

FRIDAY 08 April "Lazarus" John 11:1-12:11

Hello my "Walking with Jesus" friends.

Together we are on a journey with Jesus and His closest friends toward **His Easter**. Yesterday we had quite an experience in Jericho with blind Bartimaeus miraculously receiving his sight, and corrupt 'chief tax collector' Zacchaeus receiving forgiveness. Both started a new life the day Jesus walked into Jericho and met them!

A few days before Jesus had shocked His traveling troupe with the news, He was going to Jerusalem for the Passover feast, but He would be arrested, mocked, beaten and killed! None of His friends wanted to hear it or believe it. *Then Jesus said He would rise from the dead on the third day after His death!* I doubt any of us can imagine how that statement must have rattled their hearts and minds!!

Evidently Jesus led His group from Jericho west toward Jerusalem. Bethany was a small town just over the hills, two miles east of Jerusalem, and that was a familiar stopping point for Jesus and His disciples whenever they visited Jerusalem. A special family of two sisters and a brother lived there: Lazarus and his two sisters Mary and Martha. John gives us this record of their visit this special time: ***"Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with Jesus... A large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So, the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of Lazarus many Jews were putting their faith in Jesus."*** (John 12:1-11)

Can we put ourselves in this remarkable scene my friends? Jesus, His 12 disciples, perhaps some of the women who often traveled with Jesus, Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha... wow, that's a house full! Can you imagine the groceries needed for that dinner party? May I ask, *when was the last time you had dinner with a person who had been dead five days and was raised back to life?* No wonder the house is surrounded by people, every door and window filled with heads peering in and fingers pointing. Even though it had been a while since the unbelievable, the unthinkable had happened... still people came to see Lazarus. He was unlike any other person in Bethany or anywhere in the world, for that matter! *A dead man now fully alive, having dinner with Jesus and His friends!!*

The story of this remarkable, history changing event, is recorded for us only by John the disciple, the close friend of Jesus, in John chapter 11. Lazarus had fallen sick with an undescribed illness. He was so sick his sisters Mary and Martha sent word for Jesus, urging Jesus to come quickly to help Lazarus.

We don't know exactly where Jesus was at the time, but John writes: ***"When Jesus heard this, He 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 if you were in the group with Jesus and you heard Jesus say this, what would you have concluded about Lazarus' illness? May I ask, *what would it require for you and me to see difficult situations, tragedy, as an opportunity for God to be glorified, especially if it's your tragedy?*

John continues: ***"Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick He stayed where He was two more days."***

So, would you agree that the combination of what Jesus had said and now Jesus intentionally staying where He was, some distance from Bethany, for two more days, would lead everyone to conclude Lazarus must be on the mend and would be fine? You can imagine, therefore, everyone's shock when two days later Jesus said, **"Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. Let us go to him."** Look around at Jesus' friends, all shaking their heads, rubbing their wrinkled foreheads, looking at one another with an expression of total confusion. *What could Jesus possibly mean by what He just said?* Normally if you receive word a good friend is very ill you make every effort to rush to be with them, right? Jesus did the opposite. He didn't go, promising Lazarus would not die. Now, only a few days later, Jesus admits Lazarus did die and now He wants to go visit the family. Was Jesus admitting He'd been wrong about Lazarus' illness? Was He now planning to go and apologize and see what He could do to make amends with Lazarus' surviving sisters?

But what could Jesus possibly mean by the statement **"I am glad I was not there so that you may believe?"** Believe what? John tells us when Jesus and His group arrived at Bethany, they found out Lazarus' body had been in the tomb already four full days! Many friends had gathered, as was the custom, and they sat around seeking to console each other and trying to understand why Jesus had not come when urgently summoned? John writes: **"When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet Him... 'Lord', Martha said to Jesus, 'If you had been here my brother would not have died.'" (John 11:20,21)** I think she paused and through her tears looked deeply, confused, almost accusingly into Jesus' eyes. In her mind there was no possible explanation as to why Jesus had delayed. It could only mean one thing... He really didn't care about them as much as they thought. Someone else or something else had been more important when Jesus heard the urgent cry from Bethany about Lazarus!

May I ask friends, *do we sometimes draw similar conclusions when God does not do miracles or unleash His mighty power into our desperate need when we call on Him for help?* After an appropriate pause to make her point, Martha then added, **"But I know that even now God will give You whatever You ask."** Oh my, look around at the wide eyes, heads turning to look at Jesus to see how He'll respond. What exactly was Martha suggesting? Lazarus had been dead at least five days! No one could have imagined what they were about to hear: **"Jesus said, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha answered, 'I know my brother will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.' Jesus said, '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?'" (John 11:22-26)** Everyone who heard it was stunned. No one who heard it at that moment understood. *But now, with the benefit of all that Jesus accomplished over His Easter weekend, with His death and resurrection, and with the rest of the New Testament teaching... we understand, don't we?!!*

What do we understand? These things...

- 1. That Jesus Christ is God incarnate**, who rose from His own atonement death, ascended back to heaven from which He had come to earth, and *is right now saving, from their PERISH sin condemnation, all human beings who fully trust in HIM.* (Hebrews 7:25)
- 2. YES, there will be a resurrection when Jesus returns from heaven** and resurrects all those who have believed in Him for their salvation from their sin before they died. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15 explain to us that when we who have trusted Jesus die our bodies remain here decaying, but our spirit/soul goes immediately to be with Jesus. *And when Jesus returns, He will bring all those believing spirit/souls with Him and He will resurrect their dead bodies into a heavenly, glorified body, reuniting soul, spirit & body, to be with God forever.*

3. YES, what we call 'die' or 'death' is actually 'depart' as Paul writes in 2 Timothy 4:7,8, and Philippians 1:23 because while our bodies cease to live, *if we've trusted in Jesus, our spirit/souls remain fully alive and are transported by God into His presence awaiting that resurrection.* We who have fully trusted Jesus to save us from our sin will live forever with Him. We will never perish.

I have a life and death question for all of us around the world: *Do YOU believe these three statements to be fully true? Have you trusted God to save you from your sin condemnation because of your full faith in resurrected Jesus Christ?*

Jesus then asked Martha to lead Him to where they had laid Lazarus' body. John records Jesus urged the people to remove the large stone from in front of the cave/tomb and then Jesus raised His voice to God in prayer: ***"Father, I thank you that you hear Me...I say this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that You sent Me.' Then Jesus called out in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out'.*** (John 11:41,42) Look around at the crowd. Most are holding their noses, for the smell of death and decaying flesh coming out of that little cave is almost suffocating. All eyes turned to Jesus, then the sisters, then the cave... what did He mean by saying, ***"Lazarus come out"***? Nothing could be more impossible!

Let's pause right here... stand in the crowd, holding your nose, and tomorrow we'll come right back here, and we'll see what Jesus did that day and why it's so important today, 2000 years later!

Today's Scripture is John 11:1-12:11.