

# The Resurrecting Christ

## I. Mary mourns, Martha Moves

People mourn in different ways. The NIV fails to use the specific phrase “seated in the house” and instead merely says, “stayed at home.” The reason the original wording is significant is because it points to the precise custom of the ancient Jewish culture during their time of mourning. Traditionally, they were expected to remain seated in their house while friends and relatives would come and sit in silence to show their support.

Let me offer a freebie here. When you are supporting your loved ones during their time of mourning, don't feel like you have to talk. They aren't listening anyway. They are numb. They are greatly preoccupied with their loss and your words are like distant echoes with very little substance. Give them an opportunity to talk if they want to, but don't tell your stories. If they don't feel like talking, neither do they feel like listening to you talk. Just offer to pray and be done.

Now, back to Mary and Martha. Mary was doing what was customary in their culture. She was seated in the house. Martha was there as well, but she was not deeply committed to being there. She was too nervous, or energetic, or active to sit in silence for an extended period of time. Mary and Martha had both heard Jesus had arrived, but it was Martha who didn't wait for him to come to the house. She ran out to meet him. Mary remained seated in the house.

## II. Lord, if only you would have been here...

Notice this comment was made by both Martha and Mary. The very first thing Martha said when she approached Jesus was, “Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.” Martha returned home to again try to coax Mary to get up off her mourning bench and go see Jesus. This time Mary did go with Martha and when she came to Jesus she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

### A. Bad Theology

But when we suggest that things would have been different if God had acted like we expected Him to act, then we introduce some theological difficulties.

1. First, we suggest God operates within the constraints of earthly time clocks.

We give God a window of opportunity to do His work and if nothing happens within those time limits, we move to the final stage of grief, the stage of acceptance.

2. Second, we insinuate that God had lost control of the situation. He was late. He messed up.

There are some things that certainly could have changed the outcome of our situation, and none of them have to do with God's failure, because He doesn't fail.

3. Third, there is the insinuation that God is limited by location. “God you weren't here when I needed you. You were somewhere else.”

How can God not be here? He is omnipresent. He was never absent.

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4. Like Martha, we let our eschatological understanding of God eclipse our contemporary understanding of Him.

Martha actually added something to her statement to Jesus. After saying, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Then she immediately adds, “But I know even now that God will give you whatever you ask.” Martha deserves some credit for not being totally hopeless, but like many of us, even though she believes in what God can do, she has no clue when or how God might do it. So when Jesus responds, “Your brother will rise again,” she exemplifies the kind of clumsy, ongoing state of uncertainty and confusion we human beings typically operate in. When Jesus gives her a promise, she doesn’t get it. She thinks in eschatological terms. (“Eschatological” meaning she applies the promise to some distant future event).

I don’t mean to lose you with ten dollar words, but part of our problem is we tend to think in eschatological terms when in reality, God is ready to move now.

When we deep in the throes of our most difficult struggles God says, “Everything is going to be all right”, we have a hard time imagining he might mean here and now. We tend to say, “Yes, Lord, one of these days I will pass from this life into eternity where there is no more crying, no more pain. And then, everything is going to be all right.” There is nothing wrong with the hope we have for our eternal rest with God. But we can’t be so focused on the sweet bye and bye that we forget God can still intervene in the nasty now and now. He is a God of our future, but He is also a God who is very interested in our life here on Earth.

B. How Jesus responds to bad theology – with good promises.

Jesus reminds us there is hope here and now, but Martha fails to get the message. Here is the interchange.

**21** “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. **22** But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

**23** Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

**24** Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

**25** Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; **26** and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

**27** “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

Jesus is trying to tell her something. She isn’t understanding.

I wonder if we have the blindness of Martha. Sometimes, maybe God is trying to tell us something and we just aren’t understanding. We are too focused on the problem and the seemingly overwhelming difficulty of the situation to understand God is trying to whisper a promise of hope in our ear.

I don’t want to be overly critical of Martha, or of ourselves when we act like Martha. We, like Martha, believe in God’s ability, but we are ignorant of His will. Even though Jesus

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was using somewhat coded language to say He was going to raise Lazarus, it was still going to come as a complete surprise when He actually did it.

The simple fact is this: We are never going to fully understand everything God is going to do until He does it. Pleasant surprises are part of the excitement of serving God. You will never get to the point where you are so in tune with God and His will and His plans that He never surprises you.

## III. Jesus Wept

We recognize this as the shortest verse in the Bible. Of course, John didn't write his gospel in chapters and verses. But when the gospel was arranged by chapter and verse, the editors put these two words in a verse by themselves.

### A. The circumstances

Martha had met Jesus the moment he arrived in town. Instead of waiting for Jesus to come to the house, she leaves the house of mourning and runs out to meet Jesus. There, they have this famous exchange about the resurrection of Lazarus. Martha makes it no farther than to reiterate her firm belief that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, who has come into the world. Then Martha returns home to persuade Mary to come see Jesus. Surprisingly, Mary concedes and follows Martha to where Jesus is. When Mary leaves the house, the mourners follow her, thinking perhaps she is going to the burial site. So Mary arrives followed by this entourage of mourners. Incidentally, mourners were more than family and friends. There were, so to speak, professional mourners who went and mourned kind of as a full time occupation. Mary shows up accompanied by the mourners and she falls at Jesus feet and begins to weep. The mourners are there weeping with her.

### B. A major question: Why did Jesus weep?

**33** When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. **34** "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. **35** Jesus wept.

