

Walking with God in a Pandemic

When It Seems Like Jesus Shows Up Too Late

Rough Transcript

Brett Clemmer (with intro by Patrick Morley)

Patrick Morley:

Good morning, men. This is Pat Morley. And I want to talk to you this morning about a new series we want to begin called **Walking with God in a Pandemic**. Thank you for joining us. I know a lot of you have really been going through some challenging times, trying to figure out how to live in this new environment we have. So, we wanted to do a series that would be specifically directed to Christian guys and just trying to figure out what this all means for them.

So, we're going to do this series over the next few weeks. You'll notice I'm here in my home office. And so, Brett and myself and Kyrie Pender will be coming to you from our home offices. And we want to not talk about the economics or science or epidemiology, but we want to talk to you about the spiritual side of this and give you some biblical truth and then also, keep the boundaries of our messaging within the principles that scripture has for guys during this time. So, thank you for joining us for Easter weekend. And now, here's Brett with a special message to begin this series, Walking with God in a Pandemic. God Bless.

Brett Clemmer:

Well, hey, guys and welcome to the Man In The Mirror Bible study. This is the Man In The Mirror Bible study home edition. And during this time of COVID-19 and when we're under stay-at-home orders, we wanted to continue to bring you the Bible study. But Pat and I thought we could just teach it from our home. So, I'm out here on my sun porch here just on the north side of Orlando. And I'm really excited to bring to you this week, a teaching out of the book of John, John chapter 11. For this series, for the rest of this month, we're going to be coming to you and really just talking directly about what we're going through as men, what we're going through as the church, as we really face what it means to walk with God in a pandemic.

And so, I think there's some great truths in scripture that we can bring, and we can think about how we as Christian men can live our lives as we're going through this time of isolation and distancing. But how can we still engage as men? How can we engage with God? How can we engage with each other? And how can we engage with scripture? What does it have to teach us, as we are thinking about these really, really strange times that we live in? I mean, it is crazy, isn't it? That we would be in a time where we're told to stay in our homes and stay six feet away from people. And I love to shake hands and pat a guy on the shoulder. I can't do that right now. I love to sit down face-to-face with my friends and my family. I love to sit in church and celebrate communion with my brothers and sisters in Christ. And all of those gathering activities, they're just on hold for right now. So, how do we move through that as men of God? And so, that's what we're going to talk about during this series. You're going to get to see Pat's office and in my home. And we're going to be like the Jimmy Fallon Late Night show, just doing this from home and sharing with you from the scripture. So, if you have a Bible, go ahead and grab that Bible. We're going to turn to John chapter 11. Now, I love this chapter of the Bible and the story that it tells. You

know the story. It's the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. And we know... So, the end of the story is this.

Jesus goes to the tomb of Lazarus, it's sealed up. And so, Jesus says, "Unseal the tomb." The people are there. Martha's like, "Jesus, you don't want us to open the tomb. It's going to smell. He's been in there for four days." Jesus says, "Open the tomb." And he calls out into the tomb and he says, "Lazarus, come out." And Lazarus, by the power of God, is raised from the dead. He's given a new life. He sort of hobbles out. The Bible sort of paints the picture of him because he's all bound up in cloths. And Jesus says to his friends, "Unbind him, release him, set him free so he can live his life," which is a great picture of what we get to do for each other as men. So, that's the end of the story. We've heard this story, but what I want to talk about today is really what everything that led up to this story, and some great truths for us as we are men living in a pandemic, walking with God in a pandemic. What are some lessons that we can learn from Jesus in John chapter 11?

Now, let me set the stage for you a little bit. In John chapter 10, we had the famous speech where Jesus says, "I'm the good shepherd. And the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. The sheep know their shepherd." Then he says, "No one can snatch the sheep from my hand." And then he makes this statement, he says, "I and the Father are one." So, the Jews consider that blasphemy. He's actually claiming deity for himself. Of course, Jesus is God in the flesh, but they don't believe that about him. So, they pick up stones to stone him because he's committing blasphemy, and that's a sin punishable by death by stoning. And so, the Bible says that Jesus escapes out of that and they leave Jerusalem and they go up north to Galilee.

