

Let Me Bless You Before I Go

We've come now to the part of the Gospel of John that records events just months before the crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus is very aware of what is coming and He is conspicuously "putting His affairs in order," as we say. We're watching Him prepare to die.

In my vocation, I've had the occasion of visiting with quite a number of people who knew they were dying. It's my experience that when people come to that stage of life, they fall into one of two categories. Either they become very self-centered, demanding that endless blessings or services be poured out on them. (Many of you in the nursing profession know what I'm talking about!) Or, they become very other-centered, even in their pain. If they're agitated at all, it's because they're looking to bless the people they love, just one more time.

According to Amazon, the most highlighted passage in all books read on Kindle – highlighted almost twice as often as any other passage – is from the second volume of *The Hunger Games*. It reads, "Because sometimes things happen to people and they're not equipped to deal with them." Today, most people do not feel equipped to care for a dying person. This is mostly because we've never done it or even seen it done. By that I mean you've never talked to a dying person, fed them or sat with them for an hour on a daily basis. It has not always been like this. A hundred years ago, only 14% of people in America died in a hospital or nursing home. Today, it's 80%. Where did people die 100 years ago? At home. ¹

Jesus knew He was within weeks of dying. Though He talked about it with His disciples, it just didn't seem to register with them. Maybe it was because they were men? But what we see in this chapter is Jesus beginning to say His goodbyes. He's showing them and us how to die. Far from being morbid, this is a powerful way to bless those you love. First, we see Him: **I. Bless His Disciples With a Lesson on Faith**

The emphasis in this chapter of John is twofold: faith and the glory of God. We find some form of the word *believe* at least eight times and Jesus specifically says that His actions and their faith will produce a demonstration of the *glory of God*.

Now, imagine for a moment that you were one of the Twelve. You've been with Jesus through thick and thin for almost three years. You've seen Jesus do powerful miracles of healing and even raise at least two people who had died back to life. So, when Mary and Martha send a messenger to Jesus that their brother Lazarus is very sick, what would you expect Jesus to do? You've seen Him heal people without even going to where they were. But:

When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." (John 11:4)

Now, listen to the confusion in John's heart as he writes...

Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days. (John 11:5-6)

If you were John, if you were any of the other disciples, wouldn't you have been confused by Jesus' lack of action?

Has Jesus ever surprised you like this? You asked Him to do something important – to heal someone you loved or to take some action that seemed so right for Him to do, but He did nothing. Or you asked Him to spare you from some difficult situation or from some suffering, but He didn't do it. He did nothing. How can this be explained?

Jesus and His disciples have some back-and-forth about why Jesus delayed, then it says: **...he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."** (John 11:14-15)

Jesus could've healed him from afar, he could've prevented him from getting sick to begin with, but he had another purpose; "...so that you may believe." Is Jesus a healer? Yes. Is Jesus a miracle worker? Yes. But Jesus always has a higher priority than physical healing – it's that you may believe!

Warren Wiersbe writes about this incident with these words:

God's love for his own is not a pampering love; it is a perfecting love. The fact that He loves us and we love Him is no guarantee that we will be sheltered from the problems and pains of life. After all, the Father loves His Son, and yet the Father permitted His beloved Son to drink the cup of sorrow and experience the shame and pain of the cross. We must never think that love and suffering are incompatible. Certainly they unite in Jesus Christ. ²

Do you see what Jesus is doing? Do you see His greater lesson for His disciples in not rushing off to comfort Mary and Martha? They knew that He could heal the sick and raise the dead, but the other people who died had been dead less than a day. Because of Jesus' delay, Lazarus would have been dead four days. Some doubters today even have argued that the other people weren't really dead. Because of the unsophistication of the medical arts of His day, they thought those people were dead, when they really weren't. But after four days? His decomposing body was already a stench! Jesus did this unquestionable miracle to prove to His disciples before He left them that He had power over death itself.

What lesson does He have for you in not answering your prayer in the way or in the time you wanted it answered? I don't know exactly what His lesson is for you but I do know this: it is so that you may believe. Secondly, Jesus wanted to...

