

Empire Church of the Brethren

Sunday Service Sermons

28 May 2023

The Family Deals with Death

Text: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. Where have you laid him? He asked. Come and see, Lord, they replied." *John 11:32-35.*

This day is the day set aside to remember those who have gone on before us and who we miss.

How do we deal with death?

In a Christian manner?

Retaining the hope while experiencing the loss.

It is our families who help us get through great loss.

Mary and Martha had experienced a great loss in the death of their brother.

Jesus got there too late.

Lazarus was already buried.

Jesus tells her not to worry he will rise again.

She responds, yes in the resurrection.

Both sisters believed that if Jesus had been there he could have saved their brother.

They knew Jesus had the power of life with him.

Jesus then asked where they had laid him.

With tears in his eyes he headed to the tomb.

Jesus shared their grief and he shares our grief.

When facing death it is good to remember several comforting truths.

God can use death for good.

Death is a horrible, unnatural experience.

It brings sorrow and pain, emptiness and loneliness, frustration and helplessness.

Patiently a family needs to work with each other to admit the depth of sorrow, the extent of the pain, the aching emptiness, and the fear of loneliness.

But people of faith can see that death is more than the obvious: it is something God can use.

In *John 11:4* Jesus made the remarkable statement that God could be glorified even in Lazarus's sickness and death.

We can easily see that God was glorified in Lazarus's case, because Jesus raised him from the dead a few days later.

But we have a harder time accepting this truth today because we place our loved ones in the grave and by faith must await the resurrection in God's own time.

Do you believe that or do you believe that absent from the body-present with the Lord?

I do not know how it all works.

I never stopped being, even when dead.

There are so many accounts of out of the body experiences where they go to the Lord and then are sent back.

I asked to come back and finish my life that had just begun.

I know what I experienced and I know what others have experienced and I believe that we do not sleep until the coming of Christ.

We are his and will be with Him always.

Is it possible for God to use death to further his purposes?

Of course he can.

We have the testimony of many Christians who have experienced God's blessing and comfort in

their time of loss thus bringing glory to his name.

This kind of testimony must be what Paul had in mind in *Romans 8:28-29*: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first born among many brothers.”

Paul did not mean that everything that happens to us is good.

But God will bless those who love him so that everything that comes to us, whether good or bad or indifferent, can be worked out for good.

The picture here is of God salvaging us from life's wreckage.

In the junkyards of life God is fastidiously salvaging what he can so that out of our darkness and sorrow he can create a very good thing, more and more brothers and sisters who are conformed to the image of his Son.

Christians do not need to fear death.

Jesus confronted the doubt of death with confidence.

He challenged the despair of death with hope.

Jesus said there is life on the other side of death.

He said that death will never have the final victory: “The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.” *John 11:25*.

Note, however, the necessity of faith in *verse 25*.

To believe in Jesus means that he becomes the Lord of your life.

When you surrender your life to him in faith, trusting that he is indeed God's power to deliver us and God's grace to save us, you are delivered from the worst death can do.

Friends can help.

In *John 11:31* we see a picture of the common experience of all people through the ages.

We see Many surrounded by friends from the village who are seeking to comfort her.

Friends know that even though they can't heal the pain, they can at least share in the grief.

But the friend the sisters really wanted to see was Jesus because they knew he could have averted their brothers death, and they still had hope in Jesus' power.

Jesus often brings comfort to a family through the love of those who come in his name and offer their hands and hearts on his behalf.

When a family has suffered the loss of a loved one, friends can help in many ways.

The things that help the most are practical activities, such as cleaning the house, taking care of the children, standing by to answer the phone or welcome visitors and accepting food that is brought to the house.

The acts of service that mean the most to the bereaved are those that don't require expertise on the part of the volunteer, but simply a desire and willingness to help.

In a caring church family, the pastor is never the only one who is able to help the family.

Indeed, the whole church body can, and should, offer help and communicate Christ' love.

God's presence is never far away.

God knows about death.

He warned Adam and Eve from the very beginning that disobedience would bring death.

Even after they sinned, God did not abandon them, and he has not abandoned us.

He shoulders our grief on his own back and bears the burdens with us.

The cross on which our Savior died became God's bridge to draw us back to himself.

When a mother lost her only son to a car accident, she cried out, “Oh, where is God when I need him most?”

A friend close by replied, “I suppose he is in the same place he was when he lost his Son.”

The reality of God's grief is nowhere clearer than in the text before us in *John 11:33-36*.

At this point, Jesus gave no words of explanation, no call to courage and great faith.

He simply shared in their grief as they walked to the place where they had laid Lazarus.

The Greeks would read John's gospel in disbelief.

To them God is the Unmoved Mover.

He is above our petty emotions.

He cannot be touched by our sorrow and pain.

But John's gospel is clear: God is not apathetic, he is empathetic with his people.

We should never be ashamed or feel guilty when we mourn the loss of a loved one.

As Christians, however, we know that death is not the end.

Paul wrote, "Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For 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". *1 Thess. 4:13*

Because of our Lord's power over death, we don't need to grieve as those who have no hope.

Christians should bear witness to both the grief and victory in death.

Dwight L. Moody once said that when he was called to preach his first funeral sermon, he searched the Scriptures to find what Jesus said at funerals, only to discover that Jesus had no funeral sermons!

Jesus turned around every funeral he ever attended.

And Jesus still turns our grief into victory today.

His resurrection of others was a sign of the great resurrection that would come in his own life.

His own resurrection was the undeniable sign of God's victory over death, which he freely gives to those who trust him.

The greatest help a family could have when dealing with the death of a loved one is a vibrant faith in God and a close relationship with Jesus Christ.

When the waves of grief threaten to engulf you, remember the words of Fanny Crosby:

Down in the human heart, crushed by the tempter, Feelings lie buried that grace can restore;

Touched by a loving heart, wakened by kindness, Cords that are broken will vibrate once more.