

LAZARUS

Date: April 6, 2020

Scripture: John 11:1-44

Hello! My name is Michael Olson. Today we'll be focusing on the account of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, found in the book of John 11:1-44. As we'll find out from the text, this miracle took place toward the end of Jesus's Earthly ministry in a town called Bethany, just outside of Jerusalem.

Let's listen to John's description of what happened. As we move through the text, I'll stop and add some commentary along the way. Starting in chapter 11, verse 1.

11 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." ⁴ 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."

⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. ⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."

John 11:1-7

Most of us are familiar with the term, "God is love." Very true and we accept it in a general sense. But, in this passage, John points out that Jesus's love moves past broad generalities to specific people, people with names. Lazarus wasn't just any man. John tells us that Lazarus was a certain man. He was Jesus's friend. Jesus had a specific affection for Martha and her sister and Lazarus. And this affection was what

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caused Him to stay two days longer in the place where He was before journeying to Bethany to be with His friends.

Pastor Joby famously says, “God is never late and rarely early.” That is certainly true in this case. Jesus, in full knowledge of what was to come, set the table for the revelation of His glory by delaying His physical presence with His friends during their time of great need. As you’ll see from the text, this was very hard for Mary and Martha to grapple with. I’m sure we can all relate.

Let’s pick it up again in verse 17.

¹⁷ Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother.

John 11:17-19

There was a common belief amongst the Jews that a deceased person’s spirit would remain in it’s body for three days. After that, it was impossible for it to return. True or not, Jesus was about to completely dismantle people’s understanding of what power death actually holds in relation to His authority.

²⁰ So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

John 11:20-21

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This is crushing, isn't it? Martha is caught between her faith in Jesus's ability to heal and her current circumstances. A few verses later we find that Mary shares the same sentiment. Grief compounded with the question, "Why?"

It's more than likely that you've been there, too. Whether it's the death of a loved one, battling with the reality of a chronic illness, a dramatic deviation from the expectations we had for our lives, or any other circumstance that, as Romans tells us, God is at work through for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. We are uncomfortable with the idea that death and mourning precedes resurrection. In fact, we hate it. But, in the world that God created a seed must fall to the ground and die before it can produce fruit and an empty tomb doesn't come without a painful cross to bear. But, like the Good Shepherd He is, Jesus leads us through the valley of death's shadow in full knowledge that the payoff is worth the pain. And in response to Martha's statement of grief and questioning, Jesus let's us know what the payoff is. Let's pick it up again.

²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." 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 on the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

John 11:21-26

As we are preparing our hearts for the celebration of Easter and in light of all of the suffering that the reality of death as a result of sin had brought on Mary, Martha and

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Lazarus and on us, let's stop and take in the weight of what Jesus just said. Mary and Martha were soon to discover that they had an intimate friendship with the eternal Living Word of God. The Word made flesh that John talked about at the beginning of his letter. And that God, in Jesus, was beginning to bring to fulfillment the plan He had from the foundation of the world to reconcile all things to Himself. And He was about to use the death of Lazarus, whom He had great love and affection for, as a platform to start His campaign to make all things new. Mary, Martha and even Lazarus himself as he lay in his grave, were about to find themselves right in the middle of the launch of the God's great plan of redemption.

What is their payoff? Resurrection and life in the face of death and mourning. And resurrection and life are not a concept. They are a person, Jesus of Nazareth. He is the payoff for Mary and Martha, for Lazarus and for you.

It seems too good to be true, too big to believe. That a Holy, all powerful God would be compassionate enough to take on the form of His creation with the heart to pursue them and breathe the breath of life back into their bodies. But Jesus poses the question anyway, "Do you believe this?" And Martha responds:

²⁷ She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

John 11:27

In the verses following we find Jesus, in full knowledge of the fact that He would eventually raise Lazarus from the dead, being present with those who were mourning his loss.

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³³ 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. ³⁴ And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

John 11:33-35

Why would Jesus weep? In hindsight, we know that the joy of Lazarus's resurrection is just around the corner, moments away. Maybe Jesus was grieving the devastation that death as a result of sin was having on the people He loved. Or maybe He just wanted to be close to the broken-hearted. Either way, it's good to know that the Christ of the resurrection is also the Comforter in times of grief. In Jesus, we see that the heart of God isn't stoic and distant. God's heart leads Him to weep with those who weep while bringing about the joy of the coming kingdom.

³⁸ Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. ³⁹ 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." ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² 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." ⁴³ When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." ⁴⁴ 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 11:38-44

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Sometime in the Second Century, Saint Irenaeus, an early church father, coined the phrase, "The glory of God is man fully alive." Now, there is a lot behind this phrase. Too much to dig into here, but it certainly seems like it rings true with this story. God revealing His glory through a stone removed and a dead heart beginning to beat. Through bound hands and feet being loosed and a shrouded face being uncovered.

Lazarus was dead and now he is alive. Mary and Martha grieved and now they are caught up in sheer joy. And why? As a sign of things to come!

You see, very soon, not too far away from Lazarus's hometown, another stone would roll. Another heart would beat again. Hands and feet that were pierced would be unbound and a shroud would be folded neatly were a crucified body would once lay and the ripple effects of this resurrection would change everything.

Today, as you consider this story, can you hear Jesus saying the same thing to you, "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?"

Let's pray together.

Jesus, thank You for this story and how it points us to see our need for resurrection and life in You. We all have felt the sting of death as a result of sin. But we believe that You are who You say You are and that You will do what You said You will do. Give us the grace to move through the pain of the cross with a faith that leads us to the joy of the resurrection. In Jesus name. Amen.