

What A Friend We Have in Jesus?

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The sisters were terribly disappointed. Jesus was their friend, and they believed he was the Great Teacher, the Christ, the Son of God. He was their friend, and they called him "Lord" (**Luke 10:40**). They knew he had healed many who were sick and done wonderful things. So, when their brother, Lazarus, Jesus' friend, was very sick, the sisters, Mary and Martha, sent word to Jesus, "*Lord, the one you love is sick*" (**John 11:1-3**).

Jesus got the message, but Jesus didn't come, and he didn't heal Lazarus from afar. He chose to stay where he was two more days before turning his steps to the place where Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived; except Lazarus didn't live. He had died of the illness the sisters had sent word about to their friend, the Lord. By the time Jesus came to the town where Mary and Martha lived, Lazarus had been dead and buried four days. The sisters and their friends from the surrounding area were mourning when Jesus arrived. News of his approach preceded Jesus' arrival. Martha heard and rushed out to greet him. Though she was glad to see their friend, grief and disappointment were painfully obvious in Martha's greeting, "*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died*" (**John 11:21**). Martha then expressed confidence that Jesus could have whatever he asked of God, but it doesn't appear that she had any expectation Jesus would do anything to assuage her grief. She had hope in the future resurrection of the dead, and she plainly said that, disappointed though she was, she believed that Jesus was "*the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world*" (**John 11:27**).

After talking to Jesus, Martha went to bring her sister, Mary, to him quietly, calling her away from the mourners. But the crowd noticed Mary's abrupt departure from the house and followed her to the meeting with Jesus. They saw Mary fall at Jesus' feet. Is this worship? Or is this overwhelming grief, collapsing at the feet of the man she called, "Lord"? Her words echoed the same sad disappointment as Martha's greeting, "*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*" She was weeping at his feet, loving the Lord, but distraught with grief for her brother. Jesus loved this family, and they all knew it. John points this out repeatedly in the story. Jesus was deeply affected by the anguish of Mary, of Martha, of the crowd of weeping mourners. Jesus wept. And as Jesus came to the tomb where his friend Lazarus was buried, John says again he was deeply moved. The death of a friend, the grief of friends, these feelings resonated in Jesus, the Teacher, the Lord, the Christ, the Son of God. And yet, he had waited two days after receiving the message of Lazarus illness to start toward their home. He chose to disappoint his friends, though he loved them. He let them suffer sickness, death, and grief, including the confusion of his prolonged absence, when he could have helped with a word.

Jesus took no offense at the sisters' plaintive cry, "*If you had been here...*" Nor did he apologize for allowing them to suffer. He shared their pain, grieved with them, but he had let the process of sickness and death proceed without intervention. Afterward, Jesus did restore Lazarus to them in a phenomenal way. Despite her faith in Jesus, Martha was clearly confused and astonished by the raising of her brother after four days in the tomb (**John 11:39-40**).

Jesus may have had many reasons for allowing his friends' distress, permitting the sadness he shared in but did not prevent. Only one purpose is clearly expressed, when Jesus told the disciples, "*for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe*" (**John 11:14**). Jesus restated that purpose at the tomb in public prayer when he called on the Father saying, "*I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me*" (**John 11:42**). And people did believe in Jesus because of what he did that day (**John 11:45**), when he wept with his friends and then raised a man from the dead after four days in the tomb.

Jesus had no joy in the disappointment and suffering of his friends, but he saw value in choosing a path that included grief and uncertainty for them. We know that the sisters still loved Jesus though he had disappointed them so badly, because soon afterward Jesus was again in their neighborhood, and a meal was given in his honor, at which Lazarus was a guest and Martha served (**John 12:1-8**). There, Mary anointed Jesus with an expensive perfume, so expensive the value was described as more than a year's

wages. When some objected to Mary's tremendous generosity in fealty to Jesus, he defended her and blessed her for her kindness and the honor she showed him.

Has the Lord ever disappointed you? Probably, because his timing and his plan aren't always just what we want. *"Lord, if you had been here..."* Yet there is no doubt that he cares, he sympathizes, he shares the hurts and griefs, and he wants us to trust him no matter what happens, so that, as he did that day, he can show everyone who believes in him *"the glory of God"* (**John 11:40**).

And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us (**Romans 5:2b-5**).