

“Jesus’ Glory Revealed”
John 11:1-53
August 7, 2016

INTRODUCTION:

The last of Jesus’ miracles recorded by John is different from the others in several ways. For one thing, it was done more publicly than the others. When he turned water into wine, only Mary and perhaps the servants knew what had happened. When he fed the five thousand, only the disciples knew that it had all come from a young boy’s lunch. But with this last miracle, everything seems to be done for maximum exposure of Jesus’ power. Since Mary, Martha and Lazarus were apparently from a wealthy family, many people came to Lazarus’ funeral, including many Jewish leaders from nearby Jerusalem. And Jesus stood in the midst of them all and called out to Lazarus to come forth from a tomb he had occupied for four days.

This miracle is also unique in that it addresses a universal problem, that of mortality. Jesus healed the blind and the lame, but not everyone is blind and lame. Everyone will die. In spite of the progress made in the medical field over the last century, the death rate remains exactly what it has always been—one hundred percent. We can all hear the pain and longing expressed in the words of the preacher Vance Havner as he describes the death of his wife.

I think of a year that started out so pleasantly for my beloved and me. We had made plans for delightful months ahead together. Instead, I sat by her bedside and watched her die of an unusual disease. She expected to be healed but she died. Now, all hopes of a happy old age together are dashed to the ground. I plod alone with the other half of my life on the other side of death. My hand reaches for another hand now vanished, and I listen at night for the sound of a voice that is still. And I am tempted a thousand times to ask, “My God, Why...?”

Paradoxically, this miracle which so clearly puts on display the great power of Jesus also gives us a window into the emotional life of Jesus. We see Jesus filled with anger here and we see him weeping. Jesus tells us how we ought to view this miracle even before it happens. **“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”** (v. 4). I’ve chosen four words that capture some of the ways this miracle reveals the glory of Jesus.

I. Delay

Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, was seriously ill. So the sisters sent a simple message to Jesus. **“Lord, he whom you love is ill”** (v. 3). It is

not without significance that they don't use Lazarus' name in their message. They assumed Jesus would know who they were talking about without being specific. It was as if Lazarus was the only one Jesus loved. Of course, Mary and Martha didn't believe literally that Jesus loved only this one man in the entire universe. But there is a significant theological truth taught here about the personal nature of God's love. We often refer to God's love for the world, for the simple reason that the Bible proclaims that message. But God's love is also so personal that there is a sense in which we are all to live as if that phrase could be applied accurately to us. I am the one Jesus loves as if I were the only object of that love in the whole universe. There is a big difference between believing that God loves the world and believing God loves *me*.

The love of Jesus for Lazarus and his sisters is reiterated again in verse 5, but followed by a statement that doesn't seem to fit. Because he loves Lazarus, he stayed where he was for two more days. Jesus could have healed Lazarus from a distance with a mere word from his mouth. He had done so before, and he could have done so again in this case. Or he could have dropped everything and rushed to Bethany to heal him there. Instead, he waited until he knew he would be arriving four days after Lazarus' death. When Jesus finally does show up, both Mary and Martha say the same thing to him. **“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died”** (v. 21, 32). They were giving Jesus the benefit of the doubt here, assuming that his delay had been caused by something outside his control. But what if they had known that Jesus deliberately delayed coming to them, which was what actually happened? Yet that is precisely the position we are all in when we call out to God to help us or to help a loved one in a time of need. God hears immediately, and he could take immediate action to address our need and relieve our suffering. Sometimes he does, and sometimes he doesn't.

Any ill feelings the sisters would have had toward Jesus because of his deliberate delay, would have been reversed if they had known how the story ends, with the raising of their brother from the dead. There is no way they could have known that, but we the readers of this account do know it to be the case, and that knowledge should change everything for us. We know how it turned out for Lazarus, but with respect to our own sufferings, we are in the dark, just as much as the two sisters, in knowing how things will turn out. Let me say it this way. Knowing everything that we the readers know about this story, would you be willing to switch places with Lazarus or his sisters? Would you be willing to suffer from a painful, terminal sickness, die, be in the tomb for four days and then be raised again by Jesus? Would you be willing to do that, knowing that such a miracle would reveal the true nature of Jesus, with the result reported in verse 45: **“Many of the Jews who...had seen what he did, believed in him”**? I believe all of us who love Jesus would be willing to do that. That's exactly our situation in all of our suffering. It is for the glory of Jesus even if we are in the dark about exactly how that happens. There is

meaning in our suffering, even when God delays and doesn't show up to relieve our suffering when we would like him to.

II. Truth

The second word that reveals the glory of Jesus in this miracle is the word "truth," seen in Jesus' response to Martha. When Martha hears of Jesus' arrival, she desires a more private meeting with him than can be accomplished at her house. Jesus then says to her, **"Your brother will rise again."** She takes his meaning to be a general statement of comfort, that at some time in the distant future, at the resurrection at the end of time, Lazarus would be raised again. Notice what Martha believes about Jesus. She believes something about the past: that had Jesus been present four days ago, he could have healed Lazarus. And she believes something about the future, that Lazarus would one day be raised. What's missing here? It's the present, isn't it? Jesus seeks to strengthen her faith by focusing on the present. He does that through these well-known verses, which are another of Jesus' "I am" statements. **"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"**

Jesus is seeking to help Martha when he asks her, "Do you believe this?" Jesus is convinced that the thing that will help Martha is to believe in him. He doesn't tell her, "Martha, it's going to be okay; in just a few minutes I'm going to raise your brother from his tomb and restore him to you." That may have provided some momentary comfort for Martha. But what about the next time a need arose? And what about all the other funerals Jesus doesn't attend and reverse through a resurrection? Martha needed the same thing we need, to trust Jesus. He is life even in the worst case scenario of death. The one who dies shall live. The secular materialists are wrong in claiming that when the material body dies, everything is gone. According to Jesus, the truth is that life continues uninterrupted for the person who trusts Jesus.

