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JOHN 11:1-57

The final argument against God by sinful men is that God has not done enough to convince them of the truth of His revelation. **God has done a lot, but it isn't enough. God has acted, but not sufficiently.**

In Christ's day the argument was, ***"If you are the Christ, prove it. Do a miracle great enough to convince us that You are who You claim to be."***

The facts on this subject are that man **has** sufficient evidence and, if he doesn't believe, it's because he will **not** believe, **not because the evidence is lacking.**

I want us to ponder some questions about the raising of Lazarus from the dead before we get into the Scripture...

"How are we to take this miracle? Is this a miracle given by Jesus as one last attempt to convince His enemies that He is indeed God?"

If so, it was unsuccessful, because we're going to see an even greater determination by the enemies of Jesus to have Jesus killed.

Well, then...

"Was this miracle performed largely out of a compassion for Christ's friends?"

On the surface, this seems to be the reason for this miracle, but we're then left with the question, "Why did Jesus delay His return to Bethany for two days, as we'll see in just a moment?"

As we get into the story we find that the real motive was that "God's glory" might be revealed and that "God's Son may be glorified through it." In this miracle we see Jesus as "the resurrection and the life."

This miracle is the last one that John records besides the greatest one of all...**the resurrection of our Lord from the dead!**

So, with that in mind...let's look at this great chapter...

Verses 1-6...

Now, we can all identify with this problem. We all have had folks close to us get very ill or have lost folks who are very precious to us.

And when this happens, sometimes we question the presence or love of God or, at the least, we find our faith tested.

Well, when we're faced with the serious illness or death of a loved one, what should we do? **I don't believe we'll find a better example of what to do than what Mary and Martha did.** What they did was significant...**how** they did it is even more significant.

Before we look at the way Mary and Martha approached Jesus, we need to notice an obvious but often overlooked point. The point is simply that even those whom Jesus especially loves get sick and eventually die.

Mary and Martha sent Jesus a message: "Lord, the one **whom You love** is sick."

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Notice, the message did not say, "Lord, the one **who loves You** is sick."

In other words, we are to learn from this that sickness in a believer in no way means that God doesn't love that believer.

We should not be surprised at illness...for we know that it often is God's way of speaking to our hearts and of leading us on in the Christian life. Illness is often used by God for our good and for His glory. Illness and even death in a believer is often used in the lives of other people as well.

So, what are we to do when illness or death takes hold of one very close to us? We are to do exactly what Mary and Martha did!

The first thing they did was bring the matter to Jesus. Now, did Jesus already know that Lazarus was sick to the point of death? Of course, He did!

Prayer is not informing the Lord of something He doesn't already know... Prayer is simply that which enables us to communicate with the One who cares more than anyone else about us and our problems! Prayer gives us peace!

Jesus was very close to this family...

Jesus was not invited into many homes, but He was always welcome at the home of these three folks. He felt loved and wanted there.

And this family did love Jesus. But, I want you to notice again that the basis of their appeal to the Lord Jesus was not that Lazarus loved Him, but that He loved Lazarus... "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick."

See, if their prayer had been based on **their** love for God instead of **His** love for them, they would soon have been asking, "But have we loved Him **enough**? Has our love been a **pure** love? Have we **offended** Him?" And the honest answers to those questions would have caused them to doubt...

They **did** love Him, but they knew that their love for Jesus would never in a million years be an adequate basis for their prayer to be answered. So their appeal was not that **they** loved Him, but that **He** loved them!

Another thing I want us to see from these verses is the fact that the Lord doesn't always do what we think He ought to...

Verse 6 tells us that when Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick that He stayed two days longer in the place where He was.

From this we learn that Jesus may be completely aware of our trouble and yet act as though He were indifferent to it.

We learn that prayer for the sick may not be answered. Indeed, if this were **not** the case, no one would ever become sick or die so long as he had a friend or a relative to pray for him.

The comfort in our prayers is not in the fact that Jesus always answers them as we wish. He doesn't! The comfort is that He who made us and controls all our circumstances, knows best and is well able to direct even sickness and death to His glory.

