

Wrong Questions, Right Answer

Wandering through the phenomenal collection of art in the Louvre museum you can get an odd sense of awe and futility. This former residence of Napoleon is just so packed full with mankind's creative treasures, it numbs the mind. Crowds gather around the Mona Lisa while the rooms of renaissance sculptures are virtually empty – there are definitely popular favorites. After several hours, I discovered mine. It grabbed me instantly and I had to sit down in a kind of surrender to its message. Let me take you to a story in John 20 to explain:

To say it was salting the wound would be a gross understatement. The only person who had truly loved her, the one who had freed her from slavery to sin and evil spirits, the one she called Lord and who held her heart – the rulers had mocked, tortured and sadistically killed him. And now, this...

She'd come to the tomb early. Stumbling her way through the dark garden, she'd found it open -- the stone covering rolled back! OPEN!?

"Why?!" her heart cried out along with her lips. 'Why?!'

Searching for reasons in a storm of confusion and ever-deepening heartbreak, she grasped at an answer – 'they have taken his body!'

She ran to where she found Peter, still sulking, and John. "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb and ..." she began. Hearing this, Peter jumped to his feet and ran out – confused, angry, grieving.

'Oh, no! Why?!' his heart lamented. "...and we don't know where they've laid him!" she finished.

At that, John broke out of his own dismay and bounded after Peter. He caught up and passed him by, reaching the tomb first. 'Why?!' his heart searched along with his eyes as he stooped and looked in, seeing just the strips of linen left behind.

Peter ambled past, breathing heavily, and entered the cave. Like his fellow disciple, he beheld the linen wrappings and the neatly folded face cloth.

Then John ventured in. For some reason, he saw and something 'clicked' inwardly – he believed.

But Mary remained outside. After the two men had left, she continued weeping. Now convinced that she would never see her beloved again, she looked inside. A bit surprised, she beheld two men dressed in white sitting at either end of the now empty grave clothes.

"Dear woman, why are you weeping?" they asked. She explained what seemed to be obvious, "Because they have taken away my Lord... and I don't know where they've laid Him."

'How-did-it-happen' questions were the last thing her heart could deal with now. She turned away with one more 'Oh, why?!' echoing within her heart.

Just then, another gentle voice said, "Dear woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?"

Inexplicably, this voice seemed to unlock a watershed of heartbroken love.

This man was the gardener, she thought, he would know... "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away."

A breathless moment passed... Then came a familiar voice and along with it, the scent of fresh rain, wild roses and joy.

"Mary," He spoke softly. And her heart exploded!

In dark and lonely times, a broken heart searches for answers. Even our Lord Jesus, on the cross, cried out a "Why?" (see Mat 27:46 or Mark 15:34). So it's easy for me to imagine the disciples of Christ doing the same thing.

But God generally doesn't give us the answers we think we need. Not on our terms or timelines it seems. Oh, He answers our prayers, but if you spend some time in the Gospels, you quickly conclude that Jesus wasn't trying to be anyone's answer-man, not in the way his critics or insincere public desired.

You see, God knows that what our hearts and souls truly crave is rightness. But answers to the 'whys' or 'wherefores' cannot bring redemption, restoration, resurrection – rightness. At these times, what we need comes not from an intellectual or emotional explanation no matter how profound, but from our souls being wrapped in His loving heart.

For all things are or will be made right in Him. He, Himself, is the Answer – this is not just a play on words but rather the most awesome truth. (see John 14:6).

When Mary wanted simply to find the body of Jesus, her heart, engulfed in sorrow, was searching for an answer to the wrong question. She, in her mind, saw her Savior as in the painting before which I sat.

But while 'whys' and 'wherefores' within her earnestly desired answers, they were born out of false assumptions. There was Jesus just behind her and it only took one word from Him to make everything right – righter than right – better than right – exceedingly abundantly better than what she could imagine as right. In fact, it was already right – His word simply revealed it to her.

And we are in the same boat with Mary (or rather the disciples) bailing the same water so to speak, wondering if our God really cares. However, if He gave us just the answers to our whys, it

would only be like handing us another bailing bucket. You remember the story. Jesus told his disciples, "Let's go over to the other side" of the lake. And while He was asleep on a pillow in the stern of the boat, a sudden storm had filled it with water (see Mark 4).

But with a single command, the raging storm was stilled.

And we are in the same room with Jairus. His mind first filled with hopes of prevention is now muddled by fear of his little girl's death. (See Luke 8:41-56). Jesus didn't just have an explanation but rather, with a single command – resurrection.

Now, sorrows will come, if they haven't already, for we are living in treacherous days. As a result, many people are asking these same questions (or will be) and those who are dealing with tragedy will not generally be lifted up by some well meaning teacher's 10-point lesson on God's righteous judgments, His sovereignty, His mercy, etc.

But what hurting people need most is Christ Himself. Not just theological answers to the whys or wherefores but an honest, intimate connection to the One who but speaks the word and makes it right or reveals that it is already right.

As the birth pangs of these last days get more intense, we must know how to answer, yes. But even more so, we must be those who display Christ, His love and compassion. We must lead His children to Him, guide them into His arms.

There, held close to His heart, the clay of our souls is fashioned in trust. It's a tender place for He Who came to heal the broken hearted (Isa 61:1) died with a broken heart Himself (John 19:34).

And He rose again!

So the tragedy wasn't the end but the doorway into unexpected joy. Likewise, your hardship, your tragedy, as difficult as it is, is not the end of joy, the end of love. In Christ and only in Christ, it will one day soon be understood with a completely new perspective – a resurrection perspective.

Looking at that painting, it hit me – He's not there in that grave, in that condition, even though everyone who knew and loved Him thought He was. He was in that grave – He probably looked much like that. His death was real, the pain was real, the sorrow real, the anguish real. But early on the third day, Jesus – the Way the Truth and the Life, conquered sin and death and brought in the real reality – resurrection and eternal life in an indescribably wonderful place.

Mary, the disciples on the lake, Jairus and his family -- all discovered what we need to realize and hold on to – Jesus ends the whys and wherefores of our burdened hearts – not with explanations so much as with loving, perfect restoration – making all things right, maybe not here, but absolutely in heaven – a real place, a steadfast promise, a rock-solid guarantee for those who trust in Christ. Meanwhile, let's look eagerly toward heaven and live in genuine expectation.