So, that's where this chapter picks up, chapter 11, is that Jesus and the disciples are up north, where they cross the Jordan and gone north. And so, it says here, "A certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha." Now, it was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother, Lazarus, was ill. So, the sisters sent to him saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill, your friend is ill." And Jesus, when he heard it said, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God so that the son of God may be glorified through it." So, here we have Jesus getting word that Lazarus is ill, he's very ill. They wouldn't have sent for Jesus if he wasn't ill. And so, Jesus doesn't go right away.

Why would Mary and Martha call to Jesus? Why would they ask him to come? Well, because Jesus was famous for healing people, right? So, they wanted Jesus to come and heal their brother. And they were friends, Mary and Martha and Lazarus and Jesus. They were friends. It's their house that he stays in during this week in our church calendar, Holy Week, leading up to Good Friday when he's crucified, and then Easter Sunday when he comes back from the dead. But during that week, he lives with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, and walks into Jerusalem every day. So, they want Jesus to come and he doesn't come.

And so, as he's talking to the disciples about this, he says, "After a few days," he says, "Hey, you know what? Let's go back to Judea." The disciples are like, "Jesus, last time we were there, they tried to kill you. I don't really think that's a good place for us to go." Jesus talks to them a little bit and he says, "Look," in verse 11, "our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." And the disciples in their brilliance say, "Well, if he's asleep, he'll just wake up, Jesus. Really, it's not safe for you there." They want to protect him. "And so, we shouldn't go." Finally, in verse 14, Jesus says, "Lazarus has died. And for your sake, I am glad that I was not there so that you may believe. But let us go down to him."

So, you can imagine Jesus knew that Lazarus was ill and he didn't go. And then when he knew Lazarus was dead, then he went. And so, I think Jesus waited until Lazarus was dead because sometimes, Jesus waits to come until we can't do it any other way but with him. He will wait to intervene sometimes so that we can come to the end of ourselves. So that when he comes and when he intervenes, there's

really no other option. There's really no other reason that things would be resolved except that Jesus came in.

And you see sort of two concrete ways that Jesus explains this. If you go back to verse 4, he said, "It is for the glory of God so that the son of God may be glorified through it." So, Jesus doesn't show up sometimes until we can't do it any other way, so that he can receive the glory. And you might think, "Well, that's kind of weird, not showing up just so you can receive the glory." It's really not about Jesus receiving or God receiving undeserved glory. It's really so that we see God for who he is, that we see Jesus for who he is. And when we see him for who he is, then he gets the glory. We can't take the glory. We can't take the credit for what he does when he shows up, when we can't do it any other way.

But it's not just to bring God glory. If you go back to verse 15, he says, "For your sake, I'm glad that I was not there when he died, so that you may believe." So, sometimes he doesn't show up until we can't do it any other way, not just so that he gets the glory, but so that our faith, in the true and living God can be strengthened as we see what God does. If you read the Psalms sometime, you'll see the Psalm that say, "Fathers, teach your children the stories of what God has done." Why? Because when we have these stories of what God has done, it builds our faith and it builds others' faith.

COVID-19 is here and it's frustrating and it's devastating, and people are getting sick and some people are dying, and we're seeing horrible stories on TV, but God is going to show up. He's going to show up when there's, maybe when there's no other way that we can do it except through his intervention. And when he shows up, it's on us to remember how he showed up. When he shows up in those interactions that maybe we have with our neighbors or maybe we have with family or friends over the ever-present video conferencing that we're all doing now through Zoom and Facebook and Skype, as we interact and we see God bring change into people's lives and into people's hearts, we see the impact of God's intervention in people's illnesses sometimes.

