

Happy Easter. I'm so glad you're here. I look forward to this day every year but I think there should be a warning label on all Easter promotions.

"Warning: Attending an Easter service may be hazardous to your vision."

You can attend an Easter service and miss the Easter part. You can celebrate Easter and never see the resurrection. We can get a little distracted as humans and we focus our attention on the lesser importance of peripheral things. It happens all the time. We all suffer from this peripheral vision problem. I saw some photos last week that illustrate this:

It's possible to see the Full House but miss John Stamos.

It's possible to be in a Justin Verlander jersey but miss Verlander.

It's possible to see Buckingham Palace and miss the royal photo bomb.

Close to the palace but far from the Queen. You can get close to the cross and the empty tomb and still be a long way from the Christ.

Jesus was committed to correcting the vision of His disciples. They too suffered with this peripheral vision problem. We are looking at a story in John 11 where Jesus demonstrates His resurrection power. The death of a close friend provides an opportunity for Jesus to make one of His boldest claims supported by one of his greatest miracles. In the process He demonstrates some fundamental realities about God. The problem is you can miss these realities when you are focused on peripheral matters. Let's see if we can improve our vision this Easter Sunday because unless we see God for who He is we cannot experience the resurrection. If we don't get our vision corrected we will never see the glory He has waiting for us.

The chapter begins... 11:1-4. Did you see that? Jesus knew about this situation or at least He knew how it would end. Where everyone else sees sickness, Jesus sees glory. Even the most difficult circumstances imaginable can result in the glory of God. After all, that's what the cross is all about? A sinless man who went around doing good gets nailed to a cross? But the story doesn't end there. And neither does yours no matter what you are experiencing. **God knows about your predicament.** God is bigger than your predicament and no matter how dark things may seem, there is light at the other end. Do you believe this? Do you believe that your circumstances will result in God's glory and your good? Easier said than done right?

Pain blurs our vision. Lazarus has two sisters, Martha and Mary. When Jesus arrives in Bethany they both greet Him with the exact same words, "If..." (vv. 21, 32). How does Jesus respond?

Jesus was "deeply moved in spirit and troubled." (v. 33). John uses a rare word here that is associated with a sense of indignation. It is a word that the Greeks used to describe a horse snorting in anger. Why is Jesus indignant? What is He angry about? Jesus is angry about the state of the world. This is not the way it's supposed to be. People die and their grieving relatives are inflicted with a gaping wound in their soul that never quite heals. Physical death separates people from their loved ones but even worse, spiritual death separates people from their God. Jesus shows us that...

God cares about your pain. He is touched by human emotion. The shortest verse in the Bible proves it. (v. 35). Just two words - the subject is "Jesus," the verb is "wept." And the obvious question is "why?" Why does Jesus weep when He is fully aware that Lazarus is about to walk out of the tomb? Did He say, "Hey, wait a minute. I'm God and I can raise him from the dead? What was I thinking?" No, Jesus wept so that you and I would know that the God who created us cares about us. Do you believe this? Do you believe that the infinite God of the universe cares about you?

Some who witnessed Jesus weeping were puzzled by all of this...v. 37. This is a good question and one that most of us have asked, "So if God is so powerful He can raise the dead then why didn't He prevent it in the first place?" Earlier in the chapter the disciples expressed concern that Jesus was going to go back to the area where they were trying to kill Him. Jesus said that if He walked in the light of God's will, then He would never stumble. He wanted them to know that God is in charge and we are bulletproof until the plan and purpose of God had been fulfilled in us. **God is able to prevent your worst nightmare.** Then why doesn't He? I have to conclude that there are some things more important than my peace and prosperity in the present. The Bible says there is an invisible glory to come that can't be compared with our present earthly experience. 2 Cor. 4:17-18 says it this way:

"This light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."

Do you believe this? Do you believe that your affliction is meaningful? That your pain has purpose? That it is doing something. Causing something. Bringing about something glorious. You can't see it. The world can't see it.

“How could anything good come out of this?” That’s how you feel if you focus on the seen. So Paul says look to the things that are unseen. “Nothing in your pain is meaningless. It is all preparing. Working something. Producing something — a weight of glory, a special glory for you. Just for you because of that pain.” Piper

Lazarus had been in the tomb four days by the time Jesus arrived. There is no doubt about his condition! The four-day period is significant. In Jewish thought the spirit of a dead person hovered near the corpse for three days, desiring to return. But once the body began to decay, it left permanently. Death is irreversible. So the fact that Lazarus had been in the tomb four days meant to them that there was no coming back. But Jesus wants to show His disciples that **God CAN turn things around.** Vv. 38-44.

I think one of the cruelest words in the English language is the word “irreversible.” It’s not a bad word it’s just that it almost always is associated with bad experiences. Last year I lost a sermon on my computer. I went to every tech person I knew and they all said the same thing, “It’s irreversible.” You say something unkind and you want to get those words back but you can’t. The damage to the relationship is irreversible. You stand at the bedside of someone who has had a stroke or a brain injury and the doctor says, “I’m sorry but this condition is irreversible.”

Lazarus died. He didn’t swoon or pass out or just sort of die. He was stone cold dead. But God can do the undoable, reverse the irreversible. God makes possible what seems impossible. Do you believe this? That’s the question Jesus posed to Martha...vv. 25-26. You will never be asked a more important question. It is not a multiple-choice test. All we have to do during life on this planet is to get the right answer to one question - the one question that Martha got right, “Do you believe this?” Martha’s answer is the key to eternal life. “You are the Christ, the Son of God.” She got the answer right but she will have to take the test again. So will you. After raising Lazarus, Jesus died. He was as dead as the stone they used to seal His tomb. Many of those who saw Lazarus walk out of the tomb had already forgotten Jesus’ resurrection power. Their peripheral vision kicked in again. In their grief they forgot that “irreversible” is not a word in God’s vocabulary.

That’s why we’re here today - to be reminded again. The message of Easter is God sent His Son into the world to turn things around. **He didn’t send His Son to make bad people a little less bad or good people a little**

better. Jesus came to make dead people alive. Because of Jesus' death and resurrection there has been a great reversal, evil has been overcome with good, death has been swallowed up by life, sin has been defeated by grace, the blind can see and the dead are raised. Bad things will turn out good, good things cannot be taken from us, and the best things are yet to come.

Do you believe this? The resurrection is our hope. We are living through some anxious times. Our culture seems to be coming apart at the seams. In 1944 historian Will Durant wrote the book, *Caesar and Christ*. In it he concludes, "A great civilization is not conquered from without until it has destroyed itself within. The essential causes of Rome's decline lay in her people, her morals, her class struggle, her failing trade, her bureaucratic despotism, her stifling taxes, her consuming wars." Sound familiar? Is there any hope for America? Of course there is – if you believe in the power of the resurrection.

How about you? Have your dreams died? They can live again. Has your marriage died? It can come back to life. Have you given up on life? Fine. Get a new one. At the end of his gospel John wrote, "These have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name." Do you believe this? Those who believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life will see Heaven in all its glory.

So let me extend an invitation to you, to all of you. For the next couple of weeks we are going to discuss how to live a Life Worth Giving, how it is that we can maintain this resurrection life. If you are a part of Fellowship I don't want you to miss these two vision messages.

If you are here and you want to take the next step, whatever that is, I want to pray with you. I want to invite you to leave during this last song and come across the Concourse to a reception room we have set up there. I'll meet you there and we can discuss your situation and what needs to happen next.