And we're tempted to say, "Well, that's easy to say in the case of Lazarus because Jesus raised **him** from the dead."

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But when we're tempted to say that, we must also remember that Jesus is the resurrection and the life to all who believe!

We're going to see in just a moment that Jesus told Martha, "Your brother will rise again." But may I say to you that **your** brother, if he was a believer, will rise again. **Your** sister will rise again. **Your** mother will rise again. **Your** daddy will rise again. **Your** child will rise again. **Your** husband will rise again!

Having said that, we need to be reminded that the souls of our dead saved relatives are right now in Heaven. There is no such thing as "soul sleep." Some folks have been taught that, but God's Word does not teach it!!

Verses 7-16...

Jesus got word that Lazarus had died. Now, I truly don't believe that Jesus had to wait for that word to come to Him...but when the word did come to Him, He left to go to Bethany. And He said a very interesting thing...

"Lazarus is dead and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him."

Why was Jesus glad? What did Jesus want His disciples to believe? He wanted them to see with their own eyes that to the believer death is **nothing to fear**. The death of the believer is **harmless**. The death of the believer is **rest**. And best of all, the death of the believer is **temporary!**

I never thought about whether or not Sir Winston Churchill was a saved man. His life certainly did not always show forth that he belonged to Jesus. But I read this week that he planned his own funeral.

His funeral was sad, because it marked the passing of someone who stood firmly and with great courage and determination in the face of great danger and opposition during WWII.

I read this week that at one point in the funeral service a bugler, stationed high in the dome of St. Paul's Church in London where the funeral took place, sounded taps while everyone waited in hushed silence.

Taps signifies *the end of the day* in military circles. To some extent it was the passing of an era. **It was sad, even a bit mournful**. But then, and this is the point for which I tell the story - no sooner had the notes of taps died away in that great cathedral than the bugle sounded again.

But this time the tune was not *taps*. The tune was *reveille*, the call by which the military world *begins a new day*. Churchill wished to give testimony to the truth that death is only a gateway into God's presence into a life lived in His eternal day!

And that is why Jesus said, **"Lazarus is dead, and I am glad..."**

Verses 17-26...

I want us to look at Martha and the way the Lord Jesus dealt with Martha.

Martha is so typical of so many believers today. They believe! But, at the same time they're troubled with many questions... "How?" and "Why?" and "What if?" and they so often miss the blessing that could be theirs if they would only believe more simply.

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These believers limit God. They limit Him to time and space...just like Martha did here. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

But, Jesus had **deliberately** delayed, hadn't He? And by the way, many different reasons have been put forth for this. I'm just going to name a few:

- 1) One writer tells us that at that time there was a Jewish belief that the spirit of the dead lingered around the vicinity of the body of a dead person for three days...but on the fourth day, it would have left. This meant there was no more possibility for the soul to re-enter the body by the fourth day.
- 2) By waiting four days, more people would witness the miracle...many Jews had come from Jerusalem to comfort Mary and Martha.
- 3) Or Jesus may have simply delayed His coming so that He would arrive at just the right moment...**when all human help and hope were gone**. God doesn't make mistakes. He's never late...He is always on time!

Martha didn't see this, however, so when Jesus returned to Bethany, her first words were a bit of rebuke. And they expressed her own limited faith.

Oh, Martha believed in the resurrection, but she certainly didn't seem to believe that it had anything to do with her then.

And, doesn't this sound a little familiar? Don't we limit Jesus sometime? We believe that He is able to do all He says He will do - but not now and not here.

At least we don't expect Him to and are genuinely surprised when He does! We believe God's promises are for others or for some far distant time.

Let's turn our attention to Jesus and the way He dealt with Martha.

Jesus didn't rebuke Martha. He simply made a statement and then asked her a question. He said,

"I am the resurrection and the life: he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

Do you see that the Lord Jesus is speaking of **faith** and not **feeling**? He didn't say to Martha, "I've told you that I'm the resurrection and the life...Do you feel better now, Martha? Have you found these thoughts comforting to your soul? Do you feel your old optimism returning?"

