

I Met Jesus: Lazarus, Mary, and Martha

John 11:28-44

November 19 & 20, 2011
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Our series *I Met Jesus* introduced us last week to three special people in Jesus' life. *Martha, Mary, and Lazarus*. They were Jesus' friends and He would often stay in their home in Bethany. Martha was the oldest of the three. Based on the biblical stories, Martha fits some of the older sister stereotypes. Oldest sisters here today may be upset with me for suggesting that oldest sisters can sometimes be control freaks and bossy. I want to assure you, I wasn't talking about you; I was talking about all the other oldest sisters here. Mary is the middle sister. She was very devoted to Jesus, and in John 12 anoints Him with a \$50,000 an ounce perfume. Extravagant devotion to Christ. Lazarus was the youngest. In all the passages about Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, Lazarus is never recorded as saying anything. But then, he did have two older sisters, which explains a lot.

Let me summarize what we saw last week in John 11:1-27. Jesus was in another part of the country when Lazarus became sick. Mary and Martha send word to Jesus to come and, they hoped, heal Lazarus. Jesus, knowing what would take place, doesn't go to Bethany. He stays two more days where He is and tells His disciples that Lazarus' situation would be for God's glory.

Lazarus dies and Jesus arrives in Bethany four days later. Martha hears Jesus is coming and rushes out to Him crying out that if He had been there, Lazarus would not have died. Jesus says to her, *"Your brother will rise again."* (Verse 23) Martha interprets this through the grid of her theology, which said the only time resurrection happens is at the end of time. She replied, *"I know that he will rise again someday."* Could Jesus have thought, *Martha, Martha, Martha... don't you realize who I am?* She clearly didn't. Jesus didn't mean Lazarus would be resurrected someday, He meant *today*. Verse 25 is key; *"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live."*

Jesus is God Himself. The power that breathed life into Adam was ever present in Jesus. As God, He could do what was humanly unthinkable – reach into a grave and reconstitute a body and a soul and bring it back to life. He asked Martha, *Do you believe this?* We pick it up now at verse 28.

Jesus and Mary (Verses 28-32)

When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." (John 11:28-32)

Martha returns to their home in Bethany and whispers to her, *"Jesus is here and wants to speak to you."* Mary's devotion to Jesus is well known. She quickly rushes out to meet Jesus. The mourners who were there see her emotion and quick departure and make an assumption – she must be going to the grave – let's go with her. So Mary is rushing out. Behind her is a stream of people following. Mary arrives where Jesus is and falls at His feet.

Note that this is a familiar place for her. We see her in Luke 10 sitting and listening to Jesus' teaching at Jesus' feet. In John 12 she will wipe His feet with her hair. Here she falls at His feet in total grief and repeats exactly what Martha said in verse 21, "*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*" This repetition is important as it helps explain Jesus' deep emotion in a moment.

Remember last week, the disciples didn't understand why Jesus is going to Bethany. Martha didn't understand who He was. Mary didn't understand who He was. What we have seen is the purpose of these incredible claims (i.e. I am living water; bread of life; light of the world; resurrection and life) and miraculous signs (multiplying bread; healing of the blind man; and what He is about to do). His teaching and His miracles are primarily to reveal to them and to us His true identity and the glory of His personhood. So what about this emotion?

These are people He has spent considerable time with. They are His closest friends. Now one of them is dead. The other two don't get Him and can only repeat, "If only you had been here, Lazarus wouldn't have died." Even those closest to Him don't really know Him. They don't realize who He is.

Don't we feel this in some ways in our experience? What is loneliness if not feeling like people don't know and understand us? To be human is to know another and to be known. I think of the scene from the movie *Mr. Holland's Opus* where the Hollands are dealing with having a son born deaf. In one scene, Mrs. Holland screams and says, "I just want to talk with my son!" and weeps that she can't communicate with him. She wants to know him and him to know her. We are made this way, with the deep desire for those around us to understand us; to know us.

This passage unveils Jesus' humanity in a powerful way, but we have to understand why. I think it is complex and includes the death of a friend and the grief of Mary and Martha. The text hints at this deeper reason – they don't get Him yet. They don't realize His true identity. He shows up and the grieving continues. The possibility hasn't even crossed anyone's mind that the one who is standing there IS the resurrection and the life.

Jesus' Emotional Response (Verses 33-37)

"When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?" (Verses 33-37)

This is a passage that we must come to reverently. Other than the Garden of Gethsemane, this moment is Jesus' most deeply personal and emotional recorded in Scripture. We see His emotion in three places. Verse 33, *He was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.* They struggle to translate the Greek here. It means deep emotion, but the word carries with it the sense of anger or indignation. The word is used elsewhere to describe snorting horses.

I grew up around horses. Horses show their feelings largely in two ways – ears and sounds. You learn quickly to watch a horse's ears. If his ears are forward, generally everything is good. If a horse pins his ears backwards, he is not happy and is aiming to kick or bite someone. Along with the ears, a horse that is angry will snort. He may paw the ground. All of these are indications that this horse ain't happy. Look out!

That is the word here. Yes, He is emotional but the emotion is more than mere tears. It is visceral. The kind of breathing and sound that indicates anger. Verse 35, the shortest verse in the entire Bible may be filled with the most meaning. *Jesus wept*. Again, see His humanity here and let us ask, why did Jesus weep?

Why Did Jesus Weep?

In asking this, we must be careful not to psychoanalyze Jesus or pretend we can understand him fully. However, this very emotional moment is recorded in Scripture for a reason.

