

Jesus' Reaction to the Sickness and Death of a Friend



In order for us to discover how God the Father wants us to react to painful news it is essential that we know how Jesus did it. The Bible shows us several rather detailed instances; but the most marked episode involved a dear friend and his family.

"A certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. Therefore, his sisters sent to Him, saying, 'Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.'

When Jesus heard that He said (to his disciples), 'This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God be glorified through it.' Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister, and Lazarus, so when He heard, He stayed two more days in the place where He was. Then after this, He said to the disciples (again), 'Let us go to Judea again.'

The disciples said to Him, 'Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You and You are going there again?!?'

Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours in a day? If anyone walks in the day he does not stumble because he sees the light of the world, but if he walks in the night he stumbles because the light is not in him.' These things He said and after He said to them, 'Our friend Lazarus sleeps; but I go that I may wake him up.'

Then his disciples said, 'Lord, if he sleeps he will get up.'

Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless, let us go to him"

Then Thomas, who is called Didymus, said, "Let us go along that we may die with Him."

So, when Jesus came (to Bethany) He found that (Lazarus) already had been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away and many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary to comfort them concerning their brother. Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus

was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house.

Now Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if You had been here my brother would not have died, but even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.'

Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.'

Martha said to Him, 'I know that he will rise again in the Resurrection at the Last Day.'

Jesus said to her, 'I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me, though he may die (physically) he shall Live and whoever lives and believes in Me shall never Die (spiritually). Do you believe this?'

She said to Him, 'Yes, Lord I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God Who is to come into this world'. And when she had said these things she went her way and secretly called Mary, her sister, saying, 'The Teacher has come and is asking for you'

As soon as she heard that she arose quickly, to meet Him. Now Jesus was not yet come into the town, but was in the place where Martha met Him. (Simultaneously) the Jews who were with her in the house and comforting her, When they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, saying, 'She is going to the tomb, to weep there.'

Then when Mary came where Jesus was and saw Him she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here my brother would not have died.'

Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews that came with her weeping, He groaned in the Spirit and was troubled and He said, 'Where have you laid him?'

They said to Him, 'Lord, come, and see.'

Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, 'See how (much) He loved him!' and some of them said, 'Could not this Man Who opened the eyes of the blind have kept this man from dying?'

Then Jesus, groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave and a boulder lay against it (covering the entrance). Jesus said, 'Take away he stone.'

Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, 'Lord, by this time, there is a stench, for he has been dead four days.'

Jesus said to her, 'Did I not (just) say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?'

Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying and Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, 'Father, I thank You that You have heard Me and I know that You always hear Me. But, because of the people standing by, I said this that they may believe that You sent Me.' Now when He had said these things He cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come forth!' and he who had died came out bound hand and foot with grave clothes and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Loose him and let him go.'

Then many of the Jews who had come to see Mary and had seen the things that Jesus did believed in Him." (John 11:1-45)

Where to begin? This story is so rich in revealing Jesus' personality that it truly is hard to decide what to elaborate on first. We are shown His love, patience, compassion, tolerance, faith, preparation of Lazarus' two sisters' (as God the Father did with Jesus' parents), as well as His reaction to the lack of faith of the Jews on the scene at His power

over death as well as sickness.

Even after being summoned to help a close friend and supporter of His mission who was very ill, Jesus purposely remained two more days where He was. This had to have appeared extremely odd and callous behavior to His twelve disciples. They knew that this man and his two sisters were friends of Jesus, who not only would need but also expect His love and comfort in the crisis. Everyone also was counting on Jesus to rush to heal the sick man, something that He most definitely did not do. Why not? He always had gone wherever He had been summoned to cure someone previously, as in the case of the daughter of a ruler of a small town synagogue. (*Mark 5:21-43*) The gospels teach that these people all were strangers to Him, so His disciples had to have been wondering and discussing among themselves why Jesus would treat people whom He never even met before their encounter, but not a beloved friend.

However, the disciples' interpretation of the facts was not consistent with the rest of Jesus' personality. They should have realized that something was going on in the spirit world that they did not recognize. Things "seen" still tied them. (*II Corinthians 4:18*) Jesus was not ignoring the petition; rather He was preparing Himself for what He would be called upon to do. This required a lot of prayer and supplication with His Father beforehand. This explanation does gel with how He invariably had comported Himself earlier. Jesus was taking all the time He needed to ask for guidance. Until He was certain what exact course of action was the best, He did not budge. His disciples not only should have understood, but they should have copied His behavior and prayed along with Him.

Likewise, they should have recalled how at least once before Jesus had gone off to be alone with His Father. When He returned they were frantic because they had not been able to cast out a certain demon from a sick man. Nevertheless, He was able to do it immediately and told them the reason. Evidently, they had imagined something to the effect that having seen Jesus heal people with similar looking ailments (many, many times) they were indeed ready to perform the feat by themselves. They were wrong. Their actions were not grounded by as much developed faith as His had been. Whereas Jesus relied on the Holy Spirit to do all healing through Him, they were only acting out the motions.

