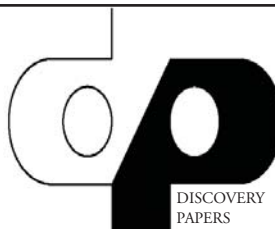


# TASTE AND SEE

**SERIES: COME AWAKE!**



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John 11:38-46  
3rd Message  
Scott Grant  
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Mark Twain said, “You don’t know what it is you want, but it just fairly makes your heart ache, you want it so much.”

Some of us know what we want—or we think we know what we want, anyway. Others of us just know that we want. Even if we know what we want and get what we want, however, we are usually left ... wanting. Our hearts still ache. There is a story, however, halfway through the Gospel of John, that may help us identify what we really want and may even soothe the ache a bit.

The story in John 11 has both encouraged and challenged me since I first encountered it as a teenager. So meaningful has the story been that my wife, Karen, and I named our second daughter after it. The setting for the story is the village of Bethany. That’s the name we chose: Bethany. The story features two sisters, Martha and Mary, and it was not lost on me, as Bethany was about to enter the world, that two sisters would be growing up together in our family, just as Martha and Mary grew up together. First, before diving into the text, some background:

Martha and Mary sent word to Jesus, who was known to heal people, that their brother Lazarus was gravely ill, but Jesus, though he loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, remained where he was. Finally, two days after receiving the message, Jesus proposed to his disciples that they return to the region of Judea for the sake of Lazarus, their friend, even though Lazarus by that time had already died and even though Jesus’ enemies in Judea had attempted to kill him when he was there last. The disciples protested but nevertheless followed Jesus to Judea for what at least one of them assumed would be a pointless suicide mission. Jesus came to the Judean village of Bethany, the home of Martha and Mary, but not until four days after the death of Lazarus. The hero came, but he came too late. Jesus sought to deepen the faith of Martha, who put up a brave front, and to restore the faith of Mary, who wept over her loss. Martha, Mary, and even the mourners who came from nearby Jerusalem to comfort them all wondered what might have been if Jesus had arrived while Lazarus was still alive. None of them, though, wondered what might be.

## Jesus comes to the tomb

John 11:38-42:

**<sup>38</sup>Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. <sup>39</sup>“Take away the stone,” he said. “But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.” <sup>40</sup>Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?” <sup>41</sup>So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. <sup>42</sup>I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”**

Earlier, the grief of those affected by the death of Lazarus triggered an emotional convulsion in Jesus; now, his approach to the tomb triggers another emotional convulsion. The death of his friend Lazarus affects Jesus in a deep and ongoing way. He is drawing the pain of Martha, Mary, and the mourners onto himself. Earlier, he said that the illness of Lazarus would serve to reveal the glory—that is, the power and goodness—of both God and the Son of God: “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.” This is what Jesus, the Son of God, does: he draws the pain of the world onto himself and thereby shows the world what God is like.

Martha, though, can’t fathom what purpose is to be served by the removal of the stone covering Lazarus’ tomb. From Martha’s perspective, Lazarus is a lost cause: he’s been dead so long that by now decomposition would be running its course. First, Jesus came too late; now, he apparently wants to shame her brother by exposing the stench of his body to the world. Isn’t that adding insult to injury?

Earlier, when Jesus arrived on the outskirts of Bethany, Martha asserted her belief in him despite his tardiness, but Jesus challenged her to believe in a deeper, more personal way. Jesus now reminds Martha of their earlier exchange and summarizes the implications of it:

“Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?” Twice, Martha told Jesus that she believed in him, even calling him the Messiah, the Son of God, but she doesn’t believe that she will see the power and goodness of God in Jesus any time soon. In fact, she’s far more concerned with what she expects Jesus to smell (the body of her dead brother) than with what she might be able to see (the glory of God). What could the removal of the stone covering the tomb of a decomposing corpse have to do with the glory of God? Martha, like so many of us, is worried about what Jesus is doing, but Jesus says, in so many words, to her and to us, “Trust me.”

