When God Doesn’t Make Sense

## (John 11:1-44)

Today, I want to share with you about “When God Doesn’t Make Sense” because the reality is that many of you are waiting on God to do something right now, but he hasn’t. In other words, you’ve been praying about something important, something you need, you’ve been trusting him, believing that God is going to answer that prayer, because you know that he can and yet he hasn’t. And the reality is, that all of us have experienced those times in different seasons of our lives where we are waiting, we know God could do something, because we’ve seen him do it in other people’s lives. But God hasn’t done what we think he should do, and so we’re stuck in this awkward season of waiting.

I don’t know what it might be for you, maybe you’re waiting for God to provide the right job, maybe it’s a financial challenge or a medical issue you’re struggling with? Maybe you’re waiting on God to do a miracle in a relationship that’s not quite what it should be? And so, you’re waiting and you’re waiting, you’re praying and you’re praying, because you believe God can do something about this, but he hasn’t done anything yet. And so, maybe you’re wondering why, why hasn’t anything changed, why isn’t God doing something?

Well, today, I want to show you a similar situation in John’s gospel. In fact, you may be familiar with Mary and Martha because you remember the story of how they opened their home to Jesus in Luke chapter ten. You may remember how Mary sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said, while Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made, but that text doesn’t say anything about their brother Lazarus. In fact, the text I want to read with you today from John chapter eleven tells us that Jesus and Lazarus were very close. In other words, they were buddies, good friends, and they would hang out together whenever Jesus came through their town on the way to Jerusalem.

You see, Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha, lived just a short distance from Jerusalem in a small town called Bethany and so Jesus would often stay at their house overnight. They would laugh and joke, carrying on together, hanging out whenever they could, but John chapter eleven begins telling us,

“Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha” (John 11:1).

And so, when Lazarus got sick Mary and Martha naturally assumed that if Jesus was healing everybody else, he would certainly do the same thing for them. So, verse three says,

“The sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick” (John 11:3).

Notice how close they were, they didn’t even have to say his name, they just said the one you love is sick. And so, they assumed if he was healing strangers that he would drop everything and come heal Lazarus. But we’re going to discover that God doesn’t always make sense.

Mary and Martha are waiting and watching but Jesus doesn’t show up. And so, the next day they figure he’s going to be here at any moment. You know, he will be here by lunchtime, it just took him a while, isn’t that him coming now? But it wasn’t Jesus, it was the mailman, and so another day goes by. Mary and Martha are certain he’s coming, we know he’s coming, we can’t believe he’s not here yet. The next day, they just know he’ll be there at any moment.

You know, they’re like, we believe in Jesus, we trust him, we know he’s coming, because we’re close. After all the years we’ve served him, going to church, taking him into our house, if there is anybody Jesus is going to come to, he’s going to come to us because whenever he needed us, we were always there for him. And maybe there are some of you who are waiting right now, you’re waiting and reminding yourself of all the reasons why Jesus should do something for you, and you’re expecting him to respond on the basis of your relationship. I want to encourage those of you that are waiting right now, you’re praying and believing God for something, just because he hasn’t answered your prayer yet, doesn’t mean that he’s not answering your prayer.

You may be in a season of waiting but I want to remind you that your waiting on God is not wasted time. Just because you don’t see anything, doesn’t mean he’s not doing something. In fact, let’s look at verse four, when Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, he 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" (John 11:4).

In other words, when he heard that Lazarus, his buddy, the one he loves was sick, he said I know what’s going on, everything’s under control, because there is a greater purpose for this sickness. In fact, he says, you’re going to see me glorified through this very thing that you have been asking me to take away. And so, God is working, he may not do what you want, when you want, but he’s going to do it. It may not be right now, because he has a different purpose, but surely, he will.

As the prophet Isaiah said, “Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear” (Isaiah 59:1).

It’s kind of like you might do with your kids; you know, you could give them whatever they asked, you could give it to them now, but you don’t because you want them to learn something first.

