



What characteristics make someone trustworthy?

Who do you turn to in times of need or tragedy? Why?

Which is more desirable in a friend amidst problems: a caring heart or an able hand? Why?

Describe the last time you grieved over something you did or over something that happened to you/around you. What evoked those strong emotions?

⊗ We've established that the world is not the way it was supposed to be. Life is not as it's supposed to be. Meant to be the benefactors of unending joy and peace and satisfaction, we are more akin to hardship, pain, and heartbreak. The world we know and live in forces us to ask the question, is there any solution? Better yet, is there a true solution? It doesn't take long to find the claims of solutions. From education to politics, the breadth of offered solutions is daunting. But when we stop and look around and within ourselves, we see that we need not only an answer to social issues, but also to our personal desires and longings. As it is, the most important question we need to answer is whether or not there is dependable answer to our desperate need.

Looking at different encounters with Jesus, we have just heard Him give His answer for what's wrong with the world, and surprisingly He directed his answer at us. We saw through his interaction with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman that we are all plagued with sin, and as a result, we desperately need something greater than reform, we need rebirth. As we seek to find a dependable answer to our desperate need, we must look a little deeper into the person who is making these audacious claims. Jesus has given us a surprising diagnosis, but before we get to His prescription, its imperative we determine if He is trustworthy. Similarly, when a doctor gives you the tragic news of terminal cancer, you trust him based on his credentials. If a friend with no medical background, degree, or experience tells you he thinks you have cancer, you will quickly disregard his diagnosis. So it is with us spiritually as we encounter Jesus. If He is going to make the claims that He does, and diagnose us as He has, then we need to make sure He has the right credentials for us to trust Him.

In the midst of problems, we want two different types of people around us. When life gets rough or we see our failures, we want those around us who are deeply empathetic. We want someone to get us, to understand our situation, to care and be moved deeply with concern. We often just need someone to listen, to hear us out. We just want someone to care. At the same time, we often want people around us who are able. We want someone who doesn't just listen, but someone who can actually make amends in our disaster. We need someone outside of us to come and fix the problems, eradicate the evil, and heal the hurt. The frustration in those times is that those characteristics never come in the same person. Either those around are empathetic and listen but offer no solution, or they offer thousands of solutions and jump to action without actually caring enough to care. But, when Jesus encounters the grieving sisters in John 11, what we see is that He is miraculously both. When it comes to our sin against God, the Bible displays Jesus as fully human, so He can completely, patiently, and genuinely empathize with what you're going through. At the same time, He is fully God, meaning that He is able and powerful, providing the solution for our wrong. He is everything we've ever wanted amidst our wrong, and nothing we've ever known. Existing within Jesus is the beautiful harmony of empathy and ability, a caring heart *and* a healing hand, and this gives Him the credibility no one else has to understand our brokenness and do something about it.

What we see in John 11 is a glorious encounter Jesus has with tragedy amidst his closest friends. Two sisters have a brother named Lazarus, and he dies as a result of an illness. Strangely, in order to show the glory and beauty of God, Jesus waits a few days when He hears Lazarus is on His deathbed. "But wait," you might say, "I thought Jesus was loving? If he loved them, why didn't He just prevent the heartbreaking death from happening?" The reason He gives is so that those involved would see the glory of God. How? When He shows up He is confronted by Lazarus's sisters and his surprising response is to weep with them. He is greatly moved by the death of Lazarus, and He weeps outside the tomb. Here is his glorious empathy. He is fully human, so He knows the hurt of a lost loved one. But that's not the end of the story. He then calls Lazarus to come out of the tomb. And Lazarus obeys. Jesus raises this man back to life, revealing his absolute authority and power over life and death. He is fully God. It's amazing.

So when Jesus gives us the diagnosis of our rebellion against God, we can trust Him because He is not speaking as an outsider, but as a fellow human, only without sin. He is also speaking as One who has authority, because He is fully God. But what is His solution? Our next encounter we will see what He did about it. We will look into His dependable answer to our desperate need.

