

O death! Where is your sting?

March 12, 2017

Scripture Reading John 11:1-6

I don't know about you. I enjoyed talking about Mary and Martha. They both are very colorful characters. I am so fascinated by this family; I have decided to zoom in on them next two weeks. Hope you will find it fascinating also. In John chapter 11 we come across the same family. But now there is a crisis!

John 11; 1-3. 1 Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2It was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. 3So the sisters sent word to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick."

This story starts with a tragedy. It was not an ordinary sickness, but it was a sickness unto death. There was no one else to heal Lazarus except Jesus. Jesus was like 40 miles away near the Jordan River. See how the sisters expressed about Jesus' relationship with Lazarus, Lazarus whom Jesus loved very much was sick! Jesus loves everyone. But Jesus loves dearly those who love Him, receive Him and obey Him! Special people request special favors. In ordinary circumstances, Jesus would have complied, but at this time He did not.

John 11:4. 4But when Jesus heard this, He said, "This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it."

Jesus knew that this sickness was for the glory of God. For, He knew that Lazarus would die only temporarily, and Jesus will resurrect him again!

John 11:5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus

As I told you last time, vs11:5 is very critical in understanding their relationship. It says that Jesus loved all three! Jesus loved all three very dearly. He would give even His life for them. Jesus loves us also dearly! God loves us also dearly. If He did not spare His own Son for us, will He not care to meet our needs? But He knows exactly what to do in our situation. We must always pray for God's will to be done. Sometimes, He may not grant our request but take away our loved one. Sometimes, miracle does happen, and people are revived fully. But in this story, this incident is very bizarre!

John 11:6. 6So when He heard that he was sick, He then stayed two days longer in the place where He was.



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Jesus did an unusual thing. He deliberately stayed 2 more days and then decided to go. He decided to go only after the death of Lazarus. It was a hard decision. He had to obey His Father's command rather than any man's. At the same time, He knew that Mary and Martha would have been devastated and comfortless!

John 11:7-9. 7 Then after this He said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." 8The disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone You, and are You going there again?" 9Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world

Disciples worried that the Jews were ready to kill Him and they did not want Jesus to go. But Jesus our Lord gave a beautiful answer. When we walk in the light of God's will, we will not stumble! But in vs 10 He says that only those who walk without that light will stumble in the darkness.

John 11:10 But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him."

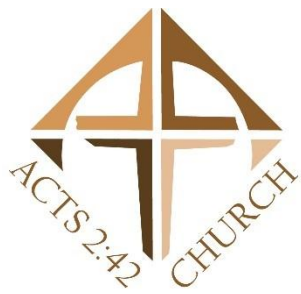
When the Lord leads us, we are in the daylight. But when there is no leading of the Lord, it is all darkness. Our objective of our life should be to walk in the light of God's will every day of our life. That must be the driving force of our life. Stop planning your future, and start following that light of God's will in your life. Focus on impressing God and not the people around you!

John 11:11-15. 11This He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep." 12The disciples then said to Him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." 13Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of literal sleep. 14So Jesus then said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, 15 and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him."

Jesus spoke of Lazarus in a figurative manner. He is sleeping. Death is like sleep. Jesus will wake us up when we die.

John 11:16. 16 Therefore Thomas, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, so that we may die with Him."

In 11:16 we can see Thomas' bold spirit! Thomas was willing to risk his life for Jesus.



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John 11:17-19. 17So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. **18**Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off; **19**and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to console them concerning their brother.

How come it became four days? Probably Lazarus died the day Mary and Martha called for Jesus. Afterward, Jesus stayed two more days deliberately. Now by the time He journeyed forty miles, a two-day journey, it would have been four days by the time He reached Bethany.

A lot of people were comforting Mary and Martha. Earlier it was so good to see the two sisters and the brother living together in unity and love. Now it's nice to see so many people coming to Mary and Martha to comfort them even after four days. They must have been popular and well-loved in that town!

John 11:20. 20Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house.

Martha came to know that Jesus had come and she rushed out to meet Him. But Mary did not move. Was she angry with Jesus or she had to sit and entertain the guests? We are not sure.

John 11:21 22. 21Martha then said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. **22**"Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."

Here we can see Martha's faith. Martha was no dud when it comes to understanding the Word of God! She knew exactly who Jesus was! We always tend to highlight Mary thinking that Martha was ignorant in Scriptures. But here she shows her depth of understanding! If you had been here, my brother would not have died. Even now you could do it! What a faith! Jesus can raise us anytime, Even if we become dry bones!

John 11:23.24. 23Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." **24**Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."

Jesus promised that her brother would rise again. But Martha misunderstood that resurrection for that last day of the Lord.

John 11:25,26. 25Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, **26**and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Jesus said that He is the author and the finisher of life. He is the resurrection; He is the Life, He is our Wisdom, He is our righteousness, He is our bread, He is our light, He is our everything!



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John 11:27-29. 27She said to Him, “Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.” 28When she had said this, she went away and called Mary her sister, saying secretly, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” 29And when she heard it, she got up quickly and was coming to Him.

Here Martha confessed who Jesus was. She knew the Word. She knew the Gospel. Next to Peter, a woman confesses that Jesus is indeed Christ. Martha understood the Word of God.

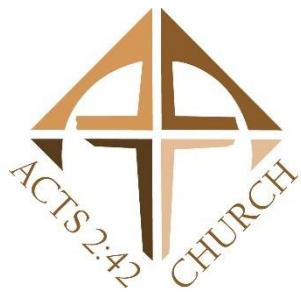
She went and called Mary secretly.