I wonder if Paul's familiar words at the end of Romans 8 are his meditation on Jesus' "I am" statement here. **"I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord"** (Ro. 8:38-39). If something as seemingly final as death cannot separate us from God, then neither can anything else. To trust in Jesus is to truly live, no matter what happens. That's what Jesus wants Martha and us to know.

III. Compassion

After his words of comforting truth to Martha, Jesus invites Mary to come and see him. She said the same thing to Jesus her sister had said, wondering why he hadn't come in time to heal her brother. In contrast to his response to Martha, Jesus doesn't speak a word to Mary. As John simply states, "**Jesus wept.**" Verse 35 is the shortest verse in the Bible, but also one of the most moving. Why did Jesus weep when he knew that in just a few minutes he was going to raise Lazarus from the dead? Why didn't he say, "Save the tears, Mary, and let me tell you what I'm about to do." Instead, the only perfect man who has ever lived entered fully into her pain. This is all the more remarkable in light of the fact that Jesus has something we will never have. He had the power to fix this situation, and he is about to do just that. But still he enters in, because his heart is full of compassion.

Jesus' response to Mary tells us something about God, and it tells us something about how we are to love people. What it tells us about God is that our suffering provokes deep emotion in God. Remember that the Bible says that Jesus shows us with complete clarity what God is like. When his children suffer, he is no stoic bystander remaining unmoved by our troubles. He enters in fully, even to the point of bringing pain to himself. It is not unlike the pain brought to parents by the suffering of their children.

This also teaches us something about how we are to love people. When confronted with the needs of those around us, we are not just to fix people, but also enter into their pain. Jesus did eventually "fix" Lazarus. Sometimes we can fix a problem being experienced by others, and sometimes we can't. I think that fixing people has been unfairly criticized today. If fixing people is wrong, then Jesus was wrong to do what he did in fixing Lazarus. What is wrong is to use fixing people as a way to avoid entering into their pain. So if a good friend loses his job and doesn't know how he is going to pay his bills, how do you love a person well in that situation? Our tendency is to go to "fixit" mode and help them begin thinking about how to secure another job. There may be a time for that, but not before simply entering into their pain with them. That's what Jesus did here, and that's what he still does.

IV. Anger

Finally, we see the anger of Jesus. This is somewhat obscured by the translation in our pew Bibles, which say that Jesus was "deeply moved." The Greek word used here is used outside the Bible of the angry snorting of bulls. Eugene Peterson translates this, "a deep anger welled up within him." What was the object of Jesus' anger? Jesus wasn't angry at the victims, Mary and Martha. Victims often get angry at themselves, thinking they have done something to deserve the tragedy befalling them. Jesus also doesn't get angry at himself, unlike so many today who respond to tragedy with anger at God. Jesus is the solution, not the problem, to all tragedy and suffering. Jesus is

angry at these great enemies of sin and death, which have brought such ruin to the beauty of his creation. The right kind of anger moves you to take the right kind of action. In his anger, Jesus rises up, bellowing like an angry animal. As he commands the stone to be rolled away, he reminds me of King David running to meet Goliath. David was filled with indignation that this man should defy the armies of God. Like him, Jesus comes as our champion to fight this great enemy, an enemy before whom we all quake with fear. He shouts with triumph, **“Lazarus, come out.”** As someone has said, the authority of Jesus is so great that, had he not specified Lazarus, all the tombs would have given up their dead.

Part of the glory of Jesus is to take action to make right the wrongs of this earth. I was reading in the Old Testament this week and was struck by the sin of being at ease in the midst of evil times. For example, Amos 6:1 says, **“Woe to those who are at ease in Zion.”** Responding to neediness and brokenness around us with a retreat into our own comfort is a great sin. Jesus did the opposite, even though it got him killed. John reports on the results of this miracle. There were two results, the first one not surprising and second one unexpected. It is not surprising that many believed in Jesus after seeing this miracle. Here is a man who has authority over death. Only God has such authority. But there was a second result, this one unexpected. John tells us that when the religious leaders heard of this miracle, they began to make **“plans to put him to death”** (v. 53). They had no room for Jesus in their lives because they feared losing their power. The high priest, Caiaphas, spoke better than he knew when he said, **“It is better for you that one man should die for the people, [than] that the whole nation should perish”** (v. 50). Caiaphas feared a Roman sacking of their nation, but Jesus died to prevent the sacking brought about by sin. In his anger, Jesus took action to defeat all our enemies. He really is the resurrection and the life. He gives us life now by dying in our place in order that our sin might be forgiven. And he will give us life in the future by raising our mortal bodies after we die, bodies that, unlike that of Lazarus, will never die again.

CONCLUSION:

There’s someone earlier in this story who spoke better than he knew, and it was one of Jesus’ disciples, Thomas. When Jesus announced that they were going to Jerusalem, Thomas remembered how they were almost stoned to death the last time they were there. Bethany is near Jerusalem, and Thomas said, **“Let us also go, that we may die with him”** (v. 16). There is a sense in which we must be willing to hear Jesus call to come and die with him if we are to be his followers. But we know that when we die with Jesus, we also join him in resurrection. He is the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in him, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in him shall never die. Do you believe this?