

Mighty to Save John 11:32-53

Introduction

All over the world today, people celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For some, it's the customary thing to do once a year. But in a world that denies miracles, what if this day is nothing more than an exercise in feel-goodism, like a eulogy at a funeral or a Hallmark movie.

Could it be that the whole notion of a resurrection—that of Jesus or of anyone else—is just too good to be true?

We would do well to remember, first of all, that the people of God have firmly held to the reality of the resurrection throughout the centuries. Job (19:25), David (Psalm 16:8-11), Isaiah (26:19), Daniel (12:1-3), and Jesus Himself and His apostles—all teach that resurrection from the dead is for real.

Some argue that raising someone from the dead can't happen. That's true, except when it happens. Like the son of the widow at Zarephath, the son of the Shunammite woman, the son of the widow at Nain, Lazarus, Christ, Dorcus, and Eutychus.

Jesus raised Lazarus from the tomb not long before He Himself rose from the dead, and in

so doing, He teaches us a great deal about what God thinks of death and sorrow and what He's doing to conquer both.

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?"

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."

40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" **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." **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."

⁴⁵ Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, ⁴⁶ but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. ⁴⁷ So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs.

⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."

⁴⁹ But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. ⁵⁰ Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." ⁵¹ He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, ⁵² and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. ⁵³ So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.

1. Great Love: Loving Sympathy for Human Suffering (32-37)

2. Great Power: Authoritative Power over Death (38-44)

3. Great Sacrifice: Substitutionary Sacrifice for Human Rescue (45-53)

1. Great Love: Loving Sympathy for Human Suffering (32-37)

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?"

Mary's words to Jesus echo what Martha said to Him earlier in verse 21. Both Mary and Martha have full confidence in Jesus' power to heal. He's demonstrated that over and over again throughout His three years of public ministry. So why did He not come in time to heal Lazarus before he died from his illness?

This question shows up again in verse 37:
John 11:37

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

In our suffering and grief, is this not the nagging question? If God has the power to heal, if God has the power to intervene so

that we don't have to go through the pain and sorrow, why doesn't He? Does He even care?

These verses address that core question. They demonstrate Christ's great love for us and His deep sympathy for us as we go through the pain.

John 11:33

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.

"Deeply moved"—the language John uses carries the idea of being indignant

"Greatly troubled" conveys great emotion to the point of shaking uncontrollably

These are common human responses to great sorrow and suffering. This response to human suffering is not out of character for Jesus. He consistently shows deep compassion for broken and needy people.

Matthew 9:36

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

This is His response even to those who rejected Him.

Luke 19:41-44

41 And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, **42** saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. **43** For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side **44** and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation."

Even to this day Jesus sympathizes with those who belong to Him.

Hebrews 4:15-16

15 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. **16** 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.

Remember that as God the Son in human flesh Jesus revealed to us God's heart. His response to human suffering is God's response.

But why indignant? In what way? At what? God loves His creation, and God loves human beings whom He made in His image and

blessed to fill and exercise dominion over the earth. Death and all the suffering leading to it attacks human beings made in God's image and reduces them to dust. Sin's sad and sordid scourge on humanity.

When a loved one is ripped from our side, or when we are dealt a lethal blow that knocks us down from perfect health to wasting away, we feel the outrage of it. We were created as living beings. Death violates and mocks our dignity and worth. The apostle Paul calls death the last enemy Christ will destroy.

So Jesus is indignant with the humiliation, pain, and sorrow sin and death have brought upon the human race, indignant with Satan the serpent who deceived and seduced our first parents, Adam and Eve. A liar and murderer from the beginning. Jesus knew better than any other human being ever how devastating and diabolical sin's curse actually is. The blessing it has ripped away from human beings made in God's image. He came to earth as the God-man to destroy the works of the devil, to cancel the curse of sin, to break the bars of death, to bring eternal life. Death is our enemy. And Jesus is death's enemy and conqueror.

As Jesus neared the tomb, He wept. "See how He loved him," some exclaimed. Yes, we know Jesus loved Lazarus. He loved Martha

and Mary. He wept for them. He wept over the plight of all humanity.

