

The Effects of a Resurrection

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John Series

John 11:38-57

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Please turn in your Bibles to John 11.

Last week Pastor Tomas helped us to see the real emotion of our Lord Jesus as he weeps at the grave of Lazarus, his friend, and joins in the sorrow of Mary and Martha. Jesus weeps with us too in our sorrows and feels our pain along with us. We have a Saviour who loves us deeply and is able to sympathize with us.

So we've followed this story of the death of Lazarus up to this point of Jesus coming to the grave and weeping. Now we read on in the chapter, starting at v.38. John 11:38. Read with me.

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."

(Now comes the reaction to this resurrection)

⁴⁵ Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, **believed** in him.

⁴⁶ But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. ⁴⁷ Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. "What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many signs. ⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, **everyone will believe** in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation."

⁴⁹ Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! ⁵⁰ You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish."

⁵¹ He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, ⁵² and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. ⁵³ So from that day on they plotted to take his life.

⁵⁴ Therefore Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the people of Judea. Instead he withdrew to a region near the wilderness, to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with his disciples.

⁵⁵ When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, many went up from the country(side) to Jerusalem for their ceremonial cleansing before the Passover. ⁵⁶ They kept looking for Jesus, and as they stood in the temple courts they asked one another, “What do you think? Isn’t he coming to the festival at all?” ⁵⁷ But the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who found out where Jesus was should report it so that they might arrest him.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Well Congregation,

You don’t see a resurrection every day, do you? Not at all. It must have been quite an event to witness. A man dead in the tomb for 4 days comes back to life before the eyes of a watching crowd—a crowd with mixed feeling toward Jesus. Everyone knew Lazarus was dead. That wasn’t up for debate. Lazarus was stone-cold dead. They buried him in the customary way in Israel. Above ground. In a tomb cut out of the rocky terrain where it would be really hard to dig a hole. Then they sealed up the cave with a big rock to protect the body and to keep the smell inside. You’ve probably seen pictures of such tombs most often associated with Jesus’ death and resurrection.

We know that Jesus had become a close friend of Lazarus and his sisters. They were among his faithful disciples. People that maybe didn’t understand just want kind of Messiah Jesus was but they most definitely believed he was a special messenger from God. Their faith and understanding were still growing. But you know from the words, “If you’d have been here, my brother would not have died,” that Mary knew Jesus was a healer, at minimum.

On this day, the crowd would see Jesus’ power over death and then respond in different ways. And that’s where we all come in as readers and listeners of this story. You and I should not simply view this miracle as “once and done.” It still speaks to us today. That power of Jesus is still here for us today. Miracles always have a purpose. As Jesus mentioned, this miracle was to show the glory of God, the light of God breaking into our dark world. Light seen through the power of Jesus.

So, to get yourself into it, let me ask you, what in your life is in need of resurrection? Or put it this way: Have you had a time in your life when you felt completely defeated—maybe emotionally or even spiritually dead? You’ve done something bad that leaves you feeling unacceptable in the eyes of God or other people. Most of us have probably had that feeling at some point. We feel we’ve done something that disqualifies

us. There are also those who feel like they've been robbed of innocence by someone who has hurt them badly. It's not your fault at all but you feel like something inside you is dead. And then there's sickness, disease or increasing frailty. We all face that in varying degrees throughout our life. It takes away our health. Takes away our ability to work. Takes away our independence. And sometimes it even takes away our life or the life of a loved one. We feel the deep pain of loss and so we need some sort of resurrection.

As we learned last Sunday, Jesus cares deeply about our losses and struggles. He weeps with us. He is moved with compassion. He identifies with us in our human struggles. But the second half of this story in John 11 shows that he acts. He doesn't only weep. He responds more than emotionally.

Jesus' Response to Our Need

Jesus responds to our need. Moreover, we can be assured as God's people that Jesus is way ahead of us in our times of need. Sure, we don't necessarily experience it that way, but that doesn't mean it isn't so. There are two things in our text that catch our attention.