II. Bless His Friends With an Act of Hope.

Jesus' friendship with Lazarus and his sisters is well documented. Luke 10 appears to be their first meeting when Martha invited Jesus into their home for dinner. While this account in John 11 is the second record of their being together, the description of their relationship here with the words of verse 5, "*Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus;*" seems to imply a friendship that had grown from many visits together. And the fact that Jesus wept when he got to the grave demonstrates the depth of the friendship as well.

So, Jesus finally goes to Mary and Martha's house, arriving four days after Lazarus has died. Martha rushes out to meet Him and says:

"Lord... if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." (John 11:21-22)

Why would she say that? Well, when Jesus sent word back to them with their messenger, He told them:

... "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." (John 11:4)

So Jesus says, ... **“Your brother will rise again.” Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”** (John 11:23-24)

But Martha is misunderstanding Jesus. Jesus is saying that He’s going to raise Him now! Which reminds me of the true story of the Christian businessman and author, Fred Smith. One summer, Fred collapsed and was taken to the hospital in a semi-conscious state. He needed to be placed on dialysis where he just kept repeating, “I want to go home... I want to go home.” His family was deeply saddened but finally decided to grant his wish and asked that he be removed from dialysis. They were told that he would die in 3-5 days.

For the next day-and-a-half, his family read Scripture to him and sang worship songs and prayed. Unexpectedly, Fred suddenly snapped back to consciousness. His daughter was there and quietly told him that the family had reluctantly given the order to remove him from dialysis and allow him to “go home” to be with Jesus.

Fred’s eyes got really big and he said, “Home to be with Jesus? I didn’t mean heaven. I meant Parkchester Drive, Dallas!” Fred was quickly re-connected to dialysis and was back “home” in a few days and lived a full life to the age of 91. ³

In Martha’s similar misunderstanding of Jesus, she still reveals a faith that is full of hope. Though she’s grieving the death of her brother and wishing that Jesus had done what she had originally asked, she still expresses a profound faith in the eternally good will of God. Martha’s grief had a bottom to it. It wasn’t a bottomless pit of pain. It had a shelf life. At the moment, she was in great pain. She missed her brother! But she could envision a day when the grief would end. Just four days after his death, probably three days after the funeral because they buried people quickly in that day, she was grieving but her grief had a bottom. It had an exit door called “hope.”

Is that true of your grief? Is that true of your so-called unanswered prayers, or have you filed your grief and unanswered prayers under the heading, “Unfinished Business with God”? We need to see what the apostle John saw on that day when Jesus finally came to Bethany. Martha’s grief had a bottom to it.

Next, Martha goes and gets her sister. Mary comes out, says the same thing to Jesus that Martha said, *“If you had been here, our brother wouldn’t have died.”* Then it says:

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. (John 11:33)

And verse 35 says: **Jesus wept.**

The word for weeping here means “a loud lamentation.” The title of the Old Testament book of Lamentations, in Hebrew, is one word – *ekah*. It is the first word of the book. It is the English word, “How?” It is a cry, “EKAH???? How Lord? How could you let this happen?” Why was Jesus weeping? Was He weeping for Lazarus? No, He knew He was going to raise Lazarus. He was weeping because of the sorrow of Martha, Mary and the friends of Lazarus.

Don’t miss this. Don’t ever think that Jesus is cold-hearted, that He rejected your prayer request because, like a government clerk, you didn’t fill out the right form or you didn’t say the magic words or He was just too busy with other things and the prayer window had closed for the day. No, no – this is not our God. No, Jesus sometimes says “No” to us because He has other plans that will do a better job of building your faith and giving His Father glory. But when you weep – Jesus always, always, always weeps with you.

In verse 33 it says that Jesus was, “...*deeply moved in spirit and troubled.*” The Greek word translated “troubled”, however, literally means that He was “indignant.” He was mad! What was He mad at? Jesus was mad at the very existence of death. Death was NOT part of His original plan for this world. It was not in the original design. This is why I believe that the Creation was a miraculous event that literally took six twenty-four hour days, not billions of years, because the “billions of years” theory is built on the premise that death was in the world before human beings were, WHICH CAN NOT BE TRUE IF GENESIS IS TRUE! In Gen. 2:17 God says to Adam:

“...but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.” (Gen. 2:17)

This is the first mention of death and it is the description of the origin of death. Those who say today, “You know, death is just another step in our journey of life. It’s not a bad thing, it’s a simple crossing over to a new reality. Death is our friend!” These people have no idea what they are talking about and most of them have never seen a person they love die.