Snapshot from the book of John

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was...

Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 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. So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. 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 from 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. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." (John 11:17-36, 38-44 ESV)

How could it be "loving" for Jesus to wait for Lazarus to die before going to see him and his sisters?

What do you think Jesus means when He says, "I am the resurrection and the life...?"

What are the implications of Jesus weeping? Does this response surprise you? Why or why not?

What are the implications of Jesus calling Lazarus to come out of the tomb?

Dr. Tim Keller's Commentary on the Passages Above

When Jesus meets Martha we indeed get a glimpse of his deity and power—he's God. But that doesn't explain the totality of who he is. The very next moment, he breaks down sobbing beneath the weight of Mary's grief and in the shadow of the grave. You would think that if a person were really divine, he wouldn't be that emotionally exposed, but he is. So here we see deity joined to human vulnerability. His love pulls him down into weeping. Despite his claim that he is the resurrection and the life—that he is God—he responds to Mary in this way because he is fully human as well. He is one with us. He feels the horrific power of death and the grief of love lost.

What you have in Jesus Christ, then, is something that is pretty hard to believe, and even harder to describe. He's not 50 percent human and 50 percent God, nor is he 20 percent God and 80 percent human, or vice versa. He's not just a human being with a particularly high God consciousness or a divine figure with the illusion of a physical body. He is God but also absolutely and totally human. Now, no other religion agrees with this. No religion other than Christianity believes that the transcendent creator, the author of life, became a weak, limited mortal who felt the full horror of death. Do you believe Jesus was the God-man? I wouldn't be surprised if you struggled with that! But look at the story, watch how he actually responds to these two women, and you may see that whether you can get your mind around the idea of a divine-yet-human person, it's exactly what you most need.

Jesus gives Martha what we could call the ministry of truth. That is what she needs most at that moment. He sort of grabs her by the shoulders with truth. "Listen to me! Don't despair. I'm here. Resurrection. Life. That's what I am." Because of his divine identity, he is high enough to point her to the stars. Then, when he gets to Mary, he gives what we could call the ministry of tears. That is what she needs most at that moment. Because of his human identity, he is low enough to step into her sorrow—with complete sincerity and integrity—and just weep with her...

It is this paradox—that he is both God and human—that gives Jesus an overwhelming beauty. He is the Lion and the Lamb. Despite his high claims, he is never pompous; you never see him standing on his own dignity. Despite being absolutely approachable to the weakest and broken, he is completely fearless before the corrupt and powerful. He has tenderness without weakness. Strength without harshness. Humility without the slightest lack of confidence. Unhesitating authority with a complete lack of self-absorption. Holiness and unending conviction without any shortage of approachability. Power without insensitivity. I once heard a preacher say, "No one has yet discovered the word Jesus ought to have said. He is full of surprises, but they are all the surprises of perfection."

So Jesus is God become human. But of course this leaves us with a question. Why did he do it? Why did absolute power have to enter into our weakness?...

...He did not come to bring judgment; he came to bear judgment. And this passage reveals this in the way it begins to unfold Jesus dilemma. Later in chapter 11, when the religious leaders see what Jesus has done in the display of power, they realize this miracle made him more dangerous than they ever thought he would be. So after he raises Lazarus, the leaders have a meeting, and by verse 53, John says, "So from that day on they plotted to take his life."

Jesus knew all this, of course. He knew that if he raised Lazarus from the dead, the religious establishment would try to kill him. And so he knew the only way to bring Lazarus out of the grave was to put himself into the grave. He knew the only way to interrupt Lazarus's funeral was to summon his own. If he was going to save us from death, he was going to have to go to the cross, and bear the judgment we deserve. That's why when Jesus approached the tomb, instead of smiling at the prospect of putting on a great show, he was shaking with anger and had tears on his cheeks. He knew what it would cost him to save us from death.

The witnesses said about Jesus, "See how he loved Lazarus"; but really we must behold how he loves us. He became human, mortal, vulnerable, killable—all out of love for us.