

Introduction

When is the last time you spent time with someone who was staring straight into the face of death? Have you ever sat with someone who was staring straight into the face of death and, instead of being overcome with fear, they were filled with faith and completely at peace?

Recently, the person who has been the greatest encouragement to my faith is **Paul McKeithan**. For those of you who may not know him, Paul and his wife, Evelyn, have been members at our church for fifty-two years.

Hard stop. Let that sink in a moment.

If you are under the age of fifty-two, would you raise your hand? I'm only thirty-five, so I am raising my hand with you. Do you realize that fifty-two years is longer than any of us who just raised our hands have been alive?

Paul is a hero of the Christian faith. He is an incredible example of what it means to be a faithful Christian man to his family, his church, and his community. He is a servant among servants.

Paul has battled various ailments for the past twenty years or so. It wasn't long ago that Paul, his doctors, and his family decided that the treatments Paul had been receiving were no longer working. Paul went home to be with his family and they called in hospice to care provide end of life care.

This past Tuesday night, Paul went home to be with Jesus.

While Paul was at home under hospice care, I was able to go and **worship with him** and his family on three separate occasions. On each occasion, I heard Paul talk about his future. When Paul talked about his future, he talked about being with Jesus. He was absolutely confident that he was going to be with Jesus.

If I talked about going on a vacation this summer, I could speak confidently that I was going to go on a trip. But I also know that something could always happen, like COVID-19 happened last year, that could change my plans.

When Paul talked about being with Jesus, he was so full of faith that he knew that nothing could change those plans. I know Paul must have faced several emotions along the way. But, here's what characterized Paul McKeithan: Paul was staring straight into the face of death, and he was full of joy and completely at peace.

How does a person come to be that way? What is it about Paul that made him like that?

There is another family in the Bible that was staring straight into the face of death. It is a family that Jesus loved dearly. If you have your Bible with you, and I hope you do, open with me to John 11. In this story, we will find the answer to what gives people like Paul this kind of faith and peace – even when they are staring straight into the face of death.

Body

This family that Jesus loved dearly was a family of two sisters and one brother who lived together in the same household. The names of the sisters were Mary and Martha and the brother's name was Lazarus. They lived together in a house in Bethany, which was a smaller town just outside Jerusalem, the capital city of the nation of Israel. This was a family Jesus loved very dearly, and Jesus visited their home on more than one occasion during His ministry.

This story takes place near the end of Jesus's ministry. At this point, the Jewish religious leaders desired to kill Jesus. They saw Jesus as a dangerous threat to their man-made traditions and their power and influence. They did not accept His teachings that He was God. So, these men were seeking to kill Jesus. In fact, they had recently picked up stones to stone Jesus to death, but Jesus escaped. He left the area of Jerusalem and went to the Jordan river near the place where John the Baptist had been baptizing people.

Meanwhile, back in Bethany, Lazarus had fallen deathly ill. When his sisters realized the severity of his condition, they sent a messenger to deliver a message to Jesus. The message was simple: Jesus, he whom You love is ill.

I like that. Mary and Martha made an appeal to Jesus. Their appeal was not based on Lazarus's love for Jesus, it was based on Jesus's love for Lazarus.

John 11:3b

"Lord, he whom you love is ill."

Can you relate to Mary and Martha? Have you ever been in a situation where you were staring death in the face, or where you were facing terrible trouble, so you called out to Jesus for help?

In verse five, the text says that Jesus loved this family. We know that Jesus is God. We know that God is love. Jesus is Love incarnate! Jesus is love in human flesh. Jesus is the very Person of Love. Jesus has the power to heal and to save. When Love heard this message, when Jesus heard this message, what would you expect Him to do? I would expect Love to come running! To rise up and save the day.

What does Jesus do?

John 11:4-7

4 But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. 7 Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."

What just happened? I thought love would come running. But Jesus delayed! Why would He do that? There was something greater at work that Jesus saw that this family and His disciples could not yet see.

Why did Jesus delay?

1. He delayed for the glory of God (verse 4).

2. He delayed so that the Son of God would be glorified (verse 4).
3. He delayed for His disciples' sake, that they might believe (verse 15).

