

Jesus Wept



David Wilkerson August 22, 2016

“Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany” (John 11:1). Most Christians know the story of Lazarus. He lived with his two sisters, Mary and Martha, in the town of Bethany. Their home was a favorite resting place for Jesus. Christ knew that this close-knit family loved him, and he loved them dearly in return. He even made their home his spiritual retreat. It was an oasis of quiet for him away from the pressing crowds.

When Lazarus grew deathly ill, Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus: “Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick” (11:3). They knew Jesus could help them in their trial. But Christ sent a message back to them, saying, “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby” (11:4). Surely Mary and Martha were puzzled at Jesus’ reply. They possibly thought Lazarus was going to be healed.

But Jesus was looking for a different response from them. He wanted to see faith rise up in his beloved friends. He wanted them to acknowledge that he was more than just their friend, a teacher, healer and miracle worker. He was saying, in so many words, “Mary, Martha, you are not to worry or sorrow. I’m going to take care of this in my time and my way. And I want you, of all people, to trust me. You’re special to me, and I desire that your confidence in me not fail. Surely you’ll believe me that my Father will receive glory from this crisis.”

Jesus was sending this family a message of incredible hope. He was telling them, “Yes, this is the most painful, excruciating experience you’ve ever gone through. But God has a purpose in it. He has chosen you and your household to endure a time of great testing. Your home is about to become a battleground between faith and unbelief. And God is going to receive all glory from it. Don’t worry, the Father has orchestrated it all.”

What is the central issue of this passage? Simply this: Jesus calls on those who love him deeply to trust him to do what’s best for them. After all, if we don’t trust him—if he can’t receive faith and confidence from his closest friends—where will he find faith on the earth?

Jesus purposely didn’t rush to Bethany

Once Jesus got the sisters’ message, he stayed for two days in the town where he was at the time (see John 11:6). I picture Mary and Martha growing desperate, wondering, “Where is Jesus? Why hasn’t he come to help? He knows how serious this situation is. And he’s less than a day’s journey away. If he loves us, why is he delaying?”

Why did the Lord take his time? Why didn’t he go immediately, out of love? I believe if we can grasp this, we’ll understand why God often doesn’t seem to come to rescue us when we think he should. What is your crisis? Is it financial matters, family problems, physical ailments, inner struggles? How bleak have things become? You’ve prayed diligently, but heaven seems like brass. You wonder, “Where is God? Why hasn’t he come to me?”

I can’t answer for the Lord in everyone’s situation. But I can say this about Mary and Martha’s crisis: The need wasn’t critical enough, not hopeless enough, to accomplish the specific purpose God desired. In some instances, a miracle is called for. Of course, the Lord doesn’t work this way all the time. But he does often deal differently with his inner circle of friends in ways that seem more drastic than normal. He waits until they’re convinced, “It’s too

late now. This is hopeless, impossible.”

In the sisters' case, God waited until death claimed Lazarus. Nothing could be more hopeless than that. All along, Jesus could have spoken a word and healed his friend even from a distance. He'd done it before. So why was this family being tested beyond their limits? You may wonder about your own situation: “Why does God come to others' rescue but not mine?”

After waiting two days, Jesus knew by the Spirit that Lazarus had died. “Then Jesus said unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.” Christ then told his disciples, “I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him” (11:14-15). Christ was telling his most intimate circle of friends, “God has brought about this impossible situation for a reason. It is to provide you with the most opportune moment to believe him for the impossible. He has orchestrated this so that my most beloved friends can show the world I have power to do what no person can do. It has to happen through faith alone.”

I believe Jesus delayed for another reason as well.

Jesus wanted to bring to light a flawed faith in his close followers. When he finally arrived at Bethany, both Mary and Martha bluntly said, “If you had been here in time, this wouldn't have happened” (see John 11:21, 32). They might as well have said, “Lord, why wait so long? Why let this situation get out of control? Now it's too late. We're left with nothing but grief.”

Jesus answered, “Thy brother shall rise again” (11:23). Martha answered, “Oh, yes, some day. We'll see him at the resurrection.” But Jesus told her, “He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?” (11:25-26). Martha replied, “Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world” (11:27). She then “went her way” (11:28).

Can you picture what's going on here? On one hand, Martha said, “Yes, Jesus, I believe you're God in flesh, that you can do anything.” She knew she was looking God in the face, holding a conversation with him. Yet in spite of this she “went her way” as if there was no God. She'd felt pain and sorrow and shed a river of tears over her brother's death. But she didn't believe Jesus was interested in any of that. It was as if God was present but unable to help her.

Beloved, this is a flawed faith. It reveals a belief in God as Creator, omnipotent and omniscient, but one who's not personally interested in us. It's a despairing resolve that he won't be God to us in our present trials. Sadly, many Christians today bring to the Lord this kind of flawed faith. They come into his house to praise him, exalt him as God in flesh, and testify that nothing is impossible for him. Yet they don't trust he'll be there for them in their trials, that he doesn't want to be involved. That is the flawed faith Jesus wanted to correct in these dear sisters.

