

May 6, 2012

# *Living Out The Gospel In Real Life*

## *I Am the Resurrection and the Life*

John 11:17 – 44

Last week we looked at the first sixteen verses of this chapter and saw that what this story magnifies and highlights is the love of God and the glory of God against a backdrop of death and suffering. John's gospel tells us that when Jesus heard that His dear friend Lazarus was dead, He stayed where He was for two more days before going to him – **because** He loved him. *Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when He heard that he was sick, He then stayed two days longer in the place where He was.* John 11:5-6 And Jesus explains that this waiting, this not rushing to the scene, this letting Lazarus die, was love by telling His disciples that *"This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it."* John 11:4 In other words, love was the motive for allowing the suffering and the tears and the anguish of real death to touch the lives of Mary and Martha and Lazarus because it would display and magnify the glory of God and display and magnify the Son of God for their good.

Overall, this story shows us **the perfection of God's timing, the motive of God's love and the goal of God's glory** in all that He plans and purposes and carries out in this world. We should understand that God is never panicked – He's never blindsided by circumstances or events – He never reacts, but He is always acting. We should reassure our souls too that undergirding all His dealings with us in this world is the strong current of His love for us and that nothing He commands or allows into our lives is for any other purpose than to help us see and savor and treasure the glory of God as our supreme joy. Finally, we need to understand that the end toward which everything on earth and in heaven is bent, **is to the end that God would be glorified.** God's glory is the goal. And when the revelation of His glory in Christ is embraced and treasured by us, God is glorified. Everything must be viewed through the lens of God's glory – every joy, every pain, every blessing and every woe. **God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.**

The whole thrust of John's gospel is the revelation of the glory of God in Christ to us. The love of God for us is demonstrated in His revealing His glory to us. John tells us in the very beginning of his gospel that *'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only Begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth'.* John 1:14 And then John says that that revelation is grace to us – *'for of His fulness we have all received, and grace upon grace'.* John 1:16 That means that the way we receive His grace is to see His glory – to see who He is and just how much He loves us and how much He is for us. To see and believe all the promises of God revealed in His Son is what saves us. The love of God is not shown simply by keeping us from suffering and pain and death – sometimes He does – and we are thankful. His love for us is demonstrated by showing us His glory – that is, showing us who He is, even in the pain and suffering and sorrow. We shouldn't measure God's love by the absence of pain and sorrow, or conversely, by the abundance of health and prosperity. **Rather we should measure the depths of God's love by how much of Himself He shows us.**

In John 17 Jesus says that the essence of eternal life is to know God. *'This is eternal life, that they know You the only true God and Jesus Christ whom You have sent'.* John 17:3 And what is happening in those dark times, those circumstances that cause us to weep and mourn and sorrow is that God is bringing us to the place where we can finally see His glory revealed, because now it is on brilliant display against a black background. It is in those places that we get to know Him, we get to hear from Him and know the sweet comfort of His love for us. Howard Hendricks tells of visiting a leprosy center in India. The morning he arrived, the residents were gathered for a praise service. One of the women with leprosy hobbled to the platform. Hendricks said that even though she was partially blind and badly disfigured, she was one of the most beautiful women he'd ever seen. Raising both of her nearly fingerless hands toward Heaven, she said in a clear voice, ***"I want to praise God that I am a leper because it was through my leprosy that I came to know Jesus Christ as my Savior. And I would rather be a leper who knows Christ than be completely whole and a stranger to His grace."***

