

Date: December 18, 2022

Series: *A Chrismon Christmas!*

Title: *Jesus: The Resurrection and the Life*

Text: John 11:1-57

Preacher: Mark Adams

One of the more interesting movies I've seen over the years is *Vantage Point*, starring Dennis Quade. It's been a while since it came out so you may have not seen it---or if you did, you forgot the plot.

Let me help.

It's the story of an attempted presidential assassination and the thing that makes this film unique is the many different perspectives it gives on the same incident. I mean, the movie is basically the same story replayed over and over again from the unique vantage point of different people who were present at the time. You watch one person's perspective and think you know the whole story but then you see another person's perspective---and it enables you to see something you couldn't see before and so on and so on.

The film highlights the truth that things aren't always as they seem. The right perspective is very important—especially when you are going through a hardship. I bring this up because today in our *Chrismon Christmas* series, we come to an incident in Jesus' ministry that illustrates this principle.

Specifically, it helps us to see that we need to mature as Christ-followers such that we can begin to look at all of life from more of a Divine perspective. Progress on our journey toward Christlikeness requires us to learn to frame things within a proper understanding of God's attributes and character. That kind of perspective is indeed a *VANTAGE POINT* that changes everything.

The Bible tells us of several people who learned this vital lesson and the popular story of David and Goliath is a good example.

Remember?

The armies of Israel—experienced soldiers—had fled in fear before the giant named Goliath but David, a small shepherd boy, calmly stood his ground and said, ***“Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?”*** (1st Samuel 17:26). Before the day was over, the stone from David's sling hit the giant right between his headlights. Israel prevailed against its enemies and the difference was one of perspective. You see, the Israelite army looked at everything from ground level. David had more of a Divine perspective.

This same *VANTAGE POINT* became a *TURNING* point in the life of the prophet Habakkuk. There was a time when he looked at the people of Israel and saw nothing but oppression and wrongdoing. From his earthly perspective, it looked as if God's sense of justice was gone, so in Habakkuk 1:2 he said, ***“O Lord, how long must I call for help before You will listen? I shout to You in vain; there is no answer. ‘Help! Murder!’ I cry, but no one comes to save. Must I forever see this sin and sadness all around me?”*** Then, by faith this prophet had an encounter with God, and after that he too enjoyed more of a Divine perspective such that he was able to conclude his book by saying, ***“Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen---and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.”*** (Habakkuk 3:17-18)

All this goes to show that, in life perspective does indeed make all the difference. In fact, let me ask you—what is your “vantage point” at the moment? Do you tend to look at life from “ground level” or is it your habit to seek a more Divine perspective?

Well, as I said, our text for this morning underscores the importance of the latter. Okay---let's look at the setting. The event in our text happened as Jesus was enjoying a very fruitful time of ministry in a remote region called Perea---the same part of the country where John the Baptist had been preaching and baptizing. But just as things were going so well, a personal emergency arose. Word came from the town of Bethany that Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha was very ill.

Now, as you may know---this three-sibling family was very dear to Jesus. The Gospel writers tell us He had a unique personal affection for them---and that He liked being in their home. It was a retreat of sorts for him---a place where he could slip off His sandals and rest---away from the constant demands of the multitudes.

Well, when Lazarus became sick Jesus where? RIGHT – Perea. And as you can see that was 20 miles from Bethany---a two-day journey.

Now as I read, I want you to note that in their message Mary and Martha didn't ASK Jesus to come to their aid. They just let Him know of Lazarus' illness and assumed that He would come quickly. After all, they knew Jesus. They understood His wonderful compassion. Of course, Jesus would come! To think otherwise was inconceivable. But surprisingly Jesus DIDN'T drop everything and hurry to their home. Instead, He waited for two more days.

Okay, let's look at the text itself. Turn to John 11:1-44 and follow along as I read this familiar story.

John 11:1-44

1 – Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.

2 – This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped His feet with her hair.

3 – So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one You love is sick.”

4 – When He heard this, Jesus said, “*This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.*”

5 – Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

6 – So, when He heard that Lazarus was sick, He stayed where He was two more days.

