



TALKS FOR GROWING CHRISTIANS TRANSCRIPT

John 11:17-37: The Lord Is Both the Shepherd and the Door of the Sheep

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. 2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. 5 Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." 6 Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them.

7 Then Jesus said to them again, "Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who ever came before Me^[a] are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."

Background Notes

When Jesus arrived in Bethany Lazarus had already been dead for four days. Apparently Lazarus must have died shortly after the messenger was sent to Jesus. It would have taken a day for the messenger to go from Bethany over to the east side of Jordan where the Lord was. Then the Lord delayed for two days (v6) and then the day's travel to Bethany -- a total of four days. So there is no doubt, then, that Lazarus was really dead.

A number of Jews had come to console Mary and Martha, and they would have been weeping along with the sisters. The word for "weep" that is used in reference in Mary and these friends (v31, 33) is a Greek word that means a loud expression of grief, especially in mourning for the dead. I remember hearing this kind of weeping when I was in Jerusalem a few years ago, and I asked our guide what was the cause of that loud continuous crying or wailing. He said that there had been a death in one of the families there. So that kind of weeping and mourning continues in the Holy Land right up to the present day.

When the Lord that saw them weeping, He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled (v33). "Groaned in the spirit" -- that is. His spirit was deeply moved. His spirit was not at peace. Why? Because of death! Death is an intruder! Death is an enemy! *"The last enemy that will be destroyed is death"(1 Corinthians 15:26)*. Death is an enemy! Death is the result of sin: *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"(Romans 6:23)*. Until our Lord's death and resurrection, Satan had the power of death. Hebrews 2:14 says, *"as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.."*

And then we read that Jesus wept! This word used for "wept" is a different Greek word than the word that is used for the loud weeping of Mary and the Jewish mourners in verses 31 and 33. The Greek word used for wept in verse 35, when our Lord wept, denotes quiet weeping, a quiet shedding of tears. This, by the way, is the shortest verse in the English Bible. (If you want to get technical, John 11:35 is the shortest verse in the **English** Bible, but the shortest verse in the **Greek** New Testament is actually 1 Thessalonians 5:16: "Rejoice always." "Rejoice always" in Greek takes fewer letters than "Jesus wept" in English!)

This one of the three times in the Gospel record that we see our Lord weeping. He wept over Jerusalem, and He wept in the Garden of Gethsemane, and He wept at the time of Lazarus' death. Notice that it is not weak or wrong to weep. God has made us emotional people! It's not wrong for a man to weep in times of deep emotion, so this Scripture would definitely support the doctrine that Jesus was fully man -- He **wept!**

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. Believers react differently when a loved one dies.

I think that we know from experience that people react in different ways to the death of a loved one, and this is certainly taught in the Bible. Mary and Martha both said the same thing -- "Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died" (v21&32) -- but their reactions to their brother's death were quite different. Mary stayed in the house weeping with the mourners. Martha went out to meet the Lord out on the road, and we don't read of her weeping at all. Mary fell at the Lord's feet, overcome with grief. Martha, on the other hand, had a profound theological discussion with the Lord! Their reactions were so different!

The same is true of us when a loved one dies. When I got the news that my dad had suddenly and unexpectedly died, I didn't cry. I couldn't cry, and I felt guilty for not crying. I was out of town when I got the news. I didn't sleep the whole night, and my mind was racing a mile a minute. It was snowing heavily -- would I be able to make the plane connections to get to New Jersey? How was my mother managing in her sudden bereavement? What about my responsibilities to help my mother with funeral arrangements, and for her future welfare? And on and on it went. But I couldn't cry. I don't think that I shed a tear until at least a month later.

Reactions are very different. Believers react in different ways when a loved one dies. Mary and Martha both loved Lazarus, but they reacted differently. The Lord didn't rebuke either one. It's all right to react in different ways when a loved one dies.

2. There are different ways to comfort believers at the time of death.

There are different ways to comfort believers at the time of death. Because people are different and they react differently, there are different ways to comfort them when that loved one dies. The Lord comforted Mary in one way, and Martha in another way.

With Martha, He answered her questions. In verse 24 we see that Martha had the Jewish idea of a general resurrection of the dead on the last day, or the day of judgment. So our Lord's answer to Martha was, "*I am the resurrection and the life. He*

*who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live”(v25). What was the Lord saying to Martha? To paraphrase what He was saying in verses 25-26: “Martha, you need to understand more about the resurrection. You need to understand that **I am God, and I am the resurrection and the life** -- I have the power to raise Lazarus back to life right now! And furthermore, because I am the resurrection and the life, everyone who believes in me shall live spiritually and eternally -- even though they die physically. And everyone who lives physically and believes in me shall never die spiritually and eternally -- so there is no need to fear death!”*

If you are a believer, there is no need to fear death because the Lord is the resurrection and the life! Martha went back to the house not only comforted, but having grown in her faith as well (v27-28). So you see, the Lord comforted Martha by answering her theological questions! She grew in her faith, in her understanding of who Jesus is, and in her concept of the resurrection to come.

I recall visiting a couple that had lost their child. I intended just to pray with them, but when I got there, they began to ask me all kinds of theological questions. Our whole time was spent, not so much in weeping together, but in answering their questions -- and believe it or not, seeing the biblical answers brought comfort and growth to them.

How different was our Lord’s comfort for Mary! As far as the record goes, the Lord said nothing to comfort Mary – He simply wept! I think there is a lesson here for us. We don’t need to say something in order to comfort believers who have lost loved ones; many times just our presence is enough. And we shouldn’t be afraid to weep with people -- the Lord did. He didn’t mourn loudly like those around Him, but He did weep quietly.

Don’t be afraid to just be there, saying nothing to a person who is grieving. Your supportive presence may be all that is needed. I am sure you can identify with me. I feel awkward in that kind of situations -- I don’t know what to say. Can you identify with that? Your supportive presence may be all that is needed. There are different ways comfort believers at the time of a loved one’s death.

Practical application

Don’t let your “if onlys” move you away from God.

At the time of a loved one’s death, invariably the “if onlys” will arise. “If only we’d gotten to the hospital sooner.” “If only we had used a different doctor.” “If only someone had done CPR.” “If only he or she hadn’t taken that trip, they wouldn’t have died.” We have the same kinds of reactions and questions as Martha and Mary had.

And it won’t be long before the “if onlys” begin to center about God. They will come, just as we see Martha’s and Mary’s reactions in verses 21 and 32: “*Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.*” We begin to think along those same “If only” lines: “If only God had warned us.” “If only God loved us more.” “If only God wasn’t mad at me.” “If only God had intervened.”

It is during times of crisis and despair that these “If onlys” come into our thoughts, and they will either move us away from God or toward God. For both Mary and Martha, their “If onlys” moved them closer to the Lord – they turned **to the LORD** with their grief and their questions.

I know people who are bitter and angry with God for taking a loved one away in death. They have never forgiven God! Their “if onlys” have moved them away from

God. But on the other hand, I know some folks who have closer to the Lord as a result of a loved one being taken away. They have brought their "If onlys" to the Lord, and they have found comfort and peace in the realization of His love for them and His sovereignty over life and death.

Be prepared for the problem of the "If onlys" when a loved one dies. Move closer to the Lord and find comfort in Him. Don't let your "If onlys" move you away from God!