

Meeting Jesus

LEADERS NOTES

Week 5

One or two of the questions in this study require people to think and dig about in the whole passage. The art of leading is to make sure that you give people time to respond rather than asking the question and answering it yourself. People may come up with a better answer than you or I, but if you think they are missing the point try to lead people to find the answer themselves rather than just telling them.

I think I advertised this study as being on Lazarus but really it is about Martha, Mary and what Jesus teaches about Himself. There are inevitably things in this chapter that the notes skip over.

We looked at Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany in Lent 2012. I explained that Pope Gregory the Great in the 7th Century argued that these were in fact the same women. This was not the view of older writers and though the view caught on even the Roman Catholic church today treats them as two separate women.

1. This passage and the few verses we know about Martha and Mary. Yet they, like others had come to believe many things about who Jesus is and His power over sickness. We can only guess how they had come to this point.

2. Mainstream Jews at the time of Jesus believed in the resurrection of the dead. The Sadducees were unusual in that they, accepting only the first five books of the Bible as authoritative rejected the idea of the resurrection. Jesus said the Sadducees were wrong - they did not understand the Scripture or the power of God. It has been fashionable in the last century or two to say that the idea of the resurrection evolved in Israelite religion. This suggestion is part of a

general approach to religion and the study of man shaped by the belief that mankind has evolved from other species over time.

But the New Testament, in particular Hebrews 11, shows that such an understanding is mistaken. The believers of the Old Testament did not look for the promises of God pure in this life. They were commended for their faith but did not receive what was promised (v39). Without the hope of the resurrection their faith was pointless and the promises of God were a sham.

4. I don't know the answer to this question. All the disciples were growing in understanding who Jesus is, but as the following question indicates they, like us, often struggle to live by what we say we believe.

6. Again I don't know the answer to this and the group may have various ideas.

It seems to me that in her grief Mary just could not face Jesus, unlike Martha. But when he actually called for her she did go.

7. I preached on this passage earlier in the term and suggested that the words Martha and Mary both said to Jesus reflected what they had said as they sat at their dying brother's bedside and in their conversation together after his death.

It is the posture of Mary that marks the difference and seems to indicate a different temperament to her sister. (In each of the three passages where Mary of Bethany is identified - Luke 10, John 11 & John 12 - we find her at Jesus' feet.)

9-11. I have no idea how accurate my statistic is. But faced with death people often find it very hard to understand why God does not intervene. We believe that God can heal the dying, and raise the dead, but he does not. A passage like this in John 11 which ought to provide us with great comfort can prove very difficult because it reminds us of the power of the Son.

The point of the statistic is to remember that though there are

several instances in the Bible of the dead being raised (nine to be precise, plus Jesus) these were exceptional and in no sense the norm in the life of Jesus.

In a similar way we see two men in the Bible who apparently did not die (Enoch and Elisha) to show us that though God has declared that death is the wage of sin, God's grace is greater.

12-15 Hopefully these questions will all make sense together. They also follow on from question 2.

At the general resurrection all will be raised at the command of Christ (Jn 5.28). (It has been remarked that the reason why Jesus said "Lazarus, come out" (Jn 11.43) was because if he had simply said "come out" every tomb in the graveyard would have opened.)

Those who have done good will rise to the resurrection of life and those who have done evil will rise to the resurrection of judgement. (Jn 5.29). As we saw in the previous study this is not about salvation by works. Ultimately to do good is to accept the Son of God and to do evil is to reject the Son of God who died for us. Hence the one who hears Jesus words and believes in Him has eternal life (Jn 5.24).

Therefore the judgement, though in the future, is also now, in that our response to Jesus determines what happens on that day. What matters is whether we come to the light (Jn 3.21) believing in Him (Jn 3.18) or whether we do not believe in Him (Jn 3.19) and so do not come to the light (Jn 3.20).

In John 11 Jesus is only putting one side of this equation as he speaks to the grieving Martha. If we believe in Him we will live, even though we die (v25) and therefore we will never die (v26), that is not die eternally.

*David Phillips,
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