

The Comfort of Jesus

John 11:17-44

The subject of death is a matter we prefer to ignore. Death is too real, too certain, too painful, too permanent, often too sudden for us to cuddle with or lightly entertain.

As Emily Dickenson famously wrote, *"Because I could not stop for Death, He kindly stopped for me;"* This chariot called death stops for each of us and so it is vital that we dwell upon God's truth about this last enemy.

The LORD has caused me to think much about death in this past month as cancer has taken deep root in the bones of my brother who until recently was very strong, very fit and very healthy **What disease can do in a matter of weeks!**

The LORD opened a door from me and Kimberly to visit with Jim at his home in Michigan this past Monday.

We talked about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in giving Jim a peace that surpasses his understanding and that guards his heart as he endures such pain and as he walks through the valley of the shadow of death. He truly fears no evil . . . not one little bit. Jim knows that he cannot create such tranquil hope and calm for himself, but that the LORD is ministering to his soul.

We talked about the purpose of life . . . of sharing the Gospel of Jesus with others, of encouraging the saints around us, of pointing our kids and grandkids to Christ. Though confined to a recliner chair, Jim is living life with eternal purpose and making an impact upon me and many others.

We reminisced about our lives together and talked about the happiness God brings through simple occasions like shooting baskets in the driveway or having a snowball fight with our dad. **Every moment with one another is a treasure from the LORD.** We are right to drink in every bit of goodness and put away goofy complaining and disputing and resentments. **Our lives are too short to invest in damaging thoughts about the people in our lives whom God has given us to love.** We are also right to see the big picture in our conversations and not be satisfied with the thin, the surface of life.

We mostly talked about hope and the bright future ahead of us. Jim knows that he will not cease to exist when his body gives way to cancer. Jim knows that he will be transported to the place where he was created to dwell forever and ever. **Death will not bring disaster to him, but physical death will be**

the doorway to his delight in the presence of his Savior. He will lose nothing when he leaves this broken world.

I told Jim that I would miss him so very much and I tears rolled down my face as I did. He smiled with love toward me. His tranquil face spoke to me an unuttered message. ***“Ritch, I know that you will miss me. But I am going where the Father is sending me. And that brings me joy to think of it.”***

As I drove home from Michigan, this passage from John 11 rolled through my heart. I felt the sorrow of Mary and Martha as they first watched their brother weaken from a terminal illness and then die. And I was warmed by Jesus’ ministry to them. So I choose to dwell upon this story for our Easter Sunday.

As Christians, we do not believe in heaven because we emotionally want to believe in heaven. We believe in heaven because One Person came from heaven to live among us and He secured a way from us to go to where He came from and be with Him forever. He proved Himself to be the way to heaven by dying on a cross and then rising to life again. Death is the matter that keeps us from eternal life. In Jesus, death itself dies. What hope!

Main Idea: The resurrection of Jesus brings comfort in every occasion of life. When we have Jesus, we have life and peace.

The Comfort of Jesus’ Presence

“Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, (what a beautiful name for a town or church!) the village of Mary and her sister Martha. It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent to him, saying, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” John 11:1-3

Note the example of these two believing sisters as they called upon Jesus to help them in their time of need. Mary and Martha knew Jesus. They knew that He cared for them. They knew that He is the One who heals and rescues. They want Him near them in this time of deep trouble.

Truth: What comfort to have Someone who cares for us. What comfort to know that Someone hears us when we cry to Him for help. What comfort to know that Someone is able to help us through any trial. What a comfort to know that Someone is always present with us.

This Someone is Jesus who loves us with an unbreakable love, who listens to every prayer with a compassionate heart and who is powerful enough to overcome any problem.

Peter would later write, “casting all our cares upon Him because He cares for you”
1 Peter 5:7

“And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20 [ESV](#))

Who else do we have who can make such promise? I would like to always be there for my kids, but I know that my human body is limited. I can only be at one place at one time. So if I am with my first born, I am not with my second and third. Only Jesus can promise to be with us ALWAYS!

