

11:1-16 The death of Lazarus

We all like to believe we have the inside track to God. We're living a good enough life that God is obligated to bail us out of trouble, and alleviate our suffering. Or, maybe we really expect more than that. God is obligated to make it so that I don't have to experience suffering. But more, we have expectations of how God to act in the details: how quickly can we expect Him to act in our behalf? Can I count on His timing to match up with my timing?

Jesus will raise Lazarus from the dead. He also raised the widow's son (Luke 7:11-17) and Jairus's daughter (Matt. 9:18-26; Mark 5:41-42; Luke 8:40-56). The Lazarus resurrection has an added significance in two ways. First, it will serve as a metaphor for Jesus' ability and power to give people new *personal* life. Second, it will be the "final straw" for the Pharisees who will do Jesus in.

If anybody has an in with Jesus it is Mary, Martha and Lazarus, three siblings. This family is very close to Jesus, and devotedly so. Mary anointed Jesus feet with anointment and her hair.

Mary and Martha hired a messenger, sending the need for Jesus to come quickly. Jesus hears the message and utters these words in v. 4. If you had heard these words what conclusion would you have drawn about Lazarus' illness and his nearness to death?

Jesus stayed two days longer after He heard the news about the imminent death of Lazarus. In verse 14 we realize that Jesus waited until Lazarus died before He left for Judea. And He was glad! Confusing!! For their benefit?? How could this delay possibly benefit the disciple? And it seems unconscionable that His delay would benefit Lazarus, Mary and Martha. More confusion.

Isa. 55:8-9

And to the disciples it seemed a terrible idea to go back to Judea. Jesus had a target on His back. The Pharisees were out to find a way to kill Him.

Both Martha and Mary are grieving the loss of their dear brother. They both are certain that if Jesus had been there his death could have been averted.

Assurance that Jesus gives seems to be a theological statement that is well-meaning, but doesn't penetrate into the soul of Martha.

v. 23-25

The Glory of God and the Life of Faith

The Larger Story—part 2

John 11; April 11, 2021

DAY 1: Human expectations; human confusion

1. Shattered dreams create situations that throw us into massive confusion about God. They underscore the truth that God speaks through the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah 55:8 “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹ “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

2. John 11 begins with the story of three close-knit siblings, Mary, Martha and Lazarus.

John 11:1 Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) ³ So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.”

3. When Jesus received this message, He was about twenty miles away from the town of Bethany where the siblings lived. How would you expect Jesus to respond? What action would you expect Him to do?

4. Under each of the next verses, jot down what you would have thought after hearing the information in each verse.

John 11:4a When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death....”

John 11:4b “.... No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.”

(Note: this verse is vital to understanding this episode from the perspective of the Larger Story).

John 11:5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

John 11:6 So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, ⁷ and then he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.” (where Bethany is located).

5. There are times when the Lord’s ways make no sense to us. If He loved them as He did why did He wait to return? We like to believe that because we are His disciples we will get “special treatment.” Surely He will come to our aid as we wish Him too.

6. If you are not familiar with this story, here’s the spoiler alert. Lazarus *did* die before Jesus returned to Bethany! If you had been Mary or Martha what conclusions would you have drawn?

DAY 2: One reason for our confusion: we insist on living by sight, not by faith

1. John 11 is nearing the end of Jesus' public ministry which has mostly taken place in Galilee, well north of Jerusalem and Judea. In Jerusalem the Pharisees are looking for an opportunity to kill Jesus. When Jesus tells His disciple that they will go to Bethany, only two miles east of Jerusalem, they think He's crazy to do that!

John 11:8 "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?"

2. Jesus answers their question with a question.

John 11:9 Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. ¹⁰ It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light."

3. What is Jesus communicating to them?

4. Having answered their question, though they remained quite confused. Jesus speaks about Lazarus.

John 11:11 After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."

John 11:12 His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." ¹³ Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

5. What becomes very apparent in this interchange is the different perspective between Jesus and His disciples. They are sure they see things accurately, but they are mistaken. One reason is Jesus is walking by faith and they are walking by sight.

*John 11:14 So then he told them plainly, "**Lazarus is dead,** ¹⁵ and **for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe.** But let us go to him."*

6. Here are three stunning statements. What strikes you about each one?

- a. "Lazarus is dead."
- b. "For your sake I am glad I was not there..."
- c. "...so that you may believe."