In the same way, we know that God hears, he is working, because the Bible says,

“The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them” (Psalms 34:17).

And what I mean is that the Lord hears your prayers, but it just may be that God wants to do something in you before he does something for you.

You may be praying today that God would take you from point A to point B, but he’s going to take you from point A, to maybe point C, D, and E, before he takes you to point B, because he’s going to do immeasurably more than all you ask or imagine.

Well, in John chapter 11, verse six says,

“When Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days” (John 11:6).

Jesus just hung out, he waited, he stayed where he was, and this is difficult to understand because it stands in stark contrast to everything that we’ve been taught about Jesus. In other words, Jesus didn’t stay there because he was too busy to go, he didn’t stay there because he was healing so many people, he didn’t stay there because something more important was happening, he just stayed there for two more days until Lazarus got worse.

It’s hard to understand why he would wait, but I can tell you from my own experience, during those waiting seasons God has done a lot of things in me before he has done anything for me. In other words, when I have been praying and trusting Jesus, I believe that…

“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (James 5:16).

And so, as I call on him, he is working in me and he teaches me patience as I wait on him. As I continue praying, he teaches me to press into him, to depend on him, and to walk by faith and not by sight. When I don’t see what I am praying for, he teaches me to trust that his ways are higher than my ways, and that he has a purpose that is so much greater. And so, even when I don’t understand, even when there is a delay, God is doing something.

Mary and Martha are getting anxious because so much time has gone by and Jesus hasn’t arrived. Lazarus has now gotten really sick and they’re expecting Jesus at any moment because that’s what he does, he is known for just showing up and healing the sick, the blind, and the lame. And so, Jesus just stops what he’s doing, he allows himself to be interrupted, like when he stopped a funeral possession and healed a young boy, or stopping to allow a woman to touch his garment and be healed, or pausing to heal a blind man who called out after him as he was passing by. But how is it that when his best friend is sick and calls for him that he doesn’t come? You know, Jesus waited, just hanging around, until Lazarus finally fights for his last breath and died.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up" (John 11:11).

And so, this doesn’t make sense, what do we do with this, because even Jesus disciples didn’t understand. They replied to Jesus,

"Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better” (John 11:12).

They thought he meant natural sleep, they thought that maybe Lazarus was doing better because he was resting. Jesus realizing that they didn’t understand him 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” (John 11:14-15).

And so, by the time Jesus finally gets there he has missed the funeral, missed the benediction, his body has been placed in the tomb, and Jesus doesn’t even make it for the graveside service. It’s over, the family has begun to disperse, they put all the food away, and finally Jesus shows up.

“On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days” (John 11:17).

The four days is significant because people in the first century had a superstition that for three days the spirit of a man would hover over the body. But by day four the spirit was gone, there was no hope of a miracle, and so Lazarus wasn’t almost dead, he wasn’t mostly dead, he was all the way dead, it’s game over.

And so, after four days, Jesus arrives in Bethany, the funeral was over, there were still some people gathered at the house eating casseroles. You know, they were still doing that stuff we do after the funeral, talking about the stuff Lazarus did, when someone knocks at the door and says that Jesus was coming. Now, remember, they have been waiting, hoping, and wishing that Jesus would come for days, and the Bible says,

“When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him” (John 11:20).

In other words, that’s a nice way of saying that Martha was going to give Jesus a piece of her mind. She was mad, and so in verse 21, you’ve got a picture this, Martha is marching down the path, one hand on her hip, the other hand with her finger out in Jesus’ face, and she said,

"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died” (John 11:21).

And so, she’s like, “I don’t even know why you’re coming now, because you should’ve done what I asked you to do, when I ask you to do it, but now it’s too late.”

In other words, she’s hurt, and so she’s like, “Where have you been? Why didn’t you come? I can’t believe you did this, after all I have done for you, we were so close, and you couldn’t even come to do this for us.” And so, she let Jesus have it, “If you had been here!”