It is when all around us darkness reigns, when our souls are fainting and fearful, that Jesus reveals so much more of Himself to us. It is in those times of despair that we learn how He is our hope – it is in those times we hurt that we experience Him as Healer. And it takes those kinds of situations and circumstances to wean us from our self-reliance and from putting our trust in what we can see with our eyes. I have never heard anyone say that the deepest experiences of Christ have come in times of extended ease and comfort. No one says that because that isn't true. John Paton, writing of his experiences as missionary to the cannibals in the South Pacific said: *'It is the sober truth, and it comes back to me sweetly after 20 years, that I had my nearest and dearest glimpses of the face and smile of my blessed Lord in those dread moments when musket, club, or spear was being leveled at my life. Oh the bliss of living and enduring, as seeing 'Him who is invisible'.* It is here that Jesus shows us His love for us, not by first removing the pain or the suffering or the death, but by giving us Himself in ways that could not be ours without this pain-filled season. The love of God is shown first in this, that He gave us Himself in the person of His Son. And because He loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus, He waited and allowed them to walk through the valley of the shadow of death, and then He showed them His glory.

So He comes to Bethany and verse 17 goes on to say: *So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off; and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to console them concerning their brother.* John 11:17-19 And here Jesus confronts the issue of His love three times. Three times He is accused of not loving Lazarus. First it is Martha: *Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house. Martha then said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.* John 11:20-21 Isn't that just like us? 'Lord, if only You had...' We have no doubt most of the time that Jesus is all-powerful. **What we doubt is His love for us.** We are skeptical of His concern because He seems to be absent when we need Him most. We remember the story He told about the sparrows and the lilies of the field and how God notes the fall of each bird and takes care of the flowers and because we are in the valley of the shadow of death we conclude that He doesn't really care for us like He said He would.

And sometimes although we believe Jesus is all-powerful and can do anything – there remains a sneaking suspicion in the back of our minds that there just might be some things that are truly impossible. Notice that Martha apparently had enough faith to believe that Jesus, if He had come sooner, could have healed her brother – but she didn't have the faith to believe that He could resurrect him. She only believed that Jesus had the power to help Lazarus when he was sick, not when he was dead. *"Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."* John 11:22-24 She was pretty sure that Jesus could ask the Father and He would raise Lazarus, but she didn't have any confidence that it would happen.

And that is so true of us, isn't it? We pray, 'O Lord we trust You to provide for us all that we need' on Sunday. But by Friday when the bills are due and He hasn't shown up, we begin to doubt His love for us. Our faith is very strong as long as the situation improves. But faith isn't faith until we operate in the dark and Jesus knows this. The reality of our faith can only be proven under fire. When we really have to trust God is when we really know the measure of our faith. **Faith isn't faith until it is all we have.** And that is when we really begin to know who Jesus is and we see His glory. Jesus told her that her brother would rise again and Martha relegates that truth to the unforeseeable future – 'Oh I know that is going to happen – but what about now?' And she doesn't realize that Jesus is Lord of the Now as well as the Then.

And He gives Martha one of the great 'I AM' statements that John records: *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"* John 11:25-26 He is telling a grieving woman who is mourning her brother's death that she does not need to wait till the final day for her brother's resurrection but that One who has power over death is with her that very day. Jesus is saying to this woman, and to all of us, that the resurrection is not a consequence of the end of time, that it is not the result of the beginning of eternity, but that it is the result of His personal power over death itself. Jesus is the resurrection, He Himself is life.

Specifically here, Jesus is what Lazarus needs, and He is what Martha needs. He says, 'Martha, Lazarus is dead *'...he who believes in Me will live even if he dies...'* that is for Lazarus. And you are alive *'...and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die.'* that is for you.' Whether Lazarus is raised at the end of the age or right now makes no difference. In each case I am the resurrection and the life. Because you believe in me you will never die and even if you die physically, because I am the resurrection you will always live. Death is not a factor for those who believe. Do you believe this?

And Martha replies, *She said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world."* John 11:27 What she believed at this point was still in the future – and what Jesus was trying to get her to see was that He was the resurrection and the life in the present – not just some far off distant day. You see, she still didn't know Him like He wanted her to know Him. **And unless you know Jesus as your present reality, you still don't know Him.** If your faith in Him is real, it is real in these places or its not real at all. But all she had right now was the knowledge that He was indeed the Christ, the Son of God and sometimes that is all we know in the testing time until we come out on the other side. Because you see, it is just those places of not understanding and not knowing that are the places where we get to know the reality of who Jesus is.

