

The Little Big Things #9
A Tomb is not a Home
July 28, 2024

I have an early question for you: What if everything we know is centered from a sense of death rather than life? What do you think will be the general outlook of the individuals in a world based on death.

Death: a permanent cessation of all vital functions: the end of life

As I pondered that definition, I believe that there is a deeper definition to death. I have seen people give up...and watched their hope die. I have seen joy and love and peace get swallowed up by death. And in place of life...came the grave clothes of despair, hopelessness and heaviness. And then I met the Nazarene. Death is not permanent in God's

In a world defined by death, tombs will become a very viable option. A lifestyle. In fact our culture has become a culture of death. We are destroying ourselves at an alarming rate.

Tomb defined is this: Home or house for the dead: an excavation in which a corpse is buried: grave b : a place of interment

A home...that what our dictionary defines a tomb as. Unfortunately, we do that as well. A home defines where we rest, a place of comfort and a place to enjoy close intimate relationships with others. A place of laughter and joy. A place to be quiet. A place to live.

Remember when Jesus crossed the sea to call the man possessed with Legion, from a tomb...and when the man was set free from his madness...Jesus tells him to go home.

Our God is wise. He never mistakes a tomb for home. Our God does not connect the words tomb and home together.... ever.

And in God's dictionary...life defeats the grave and all its aspects.

Remember Jairus?

With his daughter already dead, and the mourners already in the house, with the funeral in full swing...Jesus shows up, not to offer a few words for the family, but a few words for that little girl.

In Luke 8:54 Jesus speaks two words.

"Child Arise".

The next thing you know the father and mother are laughing and the little girl is eating and the mourners are sent home early.

Jesus walked all over death and hell. And it is in the gospel of John that we see Jesus define Himself as

"The resurrection and the Life".

Let me show you...

Turn with me to John 11.

Here we will see Jesus make His stand against death and the tomb, all for the love of friends. Jesus is now standing in the shadow of the cross. When Jesus raises Lazarus from the grave, this will solidify the Pharisee's hearts against Him, and in doing so they will plot to have Jesus killed. This glimpse of splendor and power seen in the raising of Lazarus is but a foretaste of the glory that is coming when Jesus conquers the tomb for all eternity. Let's read together John's account.

(Read Jn. 11:1-6)

According to accounts in Matthew, Mark and Luke we discover that Jesus became intimate friends with Mary, Martha and Lazarus.

Bethany was a place where the Lord could find rest and hospitality.

During His final days before His crucifixion, this house in Bethany became a retreat.

In one sense, a second home.

But all is not peaceful this particular day; Lazarus is deathly ill, and in desperation, Martha and Mary send for Jesus.

Verse 5 reveals that

"Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus."

In light of that you would expect the Lord to go running to Lazarus' bedside. Instead, He delays for two more days. This may seem cold and uncaring at first glance, but in fact it's not that way at all.

1. First: Lazarus was dead by the time the messengers had reached Jesus in Perea. The messenger left Bethany and arrived in Perea, which is one day's journey. Jesus remained in Perea for two more days, and then journeys to Bethany, which takes another day. For four days Lazarus has been in the tomb.

Here's why this is so important. According to Hebrew belief, they believed that the spirit of someone departed stayed around the body for three days, hoping for a chance to return, on the fourth day, the body was so decomposed that the spirit would leave for Sheol.

In verse 4, Jesus proclaims that God will be glorified. It is with this in mind that gathers up His men and heads for Bethany.

4 days after the funeral, word comes that Jesus was trudging up the Jericho Road.

To Martha and Mary it may have seemed that Jesus was a little late to do much about the situation, **but God is never late.**

He may delay His response, but He is never late.

God's watch is calibrated to matters of eternal consequence rather than the temporal things of this world.

And as Jesus approaches Bethany, Martha goes out to meet the Lord.

Jesus meets Martha where she is...engulfed in grief.

May I show you a truth here?

The grave unearths our view of God. When we face death, our definition of God is challenged.

Which, in turn challenges our faith. Which leads me to ask a couple of questions.

