

If Christ Had Only Been There

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[0 : 00] of my life, and is he concerned? Well, today we're gonna meet a couple ladies, two ladies who were very dear friends of Jesus, and yet we're going to see how they experienced a situation that brought similar feelings that I've just described into their lives.

You see, their brother Lazarus, who was also a dear friend of Jesus, he was very sick. He was so sick he was at the point of death, and Mary and Martha, they knew that Jesus had already healed many and was well capable of healing, so they sent a message to him, and they said, come now. It's urgent, it's necessary right now. You've got to come or Lazarus, the one you love, is going to die.

But Jesus did the very unthinkable. Now, if you received a message that this was urgent, we need you right now, most of us would drop everything and take off, especially if it's dealing with a loved one, a family member, and they need us instantly.

We're going to drop everything and take off. But Jesus did the very unthinkable. He waited two days. He waited two days before even starting the trip to Bethany where Lazarus was to get there, and when he arrived, he finds that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

[1 : 42] And both Mary and Martha, separately, different times, but both of them approached Jesus, and they say, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

If you had been here, my brother would not have died. Now, we can't read the tone or the reflection in their voices or really know their attitudes, but we can read this, and we can put ourselves in that situation and maybe imagine the feelings and the emotions and the thoughts that both Mary and Martha were going through.

Maybe they experienced frustration with Jesus. Jesus, you could have healed. You've healed so many before. Why did you not come sooner? Maybe they were disappointed that they thought Jesus loved them more.

Maybe they thought Jesus loved Lazarus. So why? Maybe they were confused. Or do we dare say maybe they had a hint of anger towards Jesus as to why he didn't respond to their message and come instantly and prevent their brother Lazarus from dying.

So let's look at our scriptures together. We're going to look at John 11. And for starters, we're going to read verses 17 through 27. On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

[3 : 18] Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

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

Jesus said to her, your brother will rise again. Martha answered, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day, but Jesus said to her, 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 said to him. I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who has come into the world. Let's call the Lord in prayer for a moment.

[4 : 24] Father, we thank you for your word and your truth. And I pray, Lord, that it is your word that is speaking to us today.

Open our eyes that we might see. Open our ears that we might hear. And Father, I pray that you soften our hearts, that we would receive what you say to each one of us, what you reveal to each one of us.

May we receive it. May we believe it. May we live it. We thank you for this. Lord, I pray that you forgive me of all of my sin.

Cleanse and purify me, Lord, today. And use me as your mouth to speak your word and your truth. In Jesus' name, amen. After Lazarus had been in the grave for four days, Jesus arrives at Bethany. Now Mary, the one that we know that sat at his feet and listened to him teach, the one who later would anoint his head with expensive perfume, she stayed seated in her house.

[5 : 37] But Martha, Martha couldn't contain herself. Martha, upon hearing that Jesus had arrived, she went running out to him. She greeted him before he actually got into town.

And she said to him what she must have been thinking for days. And maybe Mary and Martha had even said this to one another. Lord, if you had been here, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

Do you feel Martha's pain here? Do you feel her emotions? Do you feel her grief? Let me add something to that. If Mary and Martha were living with their brother, this meant they weren't married. That meant Lazarus was their provider and took care of them financially. And with Lazarus gone, here's two women in that day and time who didn't have much of a way to take care of themselves and provide for them.

And now Lazarus is dead. Can you feel the emotion that they're experiencing here?

[6 : 53] Maybe just confusion, frustration. Why did Jesus not come sooner? Why did he allow this to happen? Martha understood by her own words that Jesus was the Son of God.

She said she believed that God the Father would do anything that Jesus had asked. She said she understood these things.

She says that she believes these things. But did she really believe? Did she really have faith? Did she really have understanding? You know, how many times do we make statements within the Christian community of things that we say because we hear others say them, but we may not really believe them or we don't trust in them and we struggle there.

Martha said she believed Jesus was the Son of God. She said that she knew that he could do anything, but her actions act a little bit differently here as if she doesn't have complete understanding.

See, in that day and time, there was a high messianic expectancy, but there was also a confusion as to what the Messiah was coming for. It wasn't to die on a cross, I'll tell you that.

[8 : 18] It was more to overthrow Rome. And so maybe Mary and Martha, even though they said they believed he was the Son of God, maybe they were buying into some other understanding of who the Son of God really was.

We don't know that. But I'm just imagining here because Martha clearly didn't have the depth of understanding that we have today from we have the Bible, but she also didn't have the depth of understanding of the Roman centurion in Matthew chapter 8.

Do you remember the Roman centurion sent word to Jesus to heal his servant? And Jesus said, I'll go with you to his home.

And they're like, no, no, no, no, no. The Roman centurion said he's not worthy for Jesus to come into his house. He said, all you have to do is speak the word.

All you have to do is say it and it'll be done. And this is one of the few moments in scripture where it said Jesus was amazed. Here's a Roman that's believing and having faith in Christ like no one else.

