“WINNING THE BATTLE OVER grief and sorrow”

John 11:28-37 (NKJV)

About five or six years ago I received an email from a dear Christian brother who had visited our Church website a number of times. His name is Eddie Morris from Minerva, Ohio.

Little did I know when I received that first email that Eddie and I would develop a very dear friendship over these past several years.

Just last week I received an email from Eddie I would like to share with you before I get into tonight's message.

Eddie wrote........

Dear Brother Reggie

I do hope that this e-mail finds EVERYTHING is WELL with you. You have been a GOOD INTERNET FRIEND. The reason I am e-mailing you today I sure would appreciate it if you would PRAY for me, I am kind of DOWN. I feel LONELY and DEPRESSED. My sister ROSIE just passed away.

I looked at your website and saw that you are starting a new series on “Winning Life's Battles.” I tried to find a message on GRIEF and SORROW and I can't find either. If they are on your website
would you please be so kind as to let me know where. I just need some ENCOURAGEMENT TODAY. Thank you BROTHER. --Eddie

Well tonight's message in our series on “WINNING LIFE'S BATTLES” is on this very subject Eddie Morris asked about. And that is WINNING THE BATTLE OVER GRIEF AND sorrow.

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WHAT IS GRIEF?

The dictionary defines “grief” as: keen mental suffering or distress over affliction or loss; sharp sorrow; painful regret.

Author Edgar Jackson defines “grief” in a much more personal way. Jackson writes:

“GRIEF is a young widow trying to raise her three children alone. GRIEF is a mother walking daily to a nearby cemetery to stand quietly and alone a few minutes before going about the tasks of the day. She knows that part of her is in that cemetery, just as part of her is in her daily work.

GRIEF is the silent, knife-like terror and sadness that comes a hundred times a day, when you start to speak to someone who is no longer there. GRIEF is the emptiness that comes when you eat alone after eating with another for many years.

GRIEF is teaching yourself to go to bed without saying good night to the one who has died. GRIEF is the helpless wishing that things were different when you know they are not and never will be again. GRIEF is a whole cluster of adjustments, apprehensions, and uncertainties that strike life in its forward progress and make it difficult to redirect the energies of life.” (“Growing Strong” Charles Swindoll, p. 171, Multonomah Press, Portland, Oregon, Copyright 1983)
Well let's get into tonight's scripture text. It's a passage that is quite familiar to us. Please open your Bibles to the eleventh chapter of JOHN'S GOSPEL. And let's read verses 28-37.

**JOHN 11:28-37 (NKJV)**

28 And when she had said these things, she went her way and secretly called Mary her sister, saying, “The Teacher has come and is calling for you.”

29 As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly and came to Him.

30 Now Jesus had not yet come into the town, but was in the place where Martha met Him.

31 Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforting her, when they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, saying, “She is going to the tomb to weep there.”

32 Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.”

33 Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled.

34 And He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to Him, “Lord, come and see.”

35 Jesus wept.

36 Then the Jews said, “See how He loved him!”

37 And some of them said, “Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?”
THE BACKGROUND

Let me refresh your memory as to what had occurred in the verses prior to the ones we just read.

At this particular time in Jesus' ministry, He is preaching and teaching in the region of Judea east of the Jordan river, approximately 30-40 miles from Jerusalem.

One day a messenger came to Jesus with news from Mary and Martha that their brother Lazarus was very sick. Now these people were “no strangers” to Jesus. In fact, they were just like family.

verse 5 says, “Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister (Mary) and Lazarus.”

Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived in the small Judean village of Bethany, which was located just 2 1/2 miles from Jerusalem. Jesus had eaten many meals and slept many nights in the home of these people any time He came to Jerusalem. They loved Jesus and Jesus loved them! In fact, we are told in v. 2 that Mary was the one who had anointed Jesus with the fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair.
Now Jesus' response to this “bad news” about Lazarus probably seemed very peculiar to those who heard it.

v. 4  When Jesus heard that, He said, “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”

Even more puzzling was the fact Jesus delayed going to Bethany for two whole days. (v.6) That's not how we would have reacted is it? If we get a phone call that one of our loved ones or a very close friend is on their death bed our immediate response would likely be to throw a few things together.......jump in the car.....and go straight to the home of that loved one or friend.

