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Time, Death and the Victorious Life

John 11:7-16

Intro: Heb 4:12 says that, “the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword...” It’s living and powerful. This means that you can read the Bible every day and after 100 yrs, still learn something new in the reading of it. It’s living and it’s powerful and its also very profound; not just the exciting parts but even in passages that seem to be fairly mundane. Let’s read a few such passages from the OT: Deut 6:10-17, 8:2-3; Ex 3:4-6. These few seemingly dull passages were actually used by Jesus to counter the best temptations Satan could muster (Mt 4) and debunk the Sadducees long held bad theology concerning death and the afterlife. The primary interpretation of these passages may seem pretty humdrum but the truth each one conveys is applicable to all areas of this life. This is why Paul can say in II Tim 3:16 that, “All Scripture...is profitable...”

I said all this to point out that there are 3 such statements made in our text today that, on the surface, don’t seem to be too exciting but, upon deeper study, will reveal some very profound meanings and some very important practical applications for believers and unbelievers like.

7-10- Throughout his Gospel, John shows an unusual interest in the concept of time. In the first 2 chapters, he gives us a play-by-play of the opening week of Christ’s public ministry. He’s also careful to include specific time references alongside important events in the Lord’s ministry, mainly Jewish holidays that help anchor the story to the calendar. In fact, one of the most important words in this Gospel is “time” when used in connection with Christ’s death and resurrection, “My hour has not yet come...” (2:4) or “His hour had not yet come...” (7:30; 8:20). In light of this truth, maybe we should be asking ourselves some pointed questions: What do I do with my time? Is my time used wisely? Who controls it? Do I really trust God to give me the time needed to do the work that needs to be done?

From this perspective, our questions about time actually become a test of our trust in God. That’s exactly how it’s introduced in our text. Note: Jesus doesn’t say, “Let’s go to Bethany.” He says, “Let’s go to Judea again.” Why?

He was deliberately using a word that would remind the 12 of what awaited them in the area around Jerusalem. This is where Jesus' staunchest enemies lived. This is where they almost stoned Him. Is it wise to go back there right now?

By presenting the matter this way, Jesus was testing His disciples to see if they really trusted God to order their lives and to see if they were really willing to spend whatever time they had left in service to Jesus.

Were they willing? They seem to be (16). Whether they were willing or not, they certainly recognized the danger (8). But, it's in times of danger that we really need to trust God so we can learn from these men. Whatever the danger, it's better to be with Jesus. Whatever the outcome, it's comforting to know that our times are controlled by God.

Of course, their willingness to go doesn't mean the 12 understood the issues involved. They still feared the religious rulers. They hadn't yet learned that all of Jesus' times (& theirs) were divinely determined. So Jesus began to teach them about time. He does so with a question (9) meant to get them thinking. What does this have to teach us?

1) God gives each of us a certain amount of time and nothing can shorten it. Our lives cannot end before their time. Jesus' life wasn't going to be cut short by His enemies 1 minute before the time appointed by the Father. Neither will ours! I'm not going to die too soon. You're not either. If we're God's children, He's given us a certain number of days, and we will live every last one of them. Thus, we need not fear what people can do to us.

Of course, if prolonging our life is up to us – be fearful. Be cautious, stay off the roads, eat only healthy foods and get regular medical checkups. In fact, just to play it safe, just move into the hospital. Don't anger anyone, they may try to kill you and for Pete's sake, don't take a stand on anything – it may be your undoing! If God's not in control and you are, then be very fearful. On the other hand; if God orders the length of your days and if nothing can cut them short, then you can be as bold to serve Him as Jesus was. In God's will and plan, we are indestructible!

2) There's enough time for everything that needs to be done. This means we don't need to be frantic. When we find ourselves constantly "out of time" then we need to recognize that it's not of God. We need to establish

priorities in our lives. If we have 20 hours of work to do and only 16 hours to do it in, we need to know that 4 hours of that “work” was not given to us by God and we shouldn’t do it. What activities are dispensable? Unfortunately, when we’re busy, we tend to drop the most important things: personal Bible study, prayer, worship and fellowship with other believers.

But, we could just stop wasting our time on things that are not helpful or are downright destructive. If we’re frantic, it’s our own fault and we should reorder our priorities. We have sufficient time for all God’s given us to do.