*When she had said this, she went away and called Mary her sister, saying secretly, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she got up quickly and was coming to Him. Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha met Him.* John 11:28-30 Evidently Jesus sent Martha to get Mary who was still at the house in Bethany; and Mary comes with the mourners. *Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and consoling her, when they saw that Mary got up quickly and went out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.* John 11:31 And here Jesus is confronted by Mary over His seeming lack of love for Lazarus and for her and Martha: *Therefore, when Mary came where Jesus was, she saw Him, and fell at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."* John 11:32

She says the exact same thing as Martha. But the reaction of Jesus to Mary is altogether different from that of Martha. And it shows that Jesus knows each of His sheep by name – He knows exactly what we need – He's attuned to our peculiarities like no one else. She levels the same veiled accusation against Jesus that Martha did: 'If you really loved Lazarus you would have come right away and healed him'. But where He ministered to Martha by giving her truth: "I am the resurrection and the life" He ministers to Mary with tears. Sometimes we need the ministry of truth, and sometimes the ministry of tears shows us who He is.

Look at what happens here: *When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, and said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept.* John 11:33-35 Notice Jesus didn't say anything to Mary – it wasn't words that she needed right then. Martha needed to hear Him speaking truth to her; Mary needed to feel His compassion. Whatever we need, in whatever circumstance we find ourselves, Jesus knows exactly what we need to hear and feel from Him to carry us through.

And the question at this point is always, 'Why was He weeping?' Was He weeping as a man who just lost a friend to death? Was He weeping, as some suggest, at the unbelief He was confronting? Or was He weeping and disturbed by the way His motives were being misinterpreted? I think the answer is in the text and we don't really understand what was going on because most of the translators have been too timid about translating a word here. When the text says that Jesus was 'deeply moved' it represents a word used in the New Testament three other times outside the gospels and never implies an emotion of compassion but rather one of rebuke or warning or even anger. Literally it means, **to snort or bellow with anger**, and it is usually used for animals. And you don't have to be a great Greek scholar to understand that, it's just that scholar's are reluctant to use that kind of terminology with regards to Jesus with Mary at the tomb of Lazarus. And it is further emphasized in verse 33 by the word 'troubled' which is a word that signifies being shaken or agitated. It is the same word Jesus uses in John 14 where He tells His disciples, 'Don't let your hearts be troubled, or shaken, agitated'. It is not a positive emotion.

Of all the translations, only Eugene Peterson's paraphrase has the guts to put it plainly: *When Jesus saw her sobbing and the Jews with her sobbing, a deep anger welled up within him.* John 11:33 And again in verse 38: *Then Jesus, the anger again welling up within him, arrived at the tomb.* John 11:38 So why was He angry? Why was He agitated? Why did He weep? Was it because He just lost a friend? I think that was certainly part of the picture. As a man Jesus was subject to all the emotions and feeling we are subject to. If He had not been He could not have been our great High Priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses, who can weep with us in our sorrow and rejoice with us in our blessings. He could not have ministered to Mary very effectively at that point unless as a man He felt the pain of death at that moment, just like other men. But that cannot be the whole story because unlike everyone else there, Jesus knew what He was going to do – He was going to bring the dead to life. He was going to reverse the irreversible and in a very small sense, make all things new.