But that's not what Jesus did. He delayed leaving for Bethany for two whole days. And over the course of those two days His disciples tried to discourage Him from going to Bethany period, because the last time He was in nearby Jerusalem there had been an attempt made on Jesus' life.

Jesus was not dissuaded by their fears. You see, Jesus knew something His disciples didn't know. Jesus knew there was a divine purpose behind Lazarus' sickness and ultimate death.
Notice what Jesus said to His disciples in verses 11-15..........

John 11:11-14a (NKJV)

11 These things He said, and after that He said to them, “Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.”
12 Then His disciples said, “Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.”
13 However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep.
14 Then Jesus said to them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him.”

After delaying His departure for two days, Jesus and His disciples left for Bethany. Now remember, Jesus didn’t have a car. He and His disciples traveled on foot. It took them two days to get to Bethany.

How do we know that? Verse 17 says, So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. Lazarus had in all likelihood died before the messenger ever reached Jesus. And remember Jesus delayed two days after He got word of Lazarus' sickness. And it took Him two days to walk to Bethany. So Lazarus has already been dead four days.

Now if you have ever walked into the home of a family that has just lost a loved one you can relate to the scene Jesus is about to walk into. He is about to meet people in the darkest moment of their lives.......people who's lives have seemingly come to a screeching halt because DEATH has stolen a loved one away from them.

As we look closely at these grief-stricken people we learn some
very valuable truths that will help us **WIN THE BATTLE OVER GRIEF AND SORROW.**

Here is......

**TRUTH #1: Godly Living Doesn't Make Me Immune To Grief and Sorrow (vs. 20-22)**

John 11:20-22 (NKJV) Now Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. Now 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 of God, God will give You.”**

1. You have to wonder how many times over the course of those four days Mary and Martha had said, **“Oh, if Jesus had only been here!”** “Oh If Jesus had only been here.”

2. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were godly people. They were devout believers and followers of Jesus. These were righteous people......people of faith. Remember they had opened their home to Jesus on many occasions. And remember Mary had anointed Jesus with precious oil and wiped His feet with her hair.

3. Being such godly people, is it possible Mary and Martha believed that JESUS would have spared them from having to go through the agonizing grief of losing their brother? Is it possible they believed that the LORD
would reward their godly living by sparing the life of Lazarus?

4. I believe this is something a lot of Christians struggle with. But we must understand that **being a Christian and living a godly life doesn't make us immune to grief and sorrow.**

5. Just as GOD allows the **sun to rise on the good and the evil, and allows the rain to fall on the just and the unjust, GOD ALLOWS GRIEF AND SORROW TO FALL UPON THE GODLY AND THE UNGODLY.**

6. Its not uncommon in the time of grief and sorrow to think that God has taken our loved one from us for something we did or didn’t do. Remember Job's three friends blamed the deaths of Job's ten children on sin in Job's life.

7. **The truth is**, we live in a sinful world, and death is the result of the original sin in the Garden of Eden. And except for **Enoch and Elijah**, every solitary soul that has ever set foot on this earth experienced death, including Jesus Christ. “**For it is appointed unto man once to die, and then to face the judgment.**” (Heb. 9:27)

8. **The truth is** you can live a very godly, very righteous life that is pleasing to the LORD, and still go through
the agony of grief and sorrow.

9. **ABRAHAM** was a righteous man, yet he experienced the grief of losing Sarah.

   **JOB** was a righteous man, yet he experienced the grief of losing all ten of his children.

   **MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS** was a righteous woman, and yet she experienced the grief of losing Joseph, before Jesus was a grown man.