First, Jesus always has the glory of God in mind when responding to our loss. Again, that's not something we see or fully understand immediately. Nonetheless, when we face hard times, whether of our own making or not, we can know that God is up to something. Jesus knows the heart and mind of the Father perfectly. The glory of God can seem like a strange category to us. We might think, "So, I have to suffer in order for God to get some glory?" Isn't that sort of self-serving for God, like "Hey, you suffer and I'll look good"? But that's not how it works. It's more like Jesus saying to us, "You can enter the time of struggle knowing that your heavenly Father is going to show up for you in some way." Again, that sounds nice in theory but how does it help us in the midst of the struggle and loss?

On New Year's Day I mentioned to those who were here that I have a scar on my leg from a work-related injury that became my call to ministry. I assure you that suffering some first, second and a tiny bit of third degree burns was pretty painful for several weeks. You burn your hand on a hot pan and you feel it for a day or two. Well, my burn was much worse than that but thankfully not super serious though it did keep in the hospital for a few weeks. But how did God get glory through that accident?

I saw him caring for me. Yes, my time in the hospital was painful for many days. But it was also a wakeup call. Today, I'm glad it happened because God used it to steer me in a new direction for my life. I was trying my best to avoid his nudges toward ministry so he gave me a bigger push, you might say. And now I give him glory, honour and praise for leading me to serve his Church. It has been a huge blessing to me and I might have missed out on it if not for the burn. So, to repeat, we might not see how God is glorified in our pain at the moment but, when we do, we will give him praise and glory.

Likewise, think of Joseph from the book of Genesis. Joseph went through slavery for years(!) before he was able to give glory to God for having become the Egyptian Pharaoh's righthand man in order to save his whole family decades later. Eventually

he told his brothers who sold him to the slave traders, “You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good—for the saving of many.” God was at work through the trial and struggle, but it took time for Joseph to see that and to give God the glory. Scripture is full of examples like this.

In other words, it’s not about God wanting glory for himself in some selfish way. It’s about us recognizing how good and faithful he is and praising him for that. We give him glory because he’s so good to us. This was in the mind and heart of Jesus too as he came to Bethany to restore Lazarus. This is going to help people see God’s goodness. But for Jesus himself, it was also going to be what turned people against him which was necessary for God’s glory to come through the cross. In other words, when pain, loss and struggle come our way, we can know that Jesus has God’s glory in mind for us and we’ll eventually see it—if not in this life, then most certainly when we see God face to face. So, it’s safe to say that Jesus’ response to our struggles is love, a desire to draw us closer to God.

The other thing to see about Jesus is that he was reacting to the death of Lazarus before he even knew all the details as a man. When Jesus calls Lazarus from the tomb, he doesn’t pray to his Father for power, as we might expect. No, our text shows us that he’d been praying long beforehand. So instead of saying, “Father, I pray that you give me the power to raise this dead man!” he says in v.41 & 42,

⁴¹ ...“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....”

Notice that he says, “you have heard me” and “I knew that you always hear me.” This shows that he was praying in advance. He was in touch with and therefore in tune with the Father. He was seeking and finding the Father’s will for him in this situation. He became aware of the way in which this situation would serve God’s good purposes for humanity. This raising of Lazarus from the dead was Jesus’ 7th and final miracle in the book of John. And it serves to illustrate the words he said earlier: “I am the resurrection and the life.” It shows his power over death which he will later use when he himself rises from the dead. But, for now, just recognize that Jesus is a man of prayer, in touch with the Father and ready to do the Father’s will, which will bring glory to God.

When hardships come in our lives, we’ll be better prepared for them if we’re already people of prayer. If we’re trusting the will of the Father for our lives and prayerfully seeking that will, we will know that hardship is not a sign that God has suddenly rejected us for some unknown reason. We can trust, like Jesus did, that God is at work. It might be outside of our comprehension at that moment, but he will not reject his children. Instead, he’s faithful and faithfully at work in us through good and through hard times. Jesus reacts to the death of Lazarus with confidence that his Father is at work because he has a prayerful relationship with the Father.

