

INTRODUCTION

During the holidays, traffic is crazy and it's sometimes impossible to find a parking place. I heard about a guy who was driving around looking for a parking place. The lot was packed. He finally resorted to praying. He said, "Lord if You will find me a parking place, I promise I'll never miss another Sunday at church, and I'll start tithing every week." At that very moment, a miracle happened. A car in front of him backed out of a prime parking place. As the man pulled in, he said, "Never mind, Lord, I found one on my own!"

We are in that strange week between Christmas and New Year's. In America we don't really have a name for it. The kids aren't in school. A lot of people are off from work. So what do you do? Make gift returns? Do more shopping for the after-Christmas bargains? For some it's a time to binge watch shows on your favorite streaming service. And then, there's football. There are 15 college bowl games between today and next Sunday. But now the only one that really matters is LSU and Clemson, and it isn't until January 13. So I encourage you to spend this time between Christmas and New Year's being with family and preparing for a new year.

With that introduction, let's get back into the Gospel According to John. Let's return to the scene in John 11 In a small town named Bethany, there were two sisters grieving over the death of their brother Lazarus. Their grief is even heavier to bear because of the circumstances of this death. Lazarus had been sick and dying for many days. The two sisters, Martha and Mary, had dispatched a speedy messenger to Jesus who was down near the Jordan River. The message was urgent and simple. "Come quickly. Lazarus is dying. Please come and heal him, Lord."

But Jesus delayed for several days before He headed to Bethany. Meanwhile the messenger returned to the sisters. They expected Jesus to arrive as the healing hero and raise their brother from his sickbed. But there is only silence and waiting at the beside of their brother. Then he died. And Jesus was a no-show. The sisters are hurt and confused. "Why didn't He come?"

Our story picks up as Jesus arrives four days after the death of Lazarus.

John 11:17-27. When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Bethany was near Jerusalem (less than two miles away). Many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother.

As soon as Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him, but Mary remained seated in the house. Then Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died. Yet even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." "Your brother will rise again," Jesus told her.

Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

"Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who comes into the world."

In the Gospel of John, Jesus makes seven amazing "I AM" claims about Himself. Every time He said, "I am" He was confessing that He is the same God who revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush. Here are the seven statements in John:

1. Jesus said, "I am the Bread of Life—whoever comes to me will not hunger."
2. "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life."
3. "I am the door. If anyone goes in by me he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture."
4. "I am the Good Shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep."
5. "I am the way, the truth, the life, no one comes to the Father except through me."
6. "I am the True Vine and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that that does not bear fruit, He takes away."
7. "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he dies yet shall he live. And everyone who believes in me will never die."

In this message we will focus on what Jesus meant when He said, "I am the Resurrection and the Life." In the next message we'll talk in detail about Jesus calling Lazarus back from death, but in this message, I want to examine the interaction between Jesus and Martha. I've entitled the message "Jesus turns setbacks into comebacks." Martha had experienced an emotional setback because of the death of her brother. To multiply her misery, there was the nagging accusation that this setback could have been prevented—if only Jesus had come when they called for Him.

Using the context of this story, I want you to learn about how Jesus can turn your setbacks into comebacks. Everybody has setbacks. It may be a setback related to finances, health, your career or relationships. In fact you may be right in the middle of a setback right now.

Everyone loves a story of a comeback. That's why the Rocky movies were so popular. In each movie Rocky spent most of the movie losing—and then, there's the comeback at the end ... but I'm not sure we needed SEVEN comeback stories that spun off into the Creed series.

We would all agree that it was a great comeback story when Jesus called Lazarus to come back out from the tomb. But the greatest comeback story of history is when the corpse of Jesus was placed into a dark tomb and He came back from death. Here's the big story of this message. Because Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life, He can turn your setbacks into comebacks. There are four stages of this process that we can learn from how Jesus interacted with Mary and Martha.

