

XXV. Personal Evangelism in Biblical Perspective  
*iShare—Encounters with Jesus in John's Gospel*  
“An Encounter with Lazarus, Martha and Mary at Lazarus’ Resurrection”  
John 11:38-57  
Dr. Harry Reeder  
August 26, 2012 – Morning Sermon

This is our last study in the encounters of Jesus in the book of John and our iShare study. After this I hope to begin a series of sermons that would be the most important sermons I’ve ever preached in all of my life. It is a topical expository series using various passages of Scripture on the majesty of the Gospel accomplished and applied. So that’s where we’ll be headed as we continue to focus on the sharing of the Gospel. Let’s look at John 11:1-16 which says [1] *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.” [8] The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?” [9] Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. [10] But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.” [11] After saying these things, he said to them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.” [12] The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.” [13] Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. [14] Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus has died, [15] and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” [16] So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

Have you ever heard the phrase ‘full circle’? In the public life and ministry of Jesus in a real sense we’ve gone full circle. A messenger arrives with a message that is about to initiate the climactic miracle of the Messiah prior to His death and resurrection and that is the death and resurrection of Lazarus. It has now been initiated. It will just be a matter of days after the resurrection of Lazarus that Jesus will go aside to a third trip into the wilderness. He’ll come back, be anointed by Mary and then He will enter into Jerusalem to His atoning death and triumphant resurrection. We are now at the end of His three year public ministry which is initiated with the seventh miracle that John highlights out of all the miracles that Jesus did. It is a climactic miracle and a messenger arrives where it all begins.

His public ministry began at Bethany across the Jordan. It was there that He was baptized by John the Baptist. It was there that His Father had said “This is My Son in whom I am well pleased.” Now three years later we are back here and a messenger from

Bethany near Jerusalem arrives at Bethany across the Jordan. The messenger arrives with news that Lazarus, whom You love (the brother of Mary and Martha) is ill. In the last study we took some time to walk through John 11:1-37. I want to remind you of some things that are given to us in those verses and go back and finish the reading of those verses. Then I will take the last part of John 11 and give you a few observations.

After I gave the last study I had a number of people for various reasons come and talk to me. One who came to talk with me is seeking and we had some time to spend a great opportunity together. He had not committed his life to Christ but was interested and asking questions. I believe the Lord is working in his life and I'm looking forward to what He will do in this man's life. I mentioned to some others that I felt like I was talking to Nicodemus who is so close that he's about ready to fall into the Kingdom. This man is a heart doctor and he said to me "I listened to what you said and I have found that what you said is true." A historian said about the early Christians that they die often and they die well. He went on to say "Every time I'm with a Christian that dies there is something different. There is a note of victory. Me and my friends don't have it." I said "You can."

Our Lord is speaking of that victory. The death of the believer is not a destination but a transformation where we move from this life into glory. The death of a believer is glorious. Not only does it take the believer to glory, it becomes the opportunity to display glory. Lazarus' death and what the Lord is about to do has a very special role in displaying that glory. Let's go back and finish taking a look at where we were in the last study and let's pick up at John 11:17. Jesus has left Bethany beyond the Jordan. He has arrived just outside of Bethany near Jerusalem and we pick up there.

John 11:17-37 says [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. [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. [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?" [27] She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."*

[28] *When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." [29] And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. [30] Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. [31] 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. [32] 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." [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!" [37] But some of them*

said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?"

This is what we covered in the last study and just want to give you some reminders of some things that were in that text that you want to have as we move to these concluding verses. The first one is the Holy Spirit, in leading John to write this, is taking great pains for you to know that Jesus loves Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Three different times the text says that He loved them. Another time it tells you that Lazarus is His friend. To make this point, John reaches into something that has not yet happened, to point out how deep the relationship was that Jesus had with Mary, Martha and Lazarus, in that after the resurrection of Lazarus He will allow Mary to wash His feet with oil and wipe them with her hair. He will declare that His anointing for His death and burial. So there is a great, personal love and intimacy Jesus has with these three.

