**“I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE”**

This morning we’ll be looking at a familiar passage of scripture, John Ch 11, the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Death. It’s a part of life. We can’t escape it. It’s all around us. We see it everywhere. Even on high school campuses and in church services. We see it at funerals. Yes, death is a part of life and everyone in this room has been touched by the sting of death. Eventually, “if the Lord tarries,” we will all experience death ourselves. Death is terrible because it separates us from those we love and care about. Death marks the end of a relationship. No, we’ll never forget the person we lost. We’ll never stop loving them. But, this side of heaven, we’ll never be able to talk to them, to interact with them again. They’re gone. There’s a finality about death. But, lest we forget, death is the direct result of sin. It’s God’s judgment on the world for sin – Adam and Eve’s sin, yes, and our sin. Romans 5:12 says, “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man [Adam], and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.”

In our passage today a good friend of Jesus dies. His name is Lazarus and he is the brother of Mary and Martha who live in Bethany, a small village just east of Jerusalem. Jesus is a good friend of this family and He and His disciples have often been guests in their home. [cover slide] In this picture Jesus is consoling Mary and Martha following their brother’s death. We’ll be reading about this a bit later.

I have another picture to show you. This one is more recent [picture of my dad] This is a picture I took of my father and my aunt consoling each other after their sister, my aunt Leda, passed away. This was in 2012 and she had died of cancer. This picture was taken at her funeral. My dad dearly loved his sister and he was grief stricken when she died. She was a believer in Jesus, so we could all take comfort that she was with the Lord, in a better place, but the pain of her death still hurt my dad deeply. Why? Because he loved her and he missed her. If you talk to him today you’ll realize that the pain he felt from losing his sister still remains. Death is an awful reality, even for believers.

Well on that cheerful note let’s get into our passage and glean some insights from God’s word and find application for our lives.

READ John 11:1-5

Jesus and His disciples are on the east side of the Jordan River ministering there with great success. Ch 10 closes with these words: “many believed in Him there.” So Jesus is about a day’s journey from Bethany when He receives word that Lazarus is sick. V 2 is John’s commentary about who Mary is. Mary is a very common name today as it was in Jesus’ day. When we come to the account of the cross and the resurrection there will be Marys all over the place. So John identifies this particular Mary as the one “who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair.” Even though John won’t actually mention this event until later in Ch 12, two of the other Gospel accounts include it – Matt 26 and Mark 14. And these accounts were written some 30 years before John writes his gospel. So the story about what Mary did would have been well known to the 1st Century reader.

Mary and Martha’s message to Jesus in v 3 is short and sweet – “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” They knew Jesus would know who they were talking about and they hoped that Jesus, once He received it, would return and heal Lazarus. Jesus undoubtedly knew that Lazarus had been quite sick, near death, but if you recall He and the disciples had been forced to leave the area rather abruptly at the end of Ch 10 – “again they (the Jews) sought to arrest Him, but He escaped from their hands.” So the Pharisees’ plans to arrest and kill Jesus were foiled yet again. It was not Jesus time to die yet. The Father’s timetable for Jesus to go to the cross is nearing but it’s not here yet. So Jesus, knowing this, exited Jerusalem and made his way east across the Jordan.

Meanwhile we know from reading ahead that Lazarus is already dead by the time Jesus receives their message. Apparently what happened was shortly after Mary and Martha sent their message to Jesus, Lazarus had died. And Jesus, being the Son of God, is fully aware of this. So it is very interesting what Jesus says in v 4 (READ Jesus’ statement). Bottom line: the purpose for Lazarus’ illness and death is to bring glory to God. Jesus knows that Lazarus is dead but He also knows that Lazarus won’t stay dead. Jesus already knows what He’s going to do.

READ John 11:5 again

V 5, Jesus loves this family with an *agape* love, a divine love.

READ John 11:6-7

Jesus is in no hurry to get back to Bethany where Lazarus is because He knows Lazarus is dead. Instead, Jesus opts to remain 2 more days and continue to minister in the place where He’s at. After 2 days He announces to His disciples, “Let’s go back to Judea” -- Not exactly the news the disciples want to hear. They had just escaped from the wrath of the Jews in Jerusalem. They were safe for now, having success in their ministry. They weren’t in any hurry to head back to Judea, back to the danger zone.

READ John 11:8

“Jesus, are you sure about this? Is going back such a good idea?”

