under certain conditions. But your Lord is never quite what you imagined Him to be."

"Take away the stone." The command came with such authority that He didn't need to repeat it.

Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days." Perhaps she thought He wanted to see the body one last time. In any event, she couldn't conceive of what was about to happen. Grief and disappointment are very strong influences in the life of anyone. It is my own experience that such factors tend to challenge our very trust and faith. The natural man puts the possibility of divine intervention in the past or the future. The 'now' can beat upon the soul like a deafening and relentless strobe. But Jesus understands. He understood Martha – she wasn't 'hearing Him'.

He said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me." Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with grave clothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go." (emphasis added)

Lazarus heard Him.

Oh, how we need to let this sink in. We continually tend to underestimate our Lord because He

doesn't do things our way or according to our desire. Abraham underestimated Him and wound up with a child God never considered his son. David underestimated Him and woefully wailed that someday King Saul would kill him. Thomas underestimated Him and doubted His resurrection. You see, even with believers, the natural man, which strives continually to direct our lives, is a chronic failure in estimating God. There simply is no estimating Him. And so, that then leads us to a fundamental question.

Gene Edwards put it this way --
"You have now come face to face

with a God whom you do not fully understand. You have met a God who has not lived up to your expectations. Every believer must come to grips with a God who did not do things quite the way it was expected."

"You are going to get to know your Lord by faith or you will not know Him at all. Faith in Him, trust that is in Him...not in His ways."

"The question is not, 'Why is God doing this? Why is He like this?' The question is not 'Why does He not answer me?' The question is not, 'I need Him desperately, why does He not come rescue me?' The question is not, 'Why did God allow this tragedy to happen to me, to my children, to my wife, to my husband, to my family?' Nor is it, 'Why does God allow injustices?'"

"The question before the house is this: 'Will you follow a God you do not understand? Will you follow a God who does not live up to your expectations?'"

Clearly, His ways are not our natural ways and yet He tells us to follow Him. (See Mat 4:19; 8:22; 9:9; 10:38; 16:24) Our Lord knows that's not 'falling off a log' easy. To the contrary, it can be extremely difficult. Even Jesus petitioned the Father to change the plan of salvation, if possible, in the Garden of Gethsemane (see Mat 26:39; Mk 14:35). Following 'the plan' of God even when you want God to change it is Jesus-like.

True peace in the midst of a stormy tumult is Jesus-like. Trusting God, taking no offense, even when He doesn't do things the way we thought He would/should is Jesus-like. Listening, that is hearing God and thus doing what He directs on His timetable as well as knowing, truly knowing He hears us – this is Jesus-like.

The time is short and the world around us is in an exponential decay. Things are 'stormy', dark and dungeon-like and there's plenty of grief to go around. However, regardless of circumstances, God's glorious plan is coming to pass – nothing can stop it. As with the disciples, with John and with Mary and Martha, His message is still, "have faith". For as we follow, we absolutely will see far, far greater things than we ever imagined or expected.

Meanwhile, may we, in Jesus-like fashion, burn radically bright in these last days, and knowing that His ways are so much higher than ours, may we trust our Savior – know His word, obey His voice and follow.