

Find Life in the Son: God at the Graveside John 11:28-44

Introduction

Recent Facebook post (CiCi Emerson)

“In 1999 we promised with words and rings to have and to hold, for better for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do us apart.

12 years later I slipped that ring off his hand and kissed him goodbye this side of heaven.

12 years at his side, 12 years without him.”

“Make no mistake grief is vicious. It bites and snaps and breathes down your neck with whispers of fear. But after 12 years, maybe I can offer some perspective. You see the Enemy means everything for evil but God means everything for good. EVERYTHING. Not the "good" we traditionally think of but the good that makes you long for heaven. And that longing makes you fight sin in a way that makes the Enemy nervous. Nervous because he's realizing that neither life or death will separate you from the love of God.”

How can we be so sure God cares for us this way even when we step into the deep darkness of death's shadow?

For one thing, it is the unavoidable conviction that comes from Scriptures like John 11.

1. Illness to the Glory of God (1-4)
2. Delay, Death, and Danger to the Furtherance of Faith (5-16)
3. Faith in the Certain Promise of Resurrection (17-27)

We take up this remarkable account in John 11 again this morning beginning in verse 28:

28 When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." **29** And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. **30** Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. **31** 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. **32** 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." **33** 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. **34** And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." **35** Jesus wept. **36** So 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 also have kept this man from dying?"

38 Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. **39** 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." **40** Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" **41** So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. **42** 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." **43** When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." **44** 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."

1. Shares in Our Grief (28-38)
2. Calls for Our Faith (39-42)
3. Reverses Our Death (43-44)

1. Shares in Our Grief (28-38)

28 When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." **29** And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him.

Jesus' personal concern for both Martha and Mary shows itself here, as does Mary's deep trust in Jesus in the middle of her overwhelming grief.

When days are sunny and life is easy, it is easy to lose our sense of how badly we need Jesus. But when great grief overtakes us, His call for us to come to Him draws our hearts to Him. "When all around my soul gives way, He then is all my hope and stay."

32 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."

Mary's words echo those of her sister, Martha. The "if only's" of life haunt us in the day of our calamity. If you trust God and love God, you want God to intervene and you expect Him to do so. It can shake us when He does not. The ever-nagging question "Why?" tears at our hearts. Mary's statement shows her confidence that Jesus could have healed her brother. Most of our rescues from death come before death takes us. But this event in Jesus' ministry will demonstrate that He can rescue us even after we've died.

33 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.

Mary's weeping and that of the Jews with her touched the heart of Jesus deeply. *God is not unmoved by our sorrow. Nor is He impervious to our tears.* Even though Jesus is going to raise Lazarus within the hour, He does not dismiss the weeping of these mourners as foolish. He does not remain aloof. No, He grieves with them.

"Deeply moved"—carries the idea of being indignant. Why would Jesus respond this way?

He knows best how death violates and mocks our dignity and worth as human beings. It is the last enemy to be destroyed (1 Corinthians 15). So Jesus is indignant with the humiliation, the deep pain, and crushing sorrow that sin and its curse of death have brought down upon human beings made in God's image to live forever. He came to destroy the works of Satan, the lying serpent who deceived and seduced our first parents. Satan murdered the human race that day in the Garden when Adam and Eve listened to his lies. Jesus knew better than anyone else alive what paradise had been like before sin and death brutalized the race.

"Greatly troubled"—great emotion to the point of shaking uncontrollably

34 And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." **35** Jesus wept. **36** So 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 also have kept this man from dying?" **38** Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.

John underscores again the emotion Jesus felt as He comes to the tomb. Tears stream down His own face as others sob and cry out. Surely Jesus could have kept Lazarus from dying. They can still remember what He did for the man born blind only a few months earlier. They did not understand yet that Jesus can do more than just pull someone back from the brink of death. He can bring him up from the grave. Again He is deeply moved—indignant with the brutal pain of it all. He weeps with those who weep, just as Romans 12:15 commands us to do.

This response is not uncharacteristic of Jesus. God in human flesh feels with us and takes action on our behalf.

Matthew 9:36

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because there were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

When Jesus looked out over the city of Jerusalem He wept over its rejection of Him and the devastation that was coming upon them when the Romans destroy the city.

And for those who belong to Him He has special sympathy as He intercedes for them.
Hebrews 4:15-16

15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. **16** Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

No wonder Isaiah 53 prophesied of the coming Messiah that He would be "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (v. 3) Isaiah would exclaim, "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" (v. 4).

Matthew 8:16-17

16 That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. **17** This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases."

The earthly ministry of Jesus over and over again demonstrated the deep compassion

Jesus has for hurting people, along with His decisive action to heal the cause of the pain, and this scene is no exception.

God at the graveside shares in our grief.

Applications

- When you come to Jesus with your sorrows, what kind of reception do you think He gives you, given His response in John 11?
- What are helpful ways you can share in the grief of your brothers and sisters in Christ that would reflect His compassion?

2. Calls for Our Faith (39-42)

³⁹ 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." ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² 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."

