

# GOD WITH US

## Part 8: JESUS

### Message 19 – Restorer of LIFE; Anointed for DEATH John 11&12

#### Introduction

Thus far, John has given us 4 of Jesus' 7 "I AM" statements: *I am the Bread of Life. I am the Light of the World. I am the Gate. I am the Good Shepherd.* Now, as the public ministry of Jesus nears the conclusion in chapters 11 & 12, John gives us the 5<sup>th</sup> "I AM" statement, combined with a major miracle to prove it. Jesus will claim to be *the resurrection and the life* (the One appointed by God to defeat death and give eternal life to people). He will prove this claim by raising His beloved friend, Lazarus, from the dead. This climactic miracle took place just weeks prior to Jesus' final entry into Jerusalem for the Passover Festival, prompting large crowds to hail His arrival in Jerusalem. In fact, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey (the "triumphal entry") Lazarus was by His side as the crowds sang to Jesus: *Save us now, Son of David. Save us now!* The religious leaders were so disturbed by the popularity of Jesus that they made the final decision to find a way to put Jesus *and* His friend Lazarus to death.

#### The Death of Lazarus: 11:1-16

Jesus was very close to Lazarus and his two sisters, Martha and Mary. We see several interactions between Jesus and this trio, especially during the final weeks of Jesus' life where they played key roles. They lived in Bethany, just 2 miles from Jerusalem.

Martha and Mary sent word to Jesus that Lazarus was sick. Jesus replied that there was a special purpose behind Lazarus' condition.

***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" (11:4).***

Jesus delayed 2 more days before making the 20-mile journey to Bethany. (He was staying on the other side of the Jordan River at the time, to avoid conflict with the religious leaders in Jerusalem.) In the interim, Lazarus died and was buried. When Jesus told His disciples that they must go to Judea, they objected because the

Pharisees had recently tried to stone Jesus to death. Jesus then made His intentions clear regarding to the trip to Bethany:

***“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.” His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.” Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought He meant natural sleep. So, then He told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him” (11:11-15).***

Jesus was going to raise Lazarus from the dead as the climactic miracle of His 3 years of public ministry. The disciple Thomas, the pragmatist among the group, voiced their concern with a somewhat cynical tone:

***Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with Him” (11:16).***

(On Thomas’ tendency to be “skeptical” or “rational” see also John 14:5 and 20:24-28. He was the *common-sense* disciple, for whom it

“Providence” can be defined as “divine guidance or care.” It means that God is in control of the events of our lives; He has not lost control, or left things to “chance.” Thus, even things that seem to make no sense are part of God’s providential plan for our lives. The illness and subsequent death of Lazarus seemed to make little sense to the disciples or to the sisters of Lazarus; but Jesus saw the plan of God behind the sad and confusing events. God would be glorified through Lazarus’ death. The apostle Paul states the doctrine of divine providence this way: **“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).** No, every situation in life is not “good;” but God can take all situations, even the bad ones, and work them together for good. Someone once said: Providence is when God takes a sour lemon and makes sweet lemonade out of it!

was sometimes difficult to see with eyes of faith.)

### **Martha goes to meet Jesus: 11:17-27**

Martha went out to meet Jesus as He neared Bethany, and she had a conversation with Him concerning her disappointment that He had not come sooner. Jesus then made His 5<sup>th</sup> “I AM” declaration.

***“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 he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in Me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in Me will never die. Do you believe this?” “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that You are the Messiah, the Son of God, Who is to come into the world” (11:21-27).***

Martha made her own “good confession” of belief in the Person of Christ. It seems that she believed that Jesus would raise her brother from the dead *in the future resurrection*, but not that He was about to raise him from the dead right then.

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### **Observations on Martha: From Shirley**

Martha appears several times in the life and ministry of Jesus. She was known for her gift of hospitality. She showed her love and devotion to Jesus and His disciples by opening her heart and home, whenever they were in the region.

Martha inspires me because she created a safe place for Jesus to relax, even though it cost her effort. It was not easy to buy, cook and serve food to Jesus and His 12 disciples. That’s 14 men total, including Jesus and Lazarus, Martha’s brother! No easy task.

Even today, being in someone’s home or apartment is still the most intimate way to relax and connect. But we need to remember that “hospitality” is not the same as “entertaining.” Entertaining feels like a formal event. Hospitality is less formal. A house can be ‘lived in’ and the meal can even be a ‘carry-out.’ It is the warm and inviting spirit in the home that makes people feel like they are on level ground, free to make memories together.

Martha is unique in that she showed a comfort level with Jesus that few people ever feel or express. In Luke 10 we read of a time when Jesus and His disciples were visiting in her home. He was talking with them and Mary, Martha’s sister, left Martha and became immersed in the conversation. Martha kept busily preparing and serving, and she became increasingly frustrated that her sister Mary was not helping. She finally interrupted Jesus saying, “Lord, don’t you care that Mary has left me to do all the serving? Tell her to come and help me!”

