

Exegesis

Vs. 28-32 – After Martha’s messianic declaration, she returns home with a message for her sister: “The Master is come, and calleth for thee.” And John tells us Martha spoke with Mary “secretly.” If privacy was Jesus’ idea, it implies that the Lord wanted to allow Mary to speak her mind without an audience. But if this reticence came from Martha, she may have preferred that her sister had the same level of privacy as she did.¹ Personally, considering Martha’s propensity for control—i.e., going out to meet Jesus rather than waiting (cf. Lu. 10:40)—this clandestine approach speaks more of human devising rather than the Lord’s.

That Jesus showed such care and attention to these two women is remarkable. As a respected rabbi with a large following, it would’ve been acceptable for him to ignore these sisters altogether. Instead, after he’s talked with one sibling, he purposefully wants to make time for the other and even calls for her specifically. “Whereas contemporary rabbis regularly refused to instruct women, Jesus took a radically different approach.”² Indeed, his love for Martha and Mary was undeniable (cf. vs. 5). And, vice versa, their love for Jesus is evident in how they address him as “The Master,” **Ὁ διδάσκαλος** (*ho di-das’-ka-los*), which is better translated as “The Teacher.”³ This was a title used by a protégé to refer to their mentor, and it was the moniker most often on the lips of a disciple (cf. 1:38; 13:13, 14; 20:16; Mar. 4:48; 9:38; 10:35; 13:1; Lu. 7:40; 21:7).⁴ Martha and Mary may not be one of the twelve disciples, but they were every bit the pupils of Jesus.⁵

Upon hearing that Jesus wanted to meet with her, Mary did not delay but came to the Lord “quickly.” Our narrator also tells us that Jesus stayed outside Bethany, where Martha met him. Evidently, this was an attempt to keep their meeting out of the public eye. But Mary’s movements were so noticeable that they drew the attention of those Jews who had been comforting her. And so, when they saw Mary leave “hastily,” they followed her, thinking she was headed to her brother’s tomb to “weep.” Once again, the Jews are portrayed positively in their care and consideration for one of their own (vs. 19; cf. Rom. 12:15).

¹ Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 192; Morris (1995), p. 490.

² Köstenberger (2004), p. 337.

³ Morris (1995), p. 491, “[Martha] speaks of him as ‘The Teacher,’ and the article is probably important. Among his followers, Jesus was designated primarily by his teaching activities. But he is recognized as incomparable: he is ‘the Teacher’ [not ‘a teacher.’]”

⁴ Admittedly, Jesus’ opponents use this term too (cf. Mat. 9:11; 12:38; Mar. 12:14, 19, 32; Lu. 10:25; 11:45; 19:39).

⁵ Kruse (2017), p. 290.

Mary's words to Jesus are the same as those her sister said in verse 21: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." There is some minor variation in the word order in Greek, but it does not affect the translation.⁶ The main difference between the siblings is that, unlike Martha, Mary "fell down at [Jesus'] feet." Mary could've been unable to show as much restraint as her sister. Or, the same word translated as "fell down" shows up in other places in the N.T. where it refers to an actual collapse (cf. 18:6; Ac. 9:4; Heb. 11:30; Rev. 1:17). The stress of taking care of her brother only for him to die which then led to a funeral, the commencement of a month-long mourning process, and the arrival of her beloved Teacher might've proved too much for Mary. Whatever the reason, it is noteworthy that whenever Mary is mentioned, she is almost always at the feet of Jesus (cf. 12:3; Lu. 7:38; 10:39).⁷ It is safest to say that she did not hesitate to worship the Lord whenever she was given a chance.

Vs. 33-34 – Even though Mary's words are identical to Martha's, Jesus does not respond to her as he did to her sister. There is no back and forth regarding the resurrection (vs. 23-25). And there is no appeal for Mary to believe (vs. 26). Instead, John tells us, "When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled." The Greek word behind "weeping" indicates a loud wailing (cf. 20:11; Mat. 26:74; Mar. 5:38-39; Lu. 22:62; Phil. 3:18; Ja. 4:9; 5:1).⁸ Hence, it is likely that Mary's interaction with Jesus was different from Martha's because of the crowd's presence. Interestingly, it was customary for Jews to hire musicians and grievers to help facilitate the funeral and the month-long mourning process. Köstenberger's comments paint a gut-wrenching picture:

"This "professional mourning" doubtless provided the backdrop for the tears of Mary and her friends. The present heartbreaking scene would have been preceded by a formal funeral procession and burial, in which wailing women and flute players as well as shouts of grief from the men in the procession punctuated laments sung in the house of death, on the way to the tomb, and during the burial itself (cf. Mat. 9:23)."⁹

Thus, Mary did not get the same opportunity Martha did to grow her faith because the crowds surrounding her prevented it. Imagine how different Martha's conversation would've gone had these so-called "professional mourners" been in the background. Thus, it is entirely possible

⁶ Carson (1991), p. 415, Martha says, "Lord, if you had been here my brother had not died." Mary says, "Lord, if you had been here had not died my brother."

