

Jesus' Counter-Cultural Love

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How do you define love?

In our age of indulgence, many define love this way: *giving another person what he wants, regardless of what may be best for him.*



For example, if a 30-year old pregnant woman wants to murder her unborn child because she doesn't know how she will provide for it, then, we should give her what she wants. Love means we encourage her and maybe help her abort her baby. After all, it's her life and her body, right? In fact, according to our culture, to refuse her those desires would be a very hateful thing to do, regardless of what we think (or know) is best for her and the child.

But Jesus defines love like this: *giving a person what is best for him, regardless of what he may want.* His definition of love is not merely different, it is the exact opposite!

A Grave Message

We see this in the account of the raising of Lazarus. As John 11 begins, Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha in Bethany, is ill. Since the family was close to Jesus, Martha and Mary sent a messenger to tell him that their brother was sick. In response, Jesus made an amazing statement! He declared with confidence that the purpose of Lazarus' sickness was not merely that he would die, but that His glory would be displayed for all to see.

Because He Loved Them

The author John then makes a short but important statement: "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus." You see that love even in the message: "Lord, He whom you love, is sick." Lazarus knew, Mary and Martha knew, the disciples knew, and John wants us to know that Jesus had a special, personal affection for this family.

"Therefore," the narrative continues, "when He heard that Lazarus was sick, He . . ." Pause here for a moment. If you were hearing this story for the first time, what would you expect to be said next?

I think we all would naturally expect John to say, "Therefore Jesus went to Bethany to heal Lazarus." But that isn't how the story goes. Instead we read these shocking and confusing words: "He stayed two days longer in the place where He was." Subsequently Lazarus died.

He stayed? Jesus stayed and let Lazarus die? Yes. But why? John says He did so because He loved them.

Jesus Gives What is Best

How could that be loving? If love means always giving a person what is best for him, then we can understand from the rest of the story how it was loving for Jesus to let Lazarus die and to allow his sisters to experience such deep sorrow.

The story ends with Jesus powerfully raising Lazarus back to life after being dead for four days! Through this display, Mary, Martha, the disciples, and others encountered the glory of Jesus in a unique way as they saw firsthand His authority to raise the dead and to give eternal life to those who believe in Him.

Jesus knew this was the best thing for everyone, even His disciples.

Not all of our trials have such a happy ending, but they all do have the ultimate purpose of revealing Christ's glory now or later. Jesus knows what's best for us who are His followers and because He loves us, He always has this in mind in all of our suffering.

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