

“Just When I Need Him!”

John 11:1-35

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A few years ago, Marlene and I were heading north on I-5 when we saw a car pulled over onto the shoulder with clouds of vapor pouring out of the engine compartment. We pulled over and an elderly man was obviously relieved when we stopped. We took him on to a service station at the Brooks exit and someone went back with him to take care of the problem. He sent us a nice thank you note and a book.

A year later, Marlene and I were heading north on I-5 when we saw a car pulled over onto the shoulder with clouds of vapor pouring out of the engine compartment. We pulled over and an elderly man was obviously relieved when we stopped. He was surprised, as were we, since it was the same man. He shouted happily, “Will the same Good Samaritans rescue me again?” God put us at the right place at the right time. Again, we took him to the Brooks exit where he got help. We were there when he needed us.

Another time, Marlene and I were heading north on I-5 heading to Washington to visit my NCC Buddy, John Dammarell. We figured we’d phone when we got to Seattle and ask him to come lead us to his place. We stopped in Portland for a break and as we merged onto I-5, I saw in my rearview mirror that right behind us – was my NCC buddy, John Dammarell. He was there when I needed him! We always need Jesus that’s for sure! As Brenda sang,

“I need Thee, oh, I need Thee;
Every hour I need Thee;
Oh, bless me now, my Savior,
I come to Thee.
I need Thee every hour, stay Thou nearby;
Temptations lose their pow’r when Thou art nigh.
I need Thee every hour, in joy or pain;
Come quickly and abide, or life is vain.”

John the Apostle tells the story of when the friends of Jesus thought, “Where is He when we need Him?” Lazarus was sick and dying but though Jesus knew it, He delayed going until He knew that Lazarus had died. We pick up there, “So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off; and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to console them concerning their brother. Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house. Martha then said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha said to Him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.’ Jesus said to her,

‘I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?’ She said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.’” John 11:17-27 (NASB).

Jesus went with them to the tomb, ordered the stone rolled away and called Lazarus out of the tomb alive. A greater miracle than simply healing him. He was 4 days late but right on time! He was there when they needed Him most. That should remind us that delay is not denial – and there are 4 times when we truly need to grasp that truth. I must credit an unknown author who penned the 4 points of the outline for this sermon.

Jesus is always there when I need Him! He brings God to me — and to you. So we can say,

I. WHEN I AM AT MY LOWEST, GOD IS MY HOPE:

- A. How could the sisters have been lower?
 - 1. Their brother – protector, provider, leader – had died.
 - 2. Jesus, the one who could have healed him was conspicuously absent.
 - 3. They were heartbroken and disappointed.
- B. At times we experience the same kind of things:
 - 1. Our dreams die overnight and what we had planned goes up in smoke — along with our hope.
 - 2. Tragedy strikes without warning and our world shatters — as does our hope.
 - 3. Illness overtakes us and our bodies weaken — and so does our hope.
- C. The Bible speaks to that and urges the possession of unshaken, patient hope!
 - 1. “For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.” Romans 8:24-25 (NASB).
 - 2. “And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach — if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.” Colossians 1:21-23 (NASB).
 - 3. “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Romans 15:13 (NASB).
- D. There are real things and counterfeit things:
 - 1. Real and counterfeit money.
 - 2. Real and counterfeit works of art.
 - 3. Real and counterfeit religious experiences.
 - 4. Real and counterfeit righteousness.
 - 5. ‘Real (God promised) and counterfeit (unfounded) hope.
- E. Two stories shed light on both kinds of hope:

1. This one reveals the world's wishful thinking, unfounded, hope: A man approached a little league baseball game one afternoon. He asked a boy in the dugout what the score was. The boy responded, "Eighteen to nothing--we're behind." "Boy," said the spectator, "I'll bet you're discouraged." "Nah!" replied the little boy. "We haven't even gotten up to bat yet!"
2. This one illustrates hope based on the promise of one who could fulfill it: it's the story of the millionaire Eugene Lang, who made a promise to a class of 59 sixth-graders in East Harlem. What could he say to inspire these students, most of whom would drop out of school? Scrapping his notes, he decided to speak to them from his heart. "Stay in school," he admonished, "and I'll help pay the college tuition for every one of you." At that moment the lives of these students changed. For the first time they had hope. Said one student, "I had something to look forward to, something waiting for me. It was a golden feeling." Nearly 90 percent of that class went on to graduate from high school and some got college degrees.