So why does Jesus give the command to take away the stone? If He has the power to raise the dead, and He does, He certainly could tell

the stone to move on its own. If He doesn't have the power to raise the dead, then there's no reason to move the stone and open the tomb. Clearly Martha is not sure yet what Jesus is going to do, hence her concern for the stench of the decaying body. But Jesus answers her concern with a call to faith. He has told her He is the resurrection and the life and has asked whether she believes that those who believe in Him will live and never die. She has declared that she believes. Here He links faith to seeing the glory of God. You want to see the shining splendor of God's compassionate and powerful character? Then you must believe. "Move the stone," Jesus says, "and then trust me, you will see what amazing things God does."

So why didn't He move the stone Himself? I believe He is calling for active faith in what He commands even when we aren't sure what He's going to do. Jesus calls for an act of faith that somehow moving the stone is going to lead to something greater. He calls for faith to see the glory of God.

And then He prays to the Father to show to those observing that what He is about to do is according to the power and will of God the Father. "You have heard me, and You always do." Those who were grieving that day need to know that God the Father listens to God the Son when He prays. We need to know

that, too, for Jesus intercedes for His own to this day.

Romans 8:34

Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Hebrews 7:25

Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

What Jesus does is what God desires. What Jesus does is what God does. You want to know what God thinks of human suffering and death? Pay attention to what Jesus does here. He calls for us to trust Him to deal with our death in a way that shines out His glorious, powerful love and compassion for human beings struck down by it. God at the graveside calls for our faith.

Applications

- Why is faith in Christ's loving power to rescue us from the grave critical to our hope of salvation?
- How does knowing Jesus is ever interceding before the Father for you shape your view of the troubles you are facing right now?

- What actions of faith in Jesus is God calling you to exercise for His glory?

3. Reverses Our Death (43-44)

⁴³ When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out."

⁴⁴ 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."

In the beginning God spoke, and out of nothing came everything. Here Jesus speaks, and life pours into the dead body of Lazarus. He rises to his feet and shuffles to the open door of the tomb, where the bystanders free him from his linen wrappings.

A year and half earlier Jesus has already declared that He has this level of power and authority.

John 5:21

For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.

John 5:25-29

²⁵ "Truly, truly, I say to you, 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. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. ²⁷ And he has given him

authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸ Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

What Jesus does with Lazarus is what He's going to do with us. And in between, He Himself rises from the dead after three days and three nights in the tomb. Without the resurrection there is no good news, no real gospel. If death remains victorious, we have lost, sin has utterly destroyed us, and there is no hope. We are forever prisoners of our mortal bodies. But this Jesus, the Messiah, has conquered death in real history, observed by eyewitnesses. Death loses. Jesus wins. We win.

It's not just that one day we will figure out a way to keep people from dying. Even with all our medical advances we are still centuries short of the lifespans in the dawn of human history before the flood. But even then every human being's story ends with "and he died." *Jesus is not just going to end death. He's going to reverse it.* Death has mowed down billions of human souls. Jesus will raise to eternal life every single one of them who has trusted Him to save him or her from sin and death.

Your believing loved ones you've laid in the grave—their faces, words, and deeds remain etched in your memory—death will be forced to give them up, and life will surge through them again forever.

Just out of curiosity this week, I got wondering whether you could still go to the cave where Abraham and Sarah were buried. Sure enough, the "Cave of the Patriarchs" is still there in the area of Hebron in the west bank. There are even services still held there by Muslims and Jews. That will not always be the case.

Bodies that have been moldering in tombs and graves marked and unmarked all over the globe, Christ will raise new, more alive than ever, never to die again. All the ravages of death will be gone.

Applications

- How can knowing Jesus will completely reverse and remove whatever death has done to us help you face its current impact on you?
- Jesus spoke, and Lazarus came to life. What does that tell you about the power of God's word to produce miraculous change?
- What areas in your life or the lives of those around you need the resurrection

power of Christ at work (Ephesians 1:19-20)?

Conclusion

God at the Graveside

1. Shares in Our Grief (28-38)
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Facebook post continued

“So use that [your] grief to whisper back to the Enemy

‘you are weak and you will not use this to change how I believe or Who[m] I serve’. . . and let it keep you in the all satisfying, comforting, strong arms of Jesus where you will find hope and rest.”

Closing Song: There’s an Everlasting Kindness

Applications Summary

- When you come to Jesus with your sorrows, what kind of reception do you think He gives you, given His response in John 11?
- What are helpful ways you can share in the grief of your brothers and sisters in Christ that would reflect His compassion?
- Why is faith in Christ’s loving power to rescue us from the grave critical to our hope of salvation?

- How does knowing Jesus is ever interceding before the Father for you shape your view of the troubles you are facing right now?
- What actions of faith in Jesus is God calling you to exercise for His glory?
- How can knowing Jesus will completely reverse and remove whatever death has done to us help you face its current impact on you?
- Jesus spoke, and Lazarus came to life. What does that tell you about the power of God's word to produce miraculous change?
- What areas in your life or the lives of those around you need the resurrection power of Christ at work (Ephesians 1:19-20)?