I believe Jesus wept because He was a man and felt very keenly the loss of His friend to that enemy called death; but more importantly I believe He was angry at the devastation of sin that ends in death. If He was only weeping as a man, that couldn't be sustained because He knew what He was going to do. He knew that this sorrow would be turned to joy in a moment. Because He is a man, He sees the havoc created by sin and death and He feels the real emotions of loss and sorrow and there are the tears. But because He is God He sees something else. I won't be dogmatic about this but I believe that even as He is interrupting this funeral and bringing a man back to life, He is looking through time at all the other funerals He won't be interrupting. Death will come and funerals will be held and Jesus won't resurrect others like He did Lazarus. He's not just seeing Mary and Martha weeping, He's seeing you weeping. Have you ever wept at a funeral? He's knows that weeping. Psalm 56:8 says: *O God ! You have taken account of my wanderings; put my tears in Your bottle. Are they not in Your book?*

If you've never wept at a coffin, someday you will – you will weep despondently like Mary and Martha one day and you know what? He's seen it – it is in His book and your tears are in His bottle. And it is then that we should remember what the other mourners said about Jesus: *So the Jews were saying, "See how He loved him!"* John 11:36 But I think we need to realize He was not just weeping for Lazarus – He can't be. He can't just be weeping for Mary and Martha. Knowing that He was going to do this miracle, knowing that His glory would be revealed in a moment, knowing that this foreshadowed His own death and in His death the annihilation of the power of death – knowing this, He can't just have been weeping for them. Mere sympathy and personal sorrow would not have sustained that emotion knowing the glory and victory to come. He's thinking of all of us. It is not just 'Behold how He loved him' – but 'Behold how He loves me!'

And fortunately for us, He is not just weeping. We don't have just a God who weeps – we don't need just a God who only weeps. We don't just need tears – we don't need less than tears, but we need more than tears. We need a Jesus who approaches the grave with a bellow of anger. Again the text tells us that His motives were again questioned, this time by the mourners: *But some of them said, "Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind man, have kept this man also from dying? So Jesus, again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it.* John 11:37-38 Or as the Message has it: *Then Jesus, the anger again welling up within him, arrived at the tomb* . But I don't think we should conclude that Jesus was angry at these guys for questioning His motives. He wouldn't be angry at their grief-filled accusations, just as He wasn't angry at Martha's or Mary's accusations.

The only thing left to be angry at is death. If your child, whom you love and cherish and protect with your life is seduced into drugs or pornography or some other horrible lifestyle, wouldn't that make you angry? Sin is the ultimate seducer and death is the result. Death is there to suck out the life. Jesus came to bring life and death was the enemy He came to defeat. That is why Paul can write in 1 Corinthians – ***Death is swallowed up in life!*** Jesus knew that to do this thing, to raise Lazarus from the dead was to sign His own death warrant. In fact if you read through to the end of this chapter you'll see that this is the event that tipped the scales for Him. Now the opposing Jews not only wanted Him dead, they actively began plotting His death. Jesus knew that the only way to interrupt Lazarus' funeral was to cause His own. The only way death would not be the eventual victor at every funeral was to cause His own – to die for us and be resurrected to life for us. This is the beginning of the cosmic battle that culminates in His victory on the cross.

And so Jesus, the anger again welling up within Him confronts death, because death was the real culprit in this scene. Mary and Martha's accusations, the mourner's accusations, the tears and the wailing and the unbelief, all were not the culprits – death was, and so: *Jesus said, "Remove the stone. "Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days."* John 11:39 Martha was not telling Him something He didn't already know. Jesus had made a point of not coming until Lazarus was very dead, and He knew that in that climate decay and corruption set in very quickly. What she was really saying was, 'I don't really believe that this is going to work'. And then Jesus says something very curious: *Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"* John 11:40

Apparently He links her being able to see the glory of God with a certain level of faith. But Martha didn't have that kind of faith. She had enough faith to believe that Jesus could heal a sick man, but not enough to believe that He could raise a dead man. So how are we supposed to think about this? What is Jesus saying here: *'...if you believe, you will see the glory of God'?* What He isn't saying to her, and what He never says to us, is that we somehow need to ratchet up our faith another notch. She saw the glory of God just a few moments later – but there is no indication that her faith took a giant leap forward before that point. Belief in Jesus, faith in Christ, is not a matter of summoning up every ounce of faith we possess.

