

### **John 11:17-53**

This text is all about preparation.

#### **First Jesus prepares the very ones who hated Him to carry out His will and deliver him up to death.**

At other times Jesus withdraws. He withdraws from Jerusalem, he withdraws from the crowds when they seek to stone him or confront him, but that is only because it was not yet his hour. Now the hour has come. The Lord especially prepares this miracle the raising of Lazarus to bring the confrontation to a head.

Notice in verse 18 and 19, "Bethany was near Jerusalem," and again "many of the Jews had come." Why does John record these facts? It's not simply for geography's sake. He is making a point, a point that the Jewish leadership was watching and saw what happened. It was only about two miles from Jerusalem. This happened right in their backyard. The Jewish leadership could not help but know what went down here.

"Many of the Jews" – does that make sense? They were all Jews, Mary, Martha and Lazarus, their friends and family, Jesus and his disciples, everyone who was there was ethnically Jewish. But John often uses the term "the Jews" as a reference to the Jewish leadership. We might often do the same thing, "the republicans" did this or that or "the Democrats" even though many of us are one or the other. We still might use the term to refer to the leaders, as John does the Jews.

So representatives of the Jewish leadership were there and saw what happened. Now if we skip down to verse 45 and 46, here we have the reaction of those "Jews" - some believe but some went and told.

This is a very odd distinction to make. Usually those who believe are the ones who go and tell. In this case though it is the ones who do not believe who go and tell what happened. This is an important reminder that knowledge does not equal faith. We often make that mistake. But here you have a group of people who saw Jesus raise someone from the dead. They go and tell other people about it, and yet they do not believe in Jesus. They acknowledge the miracle but refuse to accept Jesus as the Messiah. Faith is more than knowledge, that is something we are going to come back to in a minute.

But the important point here is the division. This miracle was done on purpose by Christ to create this division. As we saw last week in the miracle of the feeding of the 5000, it separates those who believe from those who will not believe. And it prepares both groups for their role in the upcoming events of Holy week.

For the unbeliever that role is to be those who would crucify the Lord of Glory. And the raising of Lazarus brings them to that point where the time is ready and they are now ready to do it.

Another group that is prepared for their role is the crowds that were coming to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. The wishey washy back forth crowds, that since the time of Elijah even to today can't make up their minds what the truth is and whom to follow and who is God and what is truth.

Elijah had the same problem one day he shows the crowds a miracle and they all proclaim "the Lord is God," the next day the Queen declares, "I'm going to kill Elijah" and they all return to the worship of Baal. Even today the crowds will follow whoever is most charming or whoever gives them the most promises.

And so one of the very first symbols of the church was the anchor, reminding us that we should not be tossed back and forth by every fad or teaching that comes along. And how do we avoid that, by being firmly grounded in the true teaching.

But this crowd also has a role to play, because even though the Lord will die to the jeering of the crowd it is the will of the Father that Jesus ride into Jerusalem to the cries of Hosanna. And so the death and resurrection of Lazarus and seen and witnessed and talk about. And many in Jerusalem go out to meet Lazarus and to hear about how Jesus raised him from the dead, and because of this they wait eagerly for him with palm branches and songs of Hosanna on Palm Sunday.

But their faith is temporary and fleeting. One day they cry Hosanna and the next crucify him.

But this is not what Jesus wants for his disciples, and so we see a third group who is prepared by the events of Lazarus resurrection. Prepared for the events that will take place not only during holy week but beyond throughout their lives.

This group is represented in this text by Martha. And the Lord prepares her and them and us for a life of faith, faith that is more than the knowledge of the Pharisees, and more than the wishy washy emotionalism of the crowds. The lesson He has for the true believer is three fold.

1. The Glory of God is not found in the glory of man it is found in the cross.
2. Faith will wait on the word of God.
3. The end result of the faith that waits is life.

**1. The Glory of God is not found in the glory of man it is found in the cross.**

**John 11:17 <sup>17</sup> So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days.**

Why does Jesus allow Lazarus to die?

And here we come back again to that topic we have been thinking about the last couple weeks, the fact that God is a hidden God. Another way to say almost the same thing is the term “the theology of the Cross”

The term “hidden God” is a bit more vague, it only mentions the fact that God does not show himself in all of his glory, he at least partially hides himself. When we talk about the hidden God we mean hidden only in the way that a father plays hide and seek with his 2 year old son.

The term “theology of the cross” speaks about how He hides himself, that is that he is to be found in pain and suffering, “take up your cross and follow me.” God is found in the humble things of this world.

What right does God have to kill Lazarus just to show off his power?

This is a legitimate question because under certain circumstances it would make God into a monster. We could use the example of a doctor who wants to find a cure for a certain disease so he purposely injects the disease into children. Even though the end is good the means is evil and such a doctor is correctly labeled a monster. But the key there is the cause, what is the cause of the pain and suffering?

Here the scripture is clear, God is not the cause. God allows evil and pain and suffering. He uses it, sometimes it is even according to his plan that it happens, but He is never the cause. The cause of death and all suffering is man. Man sinned and thence came death.