When Jesus rejoined the group He instantly was able to cast that spirit of disease out of the person and it had to leave. It was not able to dispute Jesus' authority as it obviously had with the disciples--all of them combined. His followers questioned Him because when He had sent them out previously in pairs He gave them the power to do so. Then they indeed had been able to succeed at they considered to be the same thing, also without His physical presence. And it never was accounted that He took that capability back.

"When He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits to cast them out and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease." (Matthew 10:1)

Jesus' apostles had been able to perform what they perceived as being almost identical healings on previous occasions to the one that bewildered them that time. He explained that it was because of their unbelief, and that certain demonic spirits required more prayer and fasting in order to dominate and control them. Jesus never told His followers that the demon left because He Himself had special powers bestowed on Him by His Father in Heaven. Jesus' disciples obviously had doubted enough or given up at some point when confronted by a stronger predicament than they had encountered by themselves

before. Jesus' ability to cure the man at once meant that He was prepared because He had been in adequate prayer and fasting while He had been alone with His Father. Otherwise He, too, would have been ill equipped for the job. In order to see desired results on a consistent basis we must do the same.

The amount of prayer and discipline we will need to line up precisely with God's will vary depending on each separate predicament. Cancer, for example, is not a disease that is affected much by rapid or careless prayers. Often by the time it is detected the affliction has been able to build up an extremely strong root in a person. It even may be the case that the entire family has become disposed to falling to that particular attack. This is an even larger and more powerful stronghold to overcome. Although we may tire of defending ourselves against its attack and cease our vigil for awhile, the cancer will not stop spreading just in order to accommodate our schedules.

What can we do to impede and hopefully get rid of it altogether? Look at what Jesus did:

- (1) He did not panic.
- (2) He prayed for comfort, wisdom and guidance.
- (3) He stayed alert to receive an answer.
- (4) He did not react until He knew precisely what His Father wanted Him to do.
- (5) He did precisely that, without any deviation.

If the Holy Spirit leads you to see a doctor, He also will tell you where to go if you listen to Him. How will this happen? Follow Jesus' example. He prayed and listened long enough for His Father to guide Him explicitly. God did the same with Noah (*Genesis 6:13-22*), Moses (*Exodus 3:1--12:41*), and Joshua (*Joshua 1:5:2-27*), to name only a few. We have discussed how He did likewise with Jesus' earthly parents. Remember that you are a joint heir with Christ. (*Romans 8:16-17; Hebrews 4:14-16*) Even if you shortchange God, He will never shortchange you.

Can you imagine the disciples not questioning Jesus why He was choosing not to leave immediately to see and heal Lazarus? How about resisting the urge not to reproach Him to make a move during the three entire days and nights, and stop merely praying about the situation? Unless He stayed away from all human contact during that time, or, if they never addressed Him directly, more than likely He at least heard their criticism about His love and loyalty to His affected friend, as well as his family. If we look just at the *outward* appearance of the situation, Jesus' reaction seems quite strange, not in agreement at all with His normal attitude and behavior concerning sickness of any kind.

However, Jesus realized that the circumstance of having to raise his friend from death was a dire situation. It would take completely persistent and unwavering faith to accomplish what His Father wanted Him to do. Jesus recognized that He would be performing a great miracle, one that the Bible records that He did only two times previously. The first instance had been much more private. There was no unbelief surrounding Him to impede His faith and words. A twelve-year-old girl *just* had died when Jesus finally got to the scene. He threw everyone who ridiculed Him out of the house where the body was. Hence, the atmosphere of doubt was far less for Him to have to resist than it would be in the presence of all of Lazarus' mourners. (*Mark 5:40*)

The second testimony concerned Jesus raising a widow's son from being dead just as He happened to pass by the funeral and saw her grief. (*Luke 7:11-16*) The person had not been buried yet so the body was not nearly as decomposed as Lazarus' would have become. In addition, in that instance the expectation of Jesus' arrival had not been anticipated. Therefore, the people witnessing what He did were not already inclined to

disbelieve nor scoff at Him. Jesus knew that when He finally arrived in Bethany, He would be up against much opposition and that it was almost a certainty that He already was being blamed for letting Lazarus die in the first place.

It is obvious from the story of Lazarus that the people around the family, including the sisters themselves, had been discussing Jesus' absence and criticizing Him because of it. Lazarus' sisters both even challenged Jesus to His face about His timing. Raising Lazarus required more exercised and developed faith inside Jesus' heart and words than He had ever needed before. (*Matthew 12:34*) Not only was He about to arrive at a place where people were disposed to condemn His seeming lack of concern, His friend had been dead much longer than the previous two people. Thus, he would have suffered much more brain damage. If that weren't enough, the corpse already had been entombed for four days and most definitely had begun to rot.

