

Life Group Topic #26

BEYOND BELIEF...

John 11:1-44

WELCOME: (15 minutes)

What one thing are you most anticipating this summer? Why?

WORSHIP: (15 minutes)

Use whatever means possible to turn the group's attention to the wonder and majesty of our God- including music, prayer, meditation on the Psalms, and other art forms.

WORD APPLICATION: (45 minutes)

Briefly read or paraphrase the following sermon summary before moving to the heart of this section: the discussion around the application questions.

My Dad died when I was 29. June and I were pastoring a church in a small town in southern Alberta. My Mom called to say that she had gotten word that Dad had a heart attack while at his office and she didn't know if he was alive. It was only a few minutes before she called back to say that he was gone. A cousin flew us to Calgary and we spent the next hours and days preparing for Dad's funeral. When it came time to go to the funeral home and view his body, I was anxious to actually see if it was him...it was still so unreal. Often people look just as they did in life but my Dad was unrecognizable and so I looked for a badly scarred finger on his hand. It was him and I was overwhelmed again with the thought of how irreversible this all seemed.

The word irreversible is so final...it is so hopeless. Mary and Martha knew that feeling when their brother Lazarus died. But Jesus entered that situation and shattered the word irreversible with 28 words...*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die...*

Whatever death you are experiencing...whatever thought of irreversibility has captivated your heart and mind, Jesus is here to transform it and lead you beyond believing to trusting.

• BAD THINGS DO HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE...John 11:1-16

*Although Jesus, loved Martha, Mary and Lazarus He didn't go right away. This word for love was agapao, the highest kind of love, the unstoppable love of God...this unconditional love stayed there and did not rush to their side because there were higher purposes...this was a delay of love...Jesus delayed in order to strengthen their love and their faith...Jesus actually says in v 14 *and for your sake I am glad I was not there so that you may believe...*he was glad—rejoicing exceedingly...love permits pain. Bad things do happen to good people.*

• **THERE ARE CLEAR LIMITS TO BELIEF...John 11:17-37**

There must have been incredible silence for Martha and Mary during those intervening days...glory of God suffering according to v 4...not corrective or constructive in any clear way. They would have been involved in preparing his body for burial...washing it, placing it in a white linen gown, poignantly called a travelling dress and then wrapping it lovingly with bandages and spices. They would have led the procession to the grave...women customarily were first since it was prejudicially believed that since the woman Eve first sinned, death came through her. At the grave there would have been some memorial speeches and then mourners would form a gauntlet and wail loudly as the sisters walked slowly toward home. By the time Jesus arrived in Bethany it was 4 days after Lazarus' death and the ritual of mourning reached its highest point because the body was decaying and there was no hope.

It is significant to note the difference between Martha and Mary. **Martha is the kind of person who is concerned about the details of things...practical, business-like, thoughtful of all that could affect the comfort and well-being of those she loved...able to reiterate what she believes** in verses 24 and 27 but it hadn't moved over to trust and faith in resurrection on a personal level.

The cry of **WHERE WERE YOU?** is common to our existence and does not display immaturity or even lack of faith. Martha says in v 21...*Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask.*

- **She limits Him by distance**...if only you had been here...
- **She limits who He is by her use of the word ask.** *AITEO* is a usual word for asking—as in a favor asked of a Creator...*EROTEO* is a supplication word as a son would use in asking something of his father. Martha used aiteo and brought Jesus to the level of a prophet asking God for something rather than what she claimed to believe about Him in v 27...*Yes, Lord...I have always believed you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who has come into the world from God.* But that level of belief was not enough for this kind of crisis.

***IGNORANCE OR UNWORTHINESS IS NOT THE BARRIER...John 11:38-44**

In v 38 the KJV says Jesus was *groaning within himself* but the NLT says *Jesus was still angry* and the word means *to be very angry or moved with indignation*. He is about to do battle with death and the one who brings death. As Jesus prepares to resurrect Lazarus, Martha protests that he will stink...the practical, list-making Martha had it all factored. Jesus says...*didn't I tell you that you would see God's glory if you believe?* ...**it appears that it is not ignorance or unworthiness that stand in the way but UNBELIEF OR TRUST**

Kent Hughes says that a typical tomb had 8 occupants...hollowed out room built into a hillside with three indentations on each side and two at the end...perhaps Lazarus' tomb was occupied with other bodies Jesus calls Lazarus by name or Augustine said that all of Hades would have emptied. It is a clear picture of a battle between Jesus and Satan...a

clear picture of the spiritual war each of us is in. Death is all around us and Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Death must respond to His summons...

Grave clothes are the picture of the warfare we are in...Romans 7:18,22,23 describe it...*I want to do what is right, but I can't...I love God's law with all my heart but there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me.* The most unhappy people are not the people of the world but defeated Christians, bound up in grave clothes---they know what Jesus can do because they have experienced life but they are bound. There was human participation in moving the stone and unwrapping him and letting him go. We, as individual believers, have a role in unwrapping one another.

Irreversible is a grave clothes word...it must surrender to the possibility, the reality that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Sometimes it is by a simple act of faith that the word irreversible is robbed of its power. Jesus asked people to deal with the grave clothes and then he was free. You have been given a piece of gauze, a piece of grave clothes and you need to leave it behind. Jesus is the resurrection and the life! **Beyond belief is trust!**

Word Application Questions:

- 1. What are some "irreversible factors" of your life that you cannot change, no matter how hard you might try?**
- 2. Even though Martha believed that Jesus was Messiah, she considered certain things were beyond his ability to be trusted for. What are the parallels to your own life?**
- 3. Comment on the statement: The most unhappy people in the world are defeated Christians...Do you agree? Why?**
- 4. Jesus called people to participate in the miraculous, by unraveling the grave clothes and letting Lazarus free. What impossibilities might Jesus be asking this Life Group to participate in? What grave clothes could we unravel together?**
- 5. What should our Life Group be cultivating this summer in order to enter into all God has for us in the fall?**

WITNESS: (15 minutes)

This section is a vision-casting time designed to get the group strategizing and making concrete plans towards reaching outward to a lost world. Relational outreach always has the goal of ultimately enfolding those we reach into the Life Group. **How are we cultivating relationships with OTHERS this summer?**