

In crisis people cry out to God for help. And often they feel that God doesn't answer. In our encounters with those in grief, people may say, or at least think, "Why didn't God show up?" "Where was Jesus when I needed Him most?" This is what the sisters of Lazarus felt when Jesus didn't show up in their need. Today, let's see what we can learn from our Master about encountering and counseling those in grief, from the amazing account of the resurrection of Lazarus in John 11.

*Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. It was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. So the sisters sent word to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." But 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." Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when He heard that he was sick, He then stayed two days longer in the place where He was. Then after this He said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." The disciples *said to Him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone You, and are You going there again?"* Jesus 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. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." This 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." The disciples then said to Him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of literal sleep. So Jesus then said to them plainly, "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." Therefore Thomas, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, so that we may die with Him."*

*So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off; and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to console them concerning their brother. Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house. Martha then said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world." When she had said this, she went away and called Mary her sister, saying secretly, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she *got up quickly and was coming to Him.**

*Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha met Him. Then 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. Therefore, 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." When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, and said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept. So the Jews were saying, "See how He loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind man, have kept this man also from dying?" So Jesus, again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 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." Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"*

There is so much that has been written and said about this account. But today I want to focus on three major lessons we find here, that can help us in our encounters with grief. And they teach us

must about our God and Savior, Jesus, as well.

## 1. Jesus' greater purpose (v.4)

Our first major lesson is to learn that in every crisis circumstance God might well have a greater purpose than meets the eye. He always wants to display His glory, but it might not be in the healing, restoration or outcome that we would hope for.

Though Martha and Mary had sent word to Jesus that their brother was seriously ill, Jesus delayed two days before he began his two to three day journey to Bethany. During this time, Lazarus died, and was buried. Why did Jesus delay? Verse 4 gives us our first glimpse into the reason.

**John 11:4** *But 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 Lazarus would die only temporarily, because God's greater purpose than to heal a disease was to raise Lazarus from the dead. We will see why in a moment. And this give us reason to believe that God may also have greater purposes in our crisis moments than to just alleviate them.

Then after delaying two days, Jesus determines to go, despite the disciple's warnings of danger to Jesus. The disciples don't see that there might be a greater purpose for Jesus going /that would be worth the risk of death.

Why wait, and then why go? God's timing is always perfect – never late or early, but always just on time. We must wait on God's clear "go" signals and brake at God's stop signs. We may not understand the why, but we must trust God's timing to always be perfect. When God says "wait" – then wait, and when He says "go" be sure to go!

Jesus asks His twelve disciples, and us by extension, "Are there not twelve hours in a day?" There is plenty of time to get done what needs to be done if we are diligent, and yet there is no time to waste, for time passes quickly. This is another way of Jesus saying that God's timing is always perfect – trust it! Work while there is the light of day and the light of God – in other words, seize the moment and the opportunities to serve God when they come, for a time will come when the opportunity is no more.

Verse 17 tells us Jesus arrived four days after Lazarus had been in the tomb. Both Martha (v. 21) and Mary (v. 32) imply that Lazarus might have been saved if Jesus had come sooner. But remember, God is never late. He might not "show up" at the time or in the way you desire, but He is always faithful to "do His thing" in our circumstance.

Clearly to raise a man from the grave after four days would have far more impact on God's glory than to simply heal him from dying. And in verse 45 says that many believed because of this astounding miracle. That was an obvious "greater purpose." But when we read about God being glorified we must think of the cross, for nothing has brought God more glory than Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. And it is clear from verse 46 and following that the miracle of resurrecting Lazarus brought the plot to kill Jesus to an accelerated speed – God's greater purpose.

So the delay in Jesus going to Bethany brought (1) more disciples to Him and (2) greater movement to the glory of the cross. It was all in God's great plan. And we can help those in crisis see that God just might have a great purpose in it all. It is well said that in our darkest hour we can see the light more clearly!

## 2. Jesus' greater lesson (v.25-26)

This miracle of raising Lazarus will ever be associated with Jesus amazing words about Himself in 11:25-26, spoken to Martha in her grief.

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

This greater lesson might never have been uttered and recorded for us were it not for the miracle of Lazarus about to occur.