With the stone removed, Jesus looks not into the tomb but up to God. If Martha believes, she will see the glory of God. Jesus, looking up, already sees the glory of God, and he thanks the Father for hearing him. Jesus doesn’t feel the personal need to thank the Father for hearing him, for he knows that he always has the Father’s ear. He thanks the Father not for his own sake but for the sake of the crowd that has gathered. By publicly giving thanks, Jesus draws those listening to him into his intimacy with the Father while hoping that they will believe that the Father has sent him.

Jesus is not going to engender such faith simply by thanking God for hearing him. Just because someone gives thanks to God for hearing him doesn’t mean you should believe that God has sent that person. You can tune into certain cable television channels and listen to preachers giving thanks to God for hearing them, but you would be advised not to believe that God has sent them.

Jesus, having spoken with Martha and prayed to the Father, turns his attention to Lazarus.

## Jesus calls to Lazarus

John 11:43-46:

**<sup>43</sup>When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” <sup>44</sup>The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.” <sup>45</sup>Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. <sup>46</sup>But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.**

Jesus doesn’t simply speak to God; he also speaks

to ... Lazarus? To a corpse? To a man who’s stone-cold, stinking dead? It’s one thing to claim that God hears you; it’s quite another to believe that a corpse hears you. And what does he say to the dead man? He cries out, so there can be no doubt about what he’s saying, “Lazarus, come out!” What? He’s asking a dead man to leave his tomb? On the one hand, that’s a bit much to ask of a dead man. On the other hand, if Lazarus doesn’t come out, Jesus will become a laughingstock, his following will dissipate, and he can forget about saving the world. A lot is riding on what happens next.

Lazarus hears and obeys: he comes out. With that, Jesus asks those in the crowd to release Lazarus from his grave clothes, which he will need no more. The people in the crowd heard Jesus give thanks to the Father; they heard him call out to Lazarus; they saw Lazarus come out of the tomb; and if per chance any shred of doubt remains, they touch the body of the once-dead man as they release him from his grave clothes. Indeed, many of those who had come from Jerusalem to comfort Martha and Mary began believing in Jesus. And Martha—she saw the glory of God. She saw his power and goodness in the person of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Even so, for Martha, and for Mary and the disciples of Jesus, there would be much more to see.

Stunningly, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Then again, if he is who claims to be, if he is who John has portrayed him to be in the narrative, then perhaps the raising of Lazarus is not so surprising after all. Jesus had told his disciples that he was going to Judea to wake up their sleeping friend. He told Martha, “Your brother will rise again.” When he called for Mary, who was bent over in grief, she literally “was raised quickly and went out” to meet Jesus. Likewise, but on a grander scale, as soon as Jesus called out to Lazarus, he was raised quickly and “came out.”

What if Jesus had arrived in Bethany while Lazarus was still alive, and what if Jesus healed him according to the wishes and wonderings of Martha, Mary, and the mourners? Then he wouldn’t have raised Lazarus from the dead. No, the hero didn’t come too late. He came right on time.

## Something better

What sort of loss have you suffered? Has insult been added to injury? Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. Therefore, because he loved them, he did not come to Bethany when the sisters called. Because Jesus

loves you, he does not give you what you want when you want it. Know this, though: Jesus has plans for your loss that you don't know about. Your loss, therefore, is being drawn up into greater purposes. Your loss isn't the end of the story. If you could see the outcome now, it wouldn't make sense. When you see it later, it will take your breath away.

The hero only appears to come too late. In reality, he comes right on time. Therefore, don't wonder what might have been; dream about what might be. David Wilcox sings:

*Look, if someone wrote a play just to glorify*

*What's stronger than hate, would they not  
arrange the stage*

*To look as if the hero came too late, he's almost  
in defeat*

*It's looking like the Evil side will win, so on the  
Edge*

*Of every seat, from the moment that the whole  
thing begins*

*It is ...*

*Love that mixed the mortar*

*And it's love who stacked these stones*

*And it's love who made the stage here*

*Although it looks like we're alone*

*In this scene set in shadows*

*Like the night is here to stay*

*There is evil cast around us*

*But it's love that wrote this play ...*

*For in this darkness love can show the way.<sup>1</sup>*

The hero appears to come too late—he doesn't do what you want when you want—because he wants to do something better: something better for you. Jesus is like a good parent who sometimes withholds from his children what they want in order to give them what they need—what they really want, even if they don't know enough to want it. What, then, does Jesus want to give us? What do we need? What do we really want?

