



Suffering and the Hope of Healing_(Part 2)

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Come with me to the scene. A tomb sealed quietly in Bethany near Jerusalem, pronouncing the finality of death, the victory of corruption over the body of a man. Two sisters weep, Mary and Martha, surrounded by professional mourners. On the outskirts of town, Jesus finally arrives with his band of men. The sisters come to Jesus and blame him for not coming sooner. They knew He had the power to heal. Why didn't he come and heal? He had healed many strangers. Why didn't he come heal a friend?

Jesus, composed and determined, 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?" Martha's reply reveals that she did not understand his power or purpose, but she did know he was trustworthy: "I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

Then Jesus weeps with them. Ravi Zacharias notes that Jesus, having power to raise the dead, weeps with those who do not have that power. We do not have a high priest who cannot identify with our deepest sense of loss.

After the command was given to roll away the stone, Jesus prays aloud to his Father for all to hear and then utters the command that threw the world into gasping silence, "Lazarus, come forth!" And he came forth.

Suddenly the incredible power of death which paralyzed the world was broken. Death, though it had uttered volumes to silence the lives of scores of humans, did not have the last word. Another Word was spoken.

It is sad to see that, as this Word was spoken to penetrate the power of death, many began to plot to erase that Word. Philip Yancey points out this was the last miracle Jesus did.

But Lazarus would die again on another day. The Scripture is silent on the second physical death of Lazarus. But we can be assured that Lazarus, though the focal point of so much awe and scrutiny, was

again laid in that tomb. The physical miracles of Jesus were always temporary ones. And the loss of a brother would come again to the hearts of the women.

Death's final word can only be overshadowed by a permanent resurrection! Lazarus' resurrection was not enough. The ultimate fulcrum of suffering and healing resides in Jesus Christ, who identified with our suffering by taking our sin and sorrow upon his shoulders at the Cross, and then burst forth in his resurrection to ensure a permanent hope for you and me.

The suffering of losing those we love lingers for a long time, even when we have everlasting hope. Gerald L. Sittser, who lost three generations of his family in one automobile accident, writes in his thoughtful and helpful book, *A Grace Disguised*, "Suffering engenders a certain degree of ambivalence in those of us who believe in the resurrection. We feel the pain of our present circumstance, which reminds us of what we have lost; yet we hope for future release and victory. We doubt, yet try to believe; we suffer, yet long for real healing; we inch hesitantly toward death, yet see death as the door to resurrection.... Living with this ambivalence is both

difficult and vital. It stretches our souls, challenging us to acknowledge our mortality and yet to continue to hope for final victory—the victory Jesus won for us in his death and resurrection, a victory that awaits us only on the other side of the grave."

Though all people die, not all people will really live. Sittser writes, "The last chapter of the human story is not death but life. Jesus' resurrection guarantees it." That is, for all who are willing to be part of his unquenchable hope and his never-ending story. This hope holds all of our sorrows in tension as we await our own permanent resurrection. Jesus Christ will utter, once and for all, "Come forth!"

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