7 – Then He said to His disciples, “*Let us go back to Judea.*”

8 – “But Rabbi,” they said, “a short while ago the Jews tried to stone You, and yet You are going back there?”

9 – Jesus answered, “*Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world’s light.*”

10 – *It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light.*”

NOTE: Jesus was reminding His followers that they need not worry about the Jews because His time had not yet come---that the “sun had not yet set on His ministry. There was still daylight left---before the darkness of the cross.

11 – After He had said this, He went on to tell them, “*Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.*”

12 – His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.”

13 – Jesus had been speaking of his death, but His disciples thought He meant natural sleep.

14 – So then He told them plainly, “*Lazarus is dead,*

15 – *and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.*”

16 – Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with Him.”

17 – On His arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

18 – Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem,

19 – and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.

20 – When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet Him, but Mary stayed at home.

21 – “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

22 – But I know that even now God will give You whatever You ask.”

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

24 – Martha answered, “I know 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 will live, even though he dies;*

26 – *and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"*

27 – *"Yes Lord," she told Him, "I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, Who was to come into the world."*

28 – *And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you."*

29 – *When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to Him.*

30 – *Now Jesus had not yet entered the village but was still at the place where Martha had met Him.*

31 – *When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.*

32 – *When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell at His feet and said, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."*

33 – *When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.*

34 – *"Where have you laid him?" He asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied.*

35 – *Jesus wept.*

36 – *Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!"*

37 – *But some of them said, "Could not He Who opened the eyes of the blind have kept this man from dying?"*

38 – *Jesus, once more deeply moved came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance.*

39 – *"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."*

40 – *Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"*

41 – *So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me.*

42 – *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."*

43 – *When He had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"*

44 – *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."*

Okay, before we go any further, let's hang today's CHRISMON ornament---which as you can see is a butterfly---to remind us that Jesus is *"the Resurrection and the Life!"* 8:30 – I'm going to ask the Harder family to come. 11:00 – I'm going to ask Bob and Alyson Owers to come.

What can we learn from all this that will help us gain more of a divine perspective as we go through life----especially when we endure similar heartbreaks?

1.) Jesus KNOWS.

As God become flesh, there is nothing you endure in life that our all-powerful, all-wise, all-loving Lord doesn't know about. To quote a popular Christmas song lyric that may still be echoing in your minds, *"He knows if you've been sleeping; He knows if you're awake; He knows if you've been bad or good."* Of course, this is referring to Santa—but what is a myth about Jolly old St. Nick is TRUE about Jesus. He knows everything about you. He knows your likes and dislikes. He's familiar with your to-do list. He knows your fears. He knows your joys. He knows your sorrows.

And Jesus shows us this KNOWING here in chapter 11. John's account tells us that before the messenger arrived Jesus already knew that His friend was dead. To prove this—to show that Jesus DID know—let's look at the timetable.

- THE FIRST DAY – The messenger arrives with the news that Lazarus is ill. Jesus decides to remain where He is for two days.
- THE SECOND DAY – Jesus deliberately remains where He is.
- THE THIRD DAY – Jesus departs for Judea.
- THE FOURTH DAY – Jesus continues His journey, taking His customary direct route through Samaria, arriving in Bethany late in the day, and is told that Lazarus had been dead four days.

So, Lazarus was ALREADY DEAD when the messenger arrived on day one—and as omniscient God in the flesh, Jesus knew this. He wasn't cruelly waiting in Perea to allow Lazarus to suffer and die so that He could make a point. No---Jesus

never turned down someone who, in faith, asked for His help. He knew Lazarus was already dead---already in Heaven by the time word came to Perea.

I don't know about you but it's comforting to me to know that God is all-knowing---that He knows the fears and frustrations I face. It encourages me to know that God KNOWS about my struggles. This perspective helps me deal with tough times. This fact that God KNOWS everything about us as individuals is especially welcome news in our day and age---because due to the world's ever-increasing population and to our rapidly advancing technology, you and I are becoming just one of the crowd. More and more we are seen as insignificant numbers and statistical units in a computer database rather than unique human beings.

This is why when we have to call some company to ask about our bill---we get those phone trees that never work the way we want. When was the last time you called PEPCO or CVS or the SOCIAL SECURITY OFFICE and a real live human being answered? To stores and big companies, we're not people---we're just customers---things to be handled by some flawed AI phone answering machine.