GOD IS A GOD OF HOPE AND FURTHERMORE

II. WHEN I AM AT MY DARKEST, GOD IS MY LIGHT:

- A. There is hardly a darker hour than the death of a loved one. We, who have wept by the grave of a parent, spouse, child, sibling or friend understand that.
- B. But when life flips the switch plunging us into deep darkness, there is light!
 1. "The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light, and those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, upon them a light dawned." Matthew 4:16 (NASB). That in reference to the birth of Jesus.
 2. "In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it." John 1:4-5 (NASB).
 3. "For God, who said, 'Let there be light in the darkness,' has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ." 2 Corinthians 4:6 (NLT).
- C. It does not matter at all what kind of darkness – it has to vanish in surrender to light.
 1. It may be any personal difficulty, or hardship, or conflict. Take a look at your struggles and know that there is help with God.
 2. It may be some besetting sin that darkens your heart – that darkness cannot endure under the light of God's grace.
 3. It may be a grudge or anger or bitterness that makes life dark. His great love can shine in and darkness vanishes.
- D. Darkness is nothing — it is immaterial – it is just the absence of light. When and where light is, darkness isn't.
- E. The hope we just considered is contingent upon God's light. Let me clarify that. When I was youth minister at The Dalles, the senior pastor, H. Harold Johnson, took me elk hunting and we slept in his camper. He put me in a pole thicket and moved away to another spot. He said, "When it is too dark to hunt, come back to the camper for dinner." Problem was it got dark really rapidly – almost suddenly – and in that pole thicket I was confused about direction. It was way too dark to see my compass so I said a frantic ."S.O.S." prayer and started in the direction I was sure I had come. Just as deep anxiety

and running in circles panic set in, I caught a glimpse of light – heading toward it, I said a fast “WHEW!” prayer – Harold had set out a lantern to give me a guiding light which gave me renewed hope – I wouldn’t die in the pole thicket!.

BESIDES GOD GIVING US HOPE AND LIGHT, LET US ALL SAY

III. WHEN I AM AT MY WEAKEST, GOD IS MY STRENGTH:

- A. The sisters of Lazarus were weak in hope and faith – but Jesus changed that.
- B. When we are weak, rejoice:
 - 1. David wrote, “Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him. For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust.” Psalm 103:13-14 (NASB).
 - 2. Paul testified, “Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.” 2 Corinthians 12:7-9 (NASB).
 - 3. God loves us to bring our weakness to Him. Just like us macho guys like our wives to bring us the pickle jar because she can’t open it
- C. He is the source and substance of our strength
 - 1. The song says, “I am weak but You are strong.”
 - 2. Nehemiah wrote while rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem, “Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” Nehemiah 8:10 (NASB).
 - 3. “The LORD is my strength and my shield; My heart trusts in Him, and I am helped; Therefore my heart exults, And with my song I shall thank Him.” Psalm 28:7 (NASB).
 - 4. “He gives strength to the weary, And to him who lacks might He increases power.” Isaiah 40:29 (NASB).
 - 5. “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.” Ephesians 6:10 (NASB).
- D. “The problem ahead of you is not as great as the power inside of you.”
- E. Let me illustrate inner strength: A scrawny kid from West Texas who attended a small high school wanted to be a wrestler but they didn't have a wrestling program. He read a book on wrestling and asked one of the assistant football coaches if he would enter him in some of the wrestling matches in that region.

The coach agreed to help the kid. This little guy was not skillful, but he was wiry and stronger than he looked and had one enduring quality – he refused to give up. He won every single wrestling match because he tenaciously held on to his opponents and wore them down.

