



# Calvary of Albuquerque

## A Tale of Two Sisters - John 11:17-32

From the Series, Believe:879

By Pastor Skip Heitzig

### MESSAGE SUMMARY

In 1859 Charles Dickens wrote his famous work, *A Tale of Two Cities*, set in London and Paris before and during the French Revolution. The story before us is set in Bethany near Jerusalem and highlights the personal relationship that two sisters had with Jesus Christ. Their broken hearts provide an excellent platform to consider how Christ deals with people in grief and loss. Let's actively probe not only their responses but ours to the incredible promise Jesus makes.



### OUTLINE

- I. Jesus and Martha (vv. 17-27)
  - A. Her Sorrow
  - B. Her Struggle
- II. Jesus and Mary (vv. 28-32)
  - A. Her Summons
  - B. Her Submission
- III. Jesus and You (vv. 25-26)

### Consider This:

1. How do you handle grief—particularly unexpected death? (Stuff it inside and move on? Get angry at God? Isolate yourself from everybody? Call your friends and talk? Try to put on a brave front?)
2. What have you found helpful when you're called upon to help a friend who is going through grief? What have you found to not be helpful?
3. Do you really believe the words that Jesus said? Does it show?

### DETAILED NOTES

Two sisters—Mary and Martha—have lost their brother Lazarus. It is a sudden, unexpected tragedy in their home. Death is an enemy—the great opponent to life. "The last enemy that will be destroyed is death" (1 Corinthians 15:25).

Everyone lives with death anticipation, knowing that in a moment, everything we are and have can be stripped away. Woody Allen said, "I'm not afraid to die, I just don't want to be there when it happens." Death happens to everyone. Joseph Bayly states: "We may postpone it, we may tame its violence, but death is still there waiting for us. Death always waits. The door of the hearse is never closed. Dairy farmer and sales executive live in death's shadow, with Nobel Prize winner and prostitute, mother, infant, teen, old man. The hearse stands waiting for the surgeon who transplants a heart as well as the hopeful recipient, for the funeral director as well as the corpse he manipulates. Death spares none."

In this passage, Jesus tells us the greatest news ever to have fallen on human ears: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26). He was speaking to Martha, but His disciples were listening. Jesus' public ministry is over, he is in the midst of His private ministry to his disciples. He knows He is going to leave them. The theme of His ministry is Resurrection. First He predicted His resurrections: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). "He was speaking of the temple of His body" (John 2:21). He then demonstrated His power over death by raising Lazarus, and others, authenticating His statement in John 11:25. Finally He will raise Himself from death. When His disciples realize the truth of His statements, they become unstoppable: bold as lions—martyrs! They don't care what happens to them. Resurrection is the central theme to their communications throughout the book of Acts.

- I. Jesus and Martha (vv. 17-27)
  - Jewish Customs

Immediate burial: no embalming

Mourning: thirty days, seven of intense mourning. Demonstrative, emotional: tears robes, beat breast, wear sackcloth and ashes, hire professional mourners. Firmly believed Ecclesiastes 3:4: "A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn,

and a time to dance;"

Some superstitions Jews believed the spirit would linger for three days, seeking to re-enter the body. By the fourth day, when decomposition had set in, the spirit would depart. On the fourth day, when "all bets are off," Jesus shows up. Actions of Mary and Martha are in keeping with what we know of them from elsewhere in the Gospels. Mary sits, Martha is on her feet. "People change, but not that much." What people say during times of loss cannot be taken too heavily. Your reaction must be tempered with understanding

#### A. Her Sorrow

1. Typical process of grief (Elizabeth Kubler Ross)
  - a. Denial
  - b. Anger
  - c. Bargaining
  - d. Depression
  - e. Acceptance
2. Profound, unpredictable
3. "Let grief do its work. Tramp every inch of the sorrowful way. Drink every drop of the bitter cup. Those who truly love will say that they have found in sorrow a new joy, a joy which only the broken-hearted can know."

#### B. Her Struggle

1. Pours out what's on her mind: "If you had been here"
  - a. Limiting in time and space
    - i. Four days ago you could have done something; but not now
    - ii. If you had been here—as if Jesus couldn't do a long-distance miracle (Nobleman's son—See John 4:46-54)
2. "Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."
  - a. May be asking for a resurrection
  - b. Not a lot of faith: she will protest when Jesus approaches the tomb (See John 11:39).
3. Struggle to believe
  - a. Pours out heart, catches self: "That doesn't sound too spiritual!"
  - b. Man with demon possessed son: "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24)
4. People in grief struggle: "Where were you Lord?"
5. Jesus response: "Your brother will rise again!"
  - a. Not: "I can't believe you said that to Me!"
  - b. Takes opportunity to reveal more of Himself
  - c. God can handle our honesty (See David's Prayer in Psalm 13, Psalm 58:6)
  - d. He is unshockable. Our prayers don't impress Him either. "There is not a secret in my heart I would not pour into the ears of my God." —C.H. Spurgeon

#### II. Jesus and Mary (vv. 28-32)

##### A. Her Summons

##### B. Her Submission

1. Says the same thing as Martha, with a different attitude
2. In joy or in sorrow, Mary is always at the feet of Jesus (Luke 10:39)
3. "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21).
4. "In the presence of trouble, some people grow wings; others buy crutches."

#### III. Jesus and You (vv. 25-26)

##### A. Whoever - unconditional without any time boundary

##### B. Resurrection is more than an event. It is a person: "I am the resurrection and the life."

##### C. "There are two ultimate questions of our existence: Has anyone ever cheated death? Did He make a way for me to cheat death?"

1. Jesus
2. "Because I live, you will live also" (John 14:19).
3. "When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory" (Colossians 3:4).

##### D. Fifth of Seven "I am" statements

1. "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35).
2. "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12)
3. "I am the door" (John 10:9).
4. "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11)
5. "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25)

##### E. Do you believe this?

1. Believe: the theme of the Gospel of John
2. If so, death is not a big deal (it opens the door for more life)
3. "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" (1 Corinthians 15:55)
4. Makes all the difference now and forever
5. The Master is calling for you!

Figures Referenced: Woody Allen, Joseph Bayly, C.H. Spurgeon

Cross References: Job 1:21; Psalm 13; Psalm 58:6; Ecclesiastes 3:4; Mark 9:24; Luke 10:39; John 2:19; John 2:21; John 4:46-54; John 6:35; John 8:12; John 10:9; John 10:11; John 11:39; John 14:19; 1 Corinthians 15:25; 1 Corinthians 15:55; Colossians 3:4