What Jesus was called upon to perform was not like the ability to resuscitate a person after several minutes of a lack of oxygen to the brain. This was infinitely more delicate and complex. In addition, Jesus' entire reputation and ministry would be at stake. It was a major test for Him and He had to be fully prepared in advance. Jesus could not afford to doubt for even a single second. If He had, He would sever His connection to God the Father momentarily and thus fail in front of many witnesses. Plus, even a single, fleeting doubt would have sabotaged His *entire* mission. When He died, He, along with the rest of us, would have gone to hell, irrevocably. (Think about it. Do it again.)

Simultaneously, Jesus had to travel very near Jerusalem. This was where the main religious leaders of the entire country wanted to kill Him. They had been hoping to destroy His ministry to the point of even undermining what He had accomplished so far. His disciples were not much help either; for, they thought that they were accompanying Him to "kick butt", so to speak. Even though Jesus clearly explained the true situation to them they acted like a small mob bound to a location with false bravado. They could not have been much help to Him, rather more of a hindrance. Therefore, when Jesus went to aid Lazarus, everything on the earth seemed to be against His success, even all of His friends.

When Jesus arrived at the outskirts of the town where Lazarus had lived, died, and was buried, from that point on we do not know what His disciples did. The focus of the testimony shifted to Jesus' dealings with Lazarus' sisters, Martha and Mary. Just as God the Father prepared His Son's earthly parents, Mary and Joseph for what He wanted to do that would affect them, Jesus did likewise with Lazarus' siblings. Before He acted, He asked their permission to raise their brother from the dead. Does that amaze you? It sure did me. Here was more evidence that God does not attempt to alter anything about our lives without our express permission, even if the answer is obvious. Whereas, Satan barges right in to try to take charge of our lives, God never will without our consent. Jesus, the exact image of God the Father, spoke with each woman privately to determine how she felt in her own heart before He performed even a single action that would affect them both.

When Jesus became more disturbed by the obvious grief and suspicion in all of the people nearby, He wept. He was not reacting to Lazarus' demise as they thought. Rather, He was grieved for them. Why would Jesus cry for His friend whom He fully expected to see and visit with shortly? That makes no sense. However, the Holy Spirit within Jesus weeping and moaning due to His frustration and sadness over the unbelief of those who still doubted does. Even after at least two years of hearing about or seeing His works, most of the Jews still disputed whether Jesus was indeed God's Son. As well, they still denied His absolute ability to transcend the natural physical world. It must have been agonizing for Him after having proven His power continually that they still were skeptical that He could "tap into" His Father's power again. It reminded me of people at seashore appreciating the

waves yet not considering that the ocean has the resources to produce more of them, which is ludicrous.

As Jesus approached the tomb and asked that the boulder covering it be removed Martha reminded Him of the odor that the dead body would emit, already having been encased for four days. However, even that fact was not able to sway Jesus' faith and resolve to heal Lazarus and raise him from death. Jesus only reaction was to remind her once more to believe, and only that. Jesus could not afford to falter at that moment, so He did not focus His attention on the dead rotting corpse, rather on His Father in Heaven. Therefore, when Jesus spoke He was able to maintain His confidence that His desires most assuredly would come to pass.

Then Jesus used His spoken words to set into motion what He wanted. He did not just enter the tomb, grab the body, and bring it outside. Nor, did He ask any other person present to do it. He addressed only to two people: His Father in Heaven and Lazarus' physical remains, which in its present state was like any other senseless object--wind, waves, the sea, or even a fig tree. As usual, even in that extreme situation Jesus comported Himself with the *complete* assurance that what He asked His Father to help Him do would indeed take place, because it was in agreement with the rest of the Scriptures. Jesus first publicly appealed to His Father in prayer so that the whole assembly would witness exactly how He got His will manifested. He did this in complete conformity with how He had taught the people to petition God. He spoke to His Father directly, first thanking Him for His attention to the matter. Jesus also shouted that He trusted that His Father was indeed listening to His request because it lined up with His written Word. This Jesus did so that everyone who heard Him could regard His faith in the fact that His Father most surely would honor His petition.

When Jesus commanded a dead body to "Come forth." just as His Father had said "*Light be.*" (*Genesis 1:2*) centuries earlier, His words took place. I have tried to envision this scene many times: to hear the roar of the crowd, to see the wonder in the faces of the disciples, to feel the exhilaration of Martha and Mary, to attempt to experience the awe of the Jews present witnessing the miracle firsthand. But, I will bet that all of those wonderful emotions pale in comparison to Jesus' enjoyment of watching them finally believe in Him, and praise His Father.

(***See also *John 12:9-11* where the Pharisees put Lazarus on their "hit list" because people began coming to see Lazarus as well as Jesus.)