By the end of the season, he was undefeated and made it to the state finals for his weight classification. The kid's opponent was a two-time state champ and a bona fide college prospect. As the scrawny kid faced the state champion, the guy made a couple of quick moves, and soon had the West Texas kid on his back and about to get pinned.

The coach knew his athlete was about to lose, and he couldn't bear to watch it, so he turned his head away. Suddenly, the coach heard the roar of the crowd and when he turned around, his kid was on top of the state champ, pinning him. He had won the match! The little guy bounced across the mat and hugged the coach and said, "Coach, I won! I won!"

The coach said, "Sure, son. But I missed it. I turned away just before you were about to lose. What happened?" The kid said, "Coach, that guy was good. He had me twisted like a pretzel on that mat. But you know me, coach. I NEVER quit. I refused to give up! So I opened my eyes, and there in front of my face was a foot. I don't even know if it's against the rules or not, but I bit into the toe of the shoe with all my strength...and coach, it's amazing what you can do when you bite your OWN big toe!"

If you're ever tempted to give up in your struggles, just remember that little guy. Refuse to give up – God honors the persistent and gives them strength.

GOD GIVES US HOPE, LIGHT, STRENGTH AND THEN

IV. WHEN I AM AT MY SADDEST, GOD IS MY COMFORT:

- A. Jesus spoke words of comfort to the sisters. Paul wrote of that kind of comfort, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, Who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (NASB).
 - 1. God’s comfort is not only consolation, it is also reinforcing and strengthening us.
 - 2. God has a purpose in the hardships we experience, but He knows when enough is enough.
 - 3. God comforts us in those hardships:
 - a. To the end that we be matured and strengthened and comforted.
 - b. So that we might be a source of comfort for others who suffer.
- B. Suffering will come, suffering will end, but His comfort is eternal. Paul wrote, “Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.” 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 (NASB).
- C. In what do you need comfort?
 - 1. Poor health?
 - 2. Broken relationships?
 - 3. Age related disability?
 - 4. World moral conditions?
- D. In all those things, and even worse things, God is your comforter! All is well. [I want to put this all together with this story](#): Officer James Givens, with the Cincinnati Police Department, was sitting in his patrol car in a parking lot when a goose came up to his car and started pecking on the side of it. He threw food out for her, thinking that's what she wanted, but she didn't take it.

She continued to peck and honk, then walked away. stopped, and looked back at Officer Givens. Then she came back to his car and pecked at it again. She made it very obvious that she wanted Officer Givens to follow her, so he finally got out of his car and did just that.

The goose led him 100 yards away to a grassy area near a creek. Sitting there was one of her babies, tangled up in a string. The baby was kicking its feet, desperate for help. Being wary of helping the baby on his own, and worried that the goose might attack him, Givens called for help, but no wildlife rescuers were available at the moment.

Fortunately, Officer Cecilia Charron, came to help. She began to untangle the baby, and the mother goose just stood there and watched, honking. and just let Officer Charron do what she had to do to set the baby free. Once Charron untangled the baby, she put it down and it ran right to her mom, and they went right to swimming in the creek. Givens said. "I honestly don't know why I decided to follow her, but I did. It makes me wonder - do they know to turn to humans when they need help?" We may never know the answer to this question, but what we do know is that Officer Givens was in the right place at the right time to help these geese!

God is our hope, our light, our strength and our comfort - so, when we are down and about out, and we are all tied up in sin, God helps us at the right time and as Brenda sang, so can we cry out:

"When I think I'm going under, part the waters, Lord
When I feel the waves around me, calm the sea
When I cry for help, oh, hear me, Lord and hold out Your hand
Touch my life. Still the raging storm in me."

PRAY / INVITE

When things are hard, when things are easy, we all totally need Jesus. We need Him for ups and downs – and He will always be there when you need Him – but the question is “Are you there for Him?” Declare it, and live it. “O Jesus I Have Promised.”