Notice Jesus answer…

READ John 11:9-10

Jesus cites a well-known proverb of His day with an obvious meaning… one does their work while it is daylight and then stops when it gets dark because of the dangers associated with darkness. But Jesus’ application of it goes much deeper. As long as He, the Son, is doing the Father’s will in the Father’s timetable (daytime) He and the disciples will be safe. They’ll be OK. God will continue to protect them from any harm. However, Jesus knows that the time is coming, very soon now, when by God’s design, in His perfect time, Jesus’ earthly ministry will end and He will die (nighttime). This is a sovereignty of God statement. God’s plans and purposes are fixed. “We work while there is daylight. There’s nothing to worry about. Night is coming, the cross awaits. Let’s go!”

READ John 11:11-13

Jesus tells His disciples why they’re going back to Bethany. He knows Lazarus is dead (“fallen asleep”) and He is going to raise Lazarus from the dead (“awaken him”). But the disciples don’t grasp what Jesus is saying…

Note: Paul would later use the same euphemism “fallen asleep” in 1 Cor 11:30, 15:51, 1 Thess 4:13 to describe believers who have died.

The disciples don’t understand so Jesus explains it to them…

READ John 11:14-15

“Look, Lazarus is dead and I’m going to raise him for YOUR sake, to strengthen YOUR faith in Me – so that YOU may believe.” This falls right in line with John’s purpose for writing the Gospel of John: “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.” (Jn 20:31) Jesus is going to Bethany where He will perform one final sign displaying His deity. This sign will show that He really is the Son of God. And there will be a lot of witnesses who see it.

Well, good old Thomas, always the optimist, speaks up…

READ John 11:16

At first this seems like Thomas is just being a pessimist. But I’m going to defend Thomas. I think that this is a bold statement by him. He’s exhorting the disciples to follow Jesus no matter what, even unto death. Thomas is brave. He doesn’t know whether danger awaits or not. But he’s willing to go with Jesus whatever the cost. He is living the truth of Luke 9:23 where Jesus tells His disciples, “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.” So even though Thomas doesn’t have all of the insight that Jesus has, he says to the other disciples, “Come on, guys, let’s go with Him!”

[The song we will sing when we close celebrates this great truth]

So off they go heading west back to Bethany, a day’s journey away…

READ John 11:17-22

The main road from Jericho to Jerusalem goes thru Bethany. It’s fairly well traveled. As Jesus and the disciples approach Bethany, He finds out that Lazarus has already been buried in a tomb. From this information we can piece together a reasonable timetable for Lazarus’ death. It took a day for word to reach Jesus across the Jordan. He stays 2 more days there. Then there’s a day’s journey back to Bethany – 4 days. So Lazarus must have died soon after the messenger left with Mary and Martha’s message for Jesus. We also know that Lazarus must have been buried shortly after his death because v 17 says he’s been in the tomb 4 days.

V 19 mentions that many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary’s home to console them after Lazarus had died. One commentary I read suggested a reason for this. Lazarus was likely a member of a sect of Jews known as the Essenes who worked with the poor. This means he would have been a highly respected man in the Jewish community. Typically a Jewish funeral lasted a week. Family and friends and acquaintances showed up. There were even professional mourners hired. At some point very soon after the person died there was a funeral. The dead body was prepared – wrapped in linen cloths then sprinkled with spices to help abate the odor. The body was then transported in a funeral procession, placed in a grave, a tomb, typically a cave dug out of the natural rock in the side of a hill, possibly a family-owned plot. The grave was sealed shut and the corpse was left to decompose naturally. The Jews did not embalm like the Egyptians. After the funeral there was a meal served to the guests and mourners. People would hang around for several days consoling the family, sharing memories, reminiscing about the person who died. So when Jesus arrives on the scene this is what’s going on.

Martha gets word that Jesus is approaching Bethany. He’s on the outskirts of town. So she goes to meet Him. Apparently Mary doesn’t know this yet. Martha, like Thomas, gets a bad rap because Jesus had rebuked her once before. Luke 10:40-42 Jesus gently rebukes Martha for having her priorities in the wrong place. But in this passage, v 21-22, she exhibits a remarkable understanding of who Jesus is. She knows that Jesus has the power to heal, v 21, and she knows that Jesus power comes from God, v 22. I personally believe, based on the way Jesus responds next, that Martha actually believes that Jesus could, if He wanted to, raise Lazarus from the dead. Not all commentaries I looked at agree with that. But whatever the case she has faith in Jesus and to this He responds…

READ John 11:23-27

Martha not only demonstrates sound theology but she also shows that she has a good eschatology. She is an O.T. saint with an understanding about the resurrection of the dead at the end times. This is mentioned in the O.T. by Job (19:25-26), by Isaiah (26:19) and by Daniel (12:2).

