

## John Ch 11:1-10

Tragic times for godly people

I would like to be able to stand here and tell you that as a believer in Jesus Christ tragic times will never enter your life, that the closer you get *to* Him and the more time you spend *with* Him, the more insulated from afflictions you'll become. and I know that there are those who purport that godliness is just that, an insurance policy against suffering, and sickness, trials, tribulations, and tragedies. But Ch 11 of the gospel of John begs to differ with that erroneous doctrinal position, and if I were to summarize this ch with any one vs of the bible, I just can't think of a better one off the top of my mind other than the one that's been surfacing so much lately in our times together. and We find it there in Ps 34:19, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all." Here in Ch 11 we find a little family living in Bethany, the parents presumably dead, 2 sisters and a brother living together in this little town outside of Jerusalem. and These 3 were long time followers of Jesus, they had opened up their hearts to Him, and consequently whenever He was in town they would open up their homes for Him.

He would frequently stay with Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus. But we need to make the overall observation regarding this event that even though these people were close to Jesus, and spent time with Jesus, were consistently physically following Jesus, that it didn't keep them from tragic times. It didn't mean that Jesus didn't appreciate their hospitality, or how they availed themselves to Him, but as we go through life, wicked or righteous tragic times visit us all, the difference is where do you turn in times of tragedy, in whom do you place your hope when trials visit your life?

This family turned to Jesus, wise move, in Him there is hope, there's an assured expectation, and a guaranteed certainty, stability in otherwise shaky times. For everyone else the bible says that they are with out Christ, having no hope being with out God in the world; what a terrifying position to be in, being with out hope and with out God in the world.

I want to break this ch down in 4 basic little sub themes that seem to be woven through this ch, topics that sort of surface as we brush over it. If you want to jot them down #1 Vs 1-6 the topic that sort of comes into focus is, "A Man." and Of course this whole Ch revolves to some degree around this man, (Lazarus by name) who has fallen sick and his sisters appeal to the Lord on his behalf, and so this is the event that serves to give us Ch 11 of John's gospel. #2 Vs 7-37 we see, "A Misunderstanding" and really I use that phrase for the sake of continuity, but it would be more accurate to say that we see in these vs a *series* of misunderstandings.

Often times we find that the methods of the Lord's ministry brought about misunderstanding to the people around Him, and the bible is clear that God's not the author of confusion. So we understand that the Lord wasn't doing anything, or authoring anything confusing for them, He was simply operating outside the sphere of their present perspective, as soon as they were in line with what He was doing it all made perfect sense.

It's the same way for you and me, we think we have a line on the way the Lord should work something out in our lives, but when it seems to take a different direction than what *we* perceive to be the best, we find it difficult to understand. Why is the Lord going this direction, or taking that avenue? But in the end, through hindsight once we realize the Lord's objective, or fall in line with what the Lord is doing it all comes together and becomes real clear. We have difficulty anytime something doesn't go our way, but God's not bound to our ways, we're bound to His. and When He's doing something we don't understand in our lives, He's not the one out of sync, we are, and we need to get in line with what He's doing rather than trying to line Him in with what we think needs done, or how it needs handled.

3<sup>rdly</sup> We have in vs 38-44, "A Miracle" as the Lord brings Lazarus out of death into life. and Finally #4 Vs 45-57, "A Mandate" as the plot unfolds through the mouth of the high priest that Jesus should die for the people, and the mandate is given, and the plan is publicly formed to put Jesus to death.

Vs1

This is the same Mary in Martha found in Luke's gospel ch 10 which gives us that renowned account of Jesus entering the house of Martha and Mary (and apparently Martha was the older of the two, the keeper of the house, the authority so to speak of the home) and so Martha was all distracted by much serving. She was trying to get the meal prepared, keep the house in order, keep everyone's ice-tea filled, and Mary just sat there at the feet of Jesus, soaking in His *Word*, basking in His *presence*. and Martha as you know got upset with Mary, and said, "Lord, don't you care that my sister is making me cater this dinner alone, make her get up and help me."

The Lord told Martha, "Look, you've got a lot of things on your mind right now, and your worried about it all, but one thing is needed and Mary has chosen the better part, and it won't be taken from her." and It's not that He was *rebuking* her service, but He *reminding* her of the priority of taking the time to *rest* at His feet, *receive* of His Word, and to *remain* in His presence.