I will never forget the night my father died. He was receiving hospice care in a hospital bed in the living room of the house I grew up in. I was there when he took his last breath. I remember going home and Liz asked, “How was it?”

I said, “It was horrible. Death came and took him. Death is not our friend. It is our mortal enemy.”

Jesus promises us in The Revelation, chapter 20, that one day death will be destroyed: **Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. (Rev. 20:14)**

Jesus came to Mary and Martha to walk with them in their grief and to weep WITH them. Yes, He affirmed that what Martha said was true; in the future, there would be a resurrection. But in their moment of grief, as they wept, He wept with them. This gave them hope. In your darkest night, He’ll do the same for you. Finally, in this chapter, Jesus wanted to...

III. Bless His People with a Demonstration of Power

After Martha told Jesus that she knew He would raise her brother “...*at the last day,*” Jesus said: (John 11:25-27)

“...I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

“Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.”

This is the fifth of the seven “I Am” statements of Jesus in the Gospel of John and without question the most important because if you believes this statement, you will receive eternal life NOW! Look at it! Jesus says to Martha, “*I am the resurrection and the life.*” We all realize that this is literally true because we know that He rose from the dead. But Martha didn’t know that! It hadn’t happened yet! But simply because Jesus said it was true, she believed it. She had that much faith. How much faith do you have?

Jesus says here that physical death, while it’s our enemy, can be defeated by faith in Him. “*He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.*” This is what Jesus was speaking about when He said:

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matt. 10:28)

So, Jesus is offering us Fire Insurance for our souls! In raising Lazarus from the dead, He proved that He had power over physical death. And if that part of the equation is true, then the other half must be true as well – that He can give your soul life so that you will never die again. I mean, seriously, how much faith do you need to believe that? He proved that He has power over death. He raised a widow's son, He raised Jairus' daughter, he raised Lazarus and He was raised Himself by God the Father. How much faith does it take to believe when you have categorical proof?

Jesus did this in front of the whole town. Before He even did the miracle, Martha said, *"Yes, Lord; I believe you are the Christ..."* Then, in verse 45 it says:

Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him. (John 11:45)

What say you? Where are you putting your faith? In a philosophy that offers NO proof of any power over death? Or do you say, "You know, I don't think I need eternal life in a place with no evil. I'm satisfied with just living my life here and then no longer existing." First of all, Jesus makes it clear that we all are eternal beings. The only question is where we will spend eternity. But secondly, you're really good with just living here? Is that what your head says or your heart? It's smart to listen to your heart. Right now, I believe your heart is saying what my heart said to my head many years ago, "This is the offer of a lifetime! Don't pass this up. Say 'Yes!'"

Let's pray...

Jesus,

We thank you for this demonstration on how we can bless others. Your message of Faith, Acts of Hope and Demonstration of Power over death, shows us who you are and causes us to respond with Martha by saying, "Yes, Lord, we believe that you are the Christ."

If there is anyone within the sound of my voice who has never said that to you, I encourage you to say it now in prayer. Jesus' words from two thousand years ago are as true today as they were back then. He says to you today...

I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?

Follow Martha's example and find eternal life today. Just tell Jesus:

Yes, I believe you are the Son of God. Yes, I know that I have committed evil deeds that have made me an enemy of You and Your Father. I believe that You died on the cross to pay the ransom to set me free. Please forgive me and transfer Your death as payment for my sin debt. Thank you, Jesus, for giving me eternal life. Amen.

¹ Robert V. Wells, *Facing the "King of Terrors": Death and Society in an American Community, 1750-1990* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 195 and William Colby, "How WE Die in America," an excerpt of *Unplugged: Reclaiming our Right to Die in America* (New York: Amacom Books, 2006), AuthorViews.com

Both sources as quoted in:

Rob Moll, *The Art of Dying* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010), pp. 15, 16

² Warren Wiersbe, *Be Alive* (eBook: Screen 2 of Part 19)

³ Fred Smith, "Ask Fred," *Leadership Journal* (Summer 1005), p. 40