

Hope for the Hurting

Jesus and the Family of Lazarus – John 11:1-44

Crosspoint – Dave Spooner – April 17th, 2022

Intro:

- I don't know about you, but I don't like to suffer. I don't like it when my body is sore after a workout. I don't like it when I have a cold or covid or my body does not work like it used to. I don't like it when I don't have enough money to buy what I want to buy or do what I want to do. I don't like it when I have too much to do and too little time to do it. I don't like it when my mind is preoccupied with problems and I am too stressed to sleep.
- Over the last couple of years, it seems like there has been a whole lot of suffering happening for all of us. I have seen a huge increase in mental and emotional health issues due to isolation, uncertainty, and inflation. I have seen depression skyrocket and marital conflict abound. I have done or attended more funerals during these last two years than any period of my life. There are more health issues, and serious ones, present in our lives and the lives of those around us—in large numbers. And then there is untold and intense suffering in war zones around the world as all of our news feeds are filled with wars, shootings, and even assaults on award shows. There are a whole lot of people suffering right now, including us in this room.
- God offers us a salve for our suffering, and comfort through Christ and the gift of each other. This morning, through an interaction with a family who is suffering, you will receive comfort for your suffering and be equipped to provide comfort for others during their greatest times of need.
- Jesus was nearing the end of his ministry. He had suffered many things through the years and was heading into His greatest time of suffering before His greatest victory over sin and death. He had so many friends, both near and far, and so many had put their faith and trust in Him and loved Him more than anyone or anything.
- One set of siblings was especially dear to His heart. They were Lazarus, Mary, and Martha, and they were suffering dearly and deeply. Through their story, we will be encouraged and equipped to handle our own suffering and to help others with theirs. So let's first look at the reality of suffering in our world.

The reality of suffering

John 11:1-4 NIV

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."

- Sickness and suffering come to all people, even those who are deeply loved by God and have faith in Jesus. So don't ever tell someone that they are suffering because of their lack of faith. And don't ever believe that lie if someone tells it to you. Suffering is a regular part of reality.
- Now I want you to train yourself to ask the best questions in suffering versus the ones we usually ask. Our normal questions are, why did this happen? How long is this going to take? How soon can I stop this? What can I do to change this? They're not horrible questions, and in some ways, they are healthy, but the best and biblical question to ask is, "how can I glorify God in this suffering?" That question is the one we need to train ourselves to ask. And if you ask that question and make it your aim, you will find hope, help, and resurrection in your suffering.

John 11:5-7 NIV

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."

- The timing of Jesus is not always our timing, and His delays are not our denials. Your story does end with "they lived happily ever after," but you will go through some stuff first. When you are in the valley of the shadow of death, fear no evil, for Christ is with you. You and I have to trust Him for His timing and continue to honor Him in our hurting.
- Jesus chooses to delay. He did not even need to go there; He could have spoken the words, and it would have been done. In His wisdom and plan, God will wait so that what is of greater good will be accomplished.

John 11:8-10 NIV

"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."

- This indeed was a dangerous situation for Jesus. In fact, because of what happened with Lazarus, the Jewish ruling council decided to kill Jesus and also Lazarus. Because of Lazarus' testimony, many Jews went to Jesus. So, God knows what He is doing. When you are walking in the light, you will face difficulties, but you will stand and not stumble as one who walks in the darkness.

John 11:11-16 NIV

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."

- Sometimes we all have a hard time understanding what Jesus is going to do. But, keep communicating. The plan will become clear over time, even to the eternal "optimists" like Thomas.
- Suffering is a reality, and we turn to the places that provide comfort in and through our suffering.

The comfort of resurrection

John 11:17-23 NIV

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."

- First, Martha asked the question that most people ask when they are going through something difficult. Jesus, if You would have been here, if You would have done something, this would not have happened. Why did You not come in for the rescue? Why did You allow this to happen? Where were You, God? Even amid her questions, she still had faith, saying that, even now, something could be done.
- The primary comfort of Jesus is that there will be a resurrection. Even in sickness and death, this situation is not the final state, only a temporary one. The greatest comfort that God gives to us is the promise of a resurrection. Our lifetime compared to the vastness of eternity is nothing, like a drop in the ocean. The goodness of God in eternity will so outweigh the weight of our present reality that this will all seem like a passing dream. Even though it is difficult now, and it is, it is nothing compared to how great and how long we will have the new reality. One hundred million years from now, enjoying all that eternity entails will be far greater than anything we endure in our lifetime.
- There is real hope in the resurrection. And this is the comfort and promise offered to us in our pain. Then Jesus asks her the most important question that anyone can be asked.

