

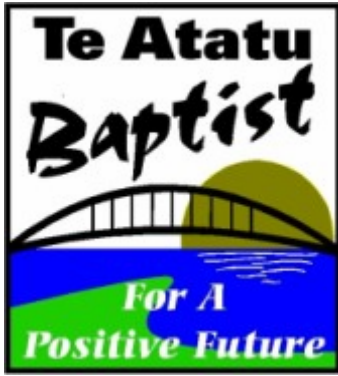
With wings *of an eagle*

Part 9 of 10

Jesus

Facing the death of someone you love





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Please note: Due to the sensitive topic of this Bible workshop – it is recommended *only* for adults.

Death is the final frontier to face humanity.

Slide # 02

In fact, it's been said that the death rate for humanity – is one per person!

We all have to embrace its reality at some point in our lives.

Sometimes we challenge its power without fear or reprisal, and other times we tremble as its shadow approaches.

Perhaps it is the *uncertainty* of what comes after death that is so unnerving.

For most people today, death is a dark corridor into the unknown, a thief to all that is dear in this life.

But what about the death of a child of God?

Shouldn't our perspective and reaction to death be *different* than those who have *no* hope?

You see, the resurrection of Jesus Christ in history provides us with an assurance that death is *not* the end, but merely a doorway into eternity.

So – Christians need *not* fear death.

But – if we were to be real, we'd have to admit – that sometimes it's really difficult to know *how* to react, especially when we face the death of someone we love – a spouse, child, parent or friend.

And it is important to ask – what is the *Biblical* way to react to such a tragedy?

Fortunately for us, we can observe Jesus as He faced the death of a loved one.

His response is as relevant today as it was in the dusty Palestinian countryside over 2000 years ago.

Slide # 03 - Let's turn in our Bibles to John chapter 11 verse 1.

1 ¶ Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.

3 So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."

5 Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

6 Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.

11 After this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."

12 His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better."

13 Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

14 So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead,

15 and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

17 ¶ On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. (It is important to note that Ancient Near Eastern

superstition believed the spirit of a person stayed close by the deceased for three days, and then left for good. In this case, meaning that Lazarus was *really* dead!)

18 Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem,

19 and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.

20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

21 "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

32 When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

33 ¶ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.

34 "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied.

35 Jesus wept.

36 Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

38 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance.

39 "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odour, for he has been there four days."

40 Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"

41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me.

42 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."

43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"

44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

45 ¶ Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him.

I have walked the journey of death with many people over my life time as a Christian.

I have buried friends and loved ones.

I have also intently watched *others* as they journey through the valley of the shadow of death.

And to be honest, the reaction many of them had, was the same as Mary and Martha – that if only Jesus had been there, their loved one *wouldn't* have died – and therefore since their loved one had died, that Jesus must *not* have been in the journey.

I have personally watched grieving children, orphaned by the death of their parents – try to open the casket and raise their mother from the dead at her funeral – convinced that God was somehow *testing* their faith – and He was going to bring about a mighty revival by resurrecting her *at the funeral service*.

I have watch other Christians fasting and refusing to eat again until God honoured His word and healed their loved one from terminal sickness.

I have sat with a dear friend and been refused from being allowed to mourn or care for him in his dying days, because of his 'claiming his healing' and refusing to accept his impending death.

Debbie and I sit and listen to stories of children, now adults, traumatized by the church and toxic Christianity – that refused to allow them to grieve and prepare for the death of a loved one – only to be more traumatized by the confusion that resulted once reality set in.

What I have observed, is that at times of immense grief and impending death – people, especially *Christians* – sometimes confuse faith with a *denial to accept reality*.

With all the tenderness and compassion I can evoke – and with the awareness that I have personally faced much pain in life, and still live with suffering – that sometimes, just *sometimes* – a person's utter belief in God delivering, healing or rescuing them from a horrible situation – is actually just a *denial of reality*, and an *inability* to accept God's comfort and peace in the *midst* of the tragedy.

I have come to fully believe in Philippians 3:10 – to know the power of Christ's resurrection while also sharing in the fullness of His suffering.

That means finding the victory and redemption of God in the midst of suffering, in the midst sickness and in the midst of death – as *well* as in the removal of it.

Because does this world really want to hear of a God who denies reality and removes all our problems?

Or is the message they long to hear – about a God who supernaturally strengthens us *through* and *in* them?