3) Though we have sufficient time, we only have that time and it should not be wasted. Time is precious. Nothing can lengthen it. Thus, it must be used wisely. The Apostle Paul is constantly reminds us to be “redeeming the time” or making the most of every opportunity “because the days are evil” ([Eph 5:16](#); [Col 4:5](#)). Only one life, t’will soon be past. Only what’s done for Christ will last.

“The light of this world” has a physical sense: the sun. It also has a spiritual sense: Jesus. He’s the sun in whose light one can walk and not stumble. Without Him, we are in darkness. Are you in darkness or do you walk with Christ who is the light of the world?

8-15- What did Jesus think about death? He was well acquainted with death, especially His own soon to be. How did He regard it? His view on death is important. He had information we don’t have so His view should instruct our own.

We should know that Christ’s answer to this question is two-fold depending on whether the death is that of a believer or a non-believer. On the death of an unbeliever, Jesus’ view was not encouraging. In fact, He warned men against dying in this condition. To die without faith in Christ as your Savior is to enter hell, according to Jesus. He spoke of it as a place of “eternal fire” and “eternal punishment” where there was “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” He spoke of the anguish and torment of the rich man who died in his sins and went to Hades. It was never a pleasant picture.

The reason for this sternness is not hard to find. The Bible teaches that death is a separation and the death of an unbeliever is a separation of the soul and the spirit from God. God is light. So a separation from God in death means darkness. God is also the source of all good gifts. So, death means a complete and eternal deprivation of those good gifts. It’s this reality, not

just the suffering alone, that makes death the fearful thing it is for unbelievers.

But, concerning the death of a believer, Jesus' words are most encouraging. He spoke of entering into paradise or Abraham's bosom. He spoke of a place filled with many mansions that He's going to prepare for those who followed Him. In our text, He called death "sleep" and said He was glad that it happened to His friend Lazarus. This is a striking statement! How can Jesus be glad? How can death possibly be a cause for rejoicing?

1) Jesus was *glad* because Lazarus was a believer and He understood what the death of a believer was. It wasn't to be feared – it was a homecoming! He calls it sleep which not only implies *it's not to be feared* but is to be seen as *something beneficial*. What is sleep, after all? Sleep is harmless – so is death, for a believer. David understood this, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil" (**Ps 23:4**). For the believer, death is only a shadow but it's only so because the grim reality of death and all its horrors was laid on our Good Shepherd.

Death is separation from God. This is what Jesus bore for those who are His sheep. He was separated from the Father so that for us, death might just be a shadow. This is why death is harmless for the believer. Jesus has tasted death fully in the place of those who believe on Him. He was struck for us so that we might be safe (saved) in Him.

Sleep is restful. It's a relief from the work of the day. So is death for the believer. That's not to say that there won't be work to do in heaven. There will be plenty of activity (b/c God is active), but it will be restful in the sense that it will be done without toil. Without the strain, labor and sorrow that work involves in this life because of the curse of sin.

Sleep is temporary. We sleep to rise again. Death for a believer is also temporary. We die, but we do so in order to rise to a world prepared for us by our heavenly Father. On the spiritual level, death is so temporary that it can barely be described by time-words at all. How long is death? It has no duration. It is a passage from this world to the next. It's a doorway. Thus, "to be absent from the body" is "to be (immediately) present with the Lord" (**II Cor 5:8**). Death for a believer is merely a gateway into God's presence, into a life lived in His eternal day. Since this is what death is, it's no wonder Jesus could say, "Lazarus is dead, and I am glad..."

2) Jesus was also *glad* because He knew He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead (11b). Death could not exist in the presence of Jesus. There's no indication in Scripture that Jesus ever met a dead person and failed to raise them. Jesus never met a funeral He didn't stop. But here's the thing: Jesus can raise the dead, but only He can do it. No one else can. Only the voice of the divine Christ can call forth life in resurrection. Has that voice called you?

3) Jesus was *glad* because He knew this resurrection would strengthen the faith of many, starting with the 12 (15b).

The disciples faith was to be strengthened. The faith of Martha and Mary was to be strengthened. In fact, many at the time who didn't even have faith would come to have faith in Jesus as a result of this amazing resurrection.

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you also have been resurrected by Him, at least in a spiritual sense. You are as much a new creation as Lazarus was about to be. We need to ask ourselves: do we live our lives as a resurrected one among the millions who are spiritually dead? Do we live in such a way as to give them a preview of eternal life in action that may compel at least some of them to come to faith in Jesus Christ too? If we live our lives in such a way that others can see our resurrection, then Jesus will be able to express a similar joy in us?