“for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”” (Hebrews 13:5-6 [ESV](#)).

Recently a friend of mine shared how as a young boy he went to court and heard his parents say that they did not want him any more. It marks him to this day.
Friends, Jesus will NEVER EVER SAY THAT TO THOSE WHO COME TO HIM!!

Friends, do you reach out to Jesus when you face trials and troubles? I urge you not to try to make your own way through them. Look to Him in faith!! He cares for you. He is present with you. He invites you to call upon Him in times of trouble.

*What a friend we have in Jesus
All our sins and griefs to bear
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!*

*Can we find a friend so faithful
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness
Take it to the Lord in prayer
--Joseph Scrivener*

But when Jesus heard it he said, “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he

was.” (John 11:4–6 ESV)

The comfort of Jesus presence in our lives does not mean that Jesus will do what we think Jesus should do.

Isaiah reminds us,

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8–9 ESV)

When we reach out to Jesus in our sorrows, His presence comforts us that He is in control of every circumstance and that we can trust Him to be good and to do good.

In this story, Mary and Martha look to Jesus for comfort and help. Jesus communicates that his comfort will take a form that they will not first appreciate. **But His purpose is right and good and true and lovely and beautiful. Jesus is going to do MORE for Mary and Martha than to keep their brother Lazarus from dying. Jesus is going to awaken them to the LORD’s eternal glory . . .** Jesus is going to open their eyes to see more of God. This is the LORD’s ultimate gift to us . . . it is a gift that makes every temporal pain worth it.

Paul encourages us,

“For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:17–18 ESV)

Christian friend, in your pain, God whispers, “Trust Me. I know you do not understand Me. But trust Me! You will find that I am good and right and loving and wise. Trust Me! You will see how this trial is working for your joy in my glory.”

The Comfort of Jesus’ Person

Who is this One to whom we go when we are afraid, distress, discouraged, troubled, or overcome?

“Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother.” (John 11:17–19 ESV)

Jesus does not reprimand us for our grief; He consoles us in our grief.

“So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house.” (John 11:20 ESV)

Each of us responds to grief differently. Mary was private, quiet and contemplative. Martha was active, talkative and engaging.

“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 from 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 on the last day.” (John 11:21–24 ESV)

As we listen to Martha’s conversation with Jesus, we hear a mixture of grace and weakness . . . faith and frailty. **She affirms that she believes in Jesus; yet she is struggling.**

Jesus meets her in her weakness and speaks ever so gently to her, yet encouragingly true to her about death. He tells her that for the believer death is not death!

“Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life . . . “ John 11:25

Jesus first points Martha to His Divine Person. Jesus is “the resurrection and the life.” What a claim! Imagine any other person saying that! We would all laugh. But we do not laugh when Jesus says it because He backs it up with miracles! Here, **Jesus is actually claiming to be the Person who has the keys of life and death. Jesus is claiming that in Him death is defeated.**

Resurrection: In using the word, “Resurrection” Jesus points us the future day when visible dead bodies are restored and reanimated. Jesus is talking about biology here. Physical cells that have been destroyed and decayed and disappear are reconstituted, revived, renewed.

Jesus offers bodily resurrection to those who believe in Him. **Jesus does not let sin and death speak the last word over the bodies of His friends.** God made us body and soul AND in Jesus God restores us in both body and soul.

Life: In using the word, “Life”, Jesus points us to the present offer of invisible spiritual life that fills the souls of those who were born dead in sin.

Jesus claims that He possesses spiritual life in Himself. His life is not derived from anyone or anything, but is an essential part of His eternal Person. **We have life through Him, but He is life!!**

Notice also that Jesus does not merely claim to be able to give life and resurrection to all who believe in Him, but Jesus’ claim is that He IS the resurrection and the life. There is no life or resurrection apart from Him.

Truth: Jesus’ person radically changes our experience in our living and in our dying. Because of WHO Jesus is we can know God right now and we can have confidence when we face death in the future.