No, according to Jesus it wasn't how she **felt** that was important, but what she **believed**. Feelings are deceiving. They come and they go. But faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is an anchor that holds and grips the solid rock of the Lord Jesus Christ!

And to Martha's credit she said, ***"Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world."***

Jesus forced Martha to examine her faith...Martha's faith may have been limited because her sphere of knowledge wasn't large, but she had a good foundation on which to build, didn't she? She **did** have a three-point faith, didn't she? She believed that Jesus was the Christ! She believed He was the Son of God! And she believed He fulfilled prophecy.

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May I say that our faith is only as solid as the object of our faith. Our faith should begin like Martha's. The very basis of our faith should be a knowledge of God's Word and centered in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's look at **Mary** and how Jesus dealt with **her**...

And by the way, we need to remember that there are several "Marys" found in the Word of God. Mary, the mother of James and also Mary, the mother of John Mark. But, this Mary is Mary of Bethany...sister of Martha and Lazarus of Bethany.

Verses 30-32...

The first words Mary uttered to Jesus are the same words Martha had said. Can't you just imagine what their conversations must have been ever since Lazarus had died? All the "if onlys"...!

But, Mary had always sat at the feet of Jesus and learned from Him, hadn't she? While Martha was always busy in the kitchen.

And we don't see Jesus questioning Mary about her faith, do we? Jesus knew about Martha's faith and He knew about Mary's. He knew that Martha had a limited faith and Mary's faith was strong.

And it was when Jesus encountered Mary and saw her weeping that John said He was deeply moved in His spirit and was troubled.

Let me share with you what Henry Blackaby said of this passage in his wonderful study, **EXPERIENCING GOD**. He said that in His delay in coming, Jesus was saying,

"If I had come when you asked Me to, I would have healed Lazarus. But, you would never have known any more about Me than you already knew. I knew that you were ready from a greater revelation of Me than you have ever known in your life. I wanted you to come to know that I am the Resurrection and the Life. My refusal and My silence was not rejection. It was an opportunity for Me to disclose to you more of Me than you have ever known."

Many, many times the only way the Lord can teach us more about Himself is by allowing us to go through trials and also in delaying in answering our prayers.

Don't ever let Satan tell you that Jesus doesn't love you. He does. He hears us. He knows exactly where we are. And He will come to you in His time and in His way!

Verses 33-37...

Jesus was **deeply moved!** **Jesus groaned** in His spirit! **Jesus wept!**

Jesus wept, I believe, for several reasons...

He wept because He was **deeply touched** by the grief of Mary and Martha.

He wept because of **the unbelief** He saw all about Him. Jesus knew that even after He would raise Lazarus, there would still be those who would not believe!

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He wept because He **was not ashamed** to be human.

He wept because **He could see what they could not see**. He could see Lazarus in paradise...surrounded by the saints of God, and Jesus was going to call him back to a world of anguish and pain and sin.

And the Jews were saying, "**Behold how He loved him!**"

I'm sure that we will never understand the full extent of God's love for us. His love is an amazing thing to me! We may not even understand this kind of love even in eternity...

How can it be that God was able to see His Son go through such horrible agony at Calvary? And how can it be that Jesus did that willingly? I cannot understand it! Yet that is what the Scriptures teach, and I believe it!

And I hope I never take it for granted! To look to the cross of Jesus Christ is to marvel at the extent of His love for us. We see there the height and depth of His love. We see the length and breadth of it.

Does Jesus love us? Yes, He does. The cross is the proof of His love for us. He, who knew no sin, was made sin for us, so great was His love for us.

But, turn it around. Do **we** love Him? Has anyone ever said of you, "**Behold, hows he loves Jesus**"?

Some believers show their love for Jesus by willing to **be martyred** for Him.

Some believers show their love for Jesus by **devoting their lives** to serving Him in a faraway country.

Some believers show their love for Jesus by **simply telling others** how to come to Him.

The story is told of Jr. Hill visiting a lost man. Bro. Hill had been preaching a revival in this little town and the preacher of the church had asked him to go with him to visit a man the church had been praying for for a long time.