This is where some of you are right now, you’ve been waiting on something, it’s not happening, and you are hurt. The financial situation has only gotten worse, that relationship has become more and more strained, you’re praying the best you can but nothing’s happening. And I love the reality of this text, because suddenly there is a glimmer of hope. It’s a reminder that if God always met your expectations when you asked, he would never have the opportunity to exceed them. “But,” says Martha,

"I know even now God will give you whatever you ask" (John 11:22).

Even now, and I love that, because that’s a place where I find myself living quite often. Just praying, “God, why didn’t you save the day, why didn’t you do it when you could have, I don’t understand, but even now I still believe you can. If you had been here, this wouldn’t have happened, but I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

Remember now, four days have passed, there is no hope for Lazarus, but watch what Jesus says to Martha in verse 23,

“Your brother will rise again” (John 11:23).

I love that because there is no hope in verse 21, but with one statement from Jesus everything can change. In just a moment, in verse 23, Jesus says, “Your brother will rise again” but Martha doesn’t get it. She answered,

“I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (John 11:24).

In other words, she believes that one day, the trumpet of God will sound, the believing dead will rise, and they will be caught up in heaven together with Jesus. That’s what she is saying, that’s the promise of Scripture, but Jesus says he’s working on something, he still working on this deal with Lazarus, actually working on a little illustration.

You see, she thought the resurrection was going to be an event, but Jesus informed her that the resurrection is more than an event, the resurrection is a person. He says,

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25-26).

In other words, death no longer has the final say, death is not the end of the game, because Jesus says whenever you put your faith in me, even though your physical body dies, you will never die. That’s what he told Martha, you can live with God forever in heaven, because I am the resurrection and the life.

"Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world" (John 11:27).

There is somebody here that is praying for something, there is something that you need, but the thing that you want is not as good as the thing that God is preparing for you. In other words, God wants to give you an upgrade. Mary and Martha called for Jesus expecting a healing, but Jesus waited because he was preparing to exceed their expectations, Jesus he was planning a resurrection.

And so, Martha goes back to the house, and called her sister to the side. She said in verse 28,

“The Teacher is here, and he is asking for you." When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him” (John 11:28-29).

And so, this is round two, they’re coming out of their corners, Jesus got double for his trouble, and I think right now either Mary or Martha could have strangled him out of frustration and anger. When Mary reached the place where Jesus was, she was angry, but when she saw him, she fell at his feet uncontrollably. She thought he didn’t care, she associated his unresponsiveness with a lack of concern, and so she thought if you really loved Lazarus, you would have come. She repeated Martha’s accusation,

“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died” (John 11:32).

In other words, “How can you say that you love me and not give me something that I really need? This isn’t about a new car or a new job, I’m just asking for my brother.”

When Jesus saw her weeping and the others, he was deeply moved in spirit.

“Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied” (John 11:33-34).

And so, she took Jesus to see where they laid the one whom he loved, the one whom he didn’t even get to say goodbye to, the one who died without hearing his voice, and it was at this point that Jesus fell to pieces. The text tells us in verse 35,

“Jesus wept” (John 11:35).

Here in this verse, we discover that Jesus hurts just like us, he has emotions just like us, he cries just like we do. This verse connects us to Jesus like no other, because in it we discover that Jesus is not too busy being God that he can’t stop and cry. In fact, this verse gives meaning to the command,

“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn” (Romans 12:15).

And so, it’s these two words, “Jesus wept,” that attempt to articulate the glory of a God who can humble himself, getting down on his knees, and cry with those who cry.

As I imagine this scene of Jesus weeping, tears running down his cheeks, I recognize in a deeper and more profound way that this is my kinsman redeemer. This is my great high priest who has gone through the heavens and who can be touched by my feelings, as the Scripture says,

“He’s able to sympathize with our weaknesses” (Hebrews 4:15).