1. Meet Jesus at your point of desperation.

Sometimes when we experience a disappointment or a setback, we want to hide out and just be alone. It was part of the Jewish mourning custom that Martha should have stayed in her home sitting Shiva for seven days after Lazarus had died. But when she got word that Jesus was on the way, she couldn't sit still. The Bible says, "As soon as Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him, but Mary remained seated in the house." (John 11:20) The wording makes it clear that Jesus hadn't even arrived in the city and Martha ran out to meet Him. Now, she could have stayed in the house, or she could have run away from Jesus—but she did the right thing—she ran to Jesus.

What's your setback? Has someone you loved died, or left you? Are you struggling with some kind of sin or addiction that you can't seem to conquer? Are you just physically overwhelmed from taking care of all the people in your life? You may be struggling with depression or deep discouragement. Our most natural reaction is to hide out or to run away from God. But you must do just the opposite. You must do what Martha did, you need to run to Jesus. HE is your own source of hope and help. Jesus will meet you at your point of desperation.

But there are some people who are struggling, but they haven't come to God because they think they can still work out their problems on their own. They haven't come to what I call the POTD—the Point of Total Desperation. When you are at that point, that's where you'll meet God.

So the first thing you do when you've suffered a setback is to run to Jesus and to cry out to Him. Jesus is inviting you today. He says, "Come to me all of you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

2. Admit your pain of disappointment.

We see Martha coming up to Jesus and she disposes of any pleasantries—or in this case unpleasanties. She doesn't say, "Well, hello, Jesus, sorry you couldn't attend the funeral of your good friend Lazarus." No she gets right to her complaint. Then Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died." (John 11:21) Her grief was mixed with a sense of outrage and disappointment. Actually, I love the fact that Martha gives Jesus a piece of her mind. Her setback led to a blowback against Jesus. "Lord, where were you? We sent for you and then we waited and we waited and we waited. And now he's been dead four days. If you had been here he would still be alive!"

If you are upset today, it's important to express your pain and disappointment with God. He can handle it. Be open and transparent with God and tell Him where you are hurting the most.

We sometimes say something to God like Martha did. "Lord, I prayed and prayed and if You had only done x then y wouldn't have happened." But sometimes we turn our "ifs" into selfies. We start the blame game toward the person in the mirror. Sometimes we experience a setback and we say, "If only I had done x then y wouldn't have happened."

Whatever the source of your setback, you can be honest with God. The Bible says you can cast your cares on Him because He cares for you.

What setback are you facing today? Is it about money? Is it about health, your marriage, your future, your fear? Whatever it is, tell it to Jesus.

One of my favorite songs is Cry Out to Jesus by Third Day. They mention some of the setbacks that people are dealing with. The song says: To everyone who's lost someone they love; Long before it was their time; You feel like the days you had were not enough; When you said goodbye. And to all of the people with burdens and pains; Keeping you back from your life. You believe that there's nothing and there is no one Who can make it right; There is hope for the helpless; Rest for the weary; And love for the broken heart. And there is grace and forgiveness; Mercy and healing. He'll meet you wherever you are. Cry out to Jesus. Cry out to Jesus.

3. See Jesus for who He really is.

This is the turning point of where Jesus turns a setback into a comeback. At this point Martha considered Jesus a miracle-worker and a gifted teacher—but they hadn't understood yet that He was God. Martha said, "My brothers dead, but I know whatever you ask of God, He will do it." Jesus said, "Martha, your brother will rise again." Then Martha gave the correct Sunday School answer, but it really didn't help her current pain. I can almost see her roll her eyes as she says, "I KNOW he will rise again in the resurrection at the end of time." But I can just hear her thinking, "But that doesn't do me any good today—that's a long time away. I need help TODAY!"

It's a religious answer but it doesn't ease her pain.

That's a problem with a lot of people today. You know the correct spiritual answers, but it doesn't really lead to a sense of peace and joy today.

And then Jesus drops the bomb. He is going to move her from a place of abstract belief about something in the future to a present, personalized truth. Martha, you don't have to wait for a future resurrection. The resurrection is right here. He's standing in front of you. Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live." (John 11:25) The Resurrection isn't an event, it's a person. So your setback can become your comeback when you see who Jesus really is. But there's one more stage.

4. Boldly believe and receive His blessing.

So follow the steps. Martha was in the depths of a setback, so she went out to meet Jesus at the point of her desperation. Then she got honest with Him. She said, "Jesus if you had been here my brother would not have died." She was honest and transparent with Him.