Those are stories that we can tell to our sons and our daughters and our grandsons and our granddaughters. The story of when Jesus showed up after there was no other way that we could do it, but through his intervention and through his presence. So, sometimes Jesus shows up, he waits to show up until there's no other way. And so, that's the first lesson I get from John chapter 11, as I think about how to walk with God through this pandemic.

The next thing I see is that in the midst of the chaos that Jesus walks into, we're going to see Jesus walks in kind of to accusations by both Martha and Mary. And in the midst of that chaos, he stays calm in the midst of the accusations. But he still shows that even in his calmness, even in his peacefulness, he still cares so deeply about us. And so, look in verse 20. It says, "So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. Martha said to Jesus," now listen to this. "Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. Jesus, we've seen you heal people, and we called for you when we needed you. We called you early. We didn't try to do it on our own. We were relying on you, just like we're supposed to, and you didn't come. Why didn't you come?'" And you can just hear the accusation and the pain in Martha's voice as she looks at Jesus.

Martha's the organized one, right? Martha's the one that takes care of things. And she had a plan, and the plan was for Jesus to come and heal Lazarus and he didn't come. He doesn't get angry with her. He has this great conversation with her. And he promises her, he says, "Lazarus is not dead yet. He's not... I'm going to bring him back. He's going to rise again." And Martha even says, "I know he's going to rise again." And Jesus says, "No, you're right. He will rise again at the resurrection. But that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about today. I'm going to solve this problem today. This is not about, 'Oh, we'll all be healed in heaven.' This is about today, Martha. I'm going to intervene in this tragedy and I'm going to make it right." So, Jesus then walks on. And so, Martha goes and gets Mary and she says, "Mary, the teacher's here, the rabbi's here. And so, Mary..."

So, as Martha is the organized one, Mary is the emotional one, right? She's the one that cleaned Jesus' feet with her own hair. She's the one that sat at Jesus' feet while Martha was doing all the work. Just because she loves Jesus so much, she's more of the emotional one. And she looks at Jesus and she says, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." The two sisters said the same thing, but I imagine that Martha said it more like, "I had a plan and you didn't fulfill the plan," and Mary said, "I love you. And if you love me, wouldn't you have come and saved our brother?" And Jesus sees her weeping. He sees the people around her weeping and he doesn't get angry with her. He's the God of the universe, right? He's the creator of everything. He knows where he's going and what he's about to do on our behalf, and he doesn't get upset with Martha and he doesn't get upset with Mary.

And when he sees the grief that Mary's going through, he grieves with her. When he sees the grief that the people around her are going through, he says his heart was troubled. And then John 11:35, that verse that we... That first verse that many boys learn in junior high school, right? John 11:35, "Jesus wept." There's no two words that could be much richer in the whole entire Bible than to see Jesus weeping, not just for Lazarus, but weeping for the pain that he knows that Mary and Martha and Lazarus, his friends, are going through, weeping for, maybe for their not understanding that he could solve this problem. He can, he is the answer to the tragedy that they're facing. And he weeps. So, you see that Jesus, he is calm in the chaos. He stands up to the accusations with love and with grace, but he deeply, deeply cares for his friends.

And guys, I'm telling you, Jesus is your friend. Jesus is my friend. He calls us his friends. He cares deeply for what we're going through. He is not a distant God sitting up on high, looking down on the little peons running around on earth. His spirit lives within us. He feels for us. He grieves with us. He mourns with us. He knows what we're going through right now. And he is going through those things too. He's experiencing those things too, along with us because he loves us. So then, what's the answer? Well, we know that the story ends, right, with Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead.

But I want to go back to something that Jesus said to Martha because I think this statement, before he solves the problem, before he raises Lazarus from the dead, this statement that he makes is a statement of amazing hope for you and me today. It was a statement of amazing hope for Martha when she heard it. So, Jesus says in verse 23, "Your brother will rise again." Martha says, "I know he will rise again, in the resurrection on the last day." And Jesus says, "No, Martha, I don't think you understand. I'm the resurrection. I'm the life. He who believes in me will never die, but will live forever. Do you believe?"