⁷ The one possible exception to this is at the resurrection (cf. 20:11-18).

⁸ Morris (1995), p. 493.

⁹ Köstenberger (2004), p. 338.

that Mary's encounter with Jesus would've gone along similar lines to her sister's had Martha succeeded in whisking her away without being noticed.

Now, while we do not get a full-blown conversation here, we get a rare glimpse into Jesus' emotions. John tells us that the Lord "groaned in the spirit, and was troubled." To speak about "in the spirit" does not refer to the Holy Spirit but means that something was happening to Jesus internally (cf. 6:63; 19:30; Mat. 26:41 Lu. 8:55; 1 Cor. 2:11; Col. 2:5).¹⁰ But considering that our narrator does not give us an object for these emotions, there is considerable debate about why Jesus "groaned" and was "troubled."

Contextually, it seems Jesus' feelings were in response to the mourners. And this is reflected in how most modern translations give phrases like "deeply moved...greatly troubled," implying that Jesus became upset in the same way that those around him were upset. But the problem with this is that the Greek word translated as either "deeply moved" (ESV, NIV, CSB) or "groaned" (KJV, NKJV) is **ἐμβριμάομαι** (*em-bree-mah'-oh-my*) and this term means to, literally, grunt with agitation and/or anger.¹¹ There seems to be little indication that Jesus was feeling sympathy at this moment. The word is used again in verse 38 with anger being implied. Still, outside of John, it shows up only three other places: in Matthew 9:30 and Mark 1:43, **ἐμβριμάομαι** carries the connotation of a stern warning with no sign of anger being present; whereas, in Mark 14:5, there seems to be some animosity as it describes how Mary was harshly rebuked (**ἐμβριμάομαι**) for anointing Jesus. Hence, a more literal translation of this verse would follow that of the Amplified Bible, Holman Christian Standard Bible, and the New Living Translation in that anger arose in Jesus because of Mary's and the mourner's weeping.¹²

But saying that Jesus was angry because the sorrow around him is problematic. After all, Jesus himself will soon weep alongside the others (vs. 35). Would it not be hypocritical for Jesus to be angry with the people's crying and then proceed to cry himself? And while one could argue that the Lord might've been weeping over their lack of faith (cf. Lu. 19:42; 1 Thess. 4:13),¹³ there is no indication in the narrative that there was a lack of faith. If anything, Mary's words are as much a declaration of faith as her sister's (vs. 21), and they elicited no such response from Jesus when Martha said them. And even Mary's posture at Jesus' feet was one of worship.¹⁴ Why would Jesus be angered by this? The most appealing suggestion that might

¹⁰ Carson (1991), p. 415

¹¹ Keener (2003), 2:846, says this term is often used to describe the snorting of horses.

¹² A.B. – "He was deeply moved in spirit [to the point of anger at the sorrow caused by death] and was troubled;" HCSB – "He was angry in His spirit and deeply moved;" NLT – "a deep anger welled up within him, and he was deeply troubled."

¹³ Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 193.

¹⁴ Carson (1991), p. 416.

rightly explain the Lord's fury is that he was angry with that which caused their suffering—i.e., death.¹⁵ Death is the great enemy and the one to whom Jesus came to defeat (cf. 1 Cor. 15:25-26; Rev. 20:14). But that is mere speculation as John gives us no indication that death itself was the reason for Jesus' groaning. And, quite to the contrary, Jesus was glad to hear that Lazarus had died (vs. 14-15). His death will be the impetus for a resurrection.

Admittedly, unless more evidence comes forward which can better explain the nuances of the term **ἐμβριμάομαι**, it seems best to allow the context surrounding the word to define its implication. In this case, Jesus saw the weeping of Mary and the Jews, and this mournful procession prompted a compassionate response from him. Jesus was profoundly disturbed and bothered by what he saw in the same way we are severely grieved and unsettled when those we love suffer.¹⁶ Any elation the Lord might've felt before was now replaced by a somber seriousness. As God, Jesus could not be moved by anything, for he does not change (cf. Mal. 3:4); but, as man, the Lord allowed himself to be moved by the environment around him. Whatever we have felt, are feeling, and will feel, he has experienced (cf. Isa. 53:3; Matt. 4:2; 9:36; 15:32; Lu. 7:13; Heb. 4:15; 5:7).¹⁷ Thompson's comments sum up this view nicely:

"Here, then, is the penultimate expression of Jesus' love for Lazarus, which has been part of the narrative since Mary and Martha's initial message to Jesus: "the one whom you love is ill." Because Jesus loves Lazarus, he weeps at his tomb; and he weeps with and for those who love Lazarus. That Jesus will soon raise Lazarus to life, and so manifest God's glory, does not mute the genuine sorrow that he experiences and expresses."¹⁸

Moved by the scene in front of him, Jesus asks, "Where have ye laid him?" Obviously, because the Lord knew everything, Jesus would also know where they had buried Lazarus. So, this question is more of a request for them to lead the way to Lazarus than a request for information. In fact, those he spoke to understood it in this way as John tells us, "They (possibly Mary and Martha¹⁹) said unto him, Lord, come and see." Jesus had seen the sisters; it was time to see the brother.

Vs. 35-37 – Apparently, as they were headed to Lazarus' grave, John tells us that "Jesus wept." As was argued above, it is clear that emotions are running high, even for the Lord. And while this may be the shortest verse in the Bible, it is worth noting that John uses a different word for

¹⁵ Köstenberger (2004), p. 340.

¹⁶ Morris (1995), p. 494;

¹⁷ Köstenberger (2004), p. 341, quotes from Stibbe (1993: 124-25),

¹⁸ Thompson (2015), p. 248.

¹⁹ Morris (1995), p. 495.

crying than he did before. In verse 33, John uses the term **κλαίω** (*klaí-oh*), which refers to open and severe crying. Whereas, here, the Greek word John uses is **δακρύω** (*da-kroo'-oh*) which does refer to the shedding of tears,²⁰ but it is more of a subdued and quiet weeping than an outward wailing.²¹ However, we should be careful about making too much of this distinction. It is likely nothing more complex than John's desire for linguistic creativity. After all, the only other time we're told that Jesus wept is in Luke 19:41, and, there, the term **κλαίω** (*klaí-oh*) is used.²² So, it makes little difference whether Jesus cried just as intensely as those around him or his weeping was more of a stoic and reserved sort of cry. Far more importantly, the fact that should not be overlooked is that Jesus wept too. And if we should make anything of the different terms, it is that John punctuates this fact by using a particular word just for the Lord. "Jesus is not some mystical, neo-Platonic God who stands far beyond the harsh realities endured by those trapped within a frail mortality but rather is the deity who sheds tears, who feels anger, and who dares to look through the dark threshold of a place which he himself will have to enter."²³

Jesus' crying has a two-fold response from those who witness it: "Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him! And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?" As usual, John portrays the Jews as divided on Jesus (cf. 7:12, 25-27, 40-43; 9:16; 10:19-21, 39, 42). The Lord cannot even cry without there being some sort of controversy. On the one side of the debate, you had those who correctly assumed that the Lord cried because of his "love" for Lazarus and, by extension, Mary and Martha (cf. vs. 5).²⁴ On the other side, you had those who cynically tried to use the most incredible miracle to date—i.e., opening the eyes of a man born blind (cf. 9:7)—as ammunition to attack Jesus.²⁵ Their reasoning is faulty, of course. They assumed that if Jesus would heal one to whom he had little personal attachment (the blind man), he should've been more inclined to heal someone to whom he had a tremendous personal attachment (Lazarus). But this is a false assumption. Just because someone is a close friend of Jesus doesn't mean they will be excused from suffering. In fact, the Scriptures and history have proven that it is precisely because of people's attachment to the Lord that they suffer (cf. 7:7; 15:18-25; Mat.

²⁰ Carson (1991), p. 416.

²¹ Morris (1995), p. 495; Köstenberger (2004), p. 341.

²² Kruse (2017), p. 292.

²³ Köstenberger (2004), p. 341, quoting from Stibbe (1993) p. 124-25.

²⁴ The Greek word is **φιλέω** (*phileō*), the same one used in verse 3.

²⁵ Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 194; Köstenberger (2004), p. 342; contra. Carson (1991), p. 417; Morris (1995), p. 496, says that there's no reason "for thinking of these words as spoken in mockery."

10:22; 24:9). The life that Jesus offers is not without the its valleys. It is a life *with* valleys where his followers do have to walk them *alone*.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Wednesday Night Live | John | Week 25

Text: **John 11:28-37**

Just as Jesus made time for Martha, he will make time for her sister Mary. But unlike before, there will be an audience, which prohibits the Lord from fully engaging with Mary.

Nevertheless, John gives us a rare glimpse into Jesus' emotions. Far from being someone who is detached and aloof from his followers, the Lord is emotionally invested and cares deeply for them. So much so that he will weep alongside them even though he knows the cause of their suffering—i.e., death—will soon be undone. Indeed, we have a Savior who knows what we feel not only because he made those feelings, but he himself has felt them.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: