

## Authority Over Death pt.2

Easter 2018

John 11:27-44

March 18, 2018

*<sup>28</sup> When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." <sup>29</sup> And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. <sup>30</sup> Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him.*

*<sup>31</sup> 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. <sup>32</sup> 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." <sup>33</sup> 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. <sup>34</sup> And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." <sup>35</sup> Jesus wept. <sup>36</sup> So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" <sup>37</sup> But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?"*

*<sup>38</sup> Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. <sup>39</sup> 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." <sup>40</sup> Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" <sup>41</sup> So they took*

***away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. <sup>42</sup> 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." <sup>43</sup> When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." <sup>44</sup> 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."***

This morning we are going to finish John's narrative of the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead. Keep something in mind as we read the story. This is not fiction. This is not a parable. This is the story of a real resurrection from the dead, told by John who was an eye witness, some 40 or 50 years later as he writes his version of the gospel story. God gave us four gospels. Each written by different men to different audiences and with different approaches. But each of the four focuses on one central theme; Jesus Christ came into the world, the one and only son of God, took on human form and lived a perfect life so that he could be crucified and raised from the dead on the third day to destroy sin and death and set us free from our eternal bondage. This is the story of the Bible. This is the story of the gospels. This is the story told in John's gospel and in particular, this is the story told in the raising of Lazarus from the dead. John is the only gospel writer who tells this story.

We picked up the story last week as Jesus received news of the impending death of his dear friend Lazarus. Jesus waited two days to go to Bethany.

He wanted to make sure that all the people knew for sure that Lazarus was dead. Jesus knew that he was going to use Lazarus' death to demonstrate his power, his authority over death. This is a huge claim, a very controversial claim. Many say that Jesus is a great man, a good teacher ... but if his claim to have authority over death is not true, he is not a great man nor is he a good teacher, he is an untrustworthy liar and a fraud. Only God has authority over death. Jesus is claiming to be God. If he is not God, then he is an ego-maniac at best, and a totally insane lunatic at worst. It is quite a statement... Jesus says that he is the son of God and that Lazarus' illness is intended to glorify him and to cause the disciples to believe.

We left the story last week with Jesus talking to Martha, Lazarus' sister. Jesus came to Bethany four days after Lazarus had died and was buried. Martha told Jesus that she believed that Jesus could have asked God to spare Lazarus' life, if he had wanted. She then said, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world." These are words of eternal life. Belief through faith. Saved by grace, through faith that is proclaimed in words of belief. Huge. Amazing. Encouraging.

Now let's pick up the story in verse 28-37.

### **Jesus Meets Mary**

In verse 28, Martha concludes her conversation with Jesus and goes to get Mary, who had stayed at the house with the mourners and her friends. The mourning process in the Jewish culture was very serious. There were

things a family was expected to do. Even a poor family needed to hire at least two flute players and one professional mourner when a family member died. Don't ask... cultures change, this just isn't something we are going to understand. But that is how it was. This wasn't a poor family by any means, so there may have been several flute players and professional mourners along with close friends and family. Martha takes Mary aside and tells her that Jesus is asking for her. She goes quickly, outside the village to the place where Martha had met him. The entourage assumed she was going to the tomb to cry, so they went with her. But Mary was going someplace unexpected. She was headed to see Jesus. When she comes to him she drops on her knees and says the same thing her sister had said, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died." Same statement, different context, different personality. It is interesting and significant that John wants us to see the emotional differences in these two women. Both were grieving and hurting deeply. Both made the same declaration of faith in Jesus. Martha was not crying nor on her knees. Mary was undone and deeply expressive.

Could I stop briefly here and say something. Sometimes we read too much into people's emotions. Everyone is different as they express their feelings. The primary difference is in the expression... not the feeling. Do you know what I mean? My wife is more outwardly emotional than I am. She is much more like Mary than Martha. She feels deeply and expresses it outwardly. I am more like Martha. I feel every bit as deeply as my wife.

My emotions run deep, both in joy and in sorrow. I am far less likely to express that outwardly, however. It is just my personality. I love the clear description of these two women. It isn't the central meaning of the passage, it is just a sidelight. But it is helpful in our relationships. Don't make the mistake of believing that people who are not like Mary don't feel the same emotions. Martha is grieving just as powerfully as Mary. She just has a totally different way of expressing it. Good to remember.

Now look at verse 33. The ESV says that when Jesus saw her and the Jews who were with her weeping, he was deeply moved. If you have a pen or pencil, I want you to write this word in above the words "deeply moved"... outraged, or indignant. Here we have a translation decision that changes the intended meaning of the verse significantly. This Greek word is sometimes used to describe the "snorting of horses."<sup>1</sup> Jesus' response was not a feeling of deep compassion for their grief, it was one of deeply felt indignation and anger. That is reinforced at the end of the verse when it says that he was "deeply troubled." But why would he be angry? Likely the best explanation is that in both Mary and the grieving crowd, Jesus saw both a lack of faith and the devastation of sin on the human condition. These people were grieving as those who have no hope. Carson points out that grief that leads to despair is an implicit denial of the resurrection. The best way to think of this is to understand that Jesus is about to show his authority over sin and death. But just prior to that act, he is seeing its full effect on the people he came to die for. Maybe he had thoughts of Satan

staining is creation with sin, maybe he saw the unbelief of those in the crowd, maybe he saw Mary's own brokenness and sin. Whatever it was, Jesus' response to the crowd is indignation.

Jesus then asks Mary, where is Lazarus' body? As Jesus approached the tomb, he wept. Jesus' righteous anger is now merciful compassion. We see indignation and mercy as being incompatible. In our lives, they are. But remember, God is always merciful, grace filled, just, and judge... all at the same time. There is no inconsistency, no struggle, no battle within. Just and the justifier. Jesus wept for his friend, for the horrors of death, for the grief of sin.

And see the response of the Jews. Two distinct camps. One group says, "look at how much he loved him." The others say, "if he could heal a blind man, could he not have healed Lazarus?" In other words, "oh my, look at him cry tears of hypocrisy. He didn't even come when Lazarus was sick. He isn't so great after all." A word of warning here. John is careful to show us two distinct responses to the very same set of facts. Some of us struggle with accepting God's will in difficult situations. Jesus let Lazarus die for a reason. Both Mary and Martha were willing to accept that by faith. They had come to terms with Jesus' claims. They knew he could have healed Lazarus and they trusted his judgment, even in their grief. But the unbelieving Jews did not. They demonstrated their unbelief by questioning Jesus' motives. "See Jesus cry... but is he really crying or is he a hypocrite? Is he simply trying to make us believe he cares? After all, Lazarus died.

Doesn't that make Jesus a fraud or a hypocrite, one of the two. He is not benevolent, he does not have Lazarus' best interests in mind." I hear a lot of that same kind of talk coming from people who profess to be Christians. "God didn't come through." "The people of the church didn't come through." "I suffered loss, I wasn't healed, I didn't get what I wanted," ... and the list goes on. That is what we see in this passage. This kind of talk is a form of unbelief. We must come to terms with Jesus and his claims. Then apply what you know about God to define your situation. If you try to use your situation to define God, you will make a horrible mistake. A mistake that will reveal your depth of unbelief. God is sovereign over all things. Lazarus died. He died for a purpose. To glorify God. But he still died. Remember that when you face serious adversity. Don't question God's motives or his goodness toward us. Don't grumble like the Jews. Trust Jesus in all things.

### **Lazarus Raised From the Dead**

Now let's turn to the last section of this story, verses 38-44. Martha has now joined them, as they walk to the tomb where Lazarus is buried. It is a cave that has a large rock rolled in front of it. It is sealed to keep the stench from coming out. Jesus says, "Take away the stone." But Martha steps in and says, "you may want to rethink that one Jesus. He has been dead for four days, it is very hot here and if you open that cave the stench will be so great you won't even believe it." The King James forever will be my favorite here, as it says, "he stinketh." Once again, I remind you that

this was done for our sake. There is no controversy over whether Lazarus was really dead. That fact is well confirmed in the story. But Jesus wants them focused on his purpose, so he reminds Martha and the crowd, “I told you that if you believed you would see the glory of God.” You already told me you believe, so let’s roll back the rock and you will see what I mean! So, they rolled away the stone and Jesus prayed to his father. Look at this prayer in verse 41-42. *“Father, I thank you that you have heard me. <sup>42</sup> 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.”*

Jesus had clearly settled the matter of Lazarus sometime in the past. “I thank you that you have heard me.” Jesus knew what was going to happen before he ever left for Bethany. This prayer is for the sake of those standing around him. “you always hear me, father.” And he prayed this prayer, so they would believe in him... as God. Think about the application, its deep. As a child of God, as one who is redeemed and adopted into the family of God... you have the same relationship with God. He always hears. Always. Think about this for a second. What does that mean? It means just what it says. Nothing you speak to God is missed, forgotten or misunderstood. He always hears, always responds. We sometime have a hard time hearing His response... but that has to do with us, not Him. What a promise, what a God, what a savior!

