

## “God’s Timing”

John 11:17-27--<sup>17</sup> On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. <sup>18</sup> Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, <sup>19</sup> and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. <sup>20</sup> When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

<sup>21</sup> “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup> But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

<sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

<sup>24</sup> Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

<sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; <sup>26</sup> and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

<sup>27</sup> “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

I have heard it said, “Timing is everything.” Well, I think there is some truth to this. What if one had bought shares in Amazon in 1997? Or Apple back in 1980? Or what if you decided to sell a house recently? Or what if you decided to build a house in the last year? Timing may not be everything but it certainly seems to make a huge difference.

No one likes delays. As I mentioned yesterday. Just going across town drives me crazy sometimes. Somehow there are days when I catch every red light. Then I get behind a slow driver who seems to have all day. It used to be the case in New Albany when the trains would run that I get stuck waiting for a train which slows and then stops and then backs up before going forward. Or construction. The other day the road worker with the sign flipped to “stop” just before it was my turn. So, I had to wait. But what if that delay helps avoid other problems that we will never know about, accidents or trouble? The only time we notice some things is only when they go wrong. Ever wonder how much the Lord actually watches out for you. In the Lord’s hands delays can be very big blessings.

Timing makes a huge difference. God even makes the delays work for His people. In John 11 we are told that Jesus deliberately waited—waited FOUR days. He knew that Lazarus was sick and then let him die. Both Martha and Mary were troubled by this. “If you had only been here sooner, my brother would not have died.” And then in their faith Martha says, “But I know that even now God will do whatever you ask.” You can sense the tension between faith, trust, and trouble.

But notice Jesus’ timing. It is understood from Jewish tradition that a dead body is not *truly and finally* dead until the fourth day. In the Talmud (a source of Jewish tradition), it says, “The whole strength of the mourning is not till the third day; for three days long the soul returns to the grave, thinking that it will return (into the body); when however it sees that the color of its face has changed then it goes away and leaves it” (*Gen. Rab.* 100 [64a]; quoted in Beasley-Murray’s *John*, pg. 189-190). Basically, the soul lingers for three days until it cannot recognize itself. On the fourth day hope is lost.

Lazarus was essentially beyond hope. The fourth day therefore, was the day which would produce the maximum amount of faith for those who witnessed Jesus raise Lazarus. The delays made the whole event much more potent and significant.

I mentioned yesterday in Mark 5 the same idea. The delays for Jairus were in the Lord’s hands an opportunity to build faith within Jairus. He delays, I believe, for Jairus to hear the testimony of the woman who had suffered from bleeding for twelve years. And yet faith led her to Jesus who welcomed her as a daughter. “Daughter, go in peace. Your faith has healed you and freed you from your suffering” Mark 5:34. Right on the heels of this, reports come that Jairus’ daughter has died. You can almost see the hope in Jairus eyes evaporate. I’m sure he was thinking at this point the same as Martha, “Lord if you had not stopped for that woman-if you had only gotten here sooner.”

When Jesus arrives, the funeral has already started. But he takes the little girl's hand and says, "Little girl, I say to you get up." And immediately, like a twelve-year old would do, she hops up and walks around—her life and her youth restored.

God's timing was important for Jesus' crucifixion. Galatians 4:4 calls it the fullness of time. The Lord had found the sweet spot in history after thousands of years for Jesus to come. And if you read verse 5 we find that the delay had purpose namely, "to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship." Rome had established roads and a common language, Greek. Caiaphas and his kind had settled into the Sanhedrin. All the right players were set for the cross. All of which were relatively unknown to David when he wrote Psalm 22 or when Isaiah wrote chapter 53. His timing will be important when the last day comes as well. In Matt 24 Jesus tells us that the last days will actually be cut short to preserve the elect. He will wait as long as possible to get every last soul that can possibly be saved.

What I am saying is that no one can fully understand why God's timing works or how it works. But I would offer you that God uses His timing to bring the maximum blessings. Consider the words of Ecclesiastes 3:1,11

There is a time for everything,

and a season for every activity under the heavens:

<sup>11</sup> *He has made everything beautiful in its time.* He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

God makes every beautiful in its time. As an example, I met my wife on my vicarage. Her mom and my vicarage pastor tried fixing us up early that year but Tricia decided to meet in the last quarter of my vicarage year. It was a good thing too. Had I met her at the beginning of Seminary or at the beginning of my vicarage year it would have been a lot harder to focus on my goals. She was very distracting. But the timing for both of us was good and it worked out. And here we are 25 years later.

God can make everything beautiful in its time; not just marriage but even death. When someone we love dies it is natural to wonder as Martha did and struggle with our faith as Martha did. We may not always understand the wisdom of God's timing. However, the one thing I hope to drive home today is that God's timing always has in mind our best interest. God's timing is meant to create the maximum opportunity for us to grow in Him. That takes a lot of trust. Yet when we look at the scriptures, we see that the Lord is consistent in making everything beautiful in its time. In faith we can rise each day with the words of Psalm 118:24, "This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it."

And now the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look on you with His favor and give you His peace in Jesus. Amen.

Pastor Matt Woods

John 3:30