16- Shakespeare wrote, "The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones." This is a fitting statement for our last point since it is made by a famous disciple, or should I say infamous! Better known as Doubting Thomas; forever labeled as such because he failed to believe the report of the resurrection of Jesus. We tend to forget that the other disciples also refused to believe the initial report until they'd seen Jesus for themselves. We should gain a better perspective of Thomas if for no other reason than what he says right here in our text.

Jesus just announced His intention to return to the area of Jerusalem and had reminded the disciples of the danger that awaited there. The danger was real and the disciples were understandably frightened. His enemies had tried to stone Him on several occasions and in different places. But the opposition at Jerusalem had been extremely fierce; and the last incident, which had only taken place a few weeks before, was the most frightening of

all. Jesus actually left Jerusalem for the area of the Jordan River because of this dangerous climate. Now He's going back and the 12 were nervous again. They knew they couldn't stop or dissuade Jesus if He was determined to return but what were they going to do? "What'll happen to Jesus if He goes back? He'll probably die? What'll happen to us? The same!" There may've been an awkward pause but finally 1 disciple spoke up with precisely the right words for the occasion.

This was hardly a cheery statement. It was fatalistic and grim. So much for looking on the bright side of things! But, Thomas' words were at least honest: the way to Jerusalem was the way to death. They were also loyal. Thomas was saying, in effect, that no matter what lay ahead, it was better to be with Jesus. This is always true. Thomas' words were also courageous. He was literally declaring his willingness to walk with Jesus into the lion's den.

Thomas' stance here is just another expression of the important biblical principle of death and denial - of dying to yourself, of saying *no* to yourself and to the world so that you might say *yes* to Jesus. Being a disciple means you must deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus. [Gal 2:20](#) speaks to this as an on going process.

This is an important principle for all believers but we don't naturally want to fit into it. Who wants to die? No one! Who wants to deny himself? Who wants to turn down a chance to fulfill their desires? No one! We live in a world that says no to nothing. No is unpopular. But this is where Christianity begins, in a sense, and it's the only way that victory in the Christian life is established. Thus, to know victory in the Christian life we must become like Thomas. Like him we hear Christ's call and like him we are keenly aware of many other things that we would rather do or become. But, we must not do them. Like Thomas we must turn our backs on these things and choose to follow Jesus.

What does death and denial mean? Initially, it means salvation. We recognize we are spiritually dead and deny that we can do anything to save ourselves and thus, turn to Jesus for salvation. But the concept doesn't end there. Death and denial for the believer means saying no to anything that is contrary to God's will and way for us. Specifically, it means saying no to anything that's contrary to God's revelation of Himself (anything contrary to

the Bible). It means saying no to anything that would take God's rightful place in our lives. "How do I know if I do that?" How do you know you're not doing it right now? The only possible way to remain in the truth is to learn the truth and know it. That's why we're so insistent on reading, teaching and understanding the Bible: so we can live according to it not contrary to it!

Death and denial also means saying no to anything that's not the will of God for us. "How can I learn to say no?" Watch Jesus, follow Him. He's the supreme example of self-denial, He even said no to the glories of heaven so that He could become man and die for our salvation. We can learn from Him. "How can I know when I have said no?" When you stop complaining. If you're murmuring, like Israel murmured in the wilderness, then you have not really turned your back on Egypt. But if you've stopped murmuring, then you're ready to go on with Christ ([Phil 3:13-14](#)).

We must die to ourselves in order that we might properly live for Jesus. When we give up trying to run our own lives or when we give up those things that seem so precious and so utterly indispensable to us, then (and only then) do we find the true joy of being a Christian and enter into lives so freed from the obsessions that we can hardly understand from that point on how they could have had such a strong hold on us. That's the difference between a joyless Christian and a joyful Christian, between one that's defeated and one that's victorious. The joyful Christian has found satisfaction in whatever God dispenses to him and is truly satisfied, for he's said no to anything that might keep him from the richness of God's own blessing and presence, and has truly risen into a new life.

Victory in Jesus starts with saying no: to self, to the world, to anything or anyone who would try to take the rightful place of God in your life. to put it simply, we just don't have time for that. We have work to do and time is running out.

One last thing: notice that Thomas was not only willing to deny himself so that he could follow Jesus; he also invited others to do the same! Let us also go... He wanted the others to do as he did. It's unfortunate that Thomas is known mainly for doubting because, when it came down to brass tacks – he was willing to put his life at risk to follow Jesus.

Are we willing to do the same? It always better to be with Jesus! 😊