Then, in verse 43, Jesus cries out “Lazarus, come out.” It is a command that no man can issue. Only God. Here is truth.



This is a fulfillment of a prophecy that Jesus made in John 5:25, *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. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.* Lazarus was dead. He heard Jesus' voice. He obeyed. Jesus has life in himself. Jesus is the way, the truth and the LIFE, no one can come to the Father except through him.

I told you last week that in the resurrection of Lazarus, Jesus was making the claim to being God incarnate. Here it is... crystal clear. This is authority over death. In Jesus, there is life. Outside Jesus, there is death. Only two choices. In fact, this verse speaks so clearly of Jesus' authority that it has been said that if Jesus had not limited his command by specifically calling out Lazarus' name, every dead person in every burial tomb in the world would have come forth. Jesus has that kind of authority... the ultimate authority over death. And guess what, the Bible tells us that Jesus will issue that command for every single person to come out of their grave at his second coming!!

Then, finally, Jesus commands them, "unbind him and let him go!" Set him free. That doesn't just apply to Lazarus. His resurrection is foreshadowing. It is a prophecy of what is to come. Jesus will die and rise from the dead on that first Easter Sunday. When he does, he will proclaim, "Unbind them all. Let them go!" For every single person who responds to the call of Jesus to believe in him... that is the promise. You will be unbound. You will be set free from bondage to sin and death.

This truth should be shouted from the housetops. Jesus died to set mankind free from the horror of sin and death. I can't imagine why anyone would resist such good news. But they do. Look briefly at the response of those who do not and will not believe.

### **The World's Response (to Being Set Free)**

The most amazing part of this story, in some ways, is the response of those who witnessed the miracle. It shows the depravity of the human heart.

These people have just witnessed one of the most incredible miracles of all time. They have seen a man resurrected from the dead, right before their very eyes. They have seen Jesus confirm that he is God and has authority over death. They have experienced the answer to mans' most vexing fear, the fear of death. But the response is mixed. Verse 45 says that some believed in him. Some put their faith in him. Some... not all, not even the majority.

But, for others Jesus is not a deliverer, he is a threat. Try to comprehend this. Their response is not simply to ignore him, but to fear him, to fear his power, his authority. So, some of the Jews ran to the Pharisees, the conservative religious leaders, and told them what Jesus had done. The Pharisees did not celebrate Jesus declaration of freedom from the fear of death. Instead, they decide to kill him. "If we let him go on like this, the Romans will come and take away our place and our nation."

Unbelievable!! For fear of losing their power and position, they will kill

Jesus. Then look at Caiaphas' statement. It has a double meaning, even though he has no idea... verse 50, *...it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.* God has such a sense of timing and irony. Of course, Caiaphas means that Jesus must die so the nation doesn't get taken away from the Jews. But God has inserted another meaning, a deeper meaning. God says, through Caiaphas, that if Jesus doesn't die, the nation has no hope of survival. Caiaphas is speaking words of rebellion toward God. Yet, with the same words, God is using Caiaphas to speak words of hope and truth to all the nations and those who are scattered abroad.

So, they decide to kill Jesus. Unbelievable. Sin so blinds us that we will openly reject our only hope for survival. Jesus has authority over death. We are dying. Jesus is our only hope of survival. The gospel seems so clear. But not to the religious leaders... not to the people of our world, not to the people of our city. Church attendance in our city is dismal. Like the Jews, we have rejected Jesus and denied his authority. We don't understand. We don't want to understand.

That is why the final words of Jesus to his disciples were the words of the Great Commission. Go and tell them. Baptize those who respond. Teach them to obey all that I have commanded. I am with you... all authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. All authority over death.

We have the good news. Jesus has authority over death. Easter is coming, and we will celebrate Jesus final victory over sin and he will declare, “Unbind them and set them free.” We are free indeed. Thank you, Jesus. Thank you for Lazarus. Thank you for the cross. Thank you for Sunday morning! We owe everything to you!

Let’s pray.

## Endnotes:

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<sup>1</sup> D. A. Carson, [\*The Gospel according to John\*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 415.