Jesus sees Mary weeping. He looks and sees the mourners weeping. Then John tells us Jesus was "deeply moved in spirit and troubled."

Then Jesus asks, "where have you laid him?" and they replied, "Come and see." Then Jesus wept.

Those who saw Jesus weeping assumed he was grieving, and they said, "He must have really loved him. See how he is weeping?" And they further misinterpret his weeping by saying,

"Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept his man from dying?"

They thought he was weeping for his own powerlessness and hopelessness.

Mary wept because of deep grief, a sense of hopelessness, a sense of loss.

The Jews wept because it was their job. But Jesus didn't weep like they wept. In fact, the word John uses for Jesus weeping is different from the word he used for the others weeping. In fact, the word John used is never used anywhere else in the New Testament. John used a unique word to imply that what Jesus was doing was unique

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and distinct from what everyone else was doing. Jesus wept, but not for hopelessness, or not to sympathize with Mary. And He wasn't weeping because he had finally come upon a circumstance he could not fix.

But Jesus wept because of the hopelessness and blindness that gripped the people. He weeps for us because we are pitiful. He weeps for us because we are so clueless. He weeps for us because so much of our suffering is so unnecessary, so self-inflicted. He weeps for us because we weep in hopelessness when hope is standing in our very presence. He weeps because the powers of Hell are abusing His sheep.

Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. Vs 38

John has twice given us some information about Christ's emotions and his attitude. He was deeply moved. We have never seen this side of Jesus exposed before. He always seemed so calm and unflappable. But John emphasizes Jesus is deeply moved. It is a sense of agitation. The word means, "angered" or disgusted."

## IV. The Resurrection

### A. Jesus gives three commands

#### 1. "Take the stone away."

Who is in charge? You have to completely understand who is in charge. Jesus said, "Take the stone away." He wanted obedience. He was in charge. They tried it their way and all the weeping and wailing hadn't changed a thing. Now Jesus was taking the helm. "Take the stone away."

And here comes Martha with some wisdom and guidance and much needed information Jesus may have missed.

"But Lord, by this time there is a bad odor. He has been in there four days."

What does she really expect Jesus to do? Does she expect him to say, "Your right, Martha. I never thought about that. "Leave that stone where it is!" "All right, Martha now that you are in charge, what are we going to do next?"

I know that is a little sarcastic, but can't you imagine how God must feel when we think He needs our help? Our advice?

When I ran a construction crew, my word was the final word. It was the only word. I commanded my crew to do something and they did it. I had a plan and I hired them to execute it. I knew what I wanted and I knew what I was doing.

It worked because they knew I was in charge. But more importantly it worked because they trusted me. They knew I knew what I was doing.

It doesn't work that way with volunteer crews. I have worked with volunteers too many times and I know that they always have alternative suggestions on how something should be done, so we waste precious time with people arguing about how to do something. That is what happens when we don't recognize who is in charge and we haven't learned how to trust. That was the problem with Martha. She didn't recognize Jesus was in charge and that he knew what he was doing.

Jesus now gives Martha her job description. "Martha, you have one job. Believe! That is all you have to do. I will do the rest. You just step aside and believe."

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Maybe the reason we fail to see God do more in our behalf is because we refuse to step aside. We want to be in the middle messing stuff up with objections and concerns and alternatives. Step aside. Your job is just to believe. God can do the rest.

So, they move the stone and Jesus prays a simple prayer:

“Father, I thank you that you have heard me. **42** I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

## 2. “Lazarus, come out!”

The Jews did not wrap the body like the Egyptians. The Jews folded a large sheet and tucked the body into the fold, like a sleeping bag. Then the sheet was sown shut. The Egyptians embalmed the body, but the Jews just piled spices on it to try to offset the stench of the rapidly decaying corpse.

“Lazarus, come out!” And Lazarus, bound up in these grave clothes, wiggles and squiggles and squirms and shuffles his way out of the tomb.

If you want a miracle from God, you are going to have to put something into action before you will see God complete his work in you. It is simply called a step of faith. I get concerned when we as a church get to comfortable. We believe God can do anything, but we insist God moves first. When God commands his people to move, we have to move. We can deal with the encumbrances and restrictions and obstacles later. We need to move!

## 3. “Take off the grave clothes and let him go!”

This was a command to others who were there. Jesus could have commanded the grave clothes to drop off Lazarus, but he chose to get people involved in the miracle process. He wanted them to have their hands on this project. God uses human involvement for a reason. He could very easily do anything you need without ever using humans. He could miraculously put money in your sock wallet. He could put groceries on your table. But he chooses to use people to hand you the money and buy you groceries. He could heal you of that cancer, but sometimes he uses doctors. He could fix your car, but sometimes he uses people to pay for a mechanic. He could have commanded the grave clothes to drop off, but he used people.

We all want a miracle, but are we willing to be part of the miracle? It may not have been pleasant unwrapping a rotting corpse, but it was necessary.

## V. What Can We Expect From God?

In all fairness, there isn't going to be a Lazarus miracle for all of us. We understand that. Even during the course of Jesus' earthly ministry, many people died that Jesus didn't raise from the dead. Even so, Jesus demonstrated a very powerful truth for all Christians, one that sets us apart from every other religion the world has ever known

If God can raise a decomposing body from the grave, we have all the evidence we need that he can raise us all up on the great resurrection day.

That is what He meant when He told Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, though they die. And whoever lives by believing in me will never die!” That is what we call eternal life. Do you have it? Make certain today!