In the face of our trials, then, we can learn from Jesus that God will get the glory and that he’s at work. I’m always amazed at how I see God’s people go through trials with peace. Why? Maybe they aren’t thinking about God’s glory specifically, but they’ve walked with him long enough to know and to trust that he’s not going to abandon us in the storms and let us drown. I’m not saying we don’t ever feel like we’re drowning. But

God's grace helps us trust him and trust that he's got bigger and better plans for our lives than we can see in the moment. His heart is always set on seeking the best for us for which we will give him glory.

The Response of People

So, we see that Jesus responds appropriately to our struggles because he has the glory of God in mind and he is prayerfully in tune with the Father. Now, secondly, let's explore the response of people to Jesus and his miracle.

There are four responses we find. And I don't have the time to go into great detail on each one but take a look with me at how we see people respond to Jesus' miracle. In short, there's a response of either belief or unbelief.

First, we see in v.45 that the miracle of Lazarus' resurrection caused many of the Jews, who had previously been unfriendly to Jesus, to come to believe in him. Secondly, verses 46-54 show us that the Sanhedrin began to plot the death of Jesus. Clearly, they aren't believing in him. Then in verses 55-57, we see that Jesus' miracle caused great excitement among the Passover crowds at Jerusalem. It's not clear if that's faith. It might be, but some of those people are going to go with the flow and shout to crucify Jesus in the coming days. And then, fourthly, the miracle strengthened the faith of Mary and Martha and of Jesus' other disciples. In fact, in the case of Mary, if you read into chapter 12, that faith manifested itself in a lavish deed of love for Jesus which we will see next week.

So, there are four different reactions to the miracle that essentially come down to belief or unbelief. And this is the heart of this passage. Do we or don't we believe in Jesus as the Son of God, the Messiah, the one who has power over sin and its consequence: death.

Unbelief

The unbelief we witness here is rather ugly, isn't it? The Jewish leaders, the Sanhedrin, worry about their own power. We see this in politics all too often. On the one hand, you might have a Jimmy Carter type of President in the USA, who now that he has died, friends describe as a servant of the people. Some said that he did what was right even if it wasn't popular or would cost him votes. We are more accustomed to hearing about politicians who are more concerned about keeping their power than about serving the people.

That's what we find in the Sanhedrin. Caiaphas the high priest sneers at his colleagues and says, "It's better for one man to die than for all of us to die." With his political eyes, he assesses Jesus' miracle and the fact that people are being attracted to Jesus as a threat. Caiaphas is all about keeping the peace, not rocking the boat. He senses that the Jewish people throwing their support behind Jesus could destabilize the relationship between the Jews and Romans. If the Romans get upset with the Jews, they'll take it out on the Sanhedrin who are supposed to keep the people in line. Or at least that's what they've been doing.

The Sanhedrin has lost sight of their role as spiritual leaders and become merely political caretakers; consequently, they are only concerned with keeping their grip on power over the people. They've lost sight of what God is doing. They can't see Jesus as their long-awaited Messiah. He's just a political problem-maker. So he concludes, "For us to maintain control over the people and to keep our position and privilege with the Romans, we must get rid of Jesus." So, you see, there is no faith in God in the reaction of the Sanhedrin. There is only unbelief: Jesus is a problem, not a Messiah.

Belief

The other reaction is belief. Some Jewish people begin to put their faith in Jesus as the Messiah, says v.45. Mary, Martha and the disciples respond with deepening faith. Then in v.55, we are told that many people went from the countryside—places like Bethany where Lazarus was from—to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. V.56 says that they were looking for Jesus, presumably to learn more from him, to get to know him better and to grow their faith. These are signs of belief.

So there are signs of belief and unbelief among the people who witness the resurrection of Lazarus.

Our Reaction

Now, what's our reaction to Jesus?

Clearly, John's aim in telling us this story is to increase our faith. Several times in this chapter you find the word *believe*. And it is associated with helping us be free. As Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, we begin to understand that he has the power to change death to life, whether physically or spiritually. When it looks like the end, when we might think there's no hope of a comeback, Jesus brings renewal, new life. He says, at it were, "Take off those grave clothes."