[9 : 30] He understood that all Jesus had to do was speak the word from a distance and his servant would be healed. And indeed it was.

You know, if Jesus had desired to heal Lazarus, he didn't have to go to Bethany. He didn't have to go lay hands on him. All he had to do is say the word and it would have been done.

He didn't have to be there physically. But Mary and Martha, neither one had the understanding and the knowledge maybe of exactly who Jesus is and the authority that he commanded even over life and death, sickness and disease.

They didn't have the faith or the understanding that the Roman centurion had because this was very difficult for them to imagine. But do we ever fall into that category ourselves?

You know, maybe God seems distant. God has remained silent to your prayers, to your pleas, to your cries, and God's silent.

[10 : 40] Do we ever think that because we don't feel God's presence, we don't have that warm, fuzzy feeling that God is with us or God has remained silent and hasn't answered our prayer.

Do we ever think that he doesn't really care? He doesn't really love me. Or maybe we think he's not even aware of the situations or the concerns in our lives.

Do we ever feel that? Ever experience that? David did. You know, David went through many hardships in life from King Saul pursuing him to killing to his own son trying to kill him.

And one thing after another, David went through a whole lot. And at one point, David felt abandoned by God. David felt like God had turned his back on him and was nowhere to be seen. And yet, at the end of that psalm, David said, but I know you are there. I don't feel you. I don't sense you.

[11 : 49] I don't know what's going on in these situations. But David said, but Lord, I know you're there. I know you're there. I know you will never leave me. But you are there.

Martha was lacking a complete understanding of the authority that Jesus had been given. Even though he said to her, you know, your brother will rise again.

And of course, she got confused and thought he was just talking about the afterlife. And then Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life.

I am the resurrection. You see, Martha didn't have full understanding of who Jesus was and the authority that he had. But he was teaching a valuable lesson here, not only to Mary and Martha, to us today, to those who might have heard, that he was the resurrection.

And anyone who is in Christ, even though they die, they will live. If Christ has the authority and the power to raise Lazarus from the dead, if Jesus Christ was raised from the dead by God the Father, then we can have hope, we can have faith, we can have trust that even though we die, God will raise us to life as well.

[13 : 12] That we will spend eternity with him in heaven. But Martha and Mary were struggling to put all this together and to really understand it.

Wouldn't it be great if we could pull it all together too? All the things that we say we know about God, all the things, all the scriptures, all the truths and promises we read in the Bible, wouldn't it be good if we could pull all those together in our own lives and not just have a head knowledge of it, but to have a faith, a trust, a belief in God and learn to trust God even when he's silent.

Even in the pain, even in the struggles, even in the worries, that we learn to trust that God is at work in our lives. He's at work in the world around us.

He's at work in our children's lives. He's at work in our grandchildren's lives. Even though we don't sense him, we may not feel him.

Maybe he hasn't answered our prayer at least the way we want him to and we think he's silent and distant and we question. Don't get confused. God is still at work.

[14 : 31] God is still at work perfecting his perfect will and his perfect plan. His will and his plan, but his will and his plan in our lives as well.

Well, when Martha had this encounter with Jesus, she left and she went to get Mary. So let's go to verse 28. And we're going to read from verse 28 to 32.

And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. The teacher's here, she said, and is asking for you. When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him.

Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.

When the Jews, who had been with Mary in the house comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.

[15 : 51] Where have you laid him? He asked. I think I went beyond what I was supposed to read, but I won't charge any for that. When Mary heard that Jesus was calling for her, she got up and she went out to Jesus.

He was still outside the village where Martha had spoken to him and she got out and she went out there and we see a recurring conversation with Jesus that Martha had just had.

This time though, Mary bows at his feet and says, Lord, you know, this is more of a brokenness, deep grief here that Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

You know, she had an element of faith. She recognized that, just like Martha, that Jesus was Lord, that he was the Messiah, the Son of God. But she too, like Martha, failed to fully understand the authority that Jesus had been given over life and death.

her understanding wasn't complete in really who Jesus was. And so, we see this brokenness within her.

[17:11] There'll be times in our lives when we may not feel God's presence. We may be going through some rough periods of time, some hardships, physical illness, maybe a loss of a loved one or ourself.

and we wonder, where is God? Where is God? Why did he allow this to happen? Why has he not answered my prayers?

But we must never draw the wrong conclusion in the midst of those. And we need to make up our minds ahead of time or when we find ourselves in the middle of the struggles, we'll slip.

But we need to decide ahead of time that despite the feelings, despite God's silence, despite the struggles or the pain, never, ever, ever conclude that God is not at work around you.

Never assume that God does not love you, that God is not concerned about you because he is. You know, Hebrews 13, 5, it says, never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.

[18:22] Memorize that. That's a short one, easy to do. Hebrews 13, 5, never will I leave you, never will I forsake you. And when we feel in the darkness, we feel in the pain, we feel God's silence and his distance, recite that verse over and over and over again that never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.

And understand that whatever we're going through, God is working about his perfect will and his perfect plan. We see individuals throughout the Old Testament that experience moments of long silence from God and they wondered what is God doing?

