

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

MAY 20TH-21ST, 2023 // GOSPEL OF JOHN

LAZARUS (JOHN 11:1-16)

As we're introduced to Lazarus in verses 1-2, John assumes we already know Mary and Martha.

- In verse 2, he refers to an event that hasn't yet occurred in John's narrative, although most readers would've already been familiar with it because of Mark's Gospel (Mark 14:6-9).
- Mary and Martha send Jesus a message telling Him that their brother Lazarus, a close friend of Jesus, is sick (vs. 3).

When Jesus hears the bad news, He reveals the same point of view He had in 9:3 when confronted with the man born blind: this sickness is for the glory of God (vs. 4).

- It ultimately won't end in death, but instead will be used to glorify Jesus.
- Jesus deeply loved this family, but instead of immediately healing Lazarus, He waits two more days (vs. 5-6).

After Jesus delayed, He said to the disciples, "Let's go to Judea again" (vs. 7).

- Because of the opposition of the religious leaders who wanted to kill Him, Judea was a dangerous place for Jesus AND the disciples (vs. 8).
- Jesus reminds them that He lives His life a bit differently: night is coming for Jesus and the day only has twelve hours, so Jesus must act obediently while it's still day (vs. 9-10).

Without receiving word that Lazarus has died, Jesus tells the disciples that he has "fallen asleep" (vs. 11).

- Jesus would often refer to death as sleep and would be misunderstood by many (vs. 12).
- For Jesus, the one who is the resurrection, Lazarus has merely fallen asleep, and now Jesus will go back, at the risk of His own life, to wake Him up.

Jesus plainly tells them, "Lazarus has died, and that's a good thing for you because you're about to see something that will build your faith" (vs. 14-15).

- Those are some hard words for us to hear! Didn't Jesus love Lazarus and his family?
- God's love for us is a perfecting, purifying love, not a pampering love. Sometimes He allows pain and hardship for His glory and our good.

This is where our faith gets stretched, tested, and grown. Is God still good when life doesn't feel good?

- Thomas utters a cynical response, but it's an honest response (vs. 16) and it's a faith-filled response.
- Thomas is willing to go wherever Jesus leads, even if it means death—somehow he knows that's exactly where he needs to be.

RESURRECTION AND LIFE (JOHN 11:17-32)

As Jesus nears Bethany after Lazarus has been dead for four days, a crowd gathers to comfort the family (vs. 17-19).

- Martha, Lazarus' sister, goes to meet Jesus and is honestly a bit confrontational—"Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died!" (vs. 21).
- Martha is a strong, assertive woman who is disappointed, confused, and heartbroken.

If we're being honest, this is often what it looks like to face tragedy as a follower of Jesus.

- We know Jesus can do all things, and so sometimes it's just very confusing when He doesn't do what we think is best on our timetable.
- Yet, Martha knows that somehow Jesus can do something miraculous in this seemingly hopeless situation (vs. 22).

"YOUR BROTHER WILL RISE AGAIN..." (VS. 23)

Martha has heard the teaching of the resurrection and she confirms to Jesus her belief in the resurrection on the last day, but Jesus is speaking of something greater (vs. 24).

- The resurrection is no longer a matter of time or place or a theological abstraction, but a living, breathing person standing right in front of her (vs. 25).

Jesus is asking Martha, "Do you trust me?"

- Everyone who lives now and does trust Jesus completely will never truly die—they will be resurrected by Jesus and live (vs. 26).
- But Jesus wants Mary to affirm her personal trust in Him—not just the idea of resurrection—to which Mary responds full of faith in everything that Jesus is (vs. 27).

After Jesus' interaction with Martha, we now read about Jesus speaking with her sister, Mary.

- Grief is a funny thing—in some ways, it's the same for everyone, but in other ways, we all go through it just a little bit differently.
- Mary asks the exact same question of Jesus as her sister (vs. 32), but instead of running to Jesus like Martha did, she remained in the house weeping with friends (vs. 20).

When Mary came to Jesus, she collapsed at His feet with the same criticism at the supposed lateness of Jesus (vs. 32).

- In grief, some of us respond with confusion and questions, others with anger, some of us try to take charge and be in control, and others of us just want to collapse and weep.
- Through all of it, Jesus sees us and asks us the same question: "Do you trust me?"

"LAZARUS, COME OUT!" (JOHN 11:33-44)

The grief and the tears of Mary, Martha, and friends of the family moved Jesus deeply in His spirit (vs. 33).

- As Jesus approached Lazarus' tomb (vs. 34), and even heard the criticism of the crowd toward His inactivity to raise Lazarus up (vs. 36-37), Jesus responded to the heartbreaking scene with His own grief.

