

Title: A Profitable Petition

Text: John 11: 1-4

Date: Jan 13, 2022

Place: SGBC, NJ

John 11: 1: Now a certain *man* was sick, *named* Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. 2: (It was *that* Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.) 3: Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick. 4 When Jesus heard *that*, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.

Lazarus was sick. So Mary and Martha sent someone to the Lord with this petition, “*Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.*” Their sending someone to our Lord was like us going to Christ in prayer. Always take every need to Christ Jesus our Lord in prayer.

No doubt these sisters loved their brother Lazarus. But they did not tell the Lord that the one whom *they* loved was sick. They said, “*Lord, he whom THOU lovest is sick.*” This is the most powerful of all petitions in prayer—“*Lord, behold, he whom THOU lovest is sick*”

Subject: A Profitable Petition

Proposition: This is a prayer full of instruction—“Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick”—we will see a few reasons why believers always take our petitions to the Lord.

CHRIST LOVES HIS OWN

We come to the Lord in prayer because Christ loves his own people. Faith in Christ is the proof we are one he loves.

God loves a particular people—his elect. There would have been no need to make this distinction were Christ’s love not toward his particular people alone. They said, “*HE whom THOU lovest is sick.*” If Christ loved all without exception this distinction would be unneeded.

The love of God is the cause of God choosing who he would save in eternity. God the Father elected his people unto salvation because he loved us. No merit in us. No good in us. Nothing even done—good or evil—by us. God chose his people because he loved us.

Deuteronomy 7: 7: The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye *were* the fewest of all people: 8: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Long before the world or angels were created, long before we were born, our Savior loved his people. That is why he chose us freely by his grace.

The love of God in Christ for his people is why God entered covenant to save us before we fell in Adam. Christ knew Adam would sin and make all his children guilty and our nature would become ruined. The fall was according to God’s purpose. Christ could say of the fall

what he said of Lazarus's death—"*This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.*"

Before God's elect fell in Adam, knowing we would fall, knowing it would take Christ's blood to redeem us, knowing the Father would have to give his only begotten Son, God the Father and Son entered covenant to recreate his ruined people in Christ's righteousness and restore to us more than we lost.

Isaiah 59: 16: He saw that, there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his own arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him.

Jacob became accountable to Laban for the whole flock of sheep committed to his charge. So "*the great Shepherd of the sheep*" became responsible to shed his blood to redeem and save the whole flock entrusted to his care. From eternity Christ's delights were with the sons of men. From eternity he loved his church and became head over all things to the church (Pro 8: 31; Eph 1: 22).

Christ's love for his people is why Christ left heaven and took our nature. If we knew more about the glory of heaven we could appreciate more what a sacrifice the Son of God made to become the Son of David. The Son of the Highest became the Babe of Bethlehem. Amazing!

1 Timothy 3:16: Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifest in the flesh.

Hebrews 2: 16: For verily he took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham.

But it is at the cross, where we behold the love of God in Christ at its zenith. There Christ hung between God and his elect, "who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree" (1 Pet 2:24). All disease, sickness, and suffering are the effect of sin. Proof positive we fell in Adam and are sinners in our flesh is that we get sick and die. The only way Christ could save his people from sin and death in harmony with God's justice was to bear our sin then justly suffer all that justice demands. He could raise Lazarus that day only because he would bear all Lazarus' sin that caused his sin and death then bear all the punishment unto death. So it was for each elect child he loves. God poured out justice justly on Christ because:

Isaiah 53: 6...The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all...

2 Corinthians 5: 21: He hath made him sin for us, who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

This is the great manifestation of the love of God. It is why we take all our petitions to Christ, "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses" (Mt 8: 17). By bearing the sin that caused it, our Substitute accomplished atonement for those he everlastingly loved. He said, "I lay down my life FOR THE SHEEP" (Jn 10: 15).

So all that Christ is, all that he purchased, all that he inherited, our Lord shall give to his people. He conquered death for his people; he shall raise us to eternal life in the first resurrection in regeneration. He justified us; he shall give us free justification through faith. He consecrated a new way into the holiest for us; he welcomes his people to come to him in prayer because he everlives to make intercession for us. And he shall resurrect us in the end.

The love of God never lessens in the least degree. It did not change in the least when we fell in Adam, not when we were conceived in sin and came forth speaking lies, not when we have tried his love by our wanderings, and nothing shall quench his love for his people. One day, the great Shepherd shall stand before the Father and say, “Behold, those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost” (Jn 17: 12).

So it is Christ’s love for his particular people that makes the believer come to him in prayer constantly. We come knowing he everlives to intercede for us constantly.

CHRIST GIVES A NEED

We come to Christ because our sovereign Lord graciously gives us a need. *“He whom thou lovest is sick.”*

Those Christ loves are not immune to sickness and suffering and many afflictions and sorrow. Self-righteous religionists tell sinners that if they had more faith they wouldn’t get sick. They would be wealthy. They would not suffer afflictions. It is a paradox to unregenerate sinners how one can suffer and yet be chosen and called and loved by Christ.