John 11:14-15

14 Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died, 15 and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

Jesus made His reasoning very clear in this verse. He had delayed in going to Lazarus so that His disciples might believe. That word "believe" means to put your complete faith and confidence in something or someone. It means to fully trust. Jesus wanted them to believe, but to believe what? Jesus would soon answer this question.

In Jewish culture, there are strong traditions that must be upheld when a loved one dies. People from the Jewish community go and comfort the bereaved for a period of several days. This is much like what we have seen in the McKeithan home this week. Evelyn has had people in her house every day to provide her comfort. Apparently, this family was very loved by the community. Many Jews came down from Jerusalem and stayed in Bethany to be with Mary and Martha to comfort them in their grief.

As Jesus was traveling towards Bethany, word reached the sisters at the house that the Master was on his way. When they heard this, Mary stayed seated in the house, but Martha – who is dubbed the initiator and the more outspoken sister – jumped up from where she was seated and went out to meet Jesus.

When Martha came to Jesus, she had a conflict weighing heavily in her soul. She knew who Jesus was, and she knew He had the power to heal. She loved Jesus very much, and she also loved her brother Lazarus very much. Her heart was being torn apart by grief, and she was confused and disappointed. Her feelings were expressed as she immediately said to Jesus,

John 11:21

21 Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."

Can you relate to how Martha felt in this moment? Jesus, I love You, but where were You? Where have You been? Where were You in my terrible trouble? Where were You in my grief? It feels like You didn't show up.

Jesus, Love in human flesh, replied to Martha and said, "Your brother will rise again."

Now, Martha was a Jewish woman who believed in the scriptures. She knew of the prophecies in the scriptures that spoke of a resurrection of the dead on the last day. For example, she would have been familiar with Daniel's prophecy...

Daniel 12:2

2 And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Based on this belief, Martha replied to Jesus...

[John 11:24](#)

[24 Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."](#)

She expressed her faith in God and in the power of God to raise the dead.

It was in this exact moment that Jesus decided to reveal something brand new about Himself. Before this moment, Jesus had never made this claim about His identity and who He was. We know Jesus was allowing all this to happen so that this family and His disciples would believe. But believe in what? Jesus was about to answer that question with absolute clarity.

[John 11:25-26](#)

[25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"](#)

Wow. What a claim! This is who Jesus is. He wanted Martha to know it. He wanted Mary and Lazarus to know it. He wanted His disciples to know it. He IS the resurrection and the life! That is who Jesus is. Do you believe it?

Martha's response is one of simple and beautiful faith...

[John 11:27](#)

[27 She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."](#)

After this, Jesus sent Martha to tell Mary that He wanted to speak with her. Martha went back to the house and told Mary in private that Jesus wanted to speak with her. When Mary heard this, her heart was overwhelmed! She jumped up quickly and ran out the door. Now remember, those Jews from Jerusalem had come down to comfort her and were there in the house with her. When they saw Mary suddenly jump up and run out, they assumed that Mary was headed to the tomb to weep. So, they jumped up and followed her out. Little did they know... they were about to encounter Jesus.

When Mary arrived, she had the same conflict in her heart. She fell at the feet of Jesus and said, "Jesus, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

When Jesus saw Mary weeping, and He saw those who were with her weeping as well, He was deeply moved in His spirit and greatly troubled. He asked them, "Where have you laid Lazarus?" They said, "Lord, come and see." Then follows the shortest verse in the entire Bible. Just two words. Though short, these words give us a profound look at the heart of Jesus...

[Jesus wept.](#)

Isn't that amazing? Jesus wept! Jesus knew that there was something bigger at play here. Something that Mary and Martha did not yet know. He knew that this was for their good. He knew that God was using their suffering in the physical realm to meet a need they had that was a far greater need in the spiritual realm. He knew all this, but when He saw them weeping, Jesus wept.

Where was Jesus in their grief? Where was Jesus in their trouble? Where was Jesus when they were hurting? He was right there. He was weeping with those who weep. God is so good like that. He doesn't let His greater plans get in the way of understanding our weaknesses and our suffering. In our darkest hour, Jesus is with us. He is comforting us. He weeps with us.

They arrived at the tomb. It was a traditional Jewish tomb for that time period. It was a cave dug out of a large rock wall. There was a tombstone that had been used to cover up the entrance to the cave where they had laid Lazarus's body.

