

God's Timing Is Simply the Worst ... and the Best

“Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was” John 11:5-6.

Timing is everything. Most of you don't need this reminder! Your lives have echoed this truth numerous times. Even more so now with everything that has happened in our world, this phrase has a deep impact. Right now, we're painfully aware that timing is everything. Whether you think of your own personal plans or even a certain individual in your life, timing has become so critically important! Even the timing of basic, daily functions, like washing our hands, is something we're closely focused upon.

The more difficult truth about timing is that we often perceive it with mixed opinions. Every plan or person's timing probably has a mix of both the worst and best timing, depending on our perspective. In fact, you could probably come up with a specific plan or person in your own life that involves that mix of both the worst and best timing. I have no doubt that you and I could spend the rest of our time together coming up with examples!

However, there's one person in each of our lives who truly has both the worst and best timing and I'm not sure we always feel comfortable stating it! It's God. Although we might be hesitant at times to voice this on the outside, it doesn't keep us from thinking this on the inside! Our Lord and Savior's timing, God's timing, is simply the worst and the best.

In John chapter 11, the focus for the rest of our mediation, we witness a powerful example of God's timing simply being the worst and the best. John brings us into a family crisis. Three siblings, Lazarus, Mary and Martha were in need. From this passage and some other passages of Scripture, we know that these three siblings were well known to Jesus. Martha was the sister who got upset with Mary and Jesus for being left to do all the work of hosting (see Luke 10:38-42). Mary, as John tells us in verse two of our text, was also known for coming to Jesus and anointing His feet with expensive perfume. Lazarus was Mary and Martha's brother and, as John records in verse five, Jesus loved him.

The current crisis for these siblings was that Lazarus was ill and nearing death. With Lazarus' days waning, his sisters got word to Jesus, hoping that He might be able to come and heal him. Timing was everything for these sisters, and certainly Jesus was aware of this! But Jesus' actions seemed to say otherwise! Listen again, to what John records in verses five and six, **“Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.”**

What? Jesus' actions seem to make no sense. If he loves this family, wouldn't He want to be with them as soon as possible? If timing was everything for this family, wouldn't timing be everything for Jesus? Instead, Jesus stays put for two more days! This was terrible timing! How could He do such a thing for this family, for people He loved?

When Jesus finally arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Talk about going from bad timing to worst, Jesus not only misses being with the family at Lazarus' passing but He also appears to be more than fashionably late to console and care for a family He knows so well! Many other people had already gone out there to be with the family well ahead of Him! Why was He so much later?

In their own ways, both sisters and even some of the crowd make it clear to Jesus that His timing was the worst. Martha was the first to encounter Jesus, and she did so with a difficult statement, **“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died”** (John 11:21). Jesus doesn't deny her claim and instead points her to the resurrection. While Martha agrees and believes in the resurrection on the Last

Day, it becomes quite clear that for Martha, Jesus' presence as the resurrection and the life has no impact on her present moment.

Several verses later, this becomes clear, as Martha warns Jesus with the obvious—that her brother's dead body is decomposing and stinks. In her mind, there was no need to open the tomb and create a stinky scene, since nothing could be done until the resurrection on the Last Day anyway! Martha's comments seem to indicate that while the resurrection of the Last Day brings future hope, that future timing isn't too comforting at the present moment as the freshness of Lazarus' death sinks in.

Like Martha, Mary also remarks, **“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died”** (*John 11:32*). As Jesus deals with this difficult statement once more, He doesn't deny her claim and listens to her with great compassion. However, just when it seems like Jesus' timing might not be the worst after all, some of the people there with the family begin to raise the question, **“Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?”** (*John 11:37*).

We can relate to Martha, Mary, and the crowd there with them. We, too, have had times in our lives where God's timing is simply the worse. There are times when we know that God could have just changed the outcome. How many of us have thought, “If only His timing had been my timing, things would have been so much better! Why didn't He deal with this situation as we know He could?” So often, we can find ourselves borrowing part of Martha and Mary's statement, “Lord, if you have been here, this wouldn't have happened.”

Yes, it's easy for us to see and believe that God's timing is the worst. As we begin to feel that God is delaying His action and response, this faulty belief only grows. It may be by choice, maybe by grief and pain, and perhaps even from frustration. Whatever distraction it might be, our sinful hearts are easily led astray to see God's timing as simply the worst.

However, the fullness of John 11, reveals to our sinful hearts and minds that even when God's timing seems and feels simply the worst, His timing is always the best. In the Lord's best timing, Martha and Mary witnessed their God whose love for them went beyond the grave. Death couldn't stop God's love or His impact on their lives. Although Lazarus had been dead for four days, their God was still present with them when all hope seemed lost. He personally shared their pain as He wept for Lazarus. He revealed His present impact on them as He raised Lazarus from the tomb.

What the Lord did for Martha and Mary was just a glimpse of what He was about to do for the world upon the cross. In what must have seemed like the worst timing ever, Jesus, the Son of God, died, leaving His disciples and followers devastated. But with His resurrection, He revealed what truly was the best timing for all people! The disciples, Christ's followers, Martha, Mary, Lazarus, you, and I, in the Lord's best timing have been forgiven, redeemed, and restored to life eternal. At the cross, God's timing that seems simply the worst has become the best for all believers in Christ, for you, and for me.

From this perspective of the cross, we, like Martha and Mary, witness our God, whose love for us goes beyond the grave. At the cross, we witness our God who knows our pain personally, who has suffered, bled, and died for us so that by these wounds He remains present with us even when all hope seems lost. And in our Lord's resurrection from the tomb, we are assured of God's present and daily impact on our lives and for all eternity!

Dear friends, I know that especially right now, it's hard to see God's timing as anything but the worst! And lost trips, lost jobs, major celebrations in jeopardy, increased family tensions, uncertainty about future plans, only tempt us to further voice frustration about God's timing. But even though God's actions and timing become very clearly not our own, may we not see this as His abandonment of us!

Rather may we continue to gather together in His Word, to be reminded of His perfect timing seen at the cross. Knowing that at the right time, in the fullness of time, Jesus went to the cross for our sake so that we might be led to trust God's timing, even now in these dark days. As we wait for the Lord and hope

in His Word, may we be assured and comforted that He is personally present right here and now, and that His timing truly is the best! Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Sheafer