The second thing the text wants you to know is they send for a message to the One who loves them to come because Lazarus is ill. It says that Jesus loved them therefore He stayed (John 11:6). He didn't go to heal him or prevent his death which would have been a postponement of death. He stayed because He loved them.

Number three, the illness and death of Lazarus Jesus has declared has a sovereign design and purpose. Because He loved them He said 'no' to the request and stayed. Jesus is not only aware but He has declared that Lazarus' death is a sovereign appointment not to the destination of death but a sovereign appointment to glory and for glory. This death is designed to bring forth the glory of God in Christ to glorify God in the Son of God, Jesus Christ through the preeminence of Christ. God is being glorified through the preeminence of Christ in what transpires in the death of Lazarus. Not only does the death of a believer bring them to glory, the death of a believer is the amplification of His glory and the death of Lazarus has a very specific purpose in the exaltation of God's glory in Christ Jesus.

The fourth thing you don't want to miss in what we've covered is the under current. There seems to be no immediate doubt that Jesus loved Mary, Martha and Lazarus but yet there is a lingering doubt because of the lingering of Jesus. As soon as Jesus gets there the first thing out of Martha's mouth is "Lord, if You had come he wouldn't have died." Jesus responds to her "Do you believe in the resurrection? He will not die. If you believe in Me you do not die, you will be raised." She says "Lord, I believe in the resurrection on the last Day." He says to her "It's not the last Day that resurrects people. It's Me and I'm here. I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me shall never end up in an eternal death. That is not their destination if they are in Me."

Martha declares that she believes in Him. She runs and tells her sister Mary and Mary comes. What is the first thing out of Mary's mouth? Mary's response is slightly different for she utters her response while sobbing and weeping. In the midst of her sobbing and weeping she says exactly what Martha says, "Lord, if You had been here my brother would not have died." It says that Jesus is greatly moved, deeply stirred and then He enters into the weeping with the shortest verse of the Bible "Jesus wept" (John 11:35). Then He says "Where is he?" They take Him from outside the town to the tomb. Then it says in John 11:36-37, [36] *So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"* [37] *But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?"*

There is this under current that questions the love of Christ. Here is what I want you to see as we move into this last part. The love of Christ is not seen by His intervention to postpone our death. The love of Christ is evidenced because He has entered into this world, will meet death and conquer it. There is the evidence of His love for you for all who have put their trust in Him. So He is greatly moved, deeply troubled, weeping and at the tomb, so now what happens? Let's move from these reminders to some observations.

John 11:38-39 says [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."* That is three times that Lazarus has been dead and he's been in the tomb four days. Why? At the time of Jesus there was an apostolic tradition that when someone died the soul was separated from the body but it hovered in the vicinity of the body for four days and the person could be resuscitated by it re-entering into the body. Jesus is not affirming this superstition by any means. He is going to make sure that no one is going to be able to say this is a resuscitation but that this is a resurrection. Martha even makes it clear when she says "if we roll away that stone there will be an odor." I like the King James Version because Martha says "Lord, we can't roll away that stone, he stinketh." There is decomposition, putrefication of the flesh. The pollution of the body has already started. There is a reason they put Gardenias all over funeral homes. It's not for beauty. It's because of this inevitable smell that death brings as part of its ravage and trauma. What does Jesus then do?

John 11:40 says [40] *Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"* He is not saying if you believe we can have a miracle. Jesus is going to bring the resurrection of Lazarus. He is saying that this miracle is not based upon your faith. It creates faith. It will strengthen the faith of His disciples. Jesus said earlier, "I'm glad I wasn't there so that your faith may be strengthened" (John 11:15). The miracles of God are not dependent upon faith. He is saying when this miracle occurs you must believe in order to be able to see the glory of God. There are a lot of people who will see this miracle. Some will believe and some will want to kill Him and Lazarus. To see the glory of God you must believe. So what does He then say?