This scene had to be surreal for Jesus. Jesus knew the power of this moment and what He was about to reveal. He knew exactly where this fit in the storyline. You see, for months, Jesus had been telling His disciples that He was going to go to Jerusalem where He would be betrayed into the hands of the chief priest, the elders, and the scribes, that He would be crucified, and that He would be raised up on the third day.

This story in John's gospel is the last story before the events of Passion Week begin to unfold. The power of the placement of this story in the gospel of John cannot be missed. Jesus was about to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey on Palm Sunday, be crucified on Good Friday, and be resurrected on Easter Sunday. Just before these events, John's gospel makes it clear who Jesus is: He IS the resurrection and the life. He is the ONE who has power and authority over death and grave.

Jesus arrived at the tomb. He knew that it would only be a matter of days before His body would lay lifeless in a tomb much like this one. And it is at this moment that He chose to back up His claim and prove who He really was.

That's why, when they arrived, [Jesus told them to remove the tombstone.](#)

Hold up. Hard stop again.

Do you realize how socially inappropriate it was for Jesus to tell them to take away the stone? Lazarus had been in the grave for four days. Jews knew that decomposition had set in by now, and that the body would have a strong odor. It was very completely unacceptable to open a grave on the fourth day.

The best way I know how to relate it is by comparing it to our day. It would be like you burying a loved one in a cemetery. Then, a good friend of yours comes in from out of town a few days after the burial. You take him to the place where your loved one is buried, and your friend stands there a moment then says, "Alright, someone dig up the body." That's what this was like.

It is no wonder that Martha replied, ["Lord! By this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days."](#)

There goes Martha, the outspoken sister, speaking up again. She was the one who had moments ago expressed that she believed in Jesus.

Jesus reminded Martha,

[John 11:40](#)

40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"

Well, these sisters knew better than to doubt Jesus by this point. They gave their consent, and the stone was removed from the grave.

Once the stone was removed, Jesus prayed. He didn't pray privately, He prayed publicly so that this family, His disciples, and all the Jews gathered could hear Him. He prayed,

[John 11:41b-42](#)

"And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me."

Then, Jesus lifted up His voice and spoke three words, and only three. He didn't say them quietly, He shouted them with authority. Jesus lifted up His voice and cried out, "[Lazarus, come out!](#)"

At that moment, the heart of Lazarus that had not beat in four days... began to beat again.

The lungs of Lazarus that had been still for four days... took another breath.

Under his own strength, because of the resurrection power of Jesus, Lazarus got up and came out of his grave! He who once was dead was made alive by the resurrection power of King Jesus!

Glory!

When Lazarus came out, Jesus saw that he was still wearing grave clothes. These clothes were part of his former existence when He was dead. Jesus commanded the people standing around to remove those grave clothes and set Lazarus free!

It reminds me of those words of Jesus in [John 8:36](#)

36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

I love what Augustine, one of the great fathers of our faith, said about this moment. Augustine says that Jesus spoke three words, and only three, to raise Lazarus from the dead. But it is a good thing that Jesus spoke three words and not only two... for if Jesus had omitted the name "Lazarus" from His cry, ALL THE TOMBS WOULD HAVE GIVEN UP THE DEAD WHO WERE IN THEM!

That's the power and the authority of King Jesus. He is the resurrection and the life!!

Conclusion

Four times in this story, Jesus states His purpose for all these events. He says that all this happened so that they might believe. So that Mary and Martha would believe. So that Lazarus would believe. So that His disciples would believe. So that you and I would believe.

This happened so that we would believe, put our faith and trust in Jesus, as our resurrection and our life.

For you to believe that Jesus is your resurrection and your life, you must first believe that you are in need of resurrection. The Bible teaches us that, like Lazarus, all of us have a problem – we are all dead in our trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1).

Our sin has separated us from God. Because of sin, the Bible says that we are spiritually dead. To be spiritually dead is for our spirit to be separated from God's Spirit. Our spirits were never made to be separated from God's. Apart from His Spirit, our spirits are cut off from life. We may be walking around physically, but spiritually, because of sin, we are dead and in the grave.

If this is you this morning, God is already making you aware that this is true of you. You are spiritually dead because of your sin. Like Lazarus, there is nothing you can do to set yourself free. You are dead and in the grave.

