

When God

When God is Late

John 11:1-45

April 28, 2024

HDBC

There are all kinds of ways to put people into opposing categories. For example:
Grace people and law people.

Messy people and neat people.

People who love to plan and people who prefer being spontaneous.

Winter people and summer people.

People who love to be early and others who don't mind being late.

The arrive early people struggle to understand the late people.

The late people want the early people to relax and chill.

All of us are late sometimes. At times it is no big deal and at other times its critical. We've all heard the phrase ***better late than never***. That may not always be true. We tend to think early or on-time is always good, and ***late*** is always bad. More times than not, this is true. Some years ago I heard the statement, ***God is never late and seldom early***. There is a sense in which that is true.

But what if I told you there was a time when Jesus was late, and it was actually a good thing? Full-disclosure, He was not late, in terms of His plan, but from the perspective of his friends, He was extremely late.

Continuing this series called ***When God***. All of us go through seasons of life when it seems that **God doesn't come through**. In spite of our most fervent praying, God just does not respond as we think He should.

Sometime it seems that **God is silent**. That He is inattentive or uncaring.

Sometimes it seems He **delights in saying NO**. His default answer.

Sometimes it seems that **God has just forgotten to show up**.

You expected Him, believed in Him and trusted in Him, but you never heard Him.

The company has failed.

The cancer has returned

The foreclosure is going through.

The prodigal child has not yet come home.

Remind you of what this series is about. About the reality that **life is hard**. We've all heard our parents tell us that when complaining about something, but it really is true. There are **dark moments** when it seems that we are **hanging onto our faith by our fingertips**. Wondering if you really can trust God.

You need to know that other **people whom God loved very much felt the same way**. They also went through times like that. People like **John the Baptist** who was a cousin of Jesus. Jesus said in all of human history up to his time no one had ever been born who was greater than John. Yet, it seemed at a point in his life that God was just silent.

There was Paul. Planted churches all over the region. Suffered unbelievable persecution for the sake of Christ. Asked God for one thing. Just take away this physical thing that is hindering me as I serve you. **He had seen God do it for others**. Some who were not even committed to God. And God said NO.

Job, who experienced a season of deep suffering with no explanation why?

What we've learned in this series is that in spite of the fact that God often seems to be inattentive and uncooperative, He is indeed never is. The problem is not with God, but with our perspective. We never know everything about every situation. **We are always limited in our knowledge. That limitation skews our perspectives.**

There was a man named **Lazarus**. He and his 2 sisters were friends of Jesus. They lived in the small village of Bethany, which was just outside of Jerusalem. Jesus often stayed in their home when in that area.

Lazarus was sick and needed Jesus. But Jesus was late. So late that Lazarus died. Well, let me tell the story as we walk through the John 11 I'm going to break it down into 5 short sections.

1. The Sickness of Lazarus (1-3)

Lazarus was sick. **We live in an imperfect world** where people get sick. People lose jobs. Marriages break up. Car accidents happen. Tornadoes destroy homes. **It's our world** and it was the world in which Lazarus lived.

Sisters sent word to Jesus. About a day's walk away. Not that far. This is the message they sent to Jesus. *Lord, the one you love is sick.* How would you like to be known as *the one Jesus loves.* That would be awesome. They did not even have to say his name, yet He knew who they were talking about.

So these messengers find Jesus and deliver the message. Everything we know about Jesus up to this time would point to **one expected response.** He is going to drop what He is doing and go heal his friend.

2. **The Delay of Jesus (4-16)**

Rather than rushing to Lazarus, Jesus delays. He hesitates. He waits. *When he heard that Lazarus was sick he stayed for two more days.* (6)

What? This is not like Jesus. No one expected this response. So shocking that John offers a commentary. He knows that there are some twists in this story that could cause us to lose our minds. So he adds in verse 5. *Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.*

This is not happening to some unknown stranger. This is happening to three people whom Jesus loved. *Can you lay to rest the notion that when bad things happen to you it must be because God does not love you?*

So, Jesus allows this really bad thing happen to people whom He deeply loves because He wants to teach us something. Notice what he said to them.

First, (4) *this sickness will not end in death, but is for the glory of God.*

We don't think in those terms. Sickness is a bad thing. We never think of it is a good light. It is part of the fall. In Heaven there will be no sickness.

But, in this case, Jesus makes it clear that this sickness was for His glory. You must always keep in mind that your situation may be designed by God or allowed by God in order to demonstrate to you and others, His glory.

Second, *Let us go to Judea.* (7)

Two days later, he announces to them that they are going to Judea, where the village of Bethany was located.

The disciples reminded him that the last time He was there **the Jews tried to stone him.** (8) They were not too pleased with the new travel plans. They are absolutely confused. First, refuses to go to Judea at the cost of His friends life. Now, when it is too late, He has decided to go.

