

March 29, 2015
Sunday Morning Service
Series: John
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from John 11:17-44.

1. What ancient Jewish theory did Jesus dispel by waiting until four days after Lazarus died before showing up?
2. Do you think that Mary and Martha were born again?
3. Why did Jesus weep?
4. What was the main reason that Jesus showed up in Bethany at this time?
5. Do you ever doubt the Lord's timing?

JESUS IS RESURRECTION **John 11:17-44**

I subscribe to a devotional message that shows up in my email every morning. A couple of weeks ago this was the devotional:

“In order to fulfil God’s will for your life, you’ll have to deal with what other people want you to be. Your boss wants you to be more productive. Your health club wants you to be fitter. Your credit card company wants you to be deeper in debt. It seems like everybody has an agenda for you and, if you spend your life trying to meet their expectations, you’ll never be free. Sometimes loving people means having to disappoint them. Seeking to become the person others want you to be is a shallow way to live. Nobody can tell you exactly how to change, because only God knows. Even you can’t

tell yourself how to change, because you didn’t create yourself. To love someone is to desire and work toward their becoming the best possible version of themselves. And the one person in the entire universe who’s qualified to do this is God. Unlike people, God has no hidden agenda or unmet needs that He’s hoping you can help Him with. He knows what the best version of you looks like.” (*The Word for Today, March 17, 2015*)

I learned this principle a few years ago for myself. I touched on it when we were studying John 3:16. God is perfect. Therefore, God loves what it is best. In God’s quest for us to have what is best, He sent the unique Son Jesus Christ to be our Savior. In order to be our Savior, He must have power over sin and over death. Jesus Christ won both of those battles on the cross and by coming out of the tomb on the first day of the week.

Our loving Creator desires for us to learn who and what Jesus is. Sometimes teaching us that lesson requires that God makes us feel poorly or downright bad and sorrowful. I know that such methods are not acceptable to wise humans. But the infinitely wise and loving Father has perfect knowledge.

Jesus needed to teach the important lesson of resurrection to His friends before He went to the cross. He chose to illustrate His power again (having raised the widow’s son and the ruler’s daughter) by raising His friend Lazarus from the dead. But in order to raise Lazarus from the dead, Jesus had to let him die. That was a very sorrowful experience for everyone involved. However, it was in the very context of sorrow and grief that Jesus illustrated that He is the authority in resurrection. He who creates us has power to raise us again from the dead. Job believed it and declared, *For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another (Job 19:25-27).*

Jesus’ followers must completely trust that He not only has the power to raise the dead, but that He is Himself the resurrection. Raising the dead is not so much what He does as what He is. He gives newness of life in every respect – spiritually and physically. We who are His friends need to be wholly convinced of this. Learning the lesson might sometimes be painful, but it is always learned on the

path of love. Jesus was glad Lazarus died (shocking as that sounds, v.15) because He loved the disciples, He loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, He loves the heavenly Father, and He loves you and me.

Jesus is the Christ the Son of God (vv.17-27).

The setting for this part of the story (vv.17-19) flows from the narrative we studied last week that told of Jesus receiving word about Lazarus's illness and then waiting a couple of days before heading to Bethany (vv.1-16). Here we read, *Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 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 (v.17-19).*

As Jesus approached the village of Bethany, He was not surprised by what He found. He knew when He heard about Lazarus's illness four days earlier that he would die. At least two days earlier Jesus informed the disciples that Lazarus had died (v.14). The purpose for the trip to Bethany did not begin and end with Lazarus. Human wisdom and empathy would conclude that the death of Lazarus and how friends and family grieved was the whole story.

To that end, Jesus found much sympathy expressed. Because Bethany was so near the chief city of Judaism, many Jews came to Mary and Martha. They gathered around the grieving sisters in order to console them. The word translated *console* means to comfort and speak words of consolation. We understand this picture because we are sometimes thrust into similar circumstances. How can we not be sympathetic when a friend loses a loved one? It is human nature to share grief. Only the most calloused person would turn away while a friend grieved over another person's passing. But Jesus loves more than that!

Jesus loved Martha who believed important truths about Him (vv.20-27). This is the same Martha we have met before in the Gospel accounts. She is the Martha who tended to be a bit zealous about her work. Here we see that she again displayed her zeal in all things. Jesus was on the way to the village, *So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house (v.20).* We remember that she was the one who wore herself

out trying to be a good hostess while Mary listened to Jesus' teaching. No doubt she exemplified the Scriptural truth, *Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might (Ecc. 9:10).*

Desiring to see the Friend who could help, Martha did not wait for Him to come to her. Her zeal to meet Jesus is a good example for us to follow . . . especially in times of need. Through Isaiah God invites us to *seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near (Isaiah 55:6).* The Hebrew word translated *seek* means to resort to, to inquire of, which is a good description of prayer. We who seek God in prayer should buy up the Savior's invitation when He said to us, *"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).* That is what Martha was doing. Like her we need to resort to the throne room of heaven. God gave us the invitation. *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16).* We can be like Martha because we know that the God who invites us to come to Him does so because He loves us.

