

“A JOURNEY THROUGH THE GOSPEL OF JOHN” SERIES

#20: “The Death of Lazarus”

SCRIPTURE: John 11:1-37

INTRO:

The people involved in this remarkable episode in the life and ministry of Jesus are Mary, her sister, Martha, and Lazarus, their brother. They live in the village of Bethany, not the Bethany beyond the Jordan, but the Bethany on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, a suburb of Jerusalem.

Since there were many “Marys,” John identifies this one as the *“Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair.”* Both Matthew (26:6-13) and Mark (14:3-9) relate this incident that actually didn’t happen until just before Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, but John uses it to identify Mary. Remember, John is writing this gospel account several years after it all happened.

First of all, note that...

...LAZARUS, THEIR BROTHER WAS VERY ILL.

In fact, he was dying. The sisters were so concerned that they sent word to Jesus, who was miles and miles away in Perea, where He had gone when the Jewish authorities had pursued him so hotly after He had healed the blind man on the Sabbath Day.

Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus, saying, *“Lord, he whom you love is ill.”* We can imagine how they felt, can’t we? It probably took days to get the message to Jesus, and it would take days until Jesus could get there. They feared that Lazarus would die before Jesus could get to Bethany.

But note that...

...JESUS DID NOT RUSH TO BETHANY.

He said, *“This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it”* (v. 4). Verse 6 says that *He stayed two days longer in the place where he was.*

He, no doubt, knew Lazarus was going to be dead before He arrived in Bethany, so, why did He say this? Why did He delay the trip to Bethany?

Note that John inserts in verse 5 that *Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus*, which infers that Jesus wasn’t ignoring their plea for help by

delaying his arrival in Bethany. He had something far greater in mind than the healing of a sick friend.

The primary reason He delayed until after Lazarus had died was that He and God His Father could be glorified as He raised Lazarus from the dead. Then, in verse 15, John indicates that another purpose was that the faith of the disciples would be strengthened.

So...

...LAZARUS DIED BEFORE JESUS ARRIVED.

As John relates, the disciples didn't think Jesus should go to Bethany. They pointed out that the Jewish religious leaders would be waiting to arrest Him. But He insisted that they return to Judea. The disciples knew He was a brave man, but to them, going back to Judea at this time was foolish.

My thoughts are that He could have healed Lazarus or even raised him from the dead from long distance. Do you believe He could have? Sure, you do. You know that He could have done it any way He chose.

But Jesus has more in mind than the disciples. He says to them, ***"Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him"*** (v. 11). John explains that Jesus was speaking of Lazarus' death, not sleeping as we normally think of it.

In verses 9 and 10, Jesus says to the disciples: ***"Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles because the light is not in him."*** What did He mean by that?

Simply that as far as His ministry was concerned, it's still daylight, so they could safely go back to Judea. He's saying that He must use the short time He has left to Him on earth.

So, after telling the disciples plainly that Lazarus had died, and that He was glad for their sakes that He was not there, so that they may believe, they proceed to return to Judea, to Bethany.

Note verse 16: ***So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."*** Thomas exhibits both a determination on behalf of all the disciples and an acceptance of the fact that going back to Judea may mean their deaths at the hand of the Jewish authorities.

We see here a foreshadowing of the death of Jesus and the challenge of being His disciple: a willingness to die for Him.

So, when they arrive in Bethany,

THEY FIND THAT LAZARUS HAS BEEN DEAD FOUR DAYS.

They also find a crowd of people who had come to console Mary and Martha. Martha met Jesus before He got to the house. She said, ***“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you”*** (v. 22).

Jesus said to Martha, ***“Your brother will rise again.”*** And she replied, ***“I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”*** She didn’t realize that Jesus meant that Lazarus would be raised back to life that very day!

Jesus said to her ***“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”*** Martha said, ***“Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”***

Jesus seems to make a contradictory statement here. He first says that ***“Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live...”*** then he says that believers ***“never die.”*** Which is it? Do we experience death as Lazarus did? Of course. But for believers it’s more than just the separation of the soul from the body; it’s the beginning of eternal life!

Scripture teaches that immediately after death the soul of a believer goes to be with Jesus, and that when Jesus returns, the souls of all believers who have died will be with Him (1st Thessalonians 4:13-18).

IN CLOSING...

Martha’s confession of her belief that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God who has come into the world came at a time when she was grieving the death of her beloved brother. Is your faith as strong and resolute when you are grieving?