

I flew to California and back over the weekend to do a funeral. Let me say that again – I FLEW. Not impressed? Of course you're not impressed. But 150 years ago, if I had told you I flew, you would have had me committed. Then someone flew. Now, everyone flies. It is hard to accept something you have never seen but once you see it you begin to seek it. When Jesus said, "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," some people thought He was crazy (10:20). But once they saw it, now anything is possible. A resurrection changes everything.

In John 11, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. What happened to Lazarus can happen to you and me. But there's one problem – in order to be resurrected, you have to die. And dying is the last thing we want to do. Let me take you to a place called Bethany, to the home of two sisters, Mary and Martha, whose brother Lazarus was sick. When he dies, Jesus brings him back to life, not just some sort of party trick to impress people. He did it to teach us some valuable lessons.

**I. When Jesus raised Lazarus He proved that death is reversible.** Let's look at the text.

Jesus receives word that His good friend Lazarus is sick...vv. 1-4.

Martha and Mary express their grief. Notice what they say. V. 21, 32.

When Jesus raised Lazarus He proved that death is reversible. This is not the end of the story. If death is reversible then this life may not be as important as we thought. Not that life is unimportant it is just that this life is relatively unimportant compared to the life God has prepared for us in heaven. I agree with the observation made by Peggy Noonan that "we have lost the old knowledge that happiness is overrated—that, in a way, life is overrated. We have lost, somehow, a sense of mystery—about us, our purpose, our meaning, our role. Our ancestors believed in two worlds, and understood this to be the solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short one. We are the first generations of man that actually expected to find happiness here on earth, and our search for it has caused such-unhappiness. The reason: If you do not believe in another, higher world, if you believe only in the flat material world around you, if you believe that this is your only chance at happiness—if that is what you believe, then you are not disappointed when the world does not give you a good measure of its riches, you are despairing."

There are a number of things Jesus does and says that are inexplicable unless death is reversible. For example, when Jesus learned that Lazarus was sick HE DELAYED GOING TO HIM FOR TWO DAYS...vv. 5-6. That statement is a head scratcher unless Jesus is God. If you have the power of life and death do you really need to be in a hurry to get to the funeral?

When Jesus learned that Lazarus was dead, He said He was glad to hear it...14-15. He was not glad that Lazarus was dead but He was glad that His disciples were going to witness a resurrection that would strengthen their faith.

So many of the activities we give our lives to are just not that important in light of eternity. Paul tells us what is most important: **1 Corinthians 15:3-4** "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures..."

We were made for eternity. That is why we are so uncomfortable with death. Marshall Shelley had a child live for two minutes. Toby entered the world at 8:20 p.m. on Nov. 22, 1991, and departed this world at 8:22. "My wife Susan and I never got to see him take his first steps. We barely got to see him take his first breath. I don't know if he would have enjoyed softball or software, dinosaurs or dragonflies. We never got to wrestle, race, or read... What would have made him laugh? Made him scared? Made him angry? Toby was born with a rare and severe genetic disorder. Three months after Toby died, the Shelley's two-year-old daughter, Mandy, died. In the wake of these two devastating losses, the Shelley's wrestled with God. Why God? Why did you do that? What was that all about? "Why?" Marshall asks, "did God create a child to live for two minutes?" He answers his own question,

"He didn't. (And) He didn't create Mandy to live two years. He did not create me to live 40 years (or whatever number he may choose to extend my days in this world). God created Toby for eternity. He created each of us for eternity, where we may be surprised to find our true calling which always seemed just out of reach here on earth." We were not created for earth alone. We were created for eternity. And all our deepest senses confirm it. We are homesick for heaven. We miss our home. God has placed eternity in our hearts and we are not comfortable with the temporary nature of this solitary, poor, nasty, short life.

**II. When Jesus raised Lazarus He proved that He is who He claimed to be.** Chapter 10 ended with Jesus claiming to be one with the Father. This claim was blasphemy to the Jews who said they were going to stone Him because, "you being a man, make yourself God." (10:33). The divinity of Christ is seen in many ways in chapter 11.

Jesus supported His claims with His deeds. He said, "I am the bread of Life," and He fed 5,000. "I am the light of the world," and He gave sight to a man born blind. "I am the resurrection and the life," He backed it up by raising Lazarus. Jesus backed up His words by raising Lazarus...vv 38-45. What is this? He can raise him from the dead but He just can't unwrap him! No. Jesus wanted His disciples to be involved in this miracle.

Everywhere Jesus went resurrections occurred. The lame walked, the blind could see, prostitutes were set free and maybe the most impressive miracle of all, tax collectors offered refunds. He said He was the resurrection and the life so... "(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." vv 44-45. What is this? He can raise him from the dead but He just can't unwrap him! No. Jesus wanted His disciples to be involved in this miracle.

**III. When Jesus raised Lazarus He proved that He can raise us too.** Why didn't Jesus empty out all the tombs? Why doesn't He raise our loved ones? Think about it. The only person disappointed in this miracle was Lazarus! He may be the most tragic character in the whole Bible because he had to die twice. In fact, we read in the next chapter that "When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well." John 12:9-10. He had to die once by sickness only to come back and be stoned to

death? He must have thought, "Thanks Jesus." If heaven is as incredible as the brief descriptions in the Bible, then why on earth would anyone ever want to be brought back?

What do I have to do to experience a resurrection? Just believe. Just transfer your trust from your own efforts, your own intellect, your own instincts to His promises and you can look forward to your own resurrection. If it can happen to Lazarus, it can happen to you. More importantly, since it happened to Jesus it will happen to you. If you believe. "But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you." Ro. 8:10-11

The day before the funeral I flew out to California to be a part of, I met with the family. The two daughters of the woman who died asked me if they could be baptized. They knew what their mom believed and they decided to transfer their trust from their own understanding of things and trust in Christ alone. Her death resulted in life for the people who mattered most to her.

When you trust in Christ alone for your salvation, resurrection occurs. "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved - and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." Eph. 2:4-7. Paul states it as if it has already happened because it has.

The problem with a resurrection is that you have to die to experience it. Maybe we need to do a little more dying. Die to your own efforts, your own intellect, your own instincts and trust in the promise of God. "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."

The question I want to leave you with is the same question Jesus asked Martha, "Do you believe this?" If you do, then you will experience the power of the resurrection in this life and in the life to come. "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead you will be saved." (Ro. 10:9)