Martha believed the love of Jesus so much that she virtually chided Him. *Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (v.21).* To tell Jesus that if He had been present sooner He could have healed her brother was to try to correct Jesus for responding incorrectly. This is to presume that she knew better than Jesus did. This is such a display of human nature. We especially do this to each other. When someone does something that we perceive as causing us a disadvantage, we tell them that they were wrong to hurt us. But what if they know something we don't know? What if they are very wise and are trying to move us toward greater godliness in our lives?

Martha was so convinced of Jesus' love for her that she believed He could do something even then. *But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you (v.22).* Surely she had resurrection in mind. Probably it was a farfetched idea in her mind. But she really did believe that her friend Jesus had such a strong relationship with God that He could ask God to raise her brother from the dead. Don't you wish you had the faith of Martha? Don't you wish all your Christian friends trusted Jesus like Martha did? She was pretty much at the pinnacle of faith in Jesus, wasn't she?

Okay, it is good that Martha trusted Jesus. But she needed to believe greater truth (vv.23-27). She really didn't know Jesus. She trusted Jesus to be a good man, a loving man, someone who was in touch with God, and probably even the Messiah. She needed to learn that Jesus is God! How would she learn that lesson?

Jesus promised to reveal the glory of God in resurrecting the dead. He assured Martha that Lazarus would rise. *Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again" (v.23)*. She was okay with that because she was fully convinced that Scripture, like Job's statement, taught a future resurrection of saints. *Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day" (v.24)*. That wasn't what Jesus referred to. Therefore, He more directly taught that He is the author of life. *(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?"*

In His character and being, Jesus is resurrection because He is the giver of life. Therefore, whoever depends wholly on the truth about Jesus will have eternal life. Physical death will be temporary because we will immediately be in the presence of God the moment we die. Because Jesus is resurrection, we can say confidently with Paul the Apostle, *Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8)*.

It does seem like Martha was grasping the critical truth. *She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world" (v.27)*. That Jesus is the Christ, God the Son, co-equal with God the Father is the critical truth of the ages. This is the truth Jesus had been hammering on at the Feast of Tabernacles and Feast of Dedication. This is the truth that spells the difference between eternal life and eternal condemnation. It means that God Himself, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, came to earth, lived perfectly, died innocently and provided His blood as the covering for our offenses against Himself. That is why Jesus was able to do the many miracles. That is why He is able to raise Lazarus from the dead. Jesus was about to offer irrefutable evidence that He is equal with God. He is the mighty God and

Jesus Sympathizes With Our Weakness (vv.28-37).

After conversing with Martha for a bit, Jesus called for Mary (vv.28-32). There is much pathos in Jesus' calling of her (vv.28-31). He requested an audience with Mary because He desired to talk with her. *When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you" (v.28)*. Of course she knew that Jesus desired to see her, and Mary went to Jesus. *And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him (v.29-30)*. The comforters were confused as they observed Mary. *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 (v.31)*. Going to the tomb to grieve was the logical and expected thing. The logical and expected thing is not always the actual thing.

Like her sister Martha, Mary expressed faith in Jesus (v.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" (v.32)*. She, too, believed strongly that Jesus could have healed Lazarus. Was she also guilty of implying that Jesus made a mistake? Anytime the creature questions the Creator, we are implying that we are His equal, that we are right to expect Him to answer us. We are like Job who was absolutely convinced he was innocent. Job was innocent. But the lesson he needed to learn was that God controls events for His glory.

We, too, must learn that God created all things for His glory. That means that God created you and me for His glory. God's glory is perfect and He loves it. Therefore, when God loves us, He desires for us to achieve the very best which is His glory. That is really hard to do in a world that is plagued by sin. Therefore also, in the Bible God uncovers truth about Himself, about us, and about His plan to redeem all things because He loves us. And as God reveals the truth about a fallen creation that He is in the process of redeeming to perfection, He is not cold and disconnected from us.

And one of the great and most well known events at the resurrection was that Jesus wept (vv.33-37). Jesus expressed sympathy for those who grieved. *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 (v.33). Jesus knew that He was about to command life into the corpse named Lazarus. He could have easily been impatient with the poor people who didn't have this information. He could have rebuked the people for not realizing that He was God in the flesh.

But in His humanity, God the Son sympathizes with us. He is the perfect high priest to represent us before God the Father. God's Word says of Him, *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15).* The plan for eternity was that God the Son would identify completely with our grief and sorrow. *He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted (Isaiah 53:3-4).* What do I face that He has not faced? He is my sympathetic counselor.