John 11:41-42 says [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."* John is writing this and he is recording this to say Jesus is not praying out loud for His prayers to be effective. Jesus has been in prayer with the Father and He knows what the Father is going to do. Jesus knows what this will accomplish but He is engaging in this public prayer so that they will know, believe and be focused upon You and not Lazarus. Notice Lazarus will not publish any books. Very little is actually said about Lazarus. This is not about Lazarus. This is about the glory of God in Jesus Christ. So Jesus prays out loud.

John 11:43-44 says [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."* Here we see the emotions of Jesus again. He was deeply disturbed, greatly troubled, deeply moved and weeping. Here we see His resolution as

He weeps and is disturbed and says “Take Me to him.” Before the miracle He prays and speaks the Word of the Lord. Then there is the resurrection of Lazarus. There is His command “Take away the stone!” There is His command to come forth. Lazarus comes forth and then there is the command to take away the grave clothes to set him free.

Here is our question in the takeaway. It is very simple. All of this has occurred for one reason. It is that the glory of God is revealed in Jesus Christ. So the question is how does this event reveal the glory of God in Christ the Messiah that you may believe? You may be thinking “Harry, I don’t think I believe.” Yes you do. It takes faith to receive Him and surrender to Him. It takes faith to reject Him and step into eternity without Him. The question is will you believe in Him? And the same question to you that was asked of Mary and Martha which is, do you believe Me? I am the Resurrection and the Life.

So how is the glory of God revealed here? I believe it is revealed four ways in Christ. The first way is that this event is an affirmation of the glory of God in Christ as the Son of God who has become the Son of Man to save sinners to the glory of God. This text displays for you in a microcosm what the Scriptures and the Gospels unfold for you and that is the full humanity of Jesus and the full deity of Jesus. When Jesus comes into the world He doesn’t lay aside His deity. He lays aside the privileges of His deity but we don’t have thirty three years without a Trinity. He is the Son of God and He displays His deity throughout this text.

When they show up with a message that Lazarus is ill, does it surprise Him? He knows. He is the omniscient Son of God. He not only knows the design of Lazarus’ death but the purpose of Lazarus’ death. John 1:14 says *[14] And the Word (Son of God) became flesh (Son of Man) and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.* God becomes Man. He doesn’t give up deity but He does take upon Himself humanity. Do you see His deity? He knows Lazarus. He knows when he dies. When he dies He says “Okay let’s go, he’s dead.” He knows He is going to resurrect him. I am the Resurrection and the Life. When He declares who He is as the Messiah He uses the name of God. He says “I am. I am the Door. I am the Life. I am the Truth. I am the Way. I am the Resurrection and the Life. I am the Beginning and the End.”

By command Lazarus leaves the dead. See His deity and yet see His full humanity. See these human emotions. He is deeply moved. He is stirred up. He is greatly troubled as He sees the travesty of death and separation of loved ones. Even though He knows the triumph over death in Him He still sees its consequences and He enters into the weeping of those who have encountered this travesty of death and loss of one. He knows the questions Lazarus must have had as he approached death. What’s there? Why hasn’t Jesus come? He knows what Mary and Martha have asked. It’s obvious that He is fully aware and He weeps not in frustration but you see Him rising up with these deep emotions. He is deeply moved which means irate. He’s not irate at the fact that they haven’t gotten yet. You see Him greatly stirred and weeping.

Look at His humanity here. He is about to raise Lazarus from the dead and He says “Take away the stone.” Could Jesus have gotten rid of that stone? He is about to bring someone out of the grave but there is another expression of His humanity. He says “Take the grave cloths off of him.” When Jesus is raised will anyone have to take any grave cloths off of Him? No. Here He is displaying clearly His deity and His humanity.