Jesus responds, “I am the resurrection and the life…” This is the fifth of His seven I AM statements in John. Remember the recurring theme of belief that runs thru the gospel of John. Here we see it again in Jesus response to Martha – “Whoever **believes** in Me, though he die [physically], yet shall he live [spiritually], and everyone who lives and **believes** in Me shall never die [basically the truth of John 3:16]. Do you **believe** this?" This is the most important question in the world and the way we answer it has eternal consequences. Martha’s answer is one of the great statements of faith in all the Bible – “Yes, Lord; I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

Well, at this point Martha returns to her house to get Mary…

READ John 11:28-31

Mary immediately leaves to go to Jesus and the Jews follow her. The Jews, enemies of Jesus, might have had ulterior motives in following Mary, but in God’s sovereignty He drew them to go to Jesus so that they would be eyewitnesses of the miracle Jesus was about to perform.

READ John 11:32

Notice that Mary says the same thing to Jesus that Martha had said. This was something they had probably discussed with each other. They believe that Jesus could have prevented Lazarus from dying by healing him. But Jesus doesn’t answer Mary. Instead He surveys the scene, all the tears, the weeping, the sadness.

READ John 11:33

[Jesus] “was deeply moved in His spirit and greatly troubled.” For now remember these words and file them away. I’ll get back to them in a minute.

READ John 11:34-37

A lot of people read these verses and point to the humanity of Jesus. Certainly there is an aspect of that here. On the surface that’s what the Jews see, v 36. They see this man, Jesus, mourning the loss of His good friend. That’s the way death affects people – uncontrollable tears of sadness. We talked about this earlier. In v 37 some of the Jews have a different view of Jesus seeing His tears as tears of regret for not healing Lazarus.

Allow me to go in a different direction than maybe you’ve ever thought about this passage before. I think that what we see on display here, Jesus weeping, is more reflective of His deity than His humanity. Here’s why I say that – Jesus already knows that He’s going to raise Lazarus from the dead. He’s mentioned this, hinted at it a couple of times in our passage. So the pain, the sorrow that most people feel, that finality of death, that separation, the end of a relationship, and so forth, wouldn’t necessarily be there with Jesus. Lazarus is going to walk out of the grave in a few minutes (well it will be next week because we won’t get to that today). I contend that there is something else driving Jesus to weep. Go back to v 33. Something is greatly moving Jesus, but it is also deeply troubling Him. And it may be something that you haven’t thought of before. And it’s this thought that we’re going to close with this morning. We’ll get Lazarus out of the grave next week.

Here standing nearby Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus are all these people and they are all weeping. Why are they so sad? Why are they weeping? Because their friend and brother, Lazarus, is dead. Jesus sees the big picture. Why is it that He left the glory of heaven and came and has been living on this earth for the past 33 years, walking on dusty roads, sweating in the dry climate of Israel, hungering, being tempted, suffering physically and emotionally, being rejected by many, being reviled? And on top of all that He is about to go thru unimaginable pain with the crucifixion. Why has Jesus come and why go thru all this? To be the Savior. To die on the cross for the sins of the world. You see, sin messed so many things up that were not a part of God’s original creation. Sin produced among other things the sting of death, which is on full display here. So Jesus weeps. Not for Lazarus, but for the lost, hurting sinful sea of humanity. He weeps for the world that He came to save. Jesus looks around and sees the results of sin, what it’s produced, the pain and suffering. In this crowd are the Jews. Many of these same Jews have openly rejected Jesus as their Messiah, as the Son of God. They’ve been hostile to Jesus. Also in this crowd are some who have believed in Jesus, like Martha and Mary and the disciples. Most of the people in this crowd, frankly are apathetic toward Jesus. These are the nameless, faceless people on the periphery. But they are not nameless and faceless to Jesus. They matter too. Jesus is on a divine mission. He came down from heaven to earth for a reason. He’s getting ready to go to the cross and to die for ALL of these people. Why? So that ALL will have the opportunity to have eternal life and ALL have a chance to escape the fires of hell. If only they’ll believe. QUOTE John 3:16

I want to leave you with this thought about Jesus and His tears. Personalize it. How could God love me that much? Why would the Father send His Son, Jesus, to die for me? It’s mind boggling! So this week I just want you to meditate on this glorious thought, wrap your mind around that truth and we’ll see Jesus raise Lazarus’ next week.