How easy it is to get *distracted* by much serving, and *disoriented* and worried about many things, but those things are *dispelled* at the feet of Jesus, be careful to maintain that priority of spending time at the feet of Jesus, *soaking* in His Word, and *staying* in His presence, and out of that overflow we *serve* His people. So as to where Martha kept the house, apparently Mary captured the home town, and I don't know if it was her vibrant personality, or her humble demeanor, or the way she ministered and was committed to the Lord, but there was apparently something about Mary that when you thought of Bethany, the connection was made, "Oh that's Mary's town." I'm sure she was an incredible lady who it will be a joy to one-day meet.

John draws our attention to another renowned event that took place in Mary's life to make sure that there's no confusion as to which Mary he's in reference to (because there are at least 4 different Mary's mentioned in the gospel records). and We'll see it specifically in Ch 12, but it was a widely known event that John could reference even in anticipation of his record of it and people would still know who he was talking about.

### Vs2-3

Now at the end of Ch 10 we were informed that Jesus had retreated to the place where John was baptizing at 1<sup>st</sup> which places Him about 20 miles from this scene here. and There's a # of things that we want to take note of here in this vs #1 we see the proper perspective on how to handle a tragedy, they immediately began to intercede, and bring this situation to the attention of Jesus. They weren't praying for themselves in this instance but they were carrying another's burden before the Lord, "Lord, behold, he whom you love is sick." and I believe that the way that you and I handle tragedy when it strikes is critical, we can freak out, lose control, fall into a frantic panic, or we can bring the situation to the Lord's attention believing that *He's* in control, even when the situation is out of *our* control.

These sisters did just that, they sent a messenger to Jesus, he no doubt ran to Jesus covering that 20 miles in one day. Obviously it would normally be a 2 day journey, about 10 miles a day by foot, but I'm sure this man ran most the distance and carried the news to Jesus immediately. #2 Not only do we see what to do (bring our situation to Jesus) but we see how to do it, notice how it was that they addressed the Lord. They said, "Lord, the one whom *You love* is sick." Not, "The one who *loves You* is sick." Now I'm certain that Lazarus did love Jesus, just as you love Jesus, just as I love Jesus, but I think we err to try and get Jesus to respond to us based upon our love for Him. Why? Because my love is feeble, and at times very fickle.

But His love is fixed, His love is firm, non-wavering and stable, so how much better to emulate the approach of those who were close to Jesus, and spent so much time with Jesus, than to try and butter the Lord up because of how sweet I am, or how I somehow merit His attention because of how much I love Him. Better to approach the Lord on the basis of His love for me, because today I love the Lord, but when I'm faced with uncertainty, I might be a little upset with the Lord. But the Lord's love doesn't waver like that, when I fail Him, or say something I shouldn't, His love is fixed *upon* m, refuses to move *from* me. So, "Lord, because of *Your* great love, God because *Your* mercies fail not, because great is *Your* compassion..." God help us to quit seeking to persuade Him by any sort of quality that we believe is in us, but rather we just acknowledge the great goodness of our God and His love for us.

3<sup>rdly</sup> I'd have you realize this word, "Love" here in vs 3 isn't the word "Agape" as one may expect. That perfect love of God that just gives because that's the type of love it is, seeking nothing in return, but just looking to bless, and be a blessing to your life. They're not saying, "Lord the one whom you agape is sick." This word translated love is the Greek word, "Phileo" which as you know is the word that defines the affection of a friend, it's a brotherly kind of love, "Philadelphia," the city of brotherly love. "Lord the one whom You have affection for is sick," "The one whom You've befriended is sick." and You guys this is important because so there are times when we can slip into that mentality of, "I know that the Lord loves me, He has to, God is love so therefore He loves me, but does the Lord really like me, am I truly His friend?" and John 11:3 rings out a resounding, "Yes." Understand today that the Lord doesn't just love you because He's stuck with you, He chose you, called you to Himself; considers you His friend. Jesus said, *"No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends,"* John 15:15