7. Jesus has been training these men to see life from God's angle, to understand the importance of the glory of God in setting the course of life, and of learning to live by faith, not by sight.

8. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 3: Walking by faith, and the glory of God.

John 11:17 On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁹ and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

1. Remember the message Jesus gave the messenger to give to Martha and Mary.

*John 11:4 When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is **for God’s glory** so that **God’s Son may be glorified** through it.”*

2. If you had been Martha hearing this message, what would you have concluded about Lazarus and his illness?

John 11:21 “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

3. Martha is an impressive woman. Though she is dealing with the grief of losing her brother, and not understanding why her brother died, you see her rock solid devotion to Jesus. What strikes you about her response?

John 11:23 Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

²⁴ Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

4. My father used to tell me, “Seth, there are two things certain in life: death and taxes.” Death is a part of living on planet Earth. So, what does Jesus mean by “*whoever lives by believing in me will never die?*”

5. The “death” He is talking about is personal death. It is living for self and self-interest as our highest value. To live that way is to miss the life of Christ alive in us. Left to our self we will experience personal death, things like misery, depression, anxiety, hopelessness, despair, and a host of other consequences. We are made to live for God and His values as our highest value.

John 11:27 “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

6. To her credit, Martha is anchored by faith. She knows Jesus is the Messiah, and however He leads, she will follow, even when suffering occurs and when she doesn’t understand God’s ways with her.

7. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

DAY 4: The life of faith is hard, but it anchors us.

1. Mary, like her sister Martha love Jesus and are devoted to following Him. When Jesus asks to see Mary, she is in the throes of grief for her brother.

John 11:28 After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.”²⁹ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him.³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.³¹ When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

³² When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

2. What strikes you about Mary’s response to Jesus?

3. It’s clear that both Martha and Mary assumed what you or I would have assumed, that Lazarus was not going to die by this illness, and yet he did. This is one of the great battles we have with faith. Everything seems to point in one direction: Jesus loves them, they know Jesus can heal Lazarus, Jesus is just a day’s walk away, and there didn’t seem to be any reason why He wouldn’t come. And then the apparent promise. It all seemed to line up to Lazarus being healed.

And yet...

4. In light of all of these apparent factors, this is why their response to Jesus is so remarkable. They do not accuse Him of any wrongdoing.

John 11:33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.³⁴ “Where have you laid him?” he asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied.³⁵ Jesus wept.³⁶ Then 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 have kept this man from dying?”

5. What strikes you about Jesus in these verses?

6. If you were Mary, and saw Jesus’ response, would that have tempered your doubts about how this seems to have played out?

7. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

DAY 5: the mystery of life is met with the glory of God and discovered in a life of faith.

John 11:38 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹ “Take away the stone,” he said.

“But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”

*⁴⁰ Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you **believe, you will see the glory of God?**”*

*⁴¹ So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, **that they may believe that you sent me.**”*

⁴³ When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

1. What finally becomes clear is that the story that Mary and Martha thought they heard and understood was misunderstood. They could not conceive of this story playing out the way it did.
2. And in hindsight, the promise that Jesus gave the messenger to give to this sisters was in fact true!

*John 11:4 When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is **for God’s glory** so that **God’s Son may be glorified** through it.”*

3. Knowing what you know now, how would you have understood the different elements of Jesus’ message in verse 4?

4. Two important truths are played out in this story.

a. When we place the glory and honor of God as our greatest value, we can place our very lives and all that is important to us in His hands, leaving the results and outcomes to His goodness. It is the glory of God that anchors, His providence and providential care as He sees fit to meet our needs.

b. The life of faith is not just some catchy way of living. Consider these benefits.

(1) When life is harder than we imagine we can trust Him with whatever outcomes He allows.

(2) When life is confusing, we can walk in peace.

(3) When the storms of life rage around us we can be anchored.

(4) When we don’t understand all that is going on around us, the salient point is to trust in the goodness and providence of God, not in having our questions “satisfactorily answered.”

(5) Faith in Christ deepens when we experience and see His love for us.

(6) Faith deepens when we see He cares for us in our sorrow and walks with us in our suffering.

5. What strikes you from today’s devotional?