And yet it is *we* – *we as Christians* - who are supposed to hold eternal hope and a *freedom* from the fear of death. Therefore, why are we so afraid of it – or afraid of any sickness that can lead to it?

So – echoing around in my head and experience are these two extremes – one of an elderly woman screaming in fear while dying at hospital – ‘Can't somebody help me – I don't want to die – I am afraid! Help me!!!!’

To that of a brother who was dear to many of us here today, on his death bed – taking the hand of Debbie and me, and calling down the blessings and mercy of God upon us all – comforting *us* with his continual refrain, ‘We love You Jesus, we love You Jesus!’

And here, in the passage we just read – we have the account, the story, the grief and the hope of Jesus – when He faced the death of someone He loved dearly.

In fact, from this passage we just read of the death and resurrection of Jesus, who can quote me the shortest verse in the Bible?

John 11:35 – Jesus wept.

The Greek word seems to express a sense of loud and public wailing.

Slide # 05

In light of this, can you tell me *why* Jesus was grieved and crying?

The most typical and obvious answer was that Jesus was upset at the death of a close friend.

I have researched this topic and passage deeply, and have come across many interpretations – some of which *concern* me greatly.

One response was that God actually orchestrated the death of Lazarus so the God could *teach* people a lesson!

Somehow I struggle to worship a god who kills people just in order to prove a point!

Others say that Jesus *wasn't* upset at the death of Lazarus, as He had planned all along to raise him from the dead – and that the reason Jesus wept – was at the frustration of the people to refuse to accept and believe in the resurrection!

And to be honest, these are exactly the same views I came against in my experience when people refused to accept the death of a loved one, or attempted to raise them from the dead!

(God is teaching me a lesson, this is all a test of my faith, I have done something wrong or don't have enough faith!)

So - I really want us to go a little *deeper* with our answer to the above question as to *why* Jesus was grieved and crying – because I think we are onto a good thing that could help us understand the heart of God a little more.

Slide # 06

You see, why would Jesus be upset and grieved over the death of Lazarus, if Jesus knew all along that He was about to raise him from the dead???? AND – why did Jesus weep????

Jesus knew Lazarus was about to be raised from the dead, and yet He still expressed grief and emotion at the loss of a loved one, and at the impact this had upon those who also loved Lazarus!

What a beautiful picture of a vulnerable God – who can and does do the impossible, and yet walks with us in and through our pain, even experiencing and expressing it with us!

Would you allow me to briefly shower you with the reality of the love and the mercy of God towards us this morning.

Here we have a beautiful expression of a God who is afflicted in all *our* afflictions (Isaiah 63:9), and who is a High Priest who understands and is experienced in *our* sorrow – acquainted with *our* grief! (Isaiah 53:3).

You know, we never read of Jesus *laughing*, but more than once we read of Him *crying*.

I just wonder that in our humanity, we become more like the Divine – when we also allow our hearts to break and the tears to flow.

And here we have a wonderful example of the love of God – Jesus weeping over one He loved dearly *as a friend*.

The reality is, that Jesus spent very *little* time with Lazarus. Indeed, most of the ministry of Jesus took Him *away* from the town where Lazarus lived.

And yet Jesus wept and mourned over his passing.

How much *more* does He weep and mourn over us and our loved ones – for precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints! (Psalm 116:15)

Upon seeing Jesus shedding a *tear*, the Jews marvelled at how much Jesus loved Lazarus.

Upon seeing Jesus shedding His blood and life upon the Cross, how much more can we marvel at His great love *for us*!

Over the last week – I have been praying for each of you – but I have been praying only one short and simple prayer.

I have prayed that you would fall in love *more* with the Lord Jesus Christ!

And yes, it is true that you need Jesus – because one day each of us in this room will face the ultimate challenge of death.

But even more than this, we need Jesus – because we have a lot of *living* yet to do.

We have many challenges and trials just around the corner.

And the wonderful message Jesus presents us with today, is that *grief and hope* are both legitimate responses to the tragedies that we face in life.

Hope *and* grief.

Slide # 07

If you have some time during the coming week, I'd encourage you to explore what could happen if we get stuck on either side of that delicate coin of Hope and Grief.

What is the danger of getting stuck on the Hope side?

What is the danger of getting stuck on the Grief side?

Slide # 08

Memory Verses:

John 11:25-26

Jesus said, "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. Do you believe this?"

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

For we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

Let's pray together

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