Next we find Mary at his feet, weeping. She had lost hope. Scripture says of Jesus, “He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled” (John 11:33). The Greek word for “groaned” indicates “indignation.” Then with a troubled sigh he said to the gathering, “Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see” (11:34). At that point, “Jesus wept” (11:35).

Why exactly was Jesus weeping? Those nearby exclaimed, “Behold how he loved him!” (John 11:36). They were saying, “See how he misses his dear friend. He cries because he'll never see him again.” But that wasn't what made Jesus weep. It was because of the naked unbelief of his closest friends. Jesus' tears came from a mixture of hurt and indignation over the blindness of those who loved him most. They were acting like agnostics, believing in God but not trusting he was involved in their personal lives. “Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave” (11:38). He was wounded by the unbelief of his inner circle of dear ones, and he shed tears over them.

At this point, Jesus commanded, “Take ye away the stone” (11:39). Here were clear instructions from the Lord. It was something he wanted the people to do before a miracle would come. Jesus does the same with us, asking us to roll away the heavy stone of our despair, fear and unbelief. Why does he ask us to do this? Whenever we face a crisis, we react in one of two ways: We either grow weary, full of unbelief, and we stop seeking Jesus—or we draw closer to him, giving him no rest until he speaks a word of direction to us. The word we usually hear from him is, “Roll away the stone. Set aside all worry, confusion and fear.”

You may not accept that Jesus has a close inner circle of friends. It's true that our Lord is no respecter of persons

and loves all of humankind. But even though he loved his twelve disciples equally as friends, he had an inner circle of Peter, James and John. These three were with him on the Mount of Transfiguration. And when he went to heal the daughter of the synagogue ruler, “he suffered no man to go in, save Peter, and James, and John” (Luke 8:51). Later, in his darkest hour at Gethsemane, who did Jesus want by his side? He took Peter, James and John to watch with him and pray.

We find this same pattern in the Old Testament. Abraham was called the friend of God. And the Lord spoke to Moses “as a man speaketh unto his friend” (Exodus 33:11). God’s promises are near and dear to all who believe, but the Bible makes it clear something special happens with those who draw near to the Lord, who seek him with their whole hearts. They become friends of God—and Jesus calls them to remain close to him.

I see the Lord setting the stage for another Lazarus-like opportunity for his close friends in these last days.

The coming hour calls for a flawless faith. I believe we’re going to see Christ calling forth his close circle of friends. He challenges us with his words to Martha: “Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?” (John 11:40). Indeed, the Bible tells us that in one town “he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief” (Matthew 13:58). Likewise, James writes of those who waver in faith: “Let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord” (James 1:7).

But, of course, Jesus did raise Lazarus from the grave. “He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes... Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go” (John 11:43-44). What an incredible miracle. Why did Jesus raise up Lazarus when no one present expressed any faith?

First, Jesus did it to glorify the Father. And second, he did it to validate himself as God in flesh. That’s why he declared days earlier, “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby” (11:4). Christ knew that the Godhead was to be glorified through this great miracle.

Yet I see another very important reason why Jesus raised up Lazarus. It was a secret known only to Mary and Jesus. It had to do with a one-pound box hidden in her bedchamber. It was a sealed box of expensive ointment called spikenard. And it was the most precious, costly possession Mary had. She’d been saving it for a special day.

Such ointment was used in the embalming process after death. Yet, evidently, Mary didn’t give up her precious spikenard even to embalm her beloved brother. (Otherwise, it would have kept Lazarus’ body from stinking.) Instead, Mary had clutched the box to her heart, declaring, “This is for Jesus, the Son of God.”

In the next chapter we read, “Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment” (John 12:3). This odor didn’t just fill the room; it rose all the way to heaven. God saw it as blessed because that odor was the very incense of faith.

Mary’s gesture was an act of pure faith. It said to the whole world, “My Savior is going to the cross to die. But I believe he is Lord over both life and death. I may have questioned him before, but I have no questions now.” Jesus knows all things, and he knew all along about this precious box that Mary held secret. Now, as she poured out the costly ointment at his feet, he told everyone around him, “against the day of my burying hath she kept this” (12:7). He also knew that though Mary was tested severely, her faith would come through to touch heaven.

Have you come to a hopeless point of desperation in your crisis? I ask you: What is your costliest possession, the most precious thing you have to give to the Lord? It is your faith, “more precious than of gold” (1 Peter 1:7). Your costly gift of faith is meant to be poured out at Jesus’ feet.

Right now he’s asking you to roll away the stone of unbelief. Then you’re to stand back in faith and watch him work wonders in your trial. I urge you: Let the incense of your faith rise to heaven where it blesses the Father. He has arranged for his Son to be glorified in your trial!

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