John 11:30-32. 30Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha met Him. 31Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and consoling her, when they saw that Mary got up quickly and went out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 32Therefore, when Mary came where Jesus was, she saw Him, and fell at His feet, saying to Him, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.

Mary never failed to worship Jesus first. Here she worships first, then she talks! Lord if you were here, my brother would not have died! In other words, Mary indirectly meant, "Jesus, you let us down, Jesus. We called you, and still, you would not come!"

John 11: 33-37 33When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, 34and said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to Him, “Lord, come and see.” 35Jesus wept. 36So the Jews were saying, “See how He loved him!” 37But some of them said, “Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind man, have kept this man also from dying?”

My dearly beloved, this is an absolute fact! When we groan and mourn in the spirit, God groans with us also! He knows exactly the kind of pain we are going through. Here the Scripture says that Jesus, the Son of God, was deeply moved in Spirit and was troubled! Mary cried because she felt that she was let down by Jesus! As Jesus was groaning in the Spirit, He could not control His emotions anymore. Here comes the shortest verse in the Scripture, 11:35. JESUS WEPT! Jesus indeed wept over the sufferings of people, the pangs of death, the sin reigning through death, the hopelessness beyond death, the very separation of our loved ones because of death. (This is a good topic for our Good Friday service. Let me know if any of you would like to speak on this topic!)



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John 11: 38-40. 38 So Jesus, again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39 Jesus said, "Remove the stone." Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days." 40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"

Jesus came near the stone and told them to remove the stone. When we were young, we grew up with a lot of hope, but most of them died one by one, and we have ruled it out totally by burying those desires totally. Jesus is telling you to remove those stones that crushed your hopes. Is anything too hard for the Lord, no nothing is too hard for the Lord? Never give up anything until you have the last breath in your body! There are so many things we have buried saying we cannot do it. But Jesus can revive that hope and bring life to it.

Martha had lost hope now. She raised the doubt; it is four days now Lord? Don't let anyone raise doubt. Jesus rebuked Martha! If you only believe, you will see the glory of God!

John 11:41-43. 41 they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. 42 "I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me." 43 When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth."

Jesus had already interceded for Lazarus, and God the Father approved that. But God wanted Him to go only after Lazarus' death that people may indeed see the glory of Jesus in His Father. Here Jesus thanks His Father for hearing His prayers. Not sometime, but always! Our Lord Jesus is doing the very same thing for us. He not only groans when we are hurt, He always hears every prayer, every sigh, every tear drop falling, every disappointment. He is with you, He is in you, and He knows exactly what you are going through. Take your concerns to the Lord in prayer, and believe firmly, He is listening intently!

Jesus knew beforehand that He was going to resurrect Lazarus. He was walking in the daylight of His Father's will. Before we go to perform a miracle, we should know whether it will happen or not. You must go prepared for a miracle. Many evangelists do not have a clue whether they will perform the miracle or not. We must be sure of a God's will in each miracle!



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Then He cried out with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. This is not just a loud voice. It is a unique voice. It is the kind of voice only Son of God has, and the dead can hear that peculiar voice, and when they hear they will be resurrected as it is mentioned in John 5:25.

John 11: 44 44The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

This must have been a frightening scene for all the people who witnessed. Lazarus did come forth, but he was still bound with cloth wrappings. He must have looked like a mummy or a ghost. Jesus commanded the people to "unbind him and let him go".

This is a great passage for those who have been spiritually dead! The first step for their resurrection is that they must hear the voice of the Lord. We must pray that they should hear the voice of the Lord. When they are spiritually resurrected by the grace of God, we must help them to loosen their wrap. They could have been bound by drugs, sex, alcohol, power, wealth etc. we as a church come together, and try to release them from the chords of their sins. The Lord may resurrect a person who is addicted to drugs, but he may still be bound by his bad habits. Stop judging. Instead, start focusing on unwrapping that person from those habits. Every one of us must play a major role in unwinding his addiction and try to set him free!

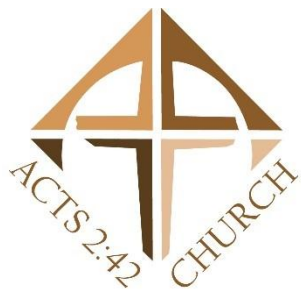
What a mighty miracle! We may assume that everyone who witnessed this resurrection would have fallen on their knees, worshiped and confessed that Jesus is Lord. Let's see what happened in the end!

John 11:45, 46. 45Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what He had done, believed in Him. 46But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done.

Many believed. None of them followed Him. But just believing is not enough. Some people were jealous of Jesus and snitched about Him to the Pharisees. This is why Jesus said in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man this way:

Luke 16:31 But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'" (Luke 16:31 NASB).

Miracles will not convert a sinner but the Word of God spoken through God's Spirit will!



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Conclusion

The tragedy of death happens to every family. It is a devastating experience even for a Christian. The concept that we have to wait to see our loved one only when Christ returns again can be painful.

The loss of loved one can produce a lot of anger toward people, even toward God.

But our Lord Jesus never fails. He may be late sometime in answering our prayers, but He always comes through.

Jesus, our Lord, is awesome! Nothing is impossible for Him.

Let us resurrect the spiritually dead through Jesus and loosen them and set them free!

Death is nothing but a divine sleep. With the shout of the Lord, we will all awake. Death cannot keep us in the ground. We will rise again. O death, where is your sting? We will conquer death through our Lord our Savior Jesus Christ, Amen!

Pastor Daniel Israel