Before he left for Judea, Jesus told his disciples, "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe." When he came to Bethany, he told Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you

believe this?" Later, at the tomb, he told her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" Also at the tomb, he told the Father, "I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." Jesus does what he does in John 11 to engender faith.

Jesus wants us to believe. First, he wants us to believe that there is a Father, an all-powerful, all-loving God. Second, he wants us to believe that the Father has sent him. Jesus doesn't do what we want him to do because he wants to do something better: he wants to give us an ever-deepening, increasingly resilient faith. What does faith do for us? First, consider the rest of the story.

## The rest of the story

John 11, which features the death of Lazarus, advances the narrative in a way that foreshadows the death of the Son of God. Martha, Mary, and the disciples were just beginning to see the glory of God. After the raising of Lazarus, Jesus, as he moved toward his death, said:

—"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (John 12:23).

—"Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once. (John 13:31-32).

—"Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you" (John 17:1).

—"And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began" (John 17:5).

Jesus was betrayed, abandoned, beaten, ridiculed, and nailed to a cross on a hill outside Jerusalem, taking into his own being the sins of the world. There, on a hill outside Jerusalem, the glory of God—especially his goodness—was manifest. The prophet Isaiah, equating sin with sickness, literally says that the Messiah bore our "sickness" (Isaiah 53:4). But this sickness did not end in death, although Jesus died and was buried. No, it was for God's glory so that God's Son would be glorified through it.

Note the links between the story of Lazarus and events of John 19 and 20:

—Women named Mary feature prominently in both John 11 and John 19-20: John 11 features Mary of Bethany, and John 19-20 features Mary Magdalene.

—Jesus, like Lazarus, is wrapped in grave clothes and placed in a tomb.

—When Jesus came to the tomb of Lazarus, he said, “Take away the stone”; when Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb of Jesus, she sees that the stone has already been taken away.

—Whereas Jesus had to order Lazarus to be released from his grave clothes, two of Jesus’ disciples discovered his grave clothes, but not his body.

—Mary of Bethany wept because she lost Lazarus and because Jesus didn’t come when she asked him; Mary Magdalene weeps because she has lost Jesus and because she thinks his body has been stolen. It seems as if grave robbers have added insult (removing the body of Jesus) to injury (the crucifixion of Jesus).

—Mary of Bethany, while she was weeping, responded to Jesus’ invitation, through Martha, “The Teacher [Rabbi] is here and is asking for you.” Mary Magdalene, while she is weeping, hears a voice from behind her, “Mary”; turns around to see Jesus, alive from the dead; and simply says, “Rabboni,” an Aramaic form of the word “Rabbi.”

—In John 11, when Jesus asked for the location of Lazarus, the crowd answered, “Come and see”; in John 20, Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb of Jesus and sees that the stone has been removed and later, after encountering the risen Jesus, comes to the disciples to tell them, “I have seen the Lord.”

—Many Jews believed in Jesus after he raised Lazarus from the dead; similarly, Jesus’ disciples believe in him after he himself has risen from the dead.

—Although Lazarus rose only to die again and await the resurrection at the last day, Jesus rose never to die again and to, in fact, effect the resurrection at the last day.

There, in a tomb outside Jerusalem, the glory of God—especially his power—was manifest. God raised his Son from the dead, triumphing over Satan, sin, and death and inaugurating a new age that will culminate in the return of the Son and the creation of a new world. John 11, then, advances the narrative not only in a way that foreshadows the death of the Son of God but also in a way that foreshadows his resurrection.