He was human

Imagine if He had arrived at the funeral of a friend, looked around very stoically, announced, "I am the resurrection and the life," raised him from the dead and went on his way. We would admire His power but we would wonder, *Is He really human? Can He relate to us?* Portraits of Him in paintings and movies tend to try and convince us that He is God by making Him emotionless and dispassionate.

I want you to look for yourself. The biblical portrait of Jesus couldn't be any different. He is filled with emotion. He weeps. He is deeply moved. He feels the sorrow of Mary and Martha. He feels. We should rejoice in this because feelings are a huge part of what it means to be us. A stoic Savior seems distant. I can't relate to Him and He can't relate to me. How about a weeping Messiah? One who does so at the grave of a loved one? Can you relate to Him and doesn't that give you confidence that He can relate to you?

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:15) This passage must be a great comfort to us in our pain and sorrow. We shed tears. Sorrow paralyzes us. We could wonder, *Does Jesus care?* Look at John 11 and you will have your answer.

He personally experienced humanity's misery

The whole scene is misery. Mourners from Jerusalem. Friends in despair. Disciples in fear. And a close friend dead four days in the grave. He looked at this example of the misery and despair of our condition. He felt the despair of death.

He saw his real enemy – death

I remember the first dead body I ever saw. In fourth grade I attended a Christian school that held classes in a church. I was cruising down a back hallway near the church auditorium and saw this large wooden box in the hallway. Being a boy who had to investigate everything, I stopped, peaked over the edge of the box, and there inches from my nose was a dead body. I think I remember running down the hallway. It scared me. Unless you are a coroner, there is something unnerving about seeing a dead body. At a viewing or funeral, if I knew the person, it is confusing to see their body and for it not to be doing what bodies do. Moving. Breathing. Laughing. Eyes open. A person there. A funeral is a grim reminder of who our real enemy is. Our real enemy is not political or financial or even human at all. Our real enemy is death. As Jesus stood by the grave, He was staring His real enemy in the face. *"The last enemy to be destroyed is death."* (1 Corinthians 15:26)

This scene is like the moment before the battle where the two armies stare each other down. Death had won a victory. Lazarus was dead. Soon the real battle would begin as

Jesus hung on the cross and willingly gave up His life to defeat death. That would be the real war. This is like a skirmish before the war; a foreshadowing of what was to come. It moved Him deeply.

He was indignant

This is the reason the text calls us to see. He was upset and He was mad. He was indignant at how sin and death had corrupted God's perfect creation. Indignant at the apparent victories of the enemies of God. Indignant that death should bring such sorrow and pain, even to special friends like Mary and Martha. The whole scene stirred a righteous indignation that this enemy, death, would win an apparent victory.

So what does He do? He weeps, but His weeping is deep and His resolve is determined. Like a horse ready to do something, He pins His ears back and says, "Where is he?" Look out! The Son of God, wielding all authority over this world and the next, strides to the tomb of Lazarus about to display a power the world has never seen.

Jesus' Power (Verses 38-44)

Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it." Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." (Verses 38-39)

Martha, ever the oldest sister, feels the need to inform Jesus that this isn't such a good idea. "Jesus, I feel the need to inform you of something that you probably have not considered..." As hard as it is, sometimes oldest sisters just need to shut up.

Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." (Verses 40-44)

Can you imagine the scene? What does He do first? He prays. He prayed and then the mighty power of God was displayed. Might that be one reason we don't see God do all He could do – because we don't pray like we should?

His next words are the exercising of power only God has, "Lazarus, come out." What happened when He said this? One writer said it's a good thing He included Lazarus' name or all the dead people would have come out. As Jesus said this, the soul, the person Lazarus, was with God. His body was here, but his life was not. What had to happen for Lazarus to be raised? His soul had to be reunited with his body and for that reuniting to animate his body and soul together. Who has authority over the realm of the dead? The souls of the dead? And who can bring that soul from there back to here? Only God.

Why did Jesus Raise Lazarus from the Dead?

To demonstrate His authority and prove His claim to be “the resurrection and the life”

Jesus recognized that making claims is one thing, backing them up is another. If you make the claim to be the resurrection and the life, how do you back that up? You don't make cookies, you don't run for political office, you raise someone from the dead who's been dead so long that there is no other explanation and you do it in front of a whole group of people who obviously didn't even consider the possibility. If that is not enough to prove it, what more do you want?

You can read later today the response. Many who saw it believed, but some ran to the Pharisees to complain about it and they plotted how to kill Jesus.

Those two responses are here today. Some believed. Some did not. Nobody questioned that Lazarus had been dead or that a miracle had happened. It's just that if you refuse to believe you refuse to believe. Even in Jesus' day, eyewitnesses to the miracle refused to believe. Judas is another example. He saw all this, yet still betrayed Him. What more could He have done? How about Jesus Himself dying and then being resurrected back to life? Keep reading – He did that too.

So this sign stands triumphantly over skeptics and assures believers that Jesus is who He claimed to be.

The life and power of God has invaded the misery of this dying world and brings hope for all who believe

All the religions and philosophies of the world have to answer the question, what is the meaning of life in light of the certainty of death? The answer to the death question determines how I find meaning in life. Christianity's answer is in resurrection. Jesus conquers death. And when He returns, Jesus will raise the dead, like He did with Lazarus.

For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17)

Why did Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead? Hope. For what? Life? When? After we die. How? The same way we see here. *Lazarus, come out!* Jon, come out! Matt, come out! Cindy, come out! Tom, come out! And you and you and you and you. Can He do it? He's already done it and He will do it again by the millions. How's that sound? Like hope? It should, because it is. It's a hope based on the person and promise of Christ. *I am the resurrection and the life.*

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