The Comfort of Jesus’ Presence, Person and now . . .

The Comfort of Jesus’ Promise

“Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?””
(John 11:25–26 ESV)

Did you catch the seeming contradiction of Jesus’ words?

“Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”

On the one hand, Jesus’ acknowledges that believers die, yet on the other hand Jesus asserts that believers never really die.

Which is it? Do we live even though we die? Or do we never die?

Answer: Yes! Both! Two promises in one. Both the same and yet pointing to something different about the life Jesus gives to those who believe in Him.

Promise #1: Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live.

Jesus is talking about the death of our bodies. Unless the Lord comes in the clouds first, we will all experience physical death. And yet death will not have the

last word over our bodies. We are created in the image of God with both a body and a soul. Sin brings death to both parts of us . . . our bodies and our soul. But Jesus brings life to both parts of us. When believers bodies die, those same bodies are promised that they will live again!

“Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.” (1 Corinthians 15:51-53 ESV)

Through the resurrection power of Jesus, we not only get back what we lost by physical death, but we are given something better! When Jesus returns to this earth, we who are in Christ will be given a new body that is fit for heaven. **Think of this, our new body will never tire, never grow old, never age, never wrinkle, never become diseased, never grow bald, never ache, never falter, and never, ever die.** Everything is restored and improved through His resurrection power.

Illustration: Gravesite service. Purpose: to remind ourselves of Jesus’ promise of a future resurrection!

This promise of the resurrection of the physical body is NOT YET! We still wait for it. Our resurrection is guaranteed by Jesus’ resurrection. But we must wait!

Promise #2: And whoever lives and believes in Me will never die.

Jesus is talking about our soul. The moment our body breathes its last breath, our soul is immediately transported by angels into the presence of God. **There is no intermediate place where our soul is cleansed of any sins that remain.** The blood of Jesus covers us and Jesus with great joy presents us as faultless before the Father. **Every person who believes in Jesus is prepared to meet God without fear of condemnation. And we never really die.** Our soul does not experience a moment of separation from the LORD.

This promise of new life in our soul is ALREADY! If you believe in Jesus, you already have this life that is found in Jesus. You already have your sins forgiven, your relationship with God reconciled, your heart made soft, your mind renewed, your adoption complete. You have spiritual life through Jesus! And this life will never be taken from you. Not by sin! Not by death!

"And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:43 [ESV](#))

Though this criminal's body remained on the cross when He died, his soul was transported into Paradise to be with Jesus. ***Why? Because his soul was made alive by Jesus on the cross and his soul did not die when his physical body died.***

"So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord." (2 Corinthians 5:6-8 [ESV](#))

"Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and **everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.** Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26 [ESV](#))

What a promise! Every promise Jesus makes, He fulfills. Let us wait in eagerness for Him to fulfill what He said He would do!

Illustration: Promise to grandkids that we are coming over to pick them up and take them to our house. I love that they believe me when I promise something. I love that they rejoice in the promise of coming to their OG and GG's house.

As they wait, they live in between the statement of the promise and the fulfillment of the promise. It can be a hard time of expectation. Are they really coming? How loooong must I wait here? I did not think it would take so long for them to arrive.

We live in between the statement of the promise and the fulfillment of the promise.

The Comfort of Jesus' Purpose

Why did Jesus allow Lazarus to die? Or more, why did Jesus allow Mary and Martha to experience such sorrow? Two clues inside the story.

But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness does not lead to death. **It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.**" (John 11:4 [ESV](#)).

*“Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus has died, and **for your sake** I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”” (John 11:14-15 [ESV](#))*

Principle: God loves us too much to let us fix our gaze only upon our transient lives here on earth. So God ordains trials to awaken us to eternity and to His glory.

To capture the mind of God is impossible for us. He is incomprehensible. This does not mean that we do not know anything about God. God tells us much about Himself that is true and precious. To say that God is incomprehensible is to simply say that we cannot know ALL that there is to know about God.

