

JESUS - “Facing The Death Of Someone You Love”



1. **(Background)** This is an extremely “emotional” passage of Scripture. Everyone, including Jesus, expresses deep and public emotion. For those of us who would prefer more of a “Dan Rather” Jesus—relatively unaffected by tragedy—this narrative explodes like a bomb. Although there is no evidence of expressions of emotion (especially from the disciples at *any time*) prior to their arrival in Bethany, we must assume that Jesus was struggling with this whole incident from the beginning.

The first sign of emotion is with Martha. She breaks Jewish tradition and leaves the house (see article on “Sitting Shiva”) to confront Jesus. We have to remind ourselves that not only did Jesus *not* come when she sent for him, He also “missed the funeral.” Martha exhibits frustration with Jesus in the midst of our grief over losing her brother. That is clear in her brief exchange with Him in vv 17-27. We need to interpret her statement, “*I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.*” as a statement of frustration. In effect, she’s saying to Jesus, “*I don’t want a theology lesson, I want my brother! And if you had been here, we wouldn’t be having this conversation.*” Martha understood resurrection in the standard Jewish way: it inaugurated the “time to come” and it occurred at the end of history. Jesus’ comment, “*I AM the resurrection...*” was radical.

The emotional intensity of this story increases when Mary too gets up from sitting shiva, and goes to the place where Martha had met Jesus. There are *seven* references to strong emotion in eight verses. Four times “weeping” is mentioned. Three of them in reference to Mary and the mourners, and once in reference to Jesus. There are also three additional references to Jesus exhibiting very strong emotions. The Greek in these verses is significant:

“weep(ing)” - vv 31,33; the word here is *klaiō*, which means to wail loudly; and the force of the verb is that this was ongoing.

“wept” - vs 35; this reference to Jesus uses a different word, *dakruō*, which means to cry softly, like a child, and the force of the verb is simply to alert us to the fact that this happened, without any indication of how long. There is a difference in the type of sorrow in the heart of Jesus, I think. While his grief might not *appear* to have the intensity of the women, it is very possible that it is actually *more* intense because it is personal and private rather than public.

“deeply moved” - vv 33, 38; The Greek is *embrimaomai*. this is a very strong word; it can mean “to snort like a horse,” and carries with it the idea of sternness, anger, or indignation. We need to have a portrait of Jesus being infuriated with this situation, but *not* because of their grief. Rather, Jesus appears to be angry at death itself.

“greatly troubled” - vs 33; this is an *internal agitation*. The Greek word, *tarassō*, can mean “*to cause one inward commotion, take away his calmness of mind, disturb his equanimity; to disquiet, make restless*”; we need to have a picture of a very “worked up” Jesus, nearly trembling with anger, quietly weeping, and having to sense of shalom in his soul. All of this is a result *not* of Lazarus’ death (He was responsible for it!), but the *impact* of his death on those Jesus loved.

2. **(Q2c)** Jesus doesn’t chide them for their grief by simply focusing on the truth of the resurrection. And, he doesn’t merely “weep with those who weep” in a vacuum either. We have a beautiful demonstration of “grief with hope” in this narrative. Also, you could build a case for Jesus dealing with Martha and Mary differently. Martha gets the heavy theology lessons on the outskirts of town and at the tomb, Mary gets the heavy empathy (although Martha got that too; she was present). There is no “cook-book” approach to dealing with our own grief or that of those we love. But, the larger principle is that for the believer, grief *must* be blended with hope. And hope can only come from Truth, not mere “resolve.” If there is no resurrection, we have no hope. That is Paul’s argument in 1 Corinthians 15:

“Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” — 1 Corinthians 15:12-20

3. **(Q6)** Grief has to do with *loss*—my own and any others who have been “left behind.” The presence of grief simultaneously validates *both* the reality and depth of human relationships, and the unnaturalness of death. Hope has to do with reaffirming (or challenging) everything the survivors believe about life. It serves as a sort of “theology exam.” This is most likely what the writer of Ecclesiastes meant when he said:

“It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of face the heart is made glad. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.” — Ecclesiastes 7:2-4



“Stumbling Stones”

1. **(Background)** Perhaps nothing demonstrates what we *truly* believe about death than how we respond when it invades our lives. Our “theology” in the most real sense, is exposed. We are faced with what we understand death to be, why we believe it happens, and whether or not we see it as a “friend” for those whose eternal destiny is secure. This is *not* a question of grief itself, but the nature and cause of our grief. Do we see death as the final “enemy” and obstacle between us and seeing God face to face, or do we see death as the “enemy” because of what it takes *from* us?

As difficult as it is to say, it must be admitted that we have “bought” the idea that people (especially Christians) are “entitled” to a relatively pain-free, 70-80 year life. Our anger and frustration with God is proportional to how much of that “entitlement” is taken from us or those we love (i.e. lots of pain, and/or loss of years) a child who suffers and then dies is the worst thing to face under this theology. Seeing the error of this theology will help us grieve genuinely and intensely, without resentment or anger towards God.

2. **(2c)** Jesus’ response emotionally must *not* be separated from his teaching here. It’s crucial that we keep these together. You have deep, deep teaching on the resurrection, the nature of Jesus and his work, as well as a riveting and real public expression of sorrow, empathy, and loss. Our temptation is to want the second without the first. Jesus shows us *how* to grieve over the death of someone we love, but his also shows us how to hope in the same circumstance. The resurrection is the “hope in which we were saved” according to Paul in Romans 8:23-25.



“Going Deeper”

Article on “Sitting Shiva”: <http://www.aish.com/jl/l/48958936.html>

1. **(Q1)** How is death actually the best and final form of “healing” for those who are suffering, from the viewpoint of a Christian?
2. **(Q2)** Is our grief over the death of someone we love related to what’s happened to them, or to us?
3. **(Q6)** How is death really a “theology exam” for those of us left behind?
4. **(Q8)** Have a few group members share their answers to this question.

5. **(Q9)** How could the death of an unbelieving friend actually serve to create a burden for the other unbelievers in my life?