John 11:24-27 NIV

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."

- Jesus gets straight to the heart of what really matters. The real issue is not if you die or if you will suffer. You will die, and you will suffer. The better and more important question is if you believe. In this passage, Jesus gives one of his seven "I AM" statements, saying that "I am the resurrection and the life." There is no other statement that is more significant than this. There is no other promise that is greater than the one He offers. "The one who believes in me will live, even though they die, and whoever lives by believing in me will never die." Do you understand this promise? Jesus is the key to eternal life because Jesus IS eternal life. Notice that this is not "easy believism"; this is "whoever lives by believing in me." This is not just a passing, "I believe in Jesus"; this is someone who lives in Him and by Him and for Him.
- Every person who has ever lived has to deal with this question. "Who do you say that I am?" Do you believe He is the resurrection and the life, or don't you? And if He is, then what He says matters, and what He does matters. Do you believe that He is the Messiah, the Son of God who has come into the world? This is the most important question anyone can answer. What say you?
- What you have in Him is far greater than anything in heaven and earth. What he offers you is worth all the suffering, all the sacrifice in the world. Keep the truth in your mind, know that there is a resurrection, and things will get incredibly better for you in the end.
- We are also going to pay attention to the other gifts of grace and ways we can give and receive comfort from and for other people.

The comfort of presence

John 11:28-31 NIV

After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." 29 When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31 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.

- Notice that Jesus comes to us and calls to us to be with Him. You are never alone. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. There is a giving and receiving, and knowing He is with us matters because in His presence, we find comfort.
- We can also do this with each other. Just being near, just drawing close to someone who is suffering, is a huge comfort. Just show up; that is enough. And sometimes, you will need to pursue those who are suffering. Having other people present in our suffering is

helpful. So continue to show up, and don't give up. Receive other people into your suffering. This is a gift of God and a gift we can give to each other.

The comfort of tears

John 11:32-37 NIV

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." 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. 34 "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied.

35 Jesus wept. 36 Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" 37 But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

- Mary asked the same question as her sister Martha. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." She asked this question, but with a different posture as "she fell at his feet." Mary did not need a theological explanation to her question. What she needed was someone to cry with her. Tears are a comfort. One of the best things we can do is "weep with those who weep." Even in God's sovereignty, He connects with us in sympathy. God is not indifferent to our suffering.
- Crying with others creates a connection in shared sorrows, and it is healing and helpful to our bodies as well. Doctors have found that "crying can cause your body to produce hormones that make you feel better. You release oxytocin and endorphins after you cry, which can help lift your mood." (Webmd.com)

The comfort of belief

John 11:38-42 NIV

Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. 39 "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."

40 Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" 41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 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."

- Believing that God hears you in your suffering is a great comfort because there is always hope with Him. Hope provides healing. Without it, we are crushed with despair, but with hope, we can gain the strength to endure.
- Our hope is encapsulated in seeing the glory of God. Strength and restoration will come, either in this life or in the life to come. Continue to believe that God hears you and He is with you. With God, we always have hope, and hope in God will always bring help.

The comfort of help

John 11:43-44 NIV

When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

- God will provide help in His time for His purpose. He calls to us, and this calling is a command. He is not asking us. He is commanding us in His will. A puritan preacher once noted that if Jesus had not specifically called out Lazarus' name, He would have cleared out the entire cemetery. God does what only He can do.
- Then He also asked others to help. "Jesus said to them, 'take off the grave clothes and let him go.'" Jesus invites us to do our part for others when He does His part. We can practically help others while praying that God will supernaturally act. Providing practical help is a huge comfort for people in their time of need and recovery.

Conclusion

- The raising of Lazarus was a foretaste of the resurrection of Jesus. Today we celebrate the most important event to ever occur on this planet. Because He lives, we will also live. Because He is in us, we are in Him. If Jesus Christ can do nothing about death, then whatever else He can do amounts to nothing. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (I Cor. 15:19). Death is man's fiercest and final enemy. Jesus defeated death through His life.
- Through suffering, you are born naturally into this world. Through His suffering, you are born again supernaturally into the new world.
- Receive hope, help, and healing for yourself, and give hope, help, and healing to those in our world. If you have not put your faith in Christ for your salvation, do so today. If you are saved, rejoice in what is before you. Receive comfort in your suffering and give comfort to others in theirs. God is for you. He is not against you and comforts us in our suffering.