## The living water

What, then, does faith do for you? First, because Jesus is the resurrection and the life, if you believe in him, you will live and you will never die. You may drink what Jesus calls “the living water” (John 4:14, 7:38). Then, when you die, you will be more alive than you could have ever

imagined. The living water is love: pure, unadulterated, crystal-clear love. Malcolm Muggeridge, a British journalist and television personality who came to faith in his sixties and later introduced the world to Mother Teresa, had this to say about the living water:

*I may, I suppose, regard myself, or pass for being, a relatively successful man. People occasionally stare at me in the streets—that’s fame. I can fairly easily earn enough to qualify for the highest slopes of Inland Revenue—that’s success. Furnished with money and a little fame even the elderly, if they care to, may partake of trendy diversions—that’s pleasure. It might happen once in a while that something I said or wrote was sufficiently heeded for me to persuade myself that it represented a serious impact on our time—that’s fulfillment. Yet I say to you—and I beg of you to believe me—multiply these tiny triumphs by a million, add them all together, and they are nothing—less than nothing, a positive impediment—measured against one draught of that living water that is offered to the spiritually hungry, irrespective of who or what they are.<sup>2</sup>*

Muggeridge got what many of us want, yet he considered it nothing, less than nothing, and even an impediment. What do you want? What do you ache for? Perhaps you ache for the living water.

## The glory of God

First, if you believe in Jesus, you will taste the living water. Second, you will see the glory of God.

On December 6, 1272, Thomas Aquinas, considered by many to be the greatest theologian of the Middle Ages, was closing in on completing his definitive work, *Summa Theologiae*, when something happened to him. He had already written about a hundred works: commentaries on the scriptures, commentaries on the church fathers, sermons, philosophical treatises, and commentaries on the Greek philosophers. Yet before finishing his masterpiece, he simply stopped. His scribe, Reginald of Piperno, urged him to get back to work, but Thomas replied, “I cannot, for I have seen things that make all my writings seem like straw.” He never wrote again. Thomas had written furiously of God, but after encountering God in a new way, he could write no more.

I must confess that I have never read even a word from Thomas Aquinas’ prodigious and (apparently) quite brilliant output. But I can’t imagine him writing any better



words than those he spoke to his scribe. I don't think he needed to finish his masterpiece, because the sentence he spoke to his scribe was his masterpiece: "I cannot, for I have seen things that make all my writings seem like straw." And I fear that in my own efforts to write about Jesus, all I'm doing is piling up straw. But write I must—at least until I see what Thomas Aquinas saw. No one knows precisely what he saw, but if we are to believe the words of Jesus, it is possible for us to see the glory of God even now—perhaps not with our eyes, definitely with our imaginations.

If you want to see the glory of God, the first place to look, in your mind's eye, is to a hill outside Jerusalem, where Jesus drew the pain of the world onto himself:

*Behold the man upon the cross  
My sin upon His shoulders  
Ashamed I hear my mocking voice  
Call out among the scoffers  
It was my sin that held Him there  
Until it was accomplished  
His dying breath has brought me life  
I know that it is finished.<sup>3</sup>*

The second place to look, in your mind's eye, is to an empty tomb outside Jerusalem, where Jesus triumphed over everything that opposes God and the image of God in humanity, including death itself:

*One day the grave could conceal Him no longer  
One day the stone rolled away from the door  
Then he arose over death he had conquered  
Now is ascended, my Lord evermore.<sup>4</sup>*

Behold the man upon the cross, and behold the tomb without the man.

If you want to see the glory of God, there's one other place you might look: your own life. Where did you come from? Random chance? What are you here for?

If random chance is responsible, you're here for nothing. But do you really believe that? Do you think, perhaps, that there might be a creator, and that you were created for something? Do you think, perhaps, even if your life has been trying up to this point, that you've been blessed? If you've been blessed, then there must be a blessing. Have you ever had the feeling that you just wanted to give thanks: to something, to someone? If you look over your life, can you see that it's a story—with surprises and

patterns—that you couldn't have authored? Perhaps, then, there's an author. If you look carefully at your own life, you might be able to see the goodness and power of God.

