

Come and See: Encounters with Jesus in the Gospel of John
The Grieving Sisters – John 11

October 29, 2023
By Pastor David Fields

“Nothing is certain...but...death and taxes.” – Benjamin Franklin, 1789

I. The Shape of Jesus’ Love

The sisters send for Jesus...and He doesn’t come. “So...He stayed where He was two more days.”
– John 11:6

Jesus...lets Lazarus die. He lets Mary and Martha cry their guts out. And...He loves them.

“Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.” – John 11:5

The loss and grief you go through doesn’t mean Jesus doesn’t love you.

II. Martha and the Truth of Jesus’ Divinity

“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” – John 11:21 and 11:32b.

These women are in the exact same situation and say the exact same words – but Jesus answers them in unique ways.

Martha is processing this whole situation in a more cerebral, intellectual sense. How does Jesus respond to her? He assures her of the truth of who He is: God Himself; the resurrection and the life.

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

“Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is come into the world.” – John 11:25-27

No Spiritual Bypass

Knowing Jesus has life ultimately in store, this doesn’t mean we don’t weep at the graveside. But it does mean that grief doesn’t have the last word – that our grief doesn’t own us. We can be truly sad, but not crushed. We can lament, honestly, without falling into despair.

III. Mary and Jesus' Human, Weeping Presence

Mary's devastated, AND...she's running to Him. She's overwhelmed, *but* she wants to be with the One who wants to be with her. What do we do with our grief? That.

Because that is also true for each of us.... "He's asking for you."

What if in your wrestling and grief and loss you knew that?

That He wants you to come to Him?

That He wants you to know that He loves you? Will weep with you?

What if you knew that Jesus joins His broken heart to yours?

To Mary, the one who runs to him weeping, Jesus simply brings His very human, very vulnerable self. He says nothing but nothing to her situation.

The Christian view of God is that Jesus is God – is one and the same as the Living God – who has come to us. Jesus is the all-powerful, all-knowing Creator. He is the Source of life and love, as He says to Martha. And He's weeping like a baby next to you, like He does with Mary.

Fully God and Fully Human

We see again and again in the Gospel of John that Jesus is both "fully God and fully human," at the same time. Not one or the other. Not half of each. Fully God. Fully human. The one who is the resurrection and life – that's a statement of His divine identity. And totally human in His crying big tears, overwhelmed with His human grief.

And this is the beauty and mystery of where God is in our grieving. He shares it, and he says, "ultimately, I have overcome it." He is totally relatable, *and* utterly able to solve the deepest issues – even the problem of death itself.

IV. Lazarus and the Undoing of Death

"Deeply moved?"

Scholar D.A. Carson writes: "It is lexically inexcusable to reduce this emotional upset [deeply moved] to the effects of empathy, grief, pain or the like." (415). Instead, Carson notes that outside of the New Testament, this word [*embrimaomai*] is used of a horse snorting, and when applied to humans it suggests, anger, outrage, or emotional indignation.

What is making Jesus so angry?

Jesus does not simply feel a sadness, but anger. Why? Because death is not God's intent.

"Do not go gentle into that good night. Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

– Dylan Thomas.

Jesus is raging against death. Why? Because He is Life. Capitol "L".

It's not just "life after death," like some sort of conscious existence, but "love after death," that's what we want. Why? Because we were made for it – for love without parting. That's God's creative purposes from the beginning. He creates out of the overflow and joy of the loving union of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And He created us for love – love with him, and each other.

Jesus is looking at our greatest nightmare – the loss of loved ones, of parting forever – and He's mad.

Jesus' Own Death as the Undoing of Death

So much of the misery we see in the world is caused by the selfishness of the human heart – pride, cruelty, oppression, war, and violence. And, if we are honest, we have all contributed to the problem. So, God could not just strap on a sword and come to defeat and destroy evil without destroying us.

"Jesus did not come with a sword in His hands; He came with nails in His hands. He did not come to bring judgement; He came to bear judgement...."

He knew that the only way to bring Lazarus out of the grave was to put Himself into the grave. He knew the only way to interrupt Lazarus's funeral was to summon His own....

That's why when Jesus approaches the tomb, instead of smiling at the prospect of putting on a great show, He was shaking with anger and had tears on His cheeks. He knew what it would cost Him to save us from death. Maybe He was able to feel the jaws of death closing in on Him. And yet knowing and experiencing all that, He cried, "Lazarus, come out." – Timothy Keller

Response

How do we respond to all this? We say with Martha, "Yes, Lord, I believe you."

We weep with Mary when our hearts are broken, and find He weeps with us too.

And now, perhaps not unlike Lazarus, we are all being called by Jesus – the one who is resurrection and life – to get up. Yes, one day, literally. And even now, in the sense of entering this "new birth" life. What do we do with that life? We use it to honour Jesus. And to point others to the hope we have in the one who is "The resurrection and the life."

Life Group Discussion and Reflection

A brief note to start: Grief and loss is a hard topic because it is so personal. Please feel free to share if you are able, but we recognize that for some in the depths of grief, this might be too difficult and personal to share many ideas. That is just fine. Each group will work with sensitivity and genuine care as we look at these questions.

Open Up

Our culture has been called a “death denying culture” in the past – that we don’t want to talk about it. Do you think that’s true? Why do you think so?

If you had a chance to listen to the Sunday sermon, what parts did you find new, helpful, or interesting?

Dig In

In the message we saw how knowing that Jesus brings resurrection hope does not mean that we do not grieve. Gospel hope is not some kind of spiritual bypass. Jesus himself “wept” in the face of loss. Look at how Paul frames a Christian view of grief for the early Christian community in his letter to the Thessalonians. The concern of this young church was what happens to those believers who had died before the return of Jesus. **Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 and discuss the following questions.**

1. How would you describe the balance between legitimate grief and gospel hope?

(Note: look how Paul speaks of God’s mercy toward him when his co-worker, Epaphroditus, is spared from death in **Philippians 2:27**: “But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow.” – Philippians 2:27b. If Epaphroditus had died Paul describes what he would be experiencing as “sorrow upon sorrow.” That’s no spiritual bypass. Sorrow. Lament. Grief. His heart would be broken apart to lose this friend).

2. Have you had to find that balance between gospel hope and legitimate grief? How did that work? How did God meet you in your grieving?
3. **Read Romans 12:15.** What instruction do we have in regard to people who are grieving? How is this like what we see in Jesus’ response to Mary?
4. Do you find simply being present (showing up) and allowing yourself to enter the grief and lament of the other easy or difficult? Why?

Prayer: Take time to pray for those who are grieving in our community and in your Life Group if that’s the case. Ask that God would continue to form us into a people who care well for the grieving. Pray that God would give us the boldness to keep sharing the hope of the gospel with our friends, co-workers, family, and neighbours who need to know it.