The Bible says that God loves us. He loves us so much that He sent Jesus to die on the cross for our sins. While Jesus hung on that cross, He took upon Himself the sins of the entire world. Then, Jesus died.

He went to the grave with your sins and with mine. Like Lazarus, Jesus's lifeless body was placed in a cave and a tombstone was rolled in front to seal it. Jesus died for your sins and for mine.

But the Bible teaches that Jesus did not remain in that grave. Death and sin are powerless against our Lord! By the power of God, Jesus CAME OUT of that grave! He proved in His resurrection that He is the resurrection and the life. He proved that He has power over death, grave, and sin. He is alive!

Jesus raised Lazarus so that we might believe that He is the resurrection and the life. Jesus died to pay for our sins, but He was raised so that we might believe that He is our resurrection and our life!

John 11:25-26

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

Do you believe this? Do YOU believe this? Do you believe that, in Jesus, your sins can be completely forgiven? Do you believe that what God has done through Jesus is enough to call you out of spiritual death and into spiritual life?

You cannot experience the resurrection power of Jesus in your life unless you believe. Jesus made it clear in this story that these things happened so that we might believe. Do you believe?

Invitation

I want to offer us an invitation this morning. This invitation is from the Lord. The invitation is to “COME OUT!” In a moment, I am going to count to three and call you to “COME OUT” with a loud voice. When I do, here is what you should do.

If you know you are dead in your trespasses and sins, and if you know that you need Jesus to raise you from spiritual death to spiritual life, then when I say, “COME OUT!” you need to rise up from where you are seated and meet me right here at the front. When you do, someone will talk with you and pray with you and lead you to new life in Jesus.

But what about those who are already Christians? What is your call this morning? When I call, “COME OUT!” I am calling those of you who already know Jesus to come out of your grave clothes. Here’s what I mean...

Jesus has already resurrected you from the dead. You are already alive in Christ! But, for whatever reason, you’ve been living like you are just a dead man walking! You’re alive, but you’ve been hoping around in your grave clothes, carrying with you the baggage from your past life.

When I call you to, “COME OUT!” I am calling those of you who know Jesus to...

- COME OUT of your sin
- COME OUT of your addiction
- COME OUT of your unforgiveness
- COME OUT of your bondage
- COME OUT of your hate
- COME OUT of your selfishness
- COME OUT of your pride
- COME OUT of your shame

You who belong to Jesus, COME OUT of your grave clothes!

What happened in this story is that when Jesus told them to release Lazarus from His graveclothes, people went and helped set him free. When I cry, “COME OUT!” this morning, and you come forward to come out of your graveclothes, what is going to happen is that other Christians are going to come around you, listen to you, pray for you, and help you get connected to a small group where we can continue to stir you to faith in who you are in Jesus.

I know its Easter Sunday. I know you may have something you’ve got planned. Let me just say, for this, your family will wait for you. Your friends will wait for you. Lunch will be there when you get there. Do not rush this. This is God’s invitation to you. It’s time for you to come out of your grave, to come out of those graveclothes, and to walk in the resurrection power of Jesus. Do you believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life?

If you believe, it is time for you to respond to this call. Let’s do this. On the count of three, come out of your seat and meet me right here. Ready?

Church, if one or one hundred get up, we are going to applaud for them and celebrate them like we've just seen a dead man come to life. Are we ready?

One, two, three... COME OUT!

COME OUT of your grave!

COME OUT of your graveclothes!

Walk in the newness of life that is yours in Jesus!

(Sort out the group.)

While these pastors and leaders meet and pray with these individuals, Pastor Scott is going to lead us in a song to clothes. By the end of the song, we will know if there is someone who may follow the Lord in baptism today. When this song is finished, I will dismiss anyone who needs to go this morning. If we have a baptism, then I will let you know and you will be invited to stay and join us.

I am grateful for Paul McKeithan this morning. He is the star witness of what it means to put your faith and your trust in Jesus as your resurrection and your life. I know the Lord is here with us now. Let's express our appreciation to Jesus for His gift to us in the life and legacy of Paul McKeithan.

Let's celebrate our resurrected King! Let's worship King Jesus. He is our resurrection and our life. Scott, please lead us.