Where is God? Why has he abandoned me? Why has he forsaken me? Jesus himself even said that, didn't he? My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

But God was working in every one of those instances, in every situation, every circumstance, God was on his throne and God was working about his perfect will and his perfect plan for each one of those individuals as well as his overall arching plan.

we have to learn that we can trust God. We trust him in all situations, in all circumstances, even when we don't understand.

[19:54] Or here's another one, even when God answers our prayer in a way we didn't want him to. And he puts us through things that we would never want to go through. So, why did Jesus wait until Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days before he would get to Bethany?

Well, let's look. Passage I have not read. Look back at verse four of this same chapter. When Jesus received the message, you know, from, that Mary and Martha had sinned, he said, 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. Do you see that? God is using this situation and this circumstance to bring glory to God and to bring glory to himself.

Now, jump down to verse 38. We're going to read verse 38 through 44. Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb.

It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. Take away the stone, he said. But Lord, said Martha, the sister of the dead man, by this time there is a bad odor for he has been there four days.

[21:17] Then Jesus said, did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God? So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, Father, I thank you that you have heard me.

I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here that they may believe that you sent me. When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, Lazarus, come out.

And the dead man came out, his hands and his feet wrapped with strips of linen and a cloth around his face. And Jesus said to them, take off the grave clothes and let him go.

Jesus delayed his coming in order to bring glory to the Father but also to bring glory to himself. He delayed his coming so that he could demonstrate his authority over life and death.

That is not to be skipped over and understand the authority. If Jesus doesn't have authority over life and death, then we can't put faith and trust that he will raise us to new life either.

[22:37] So we can't skip over that statement of Jesus saying, I am the resurrection and the life and that whoever is in him even though he dies, he will live.

It was this experience, this raising, well, Lazarus dying, being in the tomb for four days and Jesus arriving and raising him from the dead.

This experience allowed others to come to know Christ and understand the authority and the power and who else could raise someone from the dead other than Jesus Christ.

Back in that day when individuals had a death, they would pay mourners. That might have been some of the frustration that Jesus had in this passage. They paid people that would come and cry and weep and wail during that time and so we don't know there were a lot of people.

It said people came from Jerusalem out, the two mile walk out. There were a lot of people around and so this experience allowed many others to see the authority and the power of Jesus Christ and to believe in him.

[23 : 47] But thirdly, Jesus took Mary and Martha's faith to a whole new level. They said, Martha did, that I believe that God will give you anything you ask.

She said she believed that her brother would live in the afterlife, that Jesus would raise him from the dead. She believed he was the Messiah but I believe that this experience of Lazarus being raised from the dead took Mary and Martha's relationship with Christ but faith in Christ to a whole new level.

A whole new level of understanding Jesus and the authority that he has. So many times in our lives we go through experiences don't we?

Where once we get on the other side of them we look back and we realize what God had been doing in those situations in those circumstances we can never see it in the middle of it can we?

Usually we have to get beyond that experience to be able to look back and see how God was with us and the things he accomplished in the midst of that. And that strengthens our faith and it takes us to a whole new level and we have to remember those moments and those times.

[25 : 11] We have to remember them because we will go through them again and we can't question or doubt God in the instances we'll have in the future. Have you ever questioned why you had to go through a situation?

Have you ever questioned why God was allowing something to happen in your life and you just cry out why God? And he's silent.

Have you ever gotten frustrated? Disillusioned? Confused? Maybe even angry at God?

Have you ever wondered if God really cares about you? Well I hope this passage this morning in seeing this is a blatant delay by God Jesus Christ to come and respond to Mary and Martha but it was for a point.

It was for a purpose. It was to take them to a whole new level in their faith and their understanding of who Christ was and the authority and the power that he had been given.

[26 : 23] So as we go through those moments and those times just rest in Christ. Just rest in him knowing that it's painful it's difficult it's hard but I'm just going to learn to trust that God is working in a way that I don't understand and I may not agree with until I can look back maybe years later.

Maybe today you're sitting here and you're in one of those moments right now. Maybe today you're frustrated. Today you're disappointed.

Today you're confused or maybe you're even angry at God. I'd love to pray with you this morning. I won't have all the answers for you but I'd love to pray with you and help you to restore your understanding of God is working in that situation in those circumstances.

God is fulfilling and bringing about his perfect will and his plan. Let's pray. Father we just thank you for this message and your word.

We thank you that it's evident and clear in the scripture that you loved Mary and Martha and you loved Lazarus and yet you delayed not to hurt them but to bring glory to your name and to take them to a whole new level of understanding that you are the resurrection and the life.

[27 : 53] And I pray Lord today if there's anyone sitting here today who is struggling with feelings of abandonment anger disappointment I pray Lord that you would touch their hearts today and help them to know that you love them you care for them and you are working in their situation and their circumstances despite the fact of what we feel.

We thank you and praise you for that in Jesus name. Amen. If I can pray with you