So the better analogy is the doctor whose patient is sick and perhaps the doctor does not give him pain killers, or even sometime the doctor might do something painful like cut into his head or re-break his leg, because he knows that ultimately it is better for that man in this way to have pain for a little while, but in the end have something better.

So yes God is still good, even though he allows Lazarus to die, even though he allows suffering and pain, because through it he brings something much better, and because although He uses it, he is not the cause of it.

Even in the case of Job, even then God was not the cause. You have to remember that Job like all of us was born a sinner. God is trying to fix that, God is a doctor trying to cure this disease of the soul.

What good thing does bring from Lazarus death and resurrection. He shows his power over death so that we might have confidence in our death. He increases the faith of His disciples. He confronts the Jews forcing them to make a choice between him and themselves. All this he accomplishes through the death of one man.

This is why it is so important that when we pray for earthly things we pray, “your will Father,” Mary and Martha prayed that their brother would be healed but God’s will was for something so much greater. Which points Jesus makes to Martha when He says, “If you would believe you would see the glory of God.”

## 2. Faith will wait on the word of God.

**John 11:39-40** <sup>39</sup> Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been *dead* four days." <sup>40</sup> Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?"

What does Jesus say to Martha, "If you would believe, you would see the Glory of God."

That is a conditional sentence, the apodosis ( the result ) pivots on the faith of Mary. That doesn't necessarily mean the negative is true, "if you don't believe you won't see"

There are many there who don't believe and yet do see. But it at least leaves the door open, there is the possibility of not seeing, if there is no faith.

However and this is very important it is not the **work of God** that is dependent on Martha's faith. Neither the power of God, nor the works of God are dependent on Man's faith. Jesus calls Lazarus forth by the power of his word NOT by the power of Martha's faith.

But Martha's actions were dependant on her faith, to come to the tomb, to roll away the stone, to wait and watch. If Martha because of unbelief refused to roll away the stone, it wouldn't have stopped Jesus but it might have meant that Martha would not get the chance to see and participate in the miracle.

Noah is another excellent example of this. The ark did not save him, the power of God saved him, but if through unbelief he had not built the ark then he would not have been saved. The water of baptism does not save us, the Word of God saves us, yet if through unbelief you reject the baptism than the Word of God is not there to bring you salvation.

And so we are reminded that works follow faith, and yet it is not the work that save. The power of God saves. The word of God saves. The word and the power work through faith. Yet how can you say, "I believe Lord," and then refuse to act in accordance to that word. If you do not act as the word directs than you do not believe the word that was spoken to you.

Martha is the perfect example. The word of God said to her roll away the stone. Her rational said, no way the body will stink. What will Martha do? If she trusts Jesus, ie has faith, she will act according to his word. If she does not trust, she will act in the way she thinks best. Her action shows her faith.

And so faith waits and works according to the word of God, sometimes all that God's word asks of us is to wait. Sometimes it has much harder tasks for us. But those who believe the promises God speaks will gladly do and wait according to the Word for the sake of the glory that follows.

And what is that end result?

## 3. The end result of the faith that waits is life.

**John 11:25-26** <sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. <sup>26</sup> "And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

What does Jesus say? "I am the resurrection and the life"

Sometimes it is very hard for people to care about the life to come when so much of what is right here before us demands so much of our time and attention.

We might feel guilty even today on this Easter morning, as we may think we are not excited enough, or happy enough. We should be more excited right? Here we have the celebration of the day when Jesus rose from the dead. How can we not be more excited about that?

There was a man on a train in India. He told me how when he was young he applied many times to get a visa to come to the US, but always he was denied. Finally he gave up. Later he had the opportunity to go on business, and his visa would have surely been approved but he decided that he did not want to go anymore. He didn't want to come to the US because if he knew what he was missing it would be harder for him to live in India.

We have the opposite problem because we don't know what we are missing we are too likely to care more about this earthly life.

My confirmation students were asking me questions about what heaven is like the other day. What can I tell them? I haven't been there. Have you ever tried to explain color to a blind person? Not just someone who is blind but someone who has been blind from birth. How can you do it? Similarly how can God describe heaven to us?

Jesus knew what he was missing. He knew how much better life with God was to life on this earth. Which is why he doesn't even care at all about this life. He keeps saying of people that are dead, they are only sleeping. He uses the term death and life multiple times in verses 24 and 25 but he isn't talking about this life is he.

He is saying to us why do you keep worrying about the death of your body, can you not understand that what I offer you is far greater. Trust me, and I will give you life eternal, and not eternal life in this body with the pain and suffering and difficulties, but life eternal with God the Father in paradise.

So yeah it's hard to get excited for a vague promise about a future life we don't understand and can't imagine. But we have this promise from Christ, a promise that was proved true when Jesus rose from the dead. And on that day, we will rejoice and we will see and understand, not as Paul says "in part" vaguely as we do now, but fully. And so we sit and wait in faith, and as we wait we look around and worry about the things around us. And we meet friends and we lose friends, and family passes on.

For now God is hidden in word and sacrament, but then he shall be revealed.

For now we wait, but then we shall rejoice.

Martha believed and received the result of trusting in the Lord, the life of her brother. We believe and will receive life eternal. Amen

**The Peace of our Lord Jesus Christ live in your hearts and minds, now and in eternity.**