Finally #4 we notice that Mary and Martha didn't try to instruct the Lord on what to do, they just brought the situation before the Lord, and left the way things proceeded from there up to Him. and If you're anything like me you err on this point regularly, a situation comes up, and I want to begin to instruct the Lord on how to handle it, "Lord, just do this, or work it out like that." The prophet asked the rhetorical question, *"Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, Or as His counselor has taught Him? With whom did He take counsel, and who instructed Him, And taught Him in the path of justice? Who taught Him knowledge, And showed Him the way of understanding?"* Isa 40:13-14 and Obviously the point is that no one can teach the Lord, or direct His Spirit, or show Him the way of understanding, but it's not for a lack of trying. We've all sought to show the Lord the way of understanding, or give Him a bit of insight that perhaps He didn't see or hadn't yet gleaned, that will better persuade Him towards our reasoning, and direction. But these ladies, they weren't commanding the Lord, they were communicating with the Lord, how much better to commune with the Lord than to make commands of the Lord.

Often times you find the "Word Faith" community teaching how we're to command the Lord to do this, and in faith demand the Lord to do that. (Top 10 answers on the board, survey says? X, Wrong answer.) How much better to commune with the Lord, than to make commands of the Lord. We need to come to the place where we really believe that God is more concerned for us and our situation than we are, and that He is able to tend to the situation in a manner that's much better for us than what we may be able to see or understand. and So let your requests be made known to God, but let's make sure that that's what they are, *requests*, not *requirements*.

Vs4

This is the message that Jesus sends back. and He didn't say that Lazarus wouldn't die, but that the ultimate resolve of the situation wouldn't be his death. But rather it would resolve in the glory of God, and in such a way that the Son of God (again referring to Himself) would be glorified.

Now the interesting thing about this is that by the time the messenger carried the message back, Lazarus would've been already dead. Assuming that the messenger got the news to Jesus in the evening, Lazarus either died that night, or early the next morning before the messenger got the news back, because Jesus delays for 2 days, and at a normal pace (trusting that with a group of at least 12 they weren't all jogging) it was a 2 day journey to Bethany. and When Jesus got there Lazarus had been dead for 4 days.

So can you imagine the things going through Mary and Martha's head, when they heard this? "Not unto death? He's dead! This is for the glory of God?" What a hardcore lesson, I can't say that I envy them in this lesson here at all, Jesus is preparing His disciples, and these people for His departure, but the work needs to carry on, and if their faith is weak, how can the work be strong? and The challenge here is to place your trust in the word of God regardless of circumstantial evidence, it's a walk by faith not by sight kind of a lesson here. No matter how discouraging our circumstances may appear, we can always rest on the sure foundation of the Word of God. and The Word of God was, "This sickness is not unto death."

This is not an easy lesson for them by any means. and It's one that was initially failed, and understandably so, I'm staring at a dead body, and You're saying it's not unto death. and I'm sure they're thinking thoughts like, "Why would He let Lazarus go through such sickness if He truly loved him?" Or, "We know that He can just speak the word, and even from a distance (like with the nobleman's son of ch 4) Lazarus could've been healed." As I mentioned in the introduction this was a family that the gospel records make very clear was near and dear to Jesus, He loved them dearly, and yet His actions seem to contradict His love.

Ever feel that way? Lord if You truly love me, than why \_\_? and We don't always know, now obviously there are things we can glean in and from tragic times, but we don't always know why? God doesn't always explain why, but God help us not to question His love based upon circumstantial conditions. The bible doesn't say that God demonstrated His love by promising you a primrose and pampered life if you follow Him. The bible says, "*God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" Rom 5:8 The love of God isn't measured in circumstantial conditions, but rather it's measured in the cross of Christ. Jesus said, "*Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.*" John 15:13 and So let's remember that the greatness of the measure of God's love is in the work of the cross, not my life's conditions. But God will often utilize our conditions, to condition us that we might be stretched, that we might be challenged, and He'll use our conditions as a catalyst for our faith, and to bring us back to that place of utter dependence upon Him.

Vs5-6

Now this blows our minds, you would think it would say that because He loved them, He immediately dropped everything and ran to them, but it's His love for them that constrains Him to stay seemingly at a distance for a couple of more days. God's love is not a *pampering* love, it's a *perfecting* love. and I like the balance that vs 5 brings into the Mary and Martha relationship, so often Martha seems to get a bad rap. The busy one, the distracted one, the otherwise compulsive one, while Mary seems to be the more mature, meditative one who seems to choose the better part. But here the Holy Spirit makes it clear, Jesus loved Martha and (oh yeah) her sister to and Lazarus, so kind of a neat balance.