Plus---with the new WEBB telescope science continues to reveal how BIG and VAST and wonderful our universe is. As a result, our planet itself has become insignificant---a speck of matter surrounded by galaxies measured by light years rather than miles. All this makes us wonder, *"Who am I? How could 'little old me' possibly matter in all of this?"*

Well, the events that inspired today's CHRISTMON affirm the fact that you and I are SUPER-important---we matter---to the Creator of the universe Himself. He is interested in each individual on this planet.

Think of your greatest worry---your biggest challenge: GOD KNOWS. Say it out loud with me *"GOD KNOWS!"* Doesn't that feel good to say---and KNOW?!

Have you ever yearned to be completely understood by someone---to have a kindred spirit with whom communication is easy because you two are on the same "sheet of music." Well, no one understands and knows you as completely as our Lord. J. I. Packer writes, *"What matters supremely, is not the fact that I know God but the larger fact which underlies it---that He knows me. I am graven in the palms of His hands. I am never out of His mind. There is no moment when His eye is off me, or His attention distracted from me, and no moment, therefore when His care falters. There is unspeakable comfort in this truth."*

So, Jesus KNOWS. In fact, He could not possibly know you better. Doesn't that fact change your mind set when it comes to how you look at problems and heartbreaks? Doesn't this vantage point bring you comfort? Well, hang on to your seat because in our text we learn that our Lord does much more than KNOW.

2.) Jesus CARES.

Jesus is not some unconcerned king or president who sits on his throne or behind the desk in the Oval office---just watching---reading stats---knowing of our struggles. No---Jesus cares. He is moved by what moves us---concerned about what concerns us. Look back at our text beginning with verse 17---and as you do, let me tell you that funerals like Lazarus's were a very important part of the culture of his day. I mean, as many people as possible attended these events. This is what John was getting at in verses 18 and 19 when he said, ***"Many Jews [from Bethany and Jerusalem] had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother."*** And everyone who came was expected to join the funeral procession---but there was one curious custom I want you to note. The women mourners walked first, for it was held that it was a woman, who by her first sin brought death into the world, and therefore she ought to lead the mourners to the tomb.

Well, deep mourning lasted for seven days, of which the first three were days of continuous weeping. During this week it was forbidden to anoint oneself, to put on shoes, to engage in any kind of study or business and even to wash. These first days of deep mourning were followed by thirty additional days of lighter mourning when some of these restrictions were lifted. So, when Jesus came to Lazarus' home in verse 17, it was during that first week of deep mourning and when He arrived---He found what anyone would expect to find in a Jewish house where someone had died recently---rooms

crowded with sympathizers. When Martha learned of Jesus' approach, she came to Him and basically said, "Where were You?" And I think that implied in her words was her belief that it was Jesus' fault that Lazarus had died. No doubt she was thinking, *"What took You so long? Here we were doing all we could, without the power of God, and You stood away from us, at a distance, and You waited, and You delayed. Even though we notified You, You didn't come to help until now. Where were you when we were hurting?"*

Have you ever stood at a grave and asked that question? Have you ever wondered where our Lord God was when you were grieving---hurting in the depths of your being? Have you ever asked Him, *"Where were You God when my father died? Where were You when my marriage fell apart? Where were You when I lost my job? Where were You when my child went astray? Where were You when I was so depressed, I couldn't get out of bed? Don't You care about what I've been going through?"*

Before we deal with an answer to these questions, I want you to note that Jesus did not REPROVE Martha for asking. And this should tell us that it is not sinful to tell Jesus how you feel. God wants us to pour our hearts out to Him. He wants us to be honest with Him. We can indeed come BOLDLY before His throne of grace.

And—if you've ever honestly asked Jesus, *"Where were You?"* then here's the answer: He was right there at your side---hurting WITH you---grieving for you and the pain you were feeling---pain that comes from living in a fallen world---because Jesus doesn't just KNOW. He cares. I like how Dr. Paul Brand answers the question, *"Where is God when it hurts?"* He says, *"God is in you, the one hurting, not in it, the thing that hurts."* And we will see this fleshed out in how Jesus responds here to the pain of Mary and Martha---for He was moved by THEIR GRIEF—as if it were HIS OWN.

On this day God in the flesh cried---He wept openly---showing everyone how deeply He cared for this family. The women were apparently weeping when Jesus arrived, and I think when Mary joined Martha and Jesus both sisters broke down into uncontrollable sobs.

You know how that is.

When you've just had a heartbreak and a dear friend comes up to you—for some reason the love you have for this friend triggers an emotional response---and I think that's what happened here.

Well, verse 33 says that when Jesus saw this, and the Jews who had come along with her also sincerely weeping for Lazarus---who was no doubt a much loved and admired man in that community---when Jesus saw all these hurting people, He was—**GOD** was— ***"deeply moved and troubled in spirit."***

The Greek word here is the same one that is used to describe a horse snorting---and in this context it implies that our Lord let out an involuntary gasp. I mean, Jesus was so caught up in both sisters' emotion that the wind just went out of Him. He physically felt their sorrow with everything He had.

In fact, the Greek here takes it a step further. It infers Jesus was very ANGRY. Now---He wasn't angry at Mary or Martha or their friends who were grieving with them. No---He was angry at death---this enemy that had caused them so much pain. So, like a big brother hearing of a bully who had beat up on His siblings, Jesus responded in anger and said, ***"Where have you laid him?!"*** He said this much like you, or I would say, ***"Where is this bully known as death? Take Me to him and I will show him Who is boss!"***

So they took Jesus to the tomb---and when they got there, our Lord ONCE AGAIN showed His empathy for his friends by weeping. Tears ran down His face. But this time I think He wept for Lazarus. I mean, Jesus knew that in a moment Mary and Martha's tears would be turned to joy.

But Lazarus---Lazarus was about to be called back from the presence of God---back to living once more in a fallen world. Can you imagine what it would be like to be in Heaven where there is no sin or sickness or death or sorrow---where we are with God--and our loved ones---and then to have to leave? You may disagree with me about this interpretation, but

Jesus' response shows us that God enters the sorrow that we go through. His example shows us that ours is not a stoic, impassible God. We can look at Jesus and know this because, as Hebrews 1:3 says, **"He is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being."** And John 1:18 says, **"No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son, Who is at the Father's side, has made Him known."** In other words, Jesus is the exegesis of God. He "explains" God. He tells us---shows us---how God responds to our trials. He shows us that we do not have a High Priest Who cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities.

No---God cares. And---wouldn't you call that a wonderful vantage point for us to have? I mean, doesn't that perspective change things for the better? Well, God DOES care. In fact, He cares enough to let us go through tough times that will help us to grow---times of waiting that will help us to see things we wouldn't have seen in any other way. His is not a pampering love---but rather a perfecting love---a love that helps us to see one final, very important truth:

3.) Jesus---the King of Kings and Lord of Lords---RULES.

Look back at verse 23 where Jesus responds to Martha's question by telling her that Lazarus would rise again. Martha said, **"Of course he will---everyone will rise on the last day."** In essence she was saying, *"Don't give me theological facts, Jesus. I know my brother will rise on the last day---thousands of years from now---but that is not good enough. I want him here now."*

In response Jesus said, **"I am the resurrection and the life."** Don't miss the pronoun, **"I"** here.

Jesus doesn't say to her, *"Look, you've got your theological facts correct. You're on target. You're safe, Martha."* Instead, He says, *"Martha, look at ME! Martha, look up! Martha I am God. I have the power over death. I am the resurrection and the life. I rule---and because I do---he who believes in Me, even though he dies, will live."*

In other words, Jesus was saying, *"Don't put your faith in theology."* You need a better vantage point than that and here it is. **"Put your faith in ME because I do indeed rule over all things---even DEATH itself."**

Now, I want you to note HOW Jesus taught Martha this vitally important fact. You see, the Jews believed that the spirit hovered near the body for three days. After that the spirit left because the body started to decompose. Well, Jesus timed His arrival in Bethany such that He got there after four days---so in their minds all hope was gone. Jesus lovingly waited in Perea so there could be no doubt that He was Lord over life and death. When they took Him to Lazarus' tomb, He ignored the sisters' warnings about the smell that would surely be coming from the corpse and ordered the stone be rolled away. And then, after a prayer, He shouted, **"Lazarus, come out!"**

By the way, I agree with many commentators here---who say that if Jesus had not called Lazarus BY NAME---every corpse on Earth would have come back to life---because HE RULES!