   **Even JESUS Himself is called in the scriptures, “A Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief.”** (Isaiah 53:3a)

10. In our times of grief and sorrow we must remember this very important truth: **GODLY LIVING DOESN’T MAKE ME IMMUNE TO GRIEF AND SORROW.**
TRUTH #2: The LORD Comes To Meet Me In My Grief (v.28)

John 11:28 (NKJV) And when she had said these things she went her way and secretly called Mary her sister, saying, “The Teacher has come and is calling for you.”

1. When Lazarus died, Jesus was thirty or forty miles away on the other side of the Jordan River. But for all intents and purposes, it probably seemed to Mary and Martha that Jesus was clear on the other side of the world.

2. For four agonizing days they experienced unbearable grief and loneliness and sorrow. For four agonizing days it seemed as though they had been abandoned and forsaken. BUT JESUS CAME AND MET THEM IN THEIR GRIEF.

3. Most all of us has been through the experience of losing a loved one. And I would dare say that during our time of intense grief it probably seemed as though the LORD was a million miles away. We felt as though we had been abandoned and forsaken.
4. But the truth is The LORD always, I repeat ALWAYS comes to meet us in our time of grief.

Psalm 34:18 (NKJV) The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit.

5. If Mary and Martha had any doubts whatsoever that JESUS truly cared about what they were going through, those doubts were erased when they saw Jesus weeping beside the tomb of their brother. “JESUS WEPT” may be the shortest verse in the Bible, but those two words reveal a powerful truth and that is Jesus truly cares for us......He cares when we grieve! He cares when we are in sorrow! He cares when we are lonely.....and discouraged and depressed.

6. If you are still grieving the loss of your loved one, I pray that you will take great comfort in knowing THE LORD HAS COME TO MEET YOU IN YOUR GRIEF!

ILLUSTRATION

Martin Luther, the Great Reformation leader had a young daughter who became deathly ill when she was just a young girl. For many months Luther and his wife prayed that GOD would spare the life of their daughter, but in time she died.

In her agonizing grief, Mrs. Luther screamed at her husband, “Where was
GOD when our daughter died?” With tear-filled eyes, Luther said, “He was right where He was when His Son died.”

Now, here is our third truth…..

**TRUTH #3: My Grief Is But A Fleeting Moment Compared To Eternity (vs. 23-27)**

*John 11:23-27 (NKJV)*

23 Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

24 Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.

26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

27 She said to Him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

1. Having lost loved ones ourselves, we can imagine what those four days of grieving were like for Mary and Martha prior to the arrival of Jesus. *Their tears never stopped flowing and their hearts never stopped aching.*

2. That's the way it is with grief. And even after those first few days, and weeks, and months have passed, it seems that the grieving will just go on and on for the rest of our lives. And every birthday.....and every holiday.....and every anniversary just seems to reopen the old wounds of our grief. Every time we hear a certain song on the radio or sing a certain hymn in
Church or pass by an old familiar place we used to go with that loved one just brings the pain back once again.

3. But this wonderful promise that Jesus gave to Martha gives us the confident assurance that DEATH HAS NOT AND WILL NOT HAVE THE FINAL WORD OVER OUR DEPARTED CHRISTIAN LOVED ONES OR OVER US WHEN IT COMES OUR TIME TO DIE.

4. The Bible teaches us that OUR GRIEF IS BUT A FLEETING MOMENT COMPARED TO ETERNITY. Death may take our loved one away from us for a short time, but JESUS, who is the Resurrection and the Life will give our believing loved ones back to us for all eternity.

2 Corinthians 4:17 (NKJV) For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,

5. One writer put it this way: “Those believers who have gone before us are not lost, they are not separated from us permanently; they are only waiting in another place nearby for us to join them again one day soon. (ed.) Our grief is but a fleeting moment compared to eternity.”

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The late Dwight L. Moody once said, “Some day you will read in the papers that D.L. Moody of East Northfield is dead. But don’t you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am right now. I shall have gone out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal; into a body that death cannot touch, that sin cannot taint, into a body fashioned like unto His glorious body.”

“O Death, where is your sting? O grave where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to GOD who gives us the victory through our LORD Jesus Christ!”