



Mary and Martha

Unusual Women in the Bible Zoom Bible Study

July 19, 2022

Introduction

The Synoptic Gospels are Matthew, Mark and Luke—all very similar in form and content. John's Gospel offers a somewhat different perspective of Christ.

John 21:23 – 24:

Because of this, the rumor spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?" This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

Mark begins his Gospel with Jesus' baptism and Matthew and Luke begin theirs with the birth of Jesus. How does John's Gospel begin?

The resurrection of Lazarus in John 11 is only included in John's Gospel. That's what we will look at in this lesson.

What is it about your faith that most often causes you to question, ask why, wonder what God is up to?

This story from John 11 raises that question.

John 11:1 - 16

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) ³ So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."

⁴ 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." ⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, ⁷ and then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

⁸ "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?"

⁹ Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. ¹⁰ It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light."

¹¹ After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."

¹² His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.” ¹³ Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

¹⁴ So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, ¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

¹⁶ Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

Interestingly, when the sisters sent word to Jesus about Lazarus, they referred to him as “the one you love is sick.” How often do you think of yourself – refer to yourself – as “the one Jesus loves”?

What/who keeps you from living in the knowledge that “you are loved more than we know”?

Jesus had left Jerusalem and gone to the Jordan River, about a two-day journey from the city when Lazarus gets sick. So the sisters sent word to Jesus, and that would have been a two-day journey there for their messenger, no doubt one of their servants.

Jesus’ response when he received the message is remarkable as well as puzzling:

“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)

Jesus loved Martha, Mary and Lazarus. . . So? So means therefore. You could read it “Jesus loved Martha, Mary and Lazarus. Therefore. . .” What would you expect the next words to be?

God can and does use sickness for his glory.

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

The reason he stayed was because he loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus.

Have you ever gone to God with an emergency type prayer, you need him to act soon, there is no time to waste, and you pray believing he will do something, he will show up, but he doesn’t? And you wonder if prayer really works? We tend to interpret God’s delays as God’s denial.

Do you think Mary and Martha believed Jesus’ delay was for their good and God’s glory? They are living in the “I don’t get it” period—the time when their prayers have not been answered and it seems hopeless. But Jesus delayed because he knew the end from the beginning and he had a purpose for delaying.

Someone has written:

Loneliness, loss, pain, sorrow: these are disciplines; they are God’s gifts to drive us to his very heart, to increase our capacity for him, to sharpen our sensitivities and understanding, to temper our spiritual lives so that they may become channels of his mercy to others and so bear fruit for his Kingdom. But these disciplines must be seized upon and used, not thwarted. They must not be seen as excuses for living in the shadows of half-lives, but as messengers, however painful, to bring our souls into vital contact with the Living God that our lives may be filled to overflowing with himself in ways that may perhaps be impossible to those who know less of life’s darkness.

James says there is a special crown for those who stand the test:

James 1:2-3, 12:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance...

Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

When Jesus tells the disciples that they must go back to Bethany, they didn't think that was a good idea:

John 11:8-10:

⁸ "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?"

⁹ Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. ¹⁰ It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light."

What Jesus apparently means is that the "hours of daylight" is the time God has allotted for his earthly ministry, and they have not yet been completed and until they are, nobody can harm him.

God has appointed a time for each of us.

Psalm 31:15a: *My times are in your hands...*

Psalm 90:12: *Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.*

Psalm 139:16b: *...all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.*

Jesus talks about death as sleep.

1 Thessalonians 4:14:

For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

John 11:17 – 27

¹⁷ On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁹ and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

²¹ "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

²⁴ Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

²⁷ "Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

How does Jesus deal with this grieving woman?

Jesus doesn't ask her how she feels, he asks her what she believes.

Jesus tells Martha that he is the resurrection and the life. Then he confronts Martha personally: "Do you believe this?"

"The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die" (John 11:25b-26).

Camp on those truths when everything else is falling apart.

John 6:68: *Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*

Nobody else is the resurrection and the life. There is no other place, no other person to go to.

God is too wise to be mistaken
God is too good to be unkind
So when you don't understand
When you can't see his plan
When you can't trace his hand,
Trust his heart.