Well, to help you imagine the moments that followed let me read an excerpt from Charles Swindoll's book, *The Darkness and the Dawn*. He writes,

"All eyes in the group surrounding Jesus were fixed on the darkness inside the now-open tomb. An eerie chill ran up their spines as they stood in silence, mouths open. At first, they saw nothing except a black hole where the tight jaws of death gripped its victim. Then someone said, 'Look! Look there!' as he pointed toward someone or something moving inside the shallow cave. A grayish awkward figure stirred, then rose slowly off the limestone shelf just inside the entrance.

Dragging itself upright, the figure turned and shuffled toward the daylight. Arm in arm, the sisters stared in disbelief. Each could feel the heavy pounding in her chest. They sucked in their breaths, then gasped together---and then at Jesus' command they sprang to the aid of their brother. One grabbed for the head napkin as the other grasped a loose end of one of the strips of cloth and began to pull it away. Quickly they looked into Lazarus' eyes, which were bright and flashing with life. His broad smile reassured them, especially when he said to Mary, 'Hurry up and get me out of this mess!'"

Listen friends. Our LORD DOES rule—over all things—any heartbreak you can imagine—any challenge you face—even death itself. Does that change your perspective on funerals or what! Doesn't that take the terror out of a doctor's terrifying diagnosis?

By the way, that phrase in verse 4 when Jesus said, *"This sickness shall not end in death"* that phrase applies to all Christ followers—because God rules death—and He says that if we put our faith in Jesus even though we die, we shall live. The Christian doesn't get SICK and DIE—he or she gets SICK and then eternally WELL.

Last week at Lois Brown's funeral I shared a fictional story about twins—two babies who were still in their mother's womb—and they were talking. If you were at the service, I hope you don't mind hearing it again—because I felt God telling me to!

As these twins floated in their mother's womb, one twin asked the other: *"Do you believe in life after delivery?"* The other replied, *"Why, of course. There has to be something after delivery. Maybe we are here to prepare ourselves for what we will be later."* *"Nonsense,"* said the first. *"There is no life after delivery. What kind of life would that be?"* The second said, *"I don't know, but there will be more light than here. Maybe we will walk with our legs and eat from our mouths. Maybe we will have other senses that we can't understand now."* The first replied, *"That is absurd. Walking is impossible. And eating with our mouths? Ridiculous! The umbilical cord supplies nutrition and everything we need. But the umbilical cord is so short. Life after delivery is to be logically excluded."* The second insisted, *"Well I think there IS something and maybe it's different than it is here. Maybe we won't need this physical cord anymore."* The first replied, *"Nonsense! And moreover if there is life, after delivery, then why has no one ever come back from there? Delivery is the end of life, and in the after-delivery, there is nothing but darkness and silence and oblivion. It takes us nowhere."* *"Well, I don't know,"* said the second, *"but certainly we will meet Mother and she will take care of us."* The first replied *"Mother? You actually believe in Mother? That's laughable. If Mother exists, then where is She now?"* The second said, *"She is all around us. We are surrounded by her. We are OF Her. It is IN Her that we live and move and have our being. Without her, this would not and could not exist."* The first said: *"Well I don't see her, so it is only logical that She doesn't exist."* To which the second replied, *"Sometimes, when you're in silence and you focus and listen, you can perceive Her presence, and you can hear Her loving voice, calling down from above."*

Well, we all know which twin was right. There is life BEFORE and AFTER our delivery into this world. We have all experienced it—SEEN it. And Jesus tells us that since He defeated death—there is LIFE after we are "delivered" into eternity.

I want you to bring to mind the greatest challenge you are facing—that issue that causes you the most fear. Now—as you replay that nightmare in your mind listen to three facts:

JESUS KNOWS!

JESUS CARES!

And King Jesus RULES. Don't those words change YOUR perspective for the good?

Let us pray.