And maybe you are like me, you knew that he was able to sympathize with our weaknesses, but I always thought I was crying by myself, you thought you were crying by yourself, and today I want you to know that you’re not crying by yourself. You have a God who comes down where you are, kneeling down and weeping with you.

As I imagine this scene at Lazarus’ tomb, this weeping Jesus, this wasn’t King Jesus that was crying, this was a glimpse of the man Christ Jesus.

“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped” (Philippians 2:6).

And so, we’re not seeing that Jesus who rules the heavens and the earth, who commands the angels, this isn’t even the prophet Jesus who stood on the Mount of Olives and cried out,

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem… how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings…” (Matthew 23:37).

No, this is Jesus of Nazareth, the man Christ Jesus, the suffering servant, the weeping priest who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. And I’ve never felt closer to him than I have as I meditated on this Scripture right here in verse 35. This text unveils a part of Jesus that is seldom seen, because this isn’t the Jesus that healed the sick, walked on water, and raised the dead. This is the Jesus who wept, and so this Scripture gives us permission, giving us the ability to be who he made us to be when we’re angry, tired, and frustrated.

Then some of them said,

“Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" (John 11:37).

And they didn’t understand the transitional nature of this narrative. This was a pivotal point in the gospel, a game changing moment in history, because what is about to happen is the catalyst that caused Caiaphas to unveil the plot that led Jesus to the cross. You see, it was the death of Lazarus that would set it in motion, setting the purpose of God alive in Christ, and so Lazarus literally paved the way and there was no turning back.

Lazarus died, but Jesus missed the funeral, he didn’t even make the benediction, he didn’t even show up for the graveside service. Now they rolled the stone in front of the tomb, the crowd has dissipated, the family has gone back home, and when Jesus saw where they laid him. When Jesus saw where they gave up, where their faith stopped believing, where they decided he wasn’t coming, he went to that spot and he wept.

“Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance” (John 11:38).

Jesus missed the funeral, but he didn’t want to say the benediction, he wanted them to take him back to the spot where they decided nothing else is going to happen. He wanted them to take him back to that place where they stopped believing that things could change. And so, they led Jesus to the tomb, he’s standing outside the tomb, and he says,

"Take away the stone." "But, Lord," said Martha, Lazarus’ sister, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days" (John 11:39).

And so, this is the worst-case scenario, worse than death itself, because now he’s taking the Band-Aid off. Jesus is picking the scab off the wound, he’s taking them back to that place where they gave up hope, and he says there is a stone you have to roll away.

Some of you need to know that there is a stone you have to roll away, because God won’t roll it away for you. In other words, he will roll his stone away, but you have to have the courage to roll your own stone away, to look that fear in the face, to confront that thing that has confined you. And so, Jesus said,

“Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" (John 11:40).

Jesus waited, Lazarus had been in the tomb four days, everybody agrees that he is dead, and the glory of God is about to show up. They took away the stone and Jesus lets us eavesdrop on a private conversation with his father.

“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" (John 11:41-42).

In other words, for the benefit of those who don’t believe, I want them to know what my word will do, I want them to know that this didn’t just happen, but this is the catalyst that is going to set my destiny in motion. This is going to push Caiaphas over the edge, this is going to cause my haters to come kill me, and so I’m going to say it loudly in front of everybody.

“When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" (John 11:43).

Now, we don’t know the exact sequence of what happened next, we don’t know what happened first, whether the congealed blood liquefied, whether the heart started to pump, but we do know that suddenly muscles started working under those bandages. The grave clothes began to move, the strips of linen stretched, and…

“The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face” (John 11:44).

God didn’t give them what they expected, he exceeded their expectations, because they wanted Jesus to heal the sick man, but he waited just long enough to resurrect a dead man. Lazarus came out and some of you need to recognize that God’s delays are not necessarily God’s denials. You may be in a season of waiting right now, but maybe God wants to do something in you before he does something for you. Just because you don’t see it yet, doesn’t mean that God isn’t moving the heavens and the earth to bring it about.

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