But then Jesus turned the tables and said, "Martha, if you really knew who I AM, you wouldn't be upset with your setback. I'm not just someone who is waiting for the resurrection—I AM the Resurrection—and I am the Life." And now Jesus puts Martha on the spot.

He said, "Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who comes into the world." (John 11:26-27)

Jesus revealed His deity to Martha, but then He asked her if she believed Him. Three days earlier, when she was angry at Jesus she might not have believed it. But hearing it from the lips of Jesus, she said, "Lord I believe you are the Son of God." It was from that moment on that Martha knew that her setback was going to turn into a comeback.

In order to complete the loop, I'll give you a preview of what happened next. Jesus continued with Martha to her house. Her sister Mary comes out and falls at Jesus feet. She says the same thing, "If you had been here my brother would not have died."

There was a crowd gathered at the tomb and there was much weeping and wailing being expressed. We see the compassion of Jesus because the Bible says, "Jesus wept." I've always been amazed at the tender heart of Jesus revealed by those tears. He knew that Lazarus would walk out of the tomb, and yet he was so touched by the grief of others that He cried with them. They pointed to a shallow cave where a stone had been rolled over the opening. Jesus told them to remove the stone. Martha said, "Lord are you sure you want to do that? After four days, there is going to be a foul odor." Jesus said, "Didn't I tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" Then he cried with a loud voice, "LAZARUS, COME OUT!" Of course, Jesus if hadn't identified Lazarus, every dead corpse in that area would have jumped out of their tombs! "Lazarus, come out!"

It's important to notice at this point that Jesus didn't resurrect Lazarus, he resuscitated him. He gave life back to him, but Lazarus would die again. The first man who would be resurrected would be Jesus—who came back from death and is alive forever more.

Now, back to the door of the cave. The scene is almost comical. Before they buried Lazarus, they had wrapped his body in long strips of cloths from head to toe. So, Lazarus was basically a mummy hopping out of the cave. And Jesus said, "Loose Him and let Him go!" And when they unwound those old graveclothes Mary and Martha looked into the eyes of their brother—living and breathing. Their sorrow was turning into joy. The worst day of their lives had become the best day of their lives. Jesus had turned their setback into a major comeback. And Jesus can turn your setbacks into comebacks.

CONCLUSION

There are hundreds of comeback stories I could talk about. Some say that Tiger Woods winning the 2019 Masters is the greatest comeback story in sports. That was big, but Tiger doesn't give

the Lord any credit for it. But there's another sports hero I admire more. Her comeback ranks at the top of my personal list.

Bethany Hamilton was a thirteen-year old girl in Kauai who loved to surf. In 2003 she was attacked by a shark and lost her left arm. After losing nearly 2/3 of her blood, there were doubts that she would even survive. But she lived. That's a pretty big setback, but within a month she was surfing again. Two years later she won the national surfing championship. Two movies have been made about her life; Soul Surfer and Unstoppable. Seventeen years later, Bethany is married with two sons and still competes and wins surfing competitions around the world.

What a comeback. Her resilience and faith has inspired thousands of people. But she gives God the credit for her remarkable comeback. She says: "I grew up in a Christian home. When the shark attack happened. I already knew that He had me in His care, and I trusted that He had a plan and a reason for all this. I totally believed that. I still definitely rely on my faith in God and just say 'hey God I don't know why I lost my arm but I'm going to trust you and know that good can come from this situation.'"

Maybe you've had some setbacks in 2019—or you're facing some setbacks in 2020. Stay close to Jesus, tell him your pain, see Him for who He really is, and be ready to claim your blessing because He is the expert and turning setbacks into comebacks!

OUTLINE

1. Meet Jesus at your point of desperation.

"As soon as Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him, but Mary remained seated in the house."
John 11:20 CSB

2. Admit your pain of disappointment.

Then Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died." *John 11:21*

3. See Jesus for who He really is.

"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live." *John 11:25*

4. Boldly believe and receive His blessing.

Jesus said, "Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who comes into the world." *John 11:26-27*

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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