The preacher said they witnessed to the man and the man listened, but simply would not make a commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The preacher said as they got up to go that Jr. Hill turned and with tears coming down his cheeks, said to the man, "Oh, it would mean so much to me if you would give your heart to Jesus." And that man's heart melted and he knelt and received Jesus into his heart and life.

I hope that at times you weep for the lost for whom you are praying. I hope that you not only pray and weep for them, but that you tell them about Jesus and the difference He's made in your life. I hope that other people can see your concern for them and say, "**Behold, how she loves Jesus.**"

Verses 38-44...

In spite of Martha's confession of Jesus as her Messiah, she still didn't grasp the fact that

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Jesus is the resurrection and the life, did she?

Jesus said, **"Remove the stone."**

No one would have to remove the stone to allow Jesus to come out of the grave because Jesus was **resurrected!** He came from the grave with a glorified body!

And although Lazarus was a picture of the resurrection and the life, Lazarus wasn't **resurrected**...Lazarus was **resuscitated!** Lazarus was still wrapped in grave clothes. And Lazarus would need them again one day because **Lazarus would die again some day!**

And did you notice that Jesus involved those who were there in this? He told them to **"unbind him and let him go."**

They had removed the stone and they had unbound him. I believe this is a picture for us that we can indeed be used by God to do His work. The miracle belonged to Jesus, but He has a work for us to do as well.

There are dead folks all around us. These folks need to be born again so that they can have life and have it more abundantly!

Jesus used Ananias to reach Paul, after he had been struck down on the road to Damascus.

Jesus used Peter to reach Cornelius.

He used Philip to reach the Ethiopian.

Do you doubt that He would use you if you were ready to do a work for Him?

As one commentator put it:

"There is no higher privilege this side of Heaven than for us to be used of the Lord in rolling away gravestones and removing grave-clothes."

Verses 45-53...

Here we see the "holiest" of men. No doubt they opened their meetings with prayer...but they were meeting to oppose a perfectly innocent man.

The chief priests were Sadducees, and then there were Pharisees. It's interesting to know that they were enemies of each other. The Sadducees were very politically active. The Pharisees were the religious leaders. But, they were united in their opposition to the Lord Jesus.

People would rather unite with their enemies than follow Jesus.

I heard a terrorist expert say just this week on TV as he spoke of Osama bin Ladin and Saddam Hussein and the rest of the Arab world..."the enemy of enemy is my friend."

We see such arrogance in these men! They had no place or position or nation except from God's hand. All they were or ever could be was because of God's grace, and mercy and goodness. Doesn't this remind you of many of our political leaders of today?

Look at what Caiaphas said in

Verse 50...

Caiaphas was used by God to speak a prophecy! God is not limited in who He uses to proclaim His message, is He?

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God had used Balaam, the false prophet, and even Balaam's donkey to do the same thing! God would later use Pilate to proclaim Jesus "the King of the Jews" in Hebrew and in Greek and in Latin.

We learn from this that God can and often does use even the wrath of man to accomplish His purposes. Jesus may well have said to Caiaphas that day, as Joseph said to his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."

What an unbelievable reaction we see here. Instead of the entire Sanhedrin hurrying out to Bethany to investigate the miracle on the spot, they began to plot anew and afresh against Jesus.

Verses 54-57...

This marked the end of the public ministry of Jesus. From now on in our study of **John** we'll see the time of His crucifixion approaching rapidly.

I know we've rushed through this chapter. What we've seen today is a foreshadowing of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and a foreshadowing of all believers!

And we need to notice that it was after this miracle that the chief priests, Pharisees, and other religious leaders finally determined to put Jesus to death. Up until now, the conflict between them and Jesus had been simply a war with words...

The reason they were so upset about this miracle was because it provided undeniable proof that Jesus' claim that He was the resurrection and the life...and whoever believes in Him shall never die must really be true!

It was this kind of publicity that the leaders feared more than anything else.

Little did they know that one day the putting to death of the Lord Jesus Christ and His subsequent resurrection would prove once and for all that He had spoken the truth when He said, "I am the resurrection and the life."