Observe the cooperation of divine wisdom and human sympathy in this story. As divinity, Jesus is God who knows all. Therefore, He knows that He will raise Lazarus. He also knows where Lazarus is buried. But He allowed the people to play a part in the process. *And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see" (v.34).* That is God's method throughout the Bible story. He loves to use us humans in carrying out His will for His glory.

In this case, Jesus' sympathy is attractive to us fellow humans. *Jesus wept. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" (v.35-36).*

He was sympathetic. He was compassionate. But most important, Jesus did the best thing. Some of the thinking folks in the crowd brought up the "elephant in the room." *But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?" (v.37).* This conflict had already been aired. That Jesus could have showed up earlier and healed Lazarus so he would not have died is what Martha implied (v.21). This is the same thing Mary implied (v.32). Surely the disciples who had observed Jesus heal so many sick people wondered the same thing.

Their inquisitive concern is a display of human wisdom. Human sympathy cries out, "Why didn't you come and heal Your friend?" It

argues, "If You truly loved Lazarus, as Your weeping seems to indicate, why didn't You come and heal him?" The answer to those questions is that Jesus loves with supreme love. In supreme love, human sympathy must never detract us from God's glory! Human sympathy would have run to Lazarus before he died so that no one would feel poorly. Human sympathy would establish a care group and counseling to help people feel better about themselves because it cannot give life. Human sympathy would set up a relief fund so that Mary and Martha would have money by which to live. Of course all such efforts would be good and much appreciated. But all such efforts arrive only half way to the supreme standard of love.

God's love focuses on God's glory. This whole scene is not about Lazarus. It's not about Mary and Martha or the disciples. It's not about the many well wishers and sympathizers who showed up. It's not even about the fact that God the Son felt bad. The whole scene is designed to highlight the Creator's glory that He is the source of life – physical and eternal! It is to the Creator's glory that He provides for us the acceptable sacrifice so that He can redeem the fallen creation to perfection. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was just weeks away. In that grand event, we will see the astonishing glory of God displayed as He paves the way for redeeming the fallen creation.

Jesus Revealed the Glory of God (vv.38-44).

The Creator was in control (vv.38-40). Jesus walked with the crowd to the tomb where Lazarus was buried. When they arrived, He gave some very unpopular instructions (vv.38-39). *Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it (v.38).* Jesus is deeply moved because of human grief. But He is also deeply moved because of human ignorance about Him and the eternal plan of redemption. That ignorance was highlighted when Jesus gave a very unpopular command. *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" (v.39).* Common sense dictated that the odor would be over-powering. How embarrassing it would be for Mary and Martha that everyone would be offended by their brother's odor. "Jesus, where is Your sympathy?" the people might wonder. Would they ask, "Do You

show love by putting Your friends in humiliating circumstances?” Would we?

Human embarrassment or dead body odor wasn't the issue. He who claimed equality with God would show the glory of God. *Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" (v.40).* The people needed to obey Jesus if they were ever to see God's glory. We know only too sadly that most people live and die without ever seeing God's glory. That in spite of the fact that the glory of God is everywhere. David wrote, *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork (Psalm 19:1).* People who have no faith in God and His Word cannot perceive God's glory. Natural people are blind to God's glory. That is especially true regarding the greatest display of God's glory ever. People without faith especially cannot grasp the glory of God in the cross and empty tomb.

The Son glorified the Father by demonstrating resurrection (vv.41-44). He addressed God the Father publicly for the sake of the onlookers (vv.41-42). The people rolled the stone from the cover of the grave and no doubt the stench filled the air (v.41a). Then with the stench of death permeating the air, Jesus prayed audibly. *And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me 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" (vv.41b-42).* Martha was right. Jesus could ask God for anything and He would receive it (v.22). Yes, and what Jesus desired more than anything else was for the people to believe that He was God the Son, co-equal with God the Father, from whose presence He came. God revealed His glory through mighty works so that people would believe that Jesus of Nazareth was God in the flesh – which would bring glory to God.

Jesus proved that He is the author of life (vv.43-44). The man from Nazareth commanded Lazarus to come out of the grave. *When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out" (v.43).* Lazarus obeyed. That shouldn't surprise us. *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" (v.44).* And like weak humans, we spend our time debating whether Lazarus came out floating in the air

or shuffling along. Instead we should be awed that the man who died suddenly had life. Notice the descriptive text, ***"the man who had died came out."*** If it said, "Lazarus came out" unbelievers would argue that the man who came out was also named Lazarus but was not dead. Unbelievers who emulate the character of Satan, mince words like Satan does.

Because God loves the world, Jesus is resurrection. Human love attempts to prevent all circumstances that cause unhappiness. God knows that when we finally see Him for who He is, we will be happy. Sinners will be fully satisfied when they embrace God's plan of redemption in Jesus Christ. Yes, the process is sometimes painful, always humiliating, and often causes us to lose friends. But when Jesus raises us from the death of sin to spiritual life, eternal life, we are finally satisfied. And our Creator is glorified in our satisfaction.