So we know Jesus cares. Then why does He wait? Why did He wait in the case of Lazarus?

John 11:5-6 make clear that He waited on purpose.

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.

What was His purpose for waiting?

John 11:4

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."

It would have been great for Jesus to heal Lazarus. But it was even better for Jesus to raise Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus, Martha, Mary, and all of us needed to know that Jesus has the power to raise the dead. If He does not have that power, the good news is no longer good. Eternal life cannot be eternal. Our forever inheritance remains out of reach. Death would bar us from ever experiencing it.

We live in a world ravaged by suffering and death. When these strike close to us we feel the agony of it. Like Martha, Mary, and their

friends, we ask why the Lord does not intervene. We question not so much His power but His heart toward us.

You may be in the throes of that soul battle this very day. You may be been there for a long time. Where is God when you need Him most?

Our text this morning sheds light on His method and His purpose. We desire healing. He promises resurrection. We pray for short-term deliverances. He is working an eternal rescue. His delays are delays of love. He is mighty to save.

Will you not trust His love that what He is doing in your life is part of a greater plan for your greater good?

2. Great Power: Authoritative Power over Death (38-44)

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."

⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"

"Take away the stone."

If Jesus has the power to raise the dead, why not move the stone Himself?

It is a call for faith from His followers. Clearly just moving the stone would not raise the dead, but to move the stone shows faith that Jesus is going to do so. Else why open up the cave where the dead lay?

Martha objects because by this time the body of Lazarus would have started to decay. Jesus' response?

John 11:40

Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"

Here's the earlier conversation with Martha:
John 11:21-26

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?"

Martha already believes in a final resurrection. The amount of time a person has been dead makes no difference. Four days. Four years. Four centuries. Four millennia. It matters not.

EVEN NOW I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give it to you.

Jesus reveals here that He was in constant communion with the Father in whatever He did.

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."

"You heard me. You always do." The bystanders needed to know that God the Father listens to God the Son when He prays. As do we. Even now Jesus intercedes for His people.

Romans 8:34

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.

Hebrews 7:25

Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

One thing God the Father has granted to Jesus God the Son is the power to authority and power to raise people from the dead.

John 5:25-29

²⁵ "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. ²⁷ And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸ Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

Jesus demonstrates that authority here:
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."

The God of the Bible is infinite in His power. Doing the impossible is His stock in trade. He speaks and the universe comes into being. He speaks and the dead come back to life. His promises guarantee the outcome.

You can trust a God like that. Great in His love and great in His power. Great enough to give you life. He is the Source of life. Great enough to tear you loose from the jaws of death and recover you from the dust of the grave. Relying on such a Savior, how can you possibly lose? But if you refuse to trust Him, how can you possibly win?

3. Great Sacrifice: Substitutionary Sacrifice for Human Rescue (45-53)

⁴⁵ Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, ⁴⁶ but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

Not everyone who saw what Jesus did believed in Him. They had other priorities. Those priorities become clear in the verses that follow.

⁴⁷ So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs.

⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will

believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.”

The Pharisees freely admit that Jesus was performing many signs—miracles with a divine message. The Pharisees believed in miracles, including the resurrection, but they refused to believe in Jesus and were alarmed that so many were believing in Him. They join forces with the chief priests to deal with the problem.

At that time the Sadducees dominated the priesthood along with much of the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of the Jews. Theirs was the power of money and political influence. Ironically, they did not believe in the resurrection or in miracles.

Matthew 22:29

But Jesus answered them, “You are wrong [about the resurrection], because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.”

Their low view of Scripture and of God’s power usually pitted them against the Pharisees. But they were united in their hatred of Jesus because He threatened their high standing. That Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead was less important to them than protecting their power and influence.

What a sober warning! Because of their high view of Scripture, many of the Pharisees were scribes—those whose vocation was to copy the Scriptures meticulously and to teach them. So here you have the guardians of Word of God and the guardians of the worship of God (the priests) who care more about their position and power than they do about God Himself. When He shows up in the flesh and disrupts their lives, it matters not that He raises the dead. He must die.

