

**I Believe in God, but...**  
Where is He When I Need Him  
John 11:17-32  
May 19, 2019

Welcome and intro...

I have stood at a hospital bed or at a grave side and I been asked the challenging and very difficult question...where is God at? It's the questions that is asked time and time again during tragic situations day after day. It's a question that's asked in doctors offices, and nursing homes, in hospitals, in divorce courts, and lawyers offices, in fox holes, and at 2:00 am feedings. God, I believe in you but, where were you when I needed you? If we're all honest with each other and with ourselves we can all say that we have thought that and a bunch of us in the room today have said it out loud...some have screamed it at the top of our lungs.

There is a truth that most of us believe in but, when things get hard and the difficulties of life get overwhelming, we tend to lose sight of God because the intensity of the situation in front of us is greater than the God of our mind and heart. It's what people like us do, we drop into our emotions and we tend to allow them to run crazy. Our passions, or fears, our, worries, our concerns, our doubts and our uncertainties all lead us down dark paths. Our ability to think straight is gone and we act and react to accelerated heart rates, cold sweats, big eyes, and about a thousand questions that come flying at us that make our blood pressures rise and our mind race out of control. Ever been there? Me too. It happens to all of us. As people of faith we turn to God out of frustration and fear and ask questions like: couldn't you have prevented this, how could you let this happen, I've been faithful to you and this is what I get in return, I believed in you...where are you now?

So, let's get into the answer to those questions that have grown out of the hearts of theologians and moms, parents and loved ones, coworkers and friends, soldiers and refugees, people just like us who have suffered loss, gone through tragedies, seen horrible things, and have life altering, faith altering questions about the way God operates.

I want to take a moment to establish some baseline things with us that I and many Christians who are a lot smarter than I am have established. First, there is a cyclic nature to all of creation – there is sin – there is Jesus, the answer for sin – and there is re-creation. There is sin and evil and accidents and mistakes in this world we live in. We are not perfect. Think of it this way:

- God creates and God is good
- Humanity chooses to go off the mark from what God wants
- **Being off the mark is destructive and painful**
- Jesus heals and saves and in turn, re-creates something new in us

Let's take a look at a time when Jesus dealt with the tough questions. The story about a guy named Lazarus is one that is super informative for us. Jesus is present when people are hurting and are not thinking straight but, are allowing their emotions to take them in places that they would not normally go. Jesus knows what's coming so he decides that there is an opportunity for him to show people how to handle life and its difficulties. So, Jesus stays two more days before going to the place where Lazarus is at making sure that Lazarus is truly dead. To us that sounds kind of harsh but, if Jesus central concern for us is our spiritual growth and not our personal comfort level then there are going to be some things we need to learn that are going to come to us in challenging ways.

So, stay with me here for a minute because while I absolutely believe God is not out to get us...*God is out to grow us*. That means that sometimes God allows pain to happen in our lives. And while we might say something like "why would God do that" the truth is, **we often learn the most through our most difficult life events** than we do when life is easy and all is well. Let's be honest, easy is usually not memorable. Jesus makes a clear decision to wait a few more days so that people can learn a whole lot more about who He is and how life works. For Jesus, death is not the end but a change of address and death is definitely not the

worst thing that can happen to us. Jesus actually says to us that we are to be more concerned about the things that can kill our souls instead of the things that can kill our bodies. (<sup>28</sup> *"Don't be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Matthew 10:28 NLT*). We tend to get wrapped up in our physical comfort and forget that we are more than just a physical body but, we are spiritual people who are going to live forever. Jesus is concerned with the whole person that you are, not just the physical person you are. So, Jesus is always going to look at you as a person who is made up of body, mind and soul with an understanding that the soul is going to live forever.

That doesn't mean **Jesus** doesn't care...just the opposite, he **cares so much that he is willing to let us go through the challenges of life** so that our souls are refined. Jesus knows Lazarus is dead and instead of coming to the rescue and not allowing Lazarus to die, Jesus let's them taste death before he reminds them that in an extremely powerful way, that he brings life. One of the things that stands out for me in this story of Lazarus, Mary, Martha and the disciples is that Jesus knows what is going on. It reminds me that Jesus knows what we're going through. That there is nothing we go through that God does not see. Jesus knows our pain and sorrow, our troubles and your grief, our good times and our bad. Jesus does not look the other way or abandon us when we are troubled. Instead, like a faithful parent, he allows us to learn the extraordinarily valuable lessons by allowing us to live life fully and completely...with all the highs and all the lows that life has to offer every one of us.

Why would Jesus do that, because Jesus is concerned about our hearts and our faith in him. When Jesus asks them if they believe that everyone who lives in and believes in Him will never die he is asking if they trust Him. He is testing their faith, their belief. I wonder how many times I've failed that test. There are times when I have wondered what is going on, why hasn't Jesus come and fixed this problem yet. But, **the goal for Jesus is not to remove the problem but, to grow my faith and trust in Him.** Let's be honest, when Mary says, **"If only you had been here, my brother would not have died."** We've all thought it...where were you when I needed you. Jesus loves us and cares about us. The glimpse we get of this – on this side of heaven – is when we experience a child learning a life lesson the hard way. They will never touch the stove again, right. And for some of us, it's the only way we can learn life's hardest lessons.

As parents we come along after something difficult (a failed test, a troubled friendship, a break up, a fender bender) and help our children understand the lessons that we can learn. We do that because we want so much for those we love and we want them to grow into healthy adults who have learned from life's lessons. Our savior Jesus comes into our lives and does the same thing, if we let Him. If we are willing to let God be in charge then we need to also allow God to teach us the things we need to learn in this life that will make us the people God wants us to be for eternity. **When we're willing to allow God to be in charge we must give every situation to him** or we've not really surrendered. God is looking for followers who will give up our need for control and comfort and allow God, the potter – the blacksmith, to work out the imperfections and create in us a heart and soul that looks more like Jesus and less like us.

In all of this, the real question we want to ask God is, "why didn't you keep this from happening." It's a valid question. But, if we dive in a bit we discover that God is not an overly protective helicopter, lawn mower parent.

**God is not saving us from ourselves or the troubles of this world...God is saving us for an eternity in heaven forever.**

We'll dive into more on this next week but, know this, God did not leave you, God did not, has not abandoned you. God sees what's going on and is doing something, God is active. Even at this moment God is busy doing something in your life and in the situations that are troubling you. I don't know what it is that God is doing and I'm not sure we'll know until it's past but, I have learned to trust that God never sleeps and always watches out over His children.

Wrap up and conclusion