What do you want? What do you ache for? Perhaps you ache for a glimpse of the glory of God. Believe in Jesus: taste the living water and behold the glory of God.

On Easter Sunday in 1982, I was mired in the deepest depression of my life. I had just lost a cherished relationship, and my career as a journalist was going backward, not forward. I knew I needed to attend a church that day. I knew that I needed Jesus. So, I got up and came alone to Peninsula Bible Church. It just so happened that I wandered to the church that I would later serve as a pastor. In 1982, although I had begun following Jesus as a teenager eight years earlier, I began sensing the presence of the Lord in a new way. I lost what I had cherished, but I found something better. I thought I was moving backward, but in reality, I was moving forward along a new path. I began drinking more deeply from the living water, and the love of Jesus refreshed me. I began seeing the power and goodness of God more profoundly, more frequently, and in more places: in the story of Jesus, of course, but also in my own story. Maybe I didn't just happen to wander to PBC on Easter Sunday in 1982. Perhaps I was led to the church twenty-nine years ago. Ah, I think I detect a pattern—a surprising pattern. On Easter Sunday, I came to a church, knowing simply that I needed to be in a church. Twenty-nine years later, on Easter Sunday, I'm preaching the sermon at that same church. I see the glory of God.

## The time that has come

Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live" (John 5:25). Perhaps in some sense, in the time that has come, you're dead: dead, because you want what cannot satisfy you for more than a moment. According to the scriptures, those who don't yet believe in Jesus are dead in their sins—because they prefer pale substitutes to the living water and the glory of God (Ephesians 2:1). Perhaps, then, your name is Lazarus. All the players in the drama could see themselves in Lazarus—Martha, whose faith was resilient but not so personal; Mary, whose faith was personal but not so resilient; the disciples, who assumed that Jesus was leading them on a pointless suicide mission; the mourners, who were oblivious to Jesus' love for them. But listen. Jesus calls to them, and to you:

"Lazarus, come out!"

Can you hear him? If so, then get up.

John ends the story of Lazarus in a matter-of-fact manner. He chooses not to report how anyone—not even Lazarus or Jesus—reacted to the miracle, except for the mourners who had traveled from Jerusalem. What, no gasps of amazement? No praises for God? No tears of joy? What’s missing, mostly, is an embrace between Jesus and his newly alive friend. Maybe it’s up to us to fill in what’s missing. Maybe it’s up to you. Get up, Lazarus, worship the Lord, and feel the arms of Jesus around you—and dream with him about what might be.

If you don’t believe, wouldn’t now be a good time to start believing—now that you have a better idea of what faith can do for you? It can be as simple as taking a chance on Jesus. You’ve taken chances before, haven’t you? You’ve taken chances on things that have promised less and delivered much less. Take a chance on Jesus: give your life to him. Do you think you might like to taste the living water and behold the glory of God? Believe in Jesus.

## The time that is coming

A time has come, but Jesus might also remind us that “a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out” (John 5:28-29). Jesus will come again to consummate his reign, to turn evil into good, to draw all suffering up into the redemptive purposes of God—to replace ashes with a crown of beauty, mourning with the oil of gladness, and despair with a garment of praise. After all, although evil has been cast around us, it’s Love that wrote the play. Those who have longed for the appearing of Jesus will rise, not like Lazarus, who died again, but like Jesus, never to die again. They will drink deeply from the river of living water, though even one sip will make everything else seem like less than nothing. They will gaze into the eyes of their Savior, into the face of the glory of God, and everything else will seem like straw.

Yes, Jesus will come again—right on time.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>David Wilcox, “Show the Way” (Hollywood: A&M Records, 1994).

<sup>2</sup>Malcolm Muggeridge, *Seeing Through the Eye* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 97.

<sup>3</sup>Stuart Townend, “How Deep the Father’s Love for Us” (1995).

<sup>4</sup>J. Wilbur Chapman, Mark Hall, and Michael Bleeker, “Glorious Day” (Word Music Group, 2009).