Sadly, it can be a paradox to us who believe as well. Martha and Mary each made the same statement. It was true but there is a note of complaint and perplexity in it. They said,

John 11: 21: ...Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

He is Jehovah Shammah, the Lord is there. He is always here brethren. Then the friends of the family said,

John 11: 37: ...Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?

Of course, if Christ had willed it, Lazarus would not have died. If it were God’s will none of this weeping would have happened. If he willed, Christ could destroy every enemy of his people within and without. Christ could prevent all trouble—including sickness and death. He is God. He could take us to glory like he did Enoch or Elijah. But because this is so, seeing that Christ is our sovereign King who rules all things, when we suffer it is not our place to question the Lord’s sovereign hand.

Romans 9: 20: Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed *it*, Why hast thou made me thus? 21: Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?

The Lord teaches us to submit to his hand rather than attempt to take his throne. Trust the Lord and bow to him rather than judge his providential dealings. The suffering is to bring us to where he brought Job. Job said, “I have heard of thee by the hearing of ear, but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42: 5).

There are at least two good reasons we should expect affliction and trouble. One, because we need to be afflicted that we might learn the Lord’s statutes—namely, that we are sinners and he is the Savior (Ps 119:71). We need HIM constantly!

Two, believers should expect affliction because we are children the Father loves. “Whom the Lord LOVETH he chasteneth, and scourgeth EVERY son whom HE RECEIVETH” (Heb 12: 6). We should be far more fearful, if we do not suffer because affliction is a mark of a child loved of God. Job, David, Hezekiah, Lazarus, Mary, Martha—each child in scripture who God loved—suffered afflictions, as do all those the Lord loves in our day.

We saw four things the Lord worked in this for their good: one, he makes his child deny ourselves, submit to his will; two, he grows us in faith; three he reveals to us his glory; four, he benefits all his people, not just the one in need.

But here is the is the chief reason. This affliction drew them to Christ. Christ gave them a need. They came to Christ because they could not do one thing about it. That is the purpose of affliction. It is to bring us to the end of self that we might be drawn to Christ. If Christ sends poverty or does not heal or causes us to sorrow the rest of our days with heavy trials one after another, so long as he blesses it to draw us to Christ, to pour our heart trusting all into his hand, then he did it because he loved us. And we will see this, thank him, and glorify him for doing it!

Let’s remember an illustration of this. The Lord could have taken Israel straight into the promised land. But because the Lord loved his elect among them, he hemmed them in at the Red Sea, then delivered them. Therefore, Moses and Israel ended up sing praises to the Lord. So shall we.

THE LORD KNOW ALL AND IS ABLE

We come to Christ with our petitions because the Lord knows all and is able to save.

Christ knew their need before they came to him. He told them the purpose and details only he knew—*“When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby...Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep...Then said Jesus to them plainly, Lazarus is dead.”*

In the last chapter he declared “I know my sheep!” Here we see the Lord knows our need before we open our mouth. He sent it.

Matthew 6: 7: But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen *do*: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. 8: Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

God predestinated our first birth and our new birth and sovereignly brought both to pass. He controls every aspect of this world and everything that happens in our lives. Christ knows what things ye have need of before ye ask him. Then why pray? Because it is for our good and his glory. After the Lord told Israel what he would do for them,

Ezekiel 36:37: Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will yet *for* this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do *it* for them; I will increase them with men like a flock. 38... and they shall know that I *am* the LORD.

Be sure to get this. Prayer is not us turning God to our will; prayer is God making his child submit to God’s will, to cast all our care on Christ and leave it there, that we might know and remember that he is the LORD!

It is to remind us that the Lord knows best how to provide our need. He is Wisdom! He waited until Lazarus died because it was best. He said, “*And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe*” (v15).

He called on the Father before them all, not for his benefit, but to teach us, “*And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me*” (vv41-42).

All these years later, Christ is still edifying his people today through this passage because he did what was profitable in his time. He is doing the same in each of our lives today.

We go to the Lord in prayer because it is how he reminds us that only Christ has power. He is the Power. Only our Lord is ABLE to meet our every need. We are prone to say if the Lord opened the eyes of one born blind, then could he have not made it so this man had not died? Instead, we should say, “If the Lord opened the eyes of the blind, if he raised Lazarus, if he redeemed me, regenerated me, preserved me this far, he can meet this need!” Knowing what he has done for us, we should say, “Is anything too hard for the Lord” (Gen 18:14).

Philippians 1:6: Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform *it* until the day of Jesus Christ:

2 Corinthians 1: 8: For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: 9: But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: 10: Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver *us*;

Always come to Christ and let your requests be made known to the Lord.

Hebrews 4: 15: For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet without sin. 16: Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Let us pray to Christ in faith, thanksgiving, and submission. Let us make our petition based on his love for his people. Do so knowing he gave the affliction because he loves us. Do so knowing he gave the affliction to remind us he knows all and is able to meet our need, even as he did at the cross.

What a profitable petition, “*Lord, behold, He whom thou lovest is sick!*”

Amen!