- ◆ Why is it that we interpret the presence of death as the absence of God?
- ◆ Why do we think that if the body is not healed then God is not near?

Martha is in pain. Part of her is in that tomb as well.

Yet Jesus does not leave her there.

(Read vs. 23-24)

Martha trusts Jesus, but she does not yet understand who her friend really is...in verses 24-27, Jesus' true majesty is revealed.

(Read v. 24-27)

I want you to see something here. The "I AM" is speaking and telling Martha that eternal life is a reality. It is impossible for death to prevail in His presence. Let me repeat that...it is impossible for death to prevail in His presence.

And as Martha stood up and looked at Jesus, I can see Him smile as He asks her "Do you believe this?"

In the face of all of her suffering, confusion and disappointment, the only answer Jesus gives Martha is Himself. Martha confesses her belief, but like us her wildest hopes and dreams were not even close to what God had in store.

(Read vv. 28-31)

Martha goes to inform Mary that Jesus wants to speak with her; Mary is in the house with the mourners. (it was a custom to take the chairs and tables and turn them upside down. The mourners go with Mary thinking that she is going to the tomb.)

(Read vv. 32-34)

In verse 33 the words "deeply moved" or "groaned" comes from the Greek word "enebrimesato". It means to be angry. Jesus' compassion is overwhelmed by anger at the tyranny of Satan who had brought sorrow and death through sin. It is with anger that Jesus asks; "**Where have you laid him?**"

(Read vs. 35)

Twice the Scriptures tell us that Jesus wept. Once for Jerusalem, for a nation that missed it's visitation.

But here, the word used denotes a silent weeping. The picture is of a tear falling down the cheek.

This verse stuns me.

Why would One who has absolute power over death surrender so quickly to tears of sorrow. His tears honor his love for his friend. Now He weeps with those who grieve and for His friend. What an incredible Savior. For just a moment we can see the heart of our God. He is One who weeps with us.

It humbles me to know that our pain can summon His tears.

(Read vs. 36-39)

Jesus groans again and tells them to remove the stone. To do so risked defilement and Martha who just expressed such great faith now wavers. The body will stink; he's been dead too long. Yet again Jesus gently reminds her of His promise. Stones have never stood in God's way. Not then and not now.

I want you to notice here that Jesus tells them to move the stone. That stone is formidable. The stone of regret, loss, sorrow. The stone of buried hopes and dreams. It is He who will call out life...it is we who must move the stone...

(Read vs. 40-42)

The great Lion of Judea now roars and calls forth life.

(Read vs. 43-44)

Look, there's that phrase again in verse 44.

"The dead man came out".

What kind of God is this? He is the God who holds the keys to life and death.

The crowd was in such shock and joy that they forgot to help Lazarus. Jesus has to tell them to loose him from His grave clothes.

Notice again that is Jesus who calls forth life...it is we who remove the grave clothes...

Could you imagine a church...that did that? Removed grave clothes? Grave clothes do not fit life. They don't belong...

As our story concludes; I want you to see something. I see a grave with the stone rolled aside. I also see four people, arm in arm, walking and dancing and shouting down a dusty Jericho road towards home.

Where there once was mourning, there will be laughter.

The furniture will be turned upright and there will be a meal. And God will be sitting at the head of their table.

Sounds like home to me...

I want you to know this. He's going to do it again. He promised he would.

He has shown us that he can.

1 Thess. 4:16 states: "The Lord Himself will come down from heaven; with a loud command.

"The same voice that awoke the boy near Nain, and the same voice that stirred the still daughter of Jairus, and that same voice that awakened the corpse of Lazarus...that same voice will speak again. The earth and the sea will give up their dead. There will be no more death.

Jesus saw us as a people enslaved by the fear of a cheap power...death.

To prove to us that He was the conqueror of death, and the author of life, he turned every funeral he went to into a cause for joy. " Max Lucado

Great story huh? For those of us who believe, this account of Lazarus being raised from the dead is but a picture of us. But for some of us, we need to do something that Lazarus did.

Did you notice what was left behind...tossed over in the corner...lies the grave clothes...no longer needed

Show the DVD from the Chosen: Lazarus

Selah.