Martha challenged Jesus’ motives. Don’t you care? And, she told Jesus what to do! Tell her to help me! We should all be

challenged by this woman's honesty! Jesus replied to her with so much love and tenderness: "My dear Martha, you are worried and fussing about so many things! Mary has chosen what is better. She has stopped to listen to Me, and that's not going to be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41,42).

The issue here was not about Martha's value as a hard-working woman; but it was about Martha valuing Jesus. His desire this visit was to teach them more about Himself, and He did not want her to miss out on time with Him, or to blame her sister for taking time to stop and listen. Obviously, eating dinner on time was not Jesus' main concern.

*I admire Martha's courage to be so honest with Jesus! God knows how we really feel inside, and He wants us to be honest; to literally talk to Him in prayer about it, even when we don't understand or think it is fair. He will gently correct us, if He needs to.*

If that one scene was all we knew about Martha, we might have a somewhat negative view of her. But the gospel of John reveals more about this woman when he records the story of the resurrection of Lazarus, Martha and Mary's brother.

At the beginning of John 11, Martha was placed 1<sup>st</sup> in the order of the 3 siblings. John wrote: "Jesus LOVED Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus" (11:3). The sisters sent a messenger to tell Jesus that Lazarus their brother, "whom He loved" was sick. A confusing message came back to them: "His sickness would not end in death." Yet, by the time this message came back to Martha and Mary, Lazarus had already died and was buried! Only later would they understand Jesus' deeper meaning - that Lazarus' sickness and death would result in God's glory, "so that God's Son may be glorified in it."

It is interesting to note that when Jesus finally approached the village of Bethany, it was Martha who went out to meet Him first. Their intimate conversation reveals some of Martha's true strengths:

1) She was honest again, expressing her disappointment with Jesus. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." But this time, she also expressed deep faith in the midst of her disappointment. "But, I know that even now God will give You whatever you ask" (11:27).

2) Jesus told her that Lazarus would rise again. Martha affirmed her belief in the 'final resurrection,' not understood by most people. She did not expect Jesus would raise her brother from death that very day.

3) Jesus told Martha that He Himself was “the resurrection and the life.” He asked her, “Do you believe that I am?” She must have been confused; but her reply was profound: “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ Who was to come into the world” (11:27). Martha is the only person to make this “great confession” after Peter made a similar confession earlier in the gospel story (Matt.16:16).

4) Martha’s faith was solid. Only a few people truly understood Jesus’ deity as “the Christ (Messiah) Who was foretold to come into the world.

In summary, this woman Martha challenges me: - To be honest with Christ about my feelings and doubts. He can take it! - To trust in Him that He can still do miracles in my life today, even as He did in Martha’s life.

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### Mary goes to meet Jesus: 11:28-35

***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. “Where have you laid him?” He asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, “See how He loved him” (11:32-36).***

Every time Mary appears in the gospel narrative, she is *at the feet of Jesus*. Here, Jesus was moved with emotion as He saw the impact of sin and death on His friends.

The Greeks believed that one of the qualities of god was *apatheia* – lack of feeling. God was not emotionally involved with us; not moved by negative emotions, as we are. Yet, John’s portrait of Jesus shows us something very different. Jesus had deep emotions, including love and grief. He wept over the sadness surrounding Lazarus’ death. Soon after, He was deeply troubled as He considered His own approaching death (John 12:27). The Greeks said god was *apatheia*. Christianity countered with the idea that God was sympathetic – able to “feel together with” us. The book of Hebrews teaches that Jesus is our sympathetic High Priest who can feel with us in all things, and thus make the appropriate intercessory prayers on our behalf. Isn’t it good to know that **WHATEVER** you are going through, **JESUS ‘GETS IT.’** (See Luke 19:41; 22:44; Matt.23:37; Mark 10:21 for other examples of Jesus’ emotions.)

## Jesus Raises Lazarus from Death: 11:37-44

The question on *everyone's mind* was the same:

***“Could not He who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” (11:37).***

WHY was Jesus weeping? WHY had He not saved Lazarus from death. It seems as if everyone was disappointed that Jesus had not used His miracle-working power to *prevent death*. Little did they know He had allowed Lazarus' death for a greater miracle – so that He could *defeat death!* Not even Martha understood Jesus' intention, as we see from her reply to His command to move the stone away from the entrance to the tomb:

***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.” Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?” So, they took away the stone (11:38-41).***

The moving away of the stone was an act of *faith*. Martha was reminded of Jesus' earlier promise that the death of Lazarus would be an opportunity for all to see *“the glory of God” (11:4 and 11:40)*. The idea of God's glory bookends this miracle story.

***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!” 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” (11:41-44).***

Note the wording. It does not say, *“Lazarus came out.”* It says, *“The dead man came out!”* This miracle is not so much about *who* came out of the tomb; rather, it is about the astounding fact that a *dead man* came out of the tomb after 4 days. Jesus proved His “I AM” statement. *“I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in Me will LIVE even if they DIE” (11:25).*

## **The Plot to Kill Jesus: 11:45-57**

The religious leaders had seen enough. They convened a council and determined that Jesus must be put to death.

