

# “Lord, If You Had Been Here”

John 11:17-37

by Leon Barnes

No family had been closer and more attuned to Jesus' teaching or personal needs than the family of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. They had seen Jesus heal the sick. They sincerely believed Him to be the Messiah. Thus, when Lazarus became seriously ill, they were confident Jesus would be there to heal him before he died. The message had gone out, but Jesus did not come. They probably sat beside Lazarus' bed, watching the life ooze from his body, and all the while praying with fervor for Jesus to arrive.

When Jesus had not intervened and Lazarus died, the feelings of sadness probably quickly became mixed with doubts and perhaps a degree of anger. Deep inside they may have wanted to cry out, "Where is God in all this?" Loneliness invaded their hearts as the presence of the Lord was completely absent, they thought. When Jesus arrived, Lazarus had been dead for four days. The funeral was past. The two sisters were trying to figure out where to go from this point. They might have already been saying, "What will we do with his clothes? What about our future?"

## I. THE STATEMENT

Martha came out to meet Jesus first. She was an impulsive lady. When hearing Jesus was there she did not take time to tell Mary; she just went to meet Him. Her first words were, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died" (11:21). From Martha those words may well have carried a sting. Her feelings were deep and she poured them out. But somehow deep in her heart hope still breathed. Her second statement was, "Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You" (11:22). Jesus declared, "Your brother will rise again" (11:23). Martha's thoughts went naturally to the resurrection on "the last day" (11:24). But Jesus answered, "I am

the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. . . ." (11:25, 26). Jesus then asked Martha of her faith: "Do you believe this?" She responded by declaring her faith in His Messiahship (11:27).

Next, Mary came. Martha had gone back and whispered, "The Teacher is here, and is calling for you" (11:28). Mary hastily went to meet Jesus. When she met Him, she "fell at His feet, saying to Him, 'Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.'" Probably, this was a different attitude from Martha's, even though she spoke the same words. She was always at Jesus' feet (cf. Luke 10:38-42). Her cry was filled with pain and submission to the reality of the loss to a greater degree than Martha's.

## II. THE MEANING

The statement, "Lord, if You had been here, . . ." illustrates the feelings of our own minds when things happen we cannot comprehend. As doubt overwhelms us we tend to question God's presence, power, or concern. "Why me?" often is our cry. "After all, our family loves Jesus. Why us?" we ask.

They used healthy concepts when they poured out their hearts to Jesus Himself. They probably had said the same to each other before. It is always good to talk openly to God. They needed to learn, as do we, that God's presence does not mean that He will always do what we want or expect. Godliness does not exempt us from pain and death. Second Corinthians and 1 Peter teach us this truth. Godliness does offer us a different perspective.

## III. THE REACTION

Jesus' reaction to the sisters is in verse 23:

"Your brother shall rise again." We do not know if Jesus had in mind here the temporary resuscitation that would momentarily take place or the final raising from the dead. But we must never view death for long without seeking the resurrection. It is too easy for our view to become distorted. This resurrection is true of all (1 Corinthians 15:20-26). Even the dead live on (11:25, 26). "Shall live" refers not only to the resurrection but also to the life of the spirit between death and resurrection (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:1-9).

Next, notice that "He was deeply moved in spirit, and was troubled" (11:33). The word here translated "deeply moved" is the same word used in Matthew 9:30 and Mark 1:43. In those

verses, it is translated "to sternly warn." It means "to be very angry, to be moved with indignation" (Mark 14:5). He was "troubled" or agitated. To trouble means to cause an inward commotion, disturb, make restless. Probably the idea is that Jesus, seeing the pain and heartaches brought on by sin's result in death, was angered and upset but also sympathetic to their hurts.

Jesus "wept" (11:35). This is in contrast to their loud cries of wailing. Tears ran down His cheeks in a quiet response.

### **CONCLUSION**

Jesus cares! He helps! He is there even when at times we seem forsaken. Stay with Jesus. He is the help in your pain.

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