Here is what we know:

1. God is able. He settles that matter when He speaks and the world comes into being.
2. God is wise. He settles that matter with His plan to redeem a rebellious people from sin.
3. God loves us. He settles that matter at the cross of Jesus.

When God ordains for painful trials to touch our lives, it is not because He is too weak to keep them from us, it is not because He is too foolish to know what is good for us, it is not because He does not care for us. When God ordains painful trials to touch our lives, it is because He knows something we do not know. He knows the needs of our hearts and He acts to bring us eternal joy and life. We DO NOT UNDERSTAND. But we trust because we KNOW our LORD.

Christian friend, in your pain, God whispers, *“Trust Me. I know you do not understand Me. But trust Me! I know you are wondering whether I am good and right and loving and wise. Trust Me! You will see how this trial is working for your joy in my glory.”*

Let us look at the end of this story.

*“Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, **“Take away the stone.”** Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.” Jesus said to her, **“Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?”** So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, **“Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may***

believe that you sent me.” When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, ***“Lazarus, come out.”*** ***The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”***”
(John 11:38-44 [ESV](#))

Who in this story is complaining about Jesus’ delay now? The disciples? Mary? Martha? Maybe Lazarus!

Truth: We await a future day when every sorrow will be turned to joy . . . every dark question will be answered with the light of God’s love . . . every loss will become our gain . . . every fear will vanish into worship! That day is coming!

We still live waiting for the Day when Jesus returns and all is made right.

As Pastor S.M. Lockridge famously preached, “It’s Friday, but Sunday’s coming”
Pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in San Diego from 1953 to 1993.

*It’s Friday
Jesus is praying
Peter’s a sleeping
Judas is betraying
But Sunday’s comin’*

*It’s Friday
Pilate’s struggling
The council is conspiring
The crowd is vilifying
They don’t even know
That Sunday’s comin’*

*It’s Friday
The disciples are running
Like sheep without a shepherd
Mary’s crying
Peter is denying
But they don’t know
That Sunday’s a comin’*

***It’s Friday
The Romans beat my Jesus
They robe him in scarlet***

*They crown him with thorns
But they don't know
That Sunday's comin'*

*It's Friday
See Jesus walking to Calvary
His blood dripping
His body stumbling
And his spirit's burdened
But you see, it's only Friday
Sunday's comin'*

*It's Friday
The world's winning
People are sinning
And evil's grinning*

*It's Friday
The soldiers nail my Savior's hands
To the cross
They nail my Savior's feet
To the cross
And then they raise him up
Next to criminals*

*It's Friday
But let me tell you something
Sunday's comin'*

*It's Friday
The disciples are questioning
What has happened to their King
And the Pharisees are celebrating
That their scheming
Has been achieved
But they don't know
It's only Friday
Sunday's comin'*

*It's Friday
He's hanging on the cross
Feeling forsaken by his Father*

*Left alone and dying
Can nobody save him?
Ooooh
It's Friday
But Sunday's comin'*

*It's Friday
The earth trembles
The sky grows dark
My King yields his spirit*

*It's Friday
Hope is lost
Death has won
Sin has conquered
and Satan's just a laughin'*

*It's Friday
Jesus is buried
A soldier stands guard
And a rock is rolled into place*

*But it's Friday
It is only Friday
Sunday is a comin'!*

Conclusion:

Unbeliever. Do you believe this? Very personal and specific question!

For the unbeliever . . . the person without a personal commitment of faith to the Lord Jesus Christ, there is no hope in death. For those outside of the benefits of Jesus' death and resurrection, death is death. Death is worse than terrible for the unredeemed. **Death is not overcome, but is the triumphant enemy that separates you from a real relationship with the living God.**

Believer. Do you believe this? Jesus is calling Mary and Martha to hold on to Him and His promises by faith. He knows that their peace and joy in this hour depend upon them fixing their eyes on Him in trust.

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