Our sinful human nature hates a God who disrupts our little kingdoms, no matter how loving and strong He may be. These men (like many others) would rather play religion than engage in the real thing if it means having to bow the knee to a sovereign God.

They feared that if Jesus gained a greater following Rome would strip them of their places of power and subjugate their nation. So they conspired to kill Jesus. Not for any evil He had done. But for all the good. Including raising the dead.

Several ironies leap to our minds. First, how do you keep a person dead who has the power over death? Second, killing Jesus did not rescue them from Rome. They were already under Rome's domination, and in 70 AD Rome leveled Jerusalem and destroyed the temple, burning

it to the ground. No more temple. No more priesthood. No more power. All gone.

The idols they murdered Jesus to protect were smashed. *Whatever you love so much that it keeps you from trusting in Jesus you will lose anyway. But God gives those who put their faith in Jesus an everlasting inheritance that can never be taken away.* Do the math. When you refuse Jesus you lose it all.

49 But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. **50** Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." **51** He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, **52** and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. **53** So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.

Political expediency and self-interest drive Caiaphas to call for murdering Jesus, but God is so much in control that He uses even His enemies to get His will done. The wicked mouth of Caiaphas becomes an instrument in the hand of God to prophesy the gospel.

They conspire to execute the only completely righteous human being who ever lived, Jesus Christ the God-man. But in so doing, they fulfill God's plan of redemption through the spotless Lamb of God, who would take away the sins of the world through the sacrifice of Himself.

Through the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross, God will gather into one people all the children of God wherever they are scattered in whatever generation they live.

Acts 2:23-24

²³ This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. ²⁴ God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

After Jesus rose from the dead, He taught His disciples for 40 days, leaving them with final words:

Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

To this day Jesus has His enemies. Safely removed from the eyewitnesses by two thousand years, those who count themselves sophisticated and wise declare the accounts of His miracles and His resurrection nothing but lies. His contemporaries did not have that luxury. Their hatred for Jesus bypassed the evidence. They hated Him because they did not want to lose control. That's still the reason people reject Jesus as Savior and Lord. But their rejection cannot negate what God has done and is doing through Jesus. And their idols of heart will prove just as transitory.

Conclusion

If you have not yet transferred your trust over to Jesus to save you from your sin and suffering and death, what is keeping you from doing so today? Whatever it is, it's not worth it. Now is the time. Today is the day of salvation. Jesus is mighty to save. Before you lies an eternity of regret and suffering under God's wrath or an eternity of gratitude and joy in a universe washed clean from sin and death.

John 20:30-31

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs [besides the seven John records, culminating in Jesus' own resurrection from the dead] in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written

so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

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Closing Song: Hallelujah for the Cross

Discussion Questions

1. What are some reasons that the resurrection—both of Jesus and eventually of us—is absolutely crucial to the gospel?
2. Why was Jesus' delay to come see Lazarus difficult to understand but important to advancing God's glory?
3. What are some divine delays that test our faith, and what could be some Biblical reasons for them in keeping with what we find in John 11?
4. John 11:33 records that Jesus was deeply moved (indignant) and greatly troubled when He saw Mary and her friends weeping. Why was this response to death and sorrow appropriate for the God-man Savior, and what does it reveal about Jesus' attitude toward our suffering?

5. Jesus has power to raise the dead, so He certainly had power to move the stone. What does His command to move the stone call on His followers to exercise? What are some other examples of God's commands for us to participate in what only He can do?
6. Why would it be important for the passage of time not to diminish Christ's ability to raise people from the dead, whether after four days or at the end of the age?
7. Given what Jesus says in John 5:25 and the connection Peter (1 Peter 1:3-5) and Paul (Romans 8:11) make between regeneration and resurrection, what proof do we already see that Jesus still calls people from death to life?
8. The Pharisees, the chief priests, and the council feared that Jesus would cost them their place and their nation, so they conspired to get rid of Him. What are some common idols people reject Jesus in order to protect? Why is such a strategy foolish and harmful?
9. What encouragement does it give you to know that God often uses efforts to oppose Him so that they actually advance His plans and purposes?