In the Greek, vs. 33 literally means that Jesus groaned inwardly with a loud, inarticulate noise; like a snort from an angry horse.

- The trouble in Jesus' spirit was an expression of grief, indignation, anger, and even rage.
- It's as if Jesus looked upon all of the destruction, pain, and anguish caused by the great enemy of humanity (death), and what He saw angered and saddened Him.

"JESUS WEPT" (VS. 35)

Jesus was fully human, and there's nothing undignified, sinful, or shameful about expressing the sorrow of humanity through tears—sometimes that's all there is to do.

- Jesus loves His people, and He wept when He saw them weeping.
 - Jesus is the high priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses (Heb. 4:14-16).
- Moved with compassion, Jesus approached the tomb and ordered for the stone to be removed (vs. 38-39).
- This was an odd request because, by this point, the body would be decaying, and the smell would be unbearable (vs. 39).
 - But Jesus insists that faith in Him means seeing the glory of God in ways far greater than we can ever imagine (vs. 40).

The stone is removed, and Jesus goes to the Father in prayer (vs. 41).

- Jesus is confident that He is always heard when He prays; in fact, He's only praying out loud so the bystanders will hear what He's saying and believe (vs. 42).

- With a loud voice and a decisive, confident tone of authority, Jesus cried out, "Lazarus, come out!" (vs. 43).

To the shock, surprise, and great awe of everyone by the graveside, the dead man came out of the grave still bound in his grave clothes (vs. 44).

- Interestingly, Jesus didn't miraculously remove the grave clothes from Lazarus, but asked the others to help do so.
- Jesus calls us out of our spiritual graves, but we must cooperate in obedience with Him to take off the grave clothes of the old self.

THE PLOT TO KILL JESUS (JOHN 11:45-57)

Those who came to grieve with the family personally witnessed an undeniable miracle that could not be easily dismissed (vs. 45).

- Many of them who saw what Jesus did believed in Him, but some of them went to the religious leaders and told them what had happened (vs. 46).
- The Jewish council (Sanhedrin) called an emergency meeting to discuss this.

What the religious leaders were really afraid of was the loss of control.

- If Jesus disturbs their religious system, the Romans could possibly come in and take away the Jews' right to have a religious and ethnic identity (vs. 48).
- This is what most people are afraid of when it comes to Jesus: loss of control and the right to do what it is they want to do.

The high priest Caiaphas reasons to this council that it's better for Jesus to die than for the Romans to remove the Jews' right to have their own religion and culture (vs. 49-50).

- Inadvertently, Caiaphas gave an unconscious and involuntary prophecy (vs. 51-52).
- Jesus would offer Himself up in death for the Jewish nation, but not just for them, but for all those from any nation who would trust in Him.

Now those with official religious and Jewish political power want Jesus dead (vs. 53).

- This concludes the public ministry of Jesus in John's Gospel.
- Until Jesus enters Jerusalem during Passion week, He will isolate Himself in the countryside in a little town called Ephraim (vs. 54).
- Tensions are high leading up to the Jewish Passover.

At this point in the narrative, it's the last few days in the life of Jesus—He's about to be betrayed, arrested, condemned, and crucified in the city of Jerusalem.

- As many were going up to Jerusalem and preparing for the feast, they're looking for and wondering if Jesus will come (vs. 55-56).
- The religious leaders are looking for Him too—so that they can arrest Him (vs. 57).

YOU ARE LAZARUS.

- We are spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1); buried in our self-made tombs of sin, selfishness, and the rotting decay of our meaningless pursuits to try and find spiritual life on our own.
- The dead aren't raised by education or mental health or therapy, moral examples, positive environments, or hearty encouragement.
- The Word and Voice of Jesus raises the dead.

COME OUT OF THE TOMB; TAKE OFF YOUR GRAVE CLOTHES.

- If you're spiritually dead, hear the voice of Jesus calling your name and step out of your grave by repenting and believing.
- We must cooperate in obedience with Him to take off the grave clothes of the old self (often, we do this in community).
- If you're spiritually alive, live like it!

THE LAST ENEMY TO BE DESTROYED IS DEATH.

- In this life, we all will be touched by the enemy of death.
- Death is a part of this broken existence that has been torn apart by the curse of sin (Rom. 6:23).
- Jesus sees our grief, tears, and confusion as we face this enemy, and He Himself will completely destroy it one day (1 Cor. 15:24-26).

THE LOVE OF GOD IS LOVE THAT PURIFIES AND PERFECTS, NOT LOVE THAT PAMPERS.

- Sometimes God allows pain and hardship in our lives for His glory and our good.
- It's confusing when the God who can do all things doesn't do what we think is best on our timetable.
- Through all of our grief, heartache, questions, and pain, God sees us and is asking us the same question: "Do you trust me?"