“I am the resurrection and the life” literally translates as “I AM = resurrection and life,” and these are interchangeable, so also: “resurrection and life = I AM.” This is the fifth of seven “I AM” claims of Jesus in the gospel of John. (Also, I AM the bread of life, light of the world, door to the sheep, the good shepherd, way truth & life, and the vine)

Note that resurrection is first, then life, emphasizing the life as the life after death. Essentially, He is saying: I am the cause and effect of both resurrection from the grave and of life forever after physical death. Astounding!

Then we must look at the two following phrases.

**Phrase One: “He who believes in Me will live even if he dies.”**

This is taken from the perspective on one at the point of death. For one having fully believed in Jesus preceding death, his spiritual life will go on forever, despite physical death. This is a wonderful and super-comforting affirmation!

And this is the RESURRECTION part of Jesus’ I AM claim. That is, He says essentially, “When I resurrect life at the point of physical death, spiritual life goes on unhindered.”

**Phrase Two: “And everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die.”**

This is taken from the perspective of where a Christian is now in life. The implication is this: If we are believing in Jesus and living out that belief, already experiencing eternal life, it will never cease because physical death will not change what has already begun in us.

This is the LIFE part of Jesus’ I AM claim. That is: “The new life you enjoy now and will enjoy forever is my very life – the eternal life of God. This is an even more amazing thought!

In our encounters, especially in grief counseling, may we point them to the great hope of Jesus’ RESURRECTION promise and LIFE promise. This is the greater lesson through all difficult circumstance – that the Christian has promise of resurrection and life forever, removed from all earthly pain and sorrow.

**The Question that follows: “Do you believe this?”**

This will forever be the question that we should ask those who we encounter for Jesus. For the issue of believing in the resurrection and life of Jesus is absolute critical. Gladly, Martha answered beautifully in 11:27 that she believed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.” In this she was proclaiming His deity and Lordship.

In our encounters, the answer to this question can help us determine the spiritual state of the one to whom we are speaking. And we can move from their answer to either encourage to further commitment, or challenge to further investigation.

### **3. Jesus’ greater compassion (v.35-36, 38)**

Jesus shows true compassion for our losses and hurts. Just as Jesus wept over the hurt of Mary, Martha and the other mourners, Jesus “weeps” with us also through our sorrow (v. 35)

AND, Jesus greatly loves us - all His children, seen by His tears of compassion (v.36). Those seeing Jesus’ tears saw his deep love for Lazarus by his tears. Believe that Jesus weeps for all

those in sorrow.

AND Jesus is “deeply moved” (v. 33, 38) – both by sin and sorrow of the circumstance. The word Translated “troubled” in v. 33 and “deeply moved” in v. 38 implies indignation, even anger. In other places in the Scripture where this word is used that is the meaning. This can only indicate that in the midst of Jesus human sorrow, there was also an anger and indignation at the evil of sin that had brought about this death. There was a “sting” that was sin (1 Cor. 15:56). Yet the sting is overcome in victory here, and in all crisis where faith in God is employed.

I remember standing at the bedside of my mother who had died of lung cancer at the age of 66. During her illness she had put her faith in Jesus as Savior, and so the “greater purpose” of God had been accomplished. Yet still I was sorrowful, understandably, as a mourning son. But what I remember feeling amidst the sorrow was an anger at Satan for his temporary victory. It was mirroring the indignation that Jesus must have felt at the grave of his beloved friend, Lazarus. And in our encounters, we can help those in mourning know of both Jesus’ great compassion and sympathy as well as His understanding of the enemy’s right to demand death for sin. But then, we can teach of the sting of death that can be overcome by the hope of resurrection and life.

Here are some of the most precious Scriptures regarding the compassion of our Lord Jesus.

**Matthew 9:36** *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*

**2 Corinthians 1:3-4** *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*

**Hebrews 4:15-16** *For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

## IN CONCLUSION

Now do you begin to see the GRAND PURPOSE, GRAND LESSON and GRAND COMPASSION expressed and taught in this encounter with Martha, Mary and Lazarus?

In the midst of our troubling circumstance, may we ...

1. Be encouraged that somehow God is working His purpose for His glory
2. Be strengthened by God’s promised resurrection power and blessed eternal life
3. Be comforted by God’s deep compassion and understanding

In our encounters during crisis may we be encouragers, strengtheners, and comforters. And by so being, we will be instruments of the Holy Spirit of God, who is these things to all of God’s children.