So, He explains. Note verse 9-11. What is He talking about? They were concerned about going to Judea because they were all going to get killed and He's talking about days and nights . . . **Let me offer a simple explanation.**

This is about opportunity. You get things done when there is light. At night it is dark and the darkness prevents you from getting things done. **Lazarus' sickness has provided a great opportunity.** I'm going to take advantage of it. Now is the time to show you something that you will need more than once over the course of your lifetime. **So, buckle up and get ready to learn!**

Jesus then made what appears to be one of the coldest, harshest statements found in Scripture. Look at 14-15. **Lazarus is dead. And for your sakes I am glad that I was not there.** Wow, what a statement. He is dead and I am glad that I was not there. WHAT? **Why was he glad?**

Because he was about to teach a lesson that was so important that it was worth allowing all that grief to do so. This is so important for you to learn that I am willing to wait until my friend dies. Wow. Shocking.

He let Mary and Martha care for their brother until he died. He allowed them to experience the grief of watching their brother die. All the while, wondering where Jesus was. Why he did not come. And he stated that he was glad.

Why? So that you may believe . . .

Jesus was willing to allow Lazarus to die so that He might lead his disciples and ultimately us, into a strong enough faith that we could weather all the storms that would ultimately come our way. It was that important.

There is a principle here that you need to catch. *When God allows something bad happen, He plans to use it for a greater good!* That greater good is for our good. . .

That you may believe. Death is one of life's greatest tragedies. Jesus is about to teach them and us that even when we go through life's darkest experiences, we do not have to lose our faith. **We can still believe in God** even when we hurt, even when we don't understand, even when it is unfair.

Fast-forward. They have traveled to Judea and gotten close to Bethany. Jesus has a conversation first with Martha and then with Mary.

3. **The Frustration of Martha and Mary (17-32)**

Think about Mary and Martha. They had been tending to Lazarus. Wiping sweat from his brow. Holding his hand. Singing songs to him. And all the while saying things like ***don't worry . . . we sent for Jesus. He's coming. Just hang on. Jesus is coming. It's going to be fine.***

And they waited and they waited. **People gathered around not to watch Lazarus die but to watch Lazarus be healed.** Because that's what Jesus did. Anticipation grew. They knew how far away Jesus was. They knew he should have been right behind the messengers who delivered the message.

To their shock, he dies. What? Jesus was informed. He could heal. He loved them. But He never made it. **So, they applied the burial ointments** and wrapped his body in burial cloth and put him in a tomb. They must have been numb with shock. It was the last thing they expected. **They mourned.**

Martha learned that Jesus was near, so she went to meet him. Mary stayed home. Why do you think Mary stayed at home? What is she feeling? At best she is **confused and disappointed** and at worst **she is mad**. She is ticked off at Jesus. Angry. Emotions are really and not always controllable.

When Martha found Jesus she said what she & Mary were both thinking. (21) ***If you had been here, Lazarus would not have died.*** Let me paraphrase . . . ***This is your fault.*** You could have prevented this . . . **But you were late.**

You have to love Martha's faith. I still believe in you, but not to the point of resurrection. I know there is a future resurrection, but what about here and now?

Note vs 25-26. *I am the resurrection and the life. Do you believe this?*

This is the same question that He asks all of us.

Even when I did not show up when you wanted, do you believe.

Even though I did not prevent a tragedy, do you believe?

Even though I allowed you to go through excruciating pain, do you believe?

Yes, Lord, I believe. Then she runs to get Mary. You have to go see Jesus. I know you are upset. I know you are frustrated. But, you have to see Jesus.

So, she runs to Jesus and essentially says the same thing. It's your fault. At that point the story takes another interesting turn. We see an aspect of Jesus that up to this point seems to have been absent. **His Compassion.**

4. **The Compassion of Jesus (33-36)**

When he saw her pain, her weeping, he asked where the tomb was. And on the way to the tomb **John records something for us that is astounding.**

Jesus wept. What a marvelous picture of God's ability and willingness to enter into our pain. To enter into our suffering. To join with us in our grief. I'm not so distant that I cannot understand. It's as if God leans into your world and whispers ***I knew what you are feeling. I'm feeling it with you.***

5. **The Resurrection of Lazarus (37-45)**

Jesus came to the tomb and ordered them to take away the stone. They did not see this coming. **Martha then spoke of the stench** that would be in the tomb. He has been in the tomb four days. Maybe she was **twisting the knife a little bit**. Not only did you not show up in time to save him from death, but you didn't even show up right for the burial. **Man, are you late!**

Listen to what Jesus said. It's the same thing that He says to you and me.

(40) *Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?*

If you trust me you will see the glory of God. This whole thing is about the glory of God. If you continue to believe in me **you will catch a glimpse of God's glory** even in the middle of your darkest experience. Even when it hurts. Even when it is confusing. Even when it seems that I am late.

Jesus prayed and called for Lazarus.

As Lazarus came out he instructed them to take off the grave clothes. Do you know why? Because no one was moving toward Lazarus. As a matter of fact, you can be almost certain that they had each taken at least one step backwards. **No one saw that coming . . . except Jesus**

And that is the point. God is never late. He only seems late to us. He always has a plan, even when it seems to us that He is late. **Note what John adds in verse 45.** Many of the Jews who came to Mary and saw what he had done **believed in Him.** Of course they did! This was big time. Anyone can believe after the miracle!

The point Jesus wants us to learn is this.

WE CAN BELIEVE BEFORE THE MIRACLE.

And when we do, we will **catch a glimpse of His glory!**