***“What are we accomplishing?” they asked. “Here is this man performing many signs. If we let Him go on like this, everyone will believe in Him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation . . . So, from that day on they plotted to take His life” (11:47,48,53).***

Jesus, knowing of their intentions, withdrew to the wilderness with His disciples. He would wait for the Jewish Passover Festival to make His next appearance among the multitudes in Jerusalem. The leaders also decided that Lazarus must die, so that the evidence of Jesus’ miracle-working power would be destroyed.

## **Mary Anoints Jesus: 12:1-11**

***“Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to 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 Him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.” But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray Him, objected, “Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year’s wages.” He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. “Leave her alone,” Jesus replied. “It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of My burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have Me” (12:1-8).***

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## **Observations on Mary: From Shirley**

Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, is another key figure in the life of Jesus. She appears 3 times in the gospel narrative, and she is always at the feet of Jesus. (Note: This Mary is not to be confused with the “sinful woman” in Galilee who came into Simon the Pharisee’s house and anointed Jesus with her tears over His generous love and forgiveness - Lk.7:36-39).

The 1<sup>st</sup> time was when she was listening to Jesus in her home, sitting at His feet (Luke 10:39). The 2<sup>nd</sup> time was when Martha took her out to meet Jesus, after Lazarus had died. She fell at His feet weeping (John 11:32). It was Mary's emotions (and those with her) that moved Jesus to weep over the death of His friend, Lazarus. Mary echoed the disappointment of Martha that Jesus had not come sooner: "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Jesus reminded Martha (and Mary) of His 1<sup>st</sup> message He had sent to them: "Did I not tell you, if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" The sisters did believe. Their faith in Jesus contributed to this incredible miracle.

But it was the 3<sup>rd</sup> time Mary appeared in the story of Jesus that defined her legacy for all of eternity. This event occurred in their house, 6 days before the Passover and the death of Jesus. Once again, Martha was serving Jesus, the 12 and Lazarus (without complaining). Mary came and knelt at Jesus feet and took a very expensive bottle of spikenard ointment (perfume). She poured it out on His feet (Matthew and Mark add "upon His head"). She was undistracted in her act of worship as she anointed Jesus. She took down her long hair and lovingly wiped His feet. John notes that the entire house was filled with the smell of the perfume.

Sadly, Judas Iscariot began to rebuke her with contempt for wasting a year of wages by pouring the entire bottle of perfume on Jesus. The other disciples all joined in rebuking her harshly (Mk.14;5).

Jesus immediately defended her extravagant act of worship, telling the disciples to "leave her alone!" Jesus told them that what Mary did was actually anointing His body for the day of His burial. And, He promised that for generations to come, wherever the gospel was preached, this act of worship would be remembered (Mark 14:9).

*Women, when men talk down to you with contempt, or speak harshly, remember Mary and remember Jesus coming to her defense. This has brought me great comfort as I realize how much Jesus 'gets women.' Both Martha and Mary were real people with real experiences of Jesus. Their stories motivate me to keep pursuing Jesus as they did.*

**Additional Notes: Contrasts between Martha and Mary:** Martha was an extrovert; Mary an introvert. Martha showed love through serving; Mary through contemplation. Martha had many words recorded; Mary had few words. Both sisters loved Jesus; just in different ways.

**Singleness can be a blessing!** All 3 siblings seem not to have been married; thus, they were able to minister to Jesus and His disciples in many unique ways. See 1Corinthians 7:32-35 where Paul extols the virtues of being single and able to serve the Lord more freely.



## John's Summary of the Growing Tension: 12:9-11

*“Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So, the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, <sup>for</sup> on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in Him” (12:9-11).*

Both Lazarus and Jesus had attracted a huge amount of attention as a result of the miracle of Lazarus' resurrection. Remember, the Passover Festival was about to happen. Tens of thousands of Jewish pilgrims were in the region. These multitudes had, perhaps, heard about Jesus from a distance. Now they were able to be up close and personal to the miracle-worker Himself. They would be part of the crowd that welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem at His “triumphal entry” (which is recorded next in John's gospel).

### Discussion Questions

1. The fact that Jesus was not present to heal Lazarus before he died was a great disappointment to Martha and Mary. Are there aspects of God's work in your life, right now, that feel “disappointing” to you?
2. Jesus revealed that there was a greater purpose behind these events (and His delay in coming): the glory of God. How have you seen, in the past, situations that seemed disappointing to ultimately work out for the glory of God?
3. What aspects of Martha's character stand out most to you? How do you relate to her?
4. What aspects of Mary's character stand out most to you? How do you relate to her?
5. Have you ever been criticized for your devotion to Jesus; for being “extravagant” in your love for Him? What happened, and how did you respond?