God has come in the flesh. By a man came death – Adam, by a Man comes the resurrection of the dead. So here you have displayed before you in this event the glory of God by the affirmation of the full deity and full humanity of Christ. He is not fifty percent God and fifty percent man. He is 100 percent God and 100 percent Man and it's on full display.

Secondly, you the event with an announcement and the announcement is making a declaration that Jesus Christ has the authority and the power over death and life. I am the Resurrection and the Life. Martha and Mary are grappling with this. Jesus is saying this is what you need to know. There is a resurrection. There is one on the last day and there is one about to happen on this day. They happen not because it's this day or the last day but they happen because of Me. I've come therefore the resurrection has come. I am the Resurrection and the Life. If you believe in Me and believe Me you will never die. What happens when I hit that grave? You just went absent from the body and present with the Lord. Death is not your destination. Death is your transformation. Death is not your termination. Death is your transition because I am the Resurrection and the Life.

Here He declares His full power and authority. You see it right here in His announcement of I am the Resurrection and the Life. It's one thing to say it but it's another thing to do it. Where is his tomb? You see Him go to that tomb. Roll away that stone. Now bring him out. How is He going to bring him out? He prays, He speaks and says "Lazarus come out!" He is very specific. I'm not trying to be funny for this is the truth. If Jesus had not said 'Lazarus' every grave within the sound of His voice would have emptied but here you see the Sovereign say "Lazarus, come out!"

If you're a believer today you have been resurrected. You were dead in your sins and you have come to life. Do you know why? It was because the King called your name. He knows you by name. He called your name and you came out of a spiritual bone yard, from death unto life. The Sovereign gives life to whomever He wills. Here is the sufficient Sovereign. This is not the plaintive plea of Jesus saying "I hope this works." No this is the King. He said "Lazarus, come out!" That's exactly what happened when you became a believer. The King called you and you came. The King called you from death unto life. Here is the One who has absolute authority over all and when He speaks there is obedience. The Sovereign has come to the tomb, made His declaration and the dead have come to life.

There is another Day that is coming and again the Lord will come with a trumpet and a loud voice and the dead in Christ will rise. It is the work of the King. Not only did Job say "I know my Redeemer lives" but he said "Even though my skin fails, my flesh falls off yet in my flesh I shall see Him." Job knew not only his Redeemer would be resurrected but he would be. Though He would die, He would not stay dead. Death was a transition to another resurrected body and I'll see Him. Those eyes that closed in death will be given sight and I shall see Him.

Thirdly, the glory of God is revealed in this event of the death and resurrection because it anticipates and even accelerates the mission of Christ. Why did Jesus come? He came to die and to be raised. Lazarus' death and resurrection is pointing to that. It's not equal to that. It's only a type but it's pointing to that. Lazarus is going to be raised here and he'll die again. Jesus is going to be raised and ascend into glory but this is an anticipation of it. You can see in this event the swirling of all the emotions as Jesus arrives here and sees the trauma of death and sees what it is doing. He empathizes and

enters in with weeping but it also says He's greatly troubled and deeply moved. Those words mean irate and stirred up.

I do not believe He is irate and stirred up by the faltering faith of His disciples or the people who are questioning Him. I believe He is stirred up because He now sees the enemy and in days He'll meet this enemy, take hold of this enemy and defeat this enemy. This is Christ rising up for the moment of the occasion as He is now anticipating His death where He puts to death, death and eventually He'll throw death into hell itself. That's why He is greatly stirred up and moved. It is at this moment that He is anticipating His own death and His own resurrection. Because He anticipates it and triumphs over it then no believer has a tragic death.

Whenever a believer dies there is no tragedy. You might think "Well it was a young death." It's still not a tragedy. It may be traumatic but it's not a tragedy. It is the triumph of Christ and now the fullness of glory. The death of unbelievers is tragic. The death of a believer probably will be traumatic but it is not a tragedy. It is the triumph of Christ that anticipates His death and resurrection and because of this event in John 12 they will go after Jesus to put Him to death and they will want to go after Lazarus to put him to death again. Christ has come to go to the cross and through this moment He is looking at the cross where He will drink the unspeakable cup of God's wrath and die the death we are supposed to die, to give you the unfathomable cup of life. It is life evermore. I am the Resurrection and the Life.