We, of course, see Jesus in light of his own victory over death, which the resurrection of Lazarus anticipates. What he did for Lazarus was only temporary, as Lazarus would at some point die again, like all of us. But because of Jesus' sinless life, he defeated death on the cross and rose victorious from his own grave. No one called him out of the grave. Jesus rose himself from the dead because, as we sing at Easter, "Death could not keep its prey. Jesus, my Saviour; He torn the bars away!"

The victory he accomplished over death means he is all-powerful. And he uses his power to accomplish good in our lives. Just as he used the death and miracle of resurrection with Lazarus to grow the faith of some, so he does in our day too. When we trust him to work in our lives to bring glory to God and to grow our faith, we're in the best place.

Do we trust his power for us?

I've seen people overcome substance abuse. They have a new life and can give God the glory. Others see this, are amazed and their faith is strengthened, revived or

stirred to life for the first time. We see people who are sick but are restored to health. I remember when young Jeremie almost died last year but his life was spared. In those early days, his mom said to me, "I've always believed in God, but now I really believe in him." It was one of those faith strengthening moments brought about through struggle and hardship that Jesus uses to build our faith. It did so for many of us. And we give glory to God.

But it's also true when we don't see physical recovery as we wish or even prayed. Think of the hardship some of our members endured last year. Life changed drastically in an instant. So many hard questions arise. For a time, we might wonder what God is up to. And that's totally fine. Later on, though, we might start to see how our Lord Jesus was at work through the trial. In fact, we see that it's only with his power in us that we survived. I can't tell you how often I hear people say, "I couldn't have done this without the Lord. Through the hardship, his power helped us through." And, friends, his power is for us because of his resurrection.

Now sometimes I hear Christians say, "I don't think I could make it through a certain trial. My faith is not strong enough. Like, if I was persecuted for following Jesus, I would probably deny him. And in the same way, if I had to go through sickness, I don't think my faith would shine through. If my loved one died like Lazarus did, I would probably just become bitter, angry and faithless."

You know what? That might all be true if it depended on you and me alone. It would likely be true. But the same Jesus who had the power to raise Lazarus and especially to raise himself victorious over sin and death and hell, has power at work in you and me today. It's not **in** our own power and with our strong faith that we overcome the trials and the sorrows of this life. It's his power that strengthens our faith. It's his power in us—by grace—that keeps us strong and even shines through. It's **in** his power that we come forth renewed and can rip off our grave clothes, the things that keep us living in our broken past instead of his freedom now and for the future.

Friends, our reaction to Jesus should be belief!! Faith!! He's all powerful. We don't see a resurrection every day. That's true. But we do see the power of our resurrected Lord among us. It reminds us that we can trust him. We must worship him. We should do as he says. And in following him, we'll see more and more how good he is and give God all the glory.

Post covid, post-HSR rebuilding, resurrecting. Big giving shows life, excitement, desire, trust

Questions:

1. Have you had a time in your life when you felt completely defeated? A time when you figured there was no way out a mess you made or a mess you found yourself in through no fault of your own? Describe how you felt?
2. Read John 11:38. How do you think Jesus feels when he sees you in your place of defeat? Is he deeply moved by our situations?
3. Talk about and research the significance of Jesus coming to the tomb four days after Lazarus died (v.39 & v.17).
4. Do you have any idea what Jesus means by saying this is for God's glory (v.40, see also v.4 and vv.23-25)?
5. What do verses 41-42 tell us about what Jesus must have been doing in the days leading up to this miracle? Why does he thank God for hearing him versus asking God to empower him to raise the dead?
6. In verses 45-57, what are the reactions we find to what Jesus has done? Look for at least 3, even 4, specific responses, both positive and negative. Peeking ahead to chapter 12, what is Mary's specific response?
7. Back in v.44, Jesus tells people to take off the grave clothes from Lazarus. If Jesus is our resurrection and life, what might "take off the grave clothes" mean for us? Think back to the things you brought up in question 1.

There are greater lessons to be learned in this Scripture, of course. As Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, we begin to understand that he has power to change death to life, physically and spiritually. When it looks like the end, when the facts say it is over, he brings new life. We can trust this in our own lives.