And Martha just, I can imagine, she's just like, "You're the resurrection? You're the life? I believe. I believe." And I bet you she was thinking, "I'm not even, I may not even be quite sure what you mean by this right now. I mean, I hope I know what you mean. I hope it means that you're going to go intervene and you're going to raise Lazarus out of the grave. And he's going to walk with us again. I hope that's what that means. But even if that's not exactly what it means, Lord, I believe. You are the resurrection. You are the life."

Now, guys, I just can't imagine a message that we need to hear more right now than Jesus is the resurrection and Jesus is the life. We need to hear that because if Jesus is the resurrection and the life, it means that Jesus brings life from death. Jesus brings order from chaos. He brings peace out of fear. And when you know that Jesus is the resurrection and life, that means that you and I, we can live boldly and courageously in a time of incredible uncertainty and anxiety, both over our health and over our economic well-being, over our family, or maybe over our job. But Jesus is the resurrection and the life. And so, we can live boldly in that promise.

This weekend is Easter. And you may be thinking, this is Holy Week. And it doesn't really feel like Holy Week, right? Maybe you're not going to get to go to a Maundy Thursday service, if that's something you do, or Ash Wednesday service or Maundy Thursday, or Good Friday. You're not going to get to go to an Easter service, and gather with the people of your congregation, of your church. Many, many people go

to, Easter is maybe one of the two or three days a year that they even go to church, and they're not going to get to do that this year. And you might think, "This is not a Good Friday. This is not a Holy Week right now. It just, it feels unholy. It feels so difficult." But let me tell you, this most definitely is a Holy Week.

If you know the word holy, what it really means is, set apart. And this is the holiest Holy Week we've had, right? I mean, we are not just sort of spiritually setting this week apart, as we think about the sacrifice that Jesus made. We are physically set apart. Why is God doing that to us right now? Could it be that he really wants to get each of us to a place where there's less distraction, so that he can speak into our lives and into our hearts? We are set apart this week physically for a purpose, for a reason. This really is a Holy Week.

And so, my challenge to you this weekend, as we celebrate Easter in the midst of a pandemic, that we don't lose sight of the resurrection and the life that Jesus brings to us. He brings it to us spiritually, but he brings it to us literally as well. Sometimes, Jesus doesn't show up until we can't do it without him and it seems like it's too late. But when it seems like it's too late, that's when Jesus shows up. That's when God does his best work.

I hope that as you go through the next few weeks or even months of dealing with the fallout of this pandemic, that you will see Jesus' hand. You'll see the spirit of God work in your life every day, that God will impress upon you the truth of him being the resurrection and the life, and that you will live boldly and courageously, as a man of God who reaches out to his friends, to his neighbors, to his family, in whatever way he can, and who engages in a rich and deep spiritual life as we are set apart this week. Can I pray for us?

Father, thank you for the opportunity to, in the midst of being isolated and separated, still having the technology to be able to teach the Bible study, to share the Bible study with our brothers around the world. Thank you for this amazing story of your love and care for Mary and Martha, your power exhibited in the raising of Lazarus from the dead, the heart that you even have for your disciples in explaining to them patiently once again why you're doing what you're doing.

Lord, help us to give you the glory when you intervene. Lord, help us to grow in our faith, because we see the things that you do and we share those things with others, with our sons and daughters and grandsons and granddaughters. Lord, help us to not be the accusers, but even when we are, Lord, to realize that you stay calm in the midst of chaos and accusation and that you care deeply for what we're going through. And Lord, help us to cling to the power of you being the resurrection and the life. Lord, we love you. We need you. This is a difficult time. Lord, as we seek to walk with you, would you draw us to yourself so that we can walk with you in this pandemic? In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.