

Raising the Dead (John 11:1-44)

It's February already and believe it or not, Resurrection Sunday is just seven weeks away. It is when we commemorate and celebrate Jesus' resurrection, but really, we should be celebrating Jesus' resurrection every day. In fact, the reason we are gathered here together on Sunday is because it is the day of Jesus' resurrection. This isn't really the Sabbath; the Jewish Sabbath is our Saturday. We worship on Sunday, and we call it the Lord's Day because this is the day on which He rose from the dead.

He conquered sin on the cross. He conquered death by His resurrection.

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15:20-22)

If you are in Christ, you have been made alive already. If you are in Christ, you have been raised from the dead. It is not a future thing; it is a right now thing.

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. (Colossians 2:13-14)

If you are in Christ, you have been raised to life eternal.

As we count down the weeks to Resurrection Sunday, I thought it would be good to examine what Jesus was doing during that last week of His life here on earth. So, Lord willing, that's what we're going to do. But I think I need to start a little earlier than Palm Sunday. We need to remember an event that clearly shows Jesus' power over death, because this event raised the ire of the Jewish leadership past the point of no return. They had wished Him dead on many occasions. They even tried to kill Him. But this ramped up their blood lust to the point that they were willing to violate their own Law. Their hatred was so intense that they were willing to conspire with their Roman occupiers.

Oh, the insanity of sin!

What Jesus did in Bethany shortly before that final Passover feast terrified the Jewish leadership. If everyone were to believe in Jesus, then their gravy train would end. They would lose their power and their influence. So despite the fact that they knew Jesus was a teacher sent from God because of the signs He performed (John 3:2), they conspired to murder the Son of God. They conspired to kill the Messiah they claimed they were anxiously looking for.

But death was no obstacle for Jesus.

"O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING? O HADES, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY?" (1 Corinthians 15:55)

Jesus has complete power over death. Jesus has the power to raise the dead. Chapter 11 of John's Gospel is all about the raising of Lazarus from the dead. John describes the circumstances leading up to the miracle. He describes the miracle itself, then he describes the aftermath, that is, the fallout from the miracle. I'd like to have you read all of Chapter 11 as a homework assignment. We are going to focus on a few verses in the middle of the chapter this morning.

As we do, I'd like to invite you to the town of Bethany. We're about two miles outside of Jerusalem on the road that travels up from Jericho. And it is getting close to Passover. In fact, this event likely happened on the Wednesday before Palm Sunday. So masses of pilgrims will soon be traveling through Bethany on their way to the feast. News of this miracle is going to spread like wildfire. There will be lots of witnesses, and lots of travelers who will hear of the miracle from the witnesses.

But as we pick up the account, it is a time of mourning. Lazarus is a prominent man from a prominent family and he has passed away. Luke tells about a feast given in Jesus' at the family homestead. This meal was served quite some time before the events of John 11. That's where Martha got so upset with sister Mary that she said:

*"Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?
Therefore tell her to help me." (Luke 10:40)*

That's sort of bold! What a whiner!

But now, many days later, Lazarus has died. In fact, he's been dead and in the tomb for four days. The family is in mourning.

Now Jewish mourning actually lasted for 30 days. They would bury the deceased right away and then for three days that would do pretty much nothing at all. Those first three days were called days of weeping, Then came seven days of lamentation. They would actually hire professional wailers to lead the lamentation. It was a noisy affair. There were many tears and many guests. There was a big crowd because Lazarus was a wealthy and prominent man. They were on the fourth day when news of Jesus arrival came.

And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. Now Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. Now Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. (John 11:19-21)

That seems a bit accusatory, doesn't it? I think that was just Martha's personality. She was the outgoing one, the assertive one. She was the one who accused Jesus of not caring about all the work she had to do without the help of her sister. But Martha was also a woman of great faith.

*But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."
(John 11:22)*

Martha had confidence in Jesus. She had faith in Jesus. But I don't know that she really believed, at this point, that Jesus could do anything about her brother who was seriously rotting in the grave.

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." (John 11:23-24)

Martha had been listening to Jesus. She had her eschatology straight. Every human being will live forever. Jesus will not only raise those who have been saved, He will also raise the reprobate to an eternity of torment. Jesus said:

Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth— those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. (John 5:28-29)

Anybody who thinks God won't send anybody to hell has not been listening to Jesus. Jesus is going to resurrect everybody. He's going to give everybody a resurrected body suitable for their eternal abode. And you are going to either spend an eternity suffering in hell, where your worm won't die and your fire will not be quenched, or you will spend eternity in the presence of Jesus, where ...