The fourth and last one is this event is the amplification of the Gospel. I'd like to look at Ephesians 2. There are many other passages I could take you to like Romans 6, Galatians 2 but I'm just going to read from this one. What is our natural condition when we are born into this world? We are dead. Ephesians 2:1-7 says *[1] And you were dead in the trespasses and sins [2] in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—[3] among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. [4] **But God**, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, [5] even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—[6] and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, [7] so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

So today if you're a Christian you have been resurrected. You were dead. Here is our view. When I became a Christian I was in the intensive ward on life support and Jesus healed me. Wrong! Before you came to Christ you were not in the intensive ward/unit, you were in the morgue. You were dead and He prayed. He ever lives to pray for you. Romans 8:33-34 says *[33] Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. [34] Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.* It is just as He did when Lazarus came forth. Then the Word of the King came and you heard the King had died for you. You were brought from death unto life and you left the morgue. He overturned the spiritual cemetery. He turned it upside down and brought you from death unto life, why? It was to show His glory in you, the immeasurable riches of His grace and glory toward you.

So you have been resurrected through prayer and the Word. Lazarus came out with prayer and the Word. You came out through prayer and the Word. This is why we are talking about iShare because Jesus allows us to get involved in this. He allows us to enter into prayer for other people and He allows us to be His voice to them. The King has summoned you. Believe and repent. He died for you.

Here is this glorious resurrection and then your death is not a destination but a transformation. Then your body will be raised and the body you get will be like Jesus' and not like Lazarus' here because he had to die again. You will get a new body for a new heavens and a new earth.

Here is one other little piece. Take away the stone. Dare I say that's telling us to be involved in evangelism? Why would I say that? Here Jesus is about to bring Lazarus from death unto life. What does He do when someone gets converted? He brings them from death unto life. Can Jesus do that all by Himself? Absolutely. Is He dependent upon us? No. Do you think Jesus was dependent upon them to roll away the stone? No, He is letting us participate. He is letting you share the Gospel and roll away the stones that people might come to life. Then when they come to life they are now free to put off the old man, the old clothes, and put on the new clothes. Then we get the chance to participate in discipleship, not only to take away stones but to take away grave clothes and to encourage one another to grow in grace. It is absolutely astounding the glory of God revealed in this text and at work in the Gospel.

Here is where I'll end. All of you reading this will have one death for sure but for believers you get two resurrections and one death. If by faith you reject Christ you get one resurrection and two deaths. If you come to Jesus Christ you have been raised from a spiritual bone yard and you have been born again. When you die you'll go to be with Him and then at a second resurrection He'll raise your body when a loud voice calls it from the tomb. If you say 'no' to Christ you'll have a death and then a resurrection to appear before a judgment seat. Then you'll have an irrevocable death that's forever but today is life. Hear Him call your name – Martha, Lazarus, Mary, Harry... I am the Resurrection and the Life. Do you believe this? Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for the Lord Jesus, the Savior of sinners who has come for us, not to postpone a physical death but to triumph over death that we might have life in Him, to die an atoning death. O grave where is your victory? Death where is your sting? Christ is Victor and now the King who died summons us. Believe. So if you haven't made that commitment may I invite you this day? The King has summoned you into His presence. He is ready to put the robe of righteousness upon you. He has forgiven you of all of your sins. Believe in Him. Dear friend if you have already done that then you have had one resurrection and you're going to have another one. If Jesus carries you'll have a death that is not termination but its transformation. But between now and then you get the opportunity for others, will you do it? Roll away stones and help people shed the grave clothes that have been brought to life, but Father in all of this, we only ask that the praise of the glory of Your grace would be the joy of our heart. Christ victorious, Christ our Savior, Amen.