Faith is entirely outside of us. Left to ourselves we have no faith in Jesus. Faith, the Bible tells us is the gift of God: *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.* Ephesians 2:8 So Jesus could not have been telling her: 'Martha, just ratchet your faith up another notch and then you will see the glory of God'. No, what He was telling her was this: 'Martha, if you will just take My word, if you will just rely on My power and rest in My love and faithfulness, you will see how this thing is working for God's glory'. To have faith, to believe, is to take Jesus at His word and do the next thing. It is not about summoning up an extra measure of something we don't possess and only have by virtue of His giving. Faith only operates in the dark – when we don't know how things will turn out. **Faith is dependent upon who He is, not on who we are.** To believe means that we hear the word of God and do it.

Jesus was also not saying, 'If you believe I will raise Lazarus from the dead'. He said 'If you believe, you will see the glory of God'. His raising Lazarus was not predicated on her level of belief or unbelief – I don't think up until the time she saw Lazarus walking out of that tomb that she really thought that would happen. And Jesus specifically did not say, 'If you believe you'll see a miracle'. But what Jesus did say was that she would see the glory of God – and she did see the glory of God in Christ when Lazarus came out of that tomb. She saw the mighty power of God at work and saw the truth of what Jesus told her when He met her earlier – 'I am the resurrection and the life'. I think at that point she understood -'Oh you **are** the resurrection and the life!' Lazarus coming back to life was not the central point of this story – the glory of God was the point. And I think she got the point.

But there were those present who didn't get the point. There were others present at the raising of this dead man who did not see the glory of God. They saw a dead man raised – but it did not point to God's glory for them. Instead they went and ratted out Jesus to the Pharisees. They saw the work of God but they didn't see the glory of God. They witnessed the miracle but failed to see the miracle-worker. But at this point, Jesus' words to Martha were apparently enough for her: *So they removed the stone.* I would suspect that Martha told them to go ahead and remove the stone and this was faith – to remove the stone. To hear what Jesus says and to obey. And then Jesus prays: *Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. "I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me."* John 11:41-42

When God is glorified He is known for who He is. And this sign testified to the truth of who Jesus was – the very Son of God. His prayer pointed both to the depth of His love for those who were His – so that they would believe – and to the glory of the Father. *When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth."* This was not just a loud voice. This word – **kraugazo** – was used to describe the shouting of a multitude – more like a roar. And the way Jesus raised Lazarus is the way He will raise you and I on that last day: *For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.* 1 Thessalonians 4:16

*The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."* John 11:43-44

We are going to close this morning by coming to the Table and I want us to let these truths inform our thinking about what this means – to celebrate communion – to take the cup and the bread – to remember the Lord. First let the truth of His victory over sin and death liberate our hearts to see and enjoy with gratitude what He has done for us. He has called us out of our deadness and into His life – He's unwrapped us from the sin that bound us hand and foot and brought us into the freedom of eternal life.

And let us give thanks that we have a great high priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses and ministers to us with both truth and tears. To know that He is never afar off or unreachable, but loves us with a love that is willing to let us suffer even in the valley of the shadow of death so that we might see His glory. And let us not doubt that love – love that took our Lord all the way to the cross for you and for me. The love that speaks to us in our pain and suffering and sorrow – and in our pleasures and joy and gladness - **'I am the resurrection and the life!'**

*Our gracious Father,*

*We thank You for the evidence of Your great love for us in this communion meal we have shared. Let us never doubt Your love for us. Let the glory of the cross remind us that You became all suffering that we might be all joy – You were cast off that we might be brought in – You were stripped that we might be clothed – wounded that we might be healed – made thirsty that we might drink living water – made a shame and mockery that we might inherit glory – and surrendered to hell's worst that we might have heaven's best. Grant that we would not be overwhelmed when all around us seems dark, when our souls are fainting and fearful, but may we find in those places the nearest and dearest glimpses of the face and smile of our blessed Lord, and hear You say to us, 'I am the resurrection and the life'. Let us delight in God through Jesus Christ, spreading His joy through the gospel to all people we pray in the death-conquering, life-giving name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*