"EYE HAS NOT SEEN, NOR EAR HEARD, NOR HAVE ENTERED INTO THE HEART OF MAN THE THINGS WHICH GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM." (1 Corinthians 2:9)

Martha had been listening ... and she believed: *"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."*

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26)

Jesus is life. Jesus is the resurrection. This is more profound than Jesus just being able to raise the dead.

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. (John 1:4)

Jesus is the very source of all life! He called the worlds into being and everything that draws breath borrows their life from Jesus Christ. If you believe in Jesus, you have life eternal.

He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.

And then Jesus asked Martha the most important question of all: *"Do you believe this?"* Martha's answer was immediate and it was right on the mark:

She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world." (John 11:27)

I have to ask you the same question: Do you believe this? Do you believe Jesus is the eternal Son of God? Do you believe that He came into the world He created to live a perfect, sinless human life? Do you believe He sacrificed that life on the cross to pay the penalty for your sins, and for the sins of all who would accept Him? Do you believe that He was raised from the dead on the third day and resides at the right hand of the Father making intercession for you? If you do, then you will live forever with Him.

Praise God!

But if you don't, why not? It is not because God hasn't given you reason to believe. The very creation declares the glory of God. (Psalm 19:1) This Book contains the testimony of eye witnesses ... hundreds of them. If you don't believe, it's because you don't want to believe. If you don't believe it is because you're too fond of your sin.

And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. (John 3:19-20)

You need to turn from your sin and turn to Jesus.

For "WHOEVER CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD SHALL BE SAVED." (Romans 10:13)

You have an appointment with death and there is nothing you can do about it.

And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation. (Hebrews 9:27-28)

We're going to skip ahead a few verses now, but remember, you're going to read all of Chapter 11 on your own.

Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days." (John 11:38-39)

This is one of those places where I sort of like the Old King James:

Lord, by this time he stinketh: (John 11:39)

Years ago, I worked a Christian basketball camp where kids were really fond of quoting this verse. Guys would take off their shoes and their teammates would holler "Oh man, you stinketh!"

Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me."

I want you to notice something. Jesus did not ask the Father to raise Lazarus. He didn't have to. He has resurrection power in and of Himself. But He wanted people to recognize the fact that He and the Father were exactly on the same page with regard to their Divine Wills.

Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go." (John 11:40-44)

Isn't it interesting that Jesus didn't snap his fingers and cause the grave clothes fall off Lazarus? I think that illustrates an important point. He allows people to do what people can do. People can't raise the dead, but they could help Lazarus out of the grave clothes. I can't cause anybody to be saved, but I can tell folks about what God has done for me.

This was the last of Jesus' miracles. This was the greatest of His miracles. He had healed the sick, made the lame to walk, the blind to see. He had demonstrated His authority over demons. He proved that He had authority over nature in calming the seas and multiplying a tiny amount of food to feed thousands. He had raised the dead to life before, but never after so long a period of time. This shows that He has absolute authority over death. He is the author of life. Jesus Christ raises the dead.

Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him. (John 11:45)

Folks, that is the only reasonable response. To refuse to believe is completely insane. But there will always be those who are so deceived by Satan and so in love with their own sin that they refuse to believe the obvious.

But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council

and said, "What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation." And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish." Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad. Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death. (John 11:46-53)

Understand, the Jewish leadership had wanted Jesus out of the way for some time. In fact, He was threatened with death on numerous occasions. But the raising of Lazarus was the stimulus for the conspiracy that would lead to Calvary.

This thing was done very publically. It was done only two miles outside of Jerusalem, on the road where thousands of pilgrims were passing through to Passover. There was no way the news would not spread. How could the Jewish leadership possibly spin this story to their advantage?

But they would try. In fact, we learn in the next chapter that ...

... the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus. (John 12:10-11)

So when Jesus would return to Jerusalem, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey, (Zechariah 9:9) the table had been set, so to speak. The players were all prepared. The Jewish leadership, who had no excuse, would conspire to murder the King of Glory. Jesus would go to the cross. He would enter the tomb, dead for our sins and He would rise again. But God was in complete control. As Peter testified on the Day of Pentecost:

"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it. (Acts 2:22-24)

Believe it! Accept it! Let us remember it. Let us remember Him. Jesus gives life to the dead.