But here's where it gets tricky, because He loved them He stayed seemingly distant *from* them. Sometimes it's the love of God that allows pain into our lives, and again the question comes up, is it ok for Christians to be sick? Is it a sign of weak faith, or perhaps being out of the will of God?

I suppose you should talk to Lazarus about that, it seems clear to me that this account demonstrates that God allows sickness even into the most beloved of His followers (humanly speaking), vs 5 is careful to point out to us how the Lord loved this family. The Lord loved Lazarus, cared for Lazarus, was concerned for Lazarus, yet Lazarus fell sick, he's even going to die, but that's no sign of his lack of faith or the Lord's lack of love, it's simple fact of life, tragedy visits the lives of godly people. The bible says, "*People know neither love nor hatred by anything they see before them. All things come alike to all.*" Eccl 9:1-2 What does that mean? It means that our circumstances around us don't in any way dictate or demonstrate the love of God or the lack thereof, the love of God is demonstrated through the cross (as we said a minute ago).

But again God will use those circumstances to draw us near to Him, these guys didn't petition Jesus until there was something driving them to that point. But God wants us to be in that place continually of being *before* Him, waiting *upon* Him, and drawing near *to* Him. F.B. Meyer makes the comment, "How soon does pain drive us to the Saviour! Whilst Lazarus was in health, no messenger hastened bring the Saviour to Bethany. But when death hovered over the little group, they summoned Him with all speed. This is an illustration of how pain, like surge of the ocean, lifts us up and flings us down at the feet of the Saviour." and So one aspect of that perfecting love of God allows pain into our lives, so that we might be brought near to Him, reminded to commune with Him, and of our need for Him.

But something else we need to see is that sometimes the love of God will delay in a situation, but *delays* aren't *denials*. Jesus saw how this situation was fashioned in such a way so as to strengthen their faith, and glorify the Father. and So sometimes the seeming delay is in order to bring about a stronger faith on your behalf, and a greater glory on God's behalf. I'm certain there's all kinds of questions in their minds right now, but in retrospect none of them would have it any different, what an incredible testimony to the glory and faithfulness of God, and how we can trust Him against all odds.

Even in what seems to be impossible situations, and how there faith was elevated to a place that it would've been impossible to be apart from things happening just like they did. God has a perfect plan for your life, and sometimes pain is apart of it, and He'll use it to increase your faith, and demonstrate His faithfulness, that He might uses you to His glory in even greater ways.

Vs7-10

Or to understand this another way, "Boys I'm walking in the light of the Father's will for My life, and as long as I do that, no harm will befall Me until such time as He has ordained." It's safer to be in a battlefield in the middle of God's will than in a bomb shelter during peacetime outside of God's will. and That's what Jesus is saying here, He's recognizing that span of time that's been allotted to Him to be busy about the Father's will, and how important it is to be sensitive to the Father's promptings during that season, or span of time. You do what you want to do, you'll be in the dark, and you're just asking for problems, but if you're busy about the Lord's will for you, then you're under the divine protection policy, He'll take care of your life, and if He allows tragedy, then somewhere in it is a plan for the building of your faith, and the glorifying of Himself.

Will you always have the privilege of seeing how it works out on this side of Heaven? No, but it's what the bible teaches, and because we walk by faith and not by sight we believe it, regardless of what circumstances may befall me. It's a difficult lesson I know, but let's remember when tragic times come to you godly people, bring it before Jesus, place your trust in Him, don't command Him, just commune with Him, and don't doubt the love of God because of circumstantial conditions. God loves you, delays aren't denials, it could be a situation that's fashioned in just such a way that there's opportunity for God to be glorified, and your faith to become greater, and in the end you'll never regret allowing God to work His perfect will into your life, you'll regret fighting against it, but never submitting to it.

If God is calling out to you today to surrender your life to Him, you need to know that it's His will that you should never perish but that you should have eternal life through Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of your sins through Him, believe me you'll regret each moment that you fight against it, but never for a moment will you regret surrendering to His will for you. God demonstrated His love for you at the cross, and you can leave here a new creation in Christ, all the things you ever done passing away and all things in your life being made brand new, but only in Christ.