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The Faith of Jesus

John 11:36-44

Intro: Today we are finally going to deal with the raising of Lazarus from the dead. This is the climatic miracle of John's Gospel by any standard of measurement. It's the last of 7 miracles recorded and it appears just before the beginning of the Lord's final week of ministry. It's the longest and most elaborately described of the miracles in this book and the resulting fallout from this miracle is more significant. More than any of His other miracles by far, this one will increase the determination of the religious leaders to eliminate Jesus once and for all. But, beyond all of this, the greatest significance of this miracle is in what it portrays to us spiritually. This miracle is a perfect picture of how a man or woman who is dead in sin is brought to spiritual life by Jesus Christ. As we have seen, the contents of this chapter can be studied for what they have to teach us about sin, faith, the power of Christ and evangelism.

But, before we dive right into the miracle itself, we must pause to look at 2 important verses [36-37](#).

[36-37](#)- Just coming off of our study of [vs35](#) (Jesus wept) where we saw that Jesus took this opportunity to enter into the sorrow and suffering of humanity, that He was not above grief, not ashamed to reveal His own humanity or be identified with those who are hurting. In this verse we see both the love of Jesus and the compassion of the Father for a fallen race that suffers the consequences of their own sin and rebellion. Now we turn to study the reactions of those who were present and who witnessed these emotions of Jesus and the conclusions that they drew from it.

Clearly, there were 2 reactions. One reaction comes from those who are obviously unbelievers ([37](#)). I don't mean to imply that there was any hint of mockery in their statement because there doesn't seem to be. These words appear to be spoken with genuine sorrow and sympathy. They see the tears of Jesus, but wrongly take them as evidence of weakness on His part. They thought it truly sad that Jesus, in all His greatness, could do nothing for Lazarus now.

While these words are not an accusation, we should also recognize that they were not helpful to anyone either. This observation comes from a place we all tend to visit way too often – the land of wishful thinking. We've all said this a few times, I'm sure, "If only..." In fact, both Martha and Mary greeted Jesus with this same perspective, "Lord, if You had been here..." We need to begin to understand that wishful thinking and faith are completely different things and are in fact, incompatible. Wishful thinking actually ignores the reality of God's work in our lives. The Israelites were famous for this while God moved them to the Promise Land, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt..." (Num 14:2).

God was working in their lives in a great and mighty way and all they could think about was what life would have been like if only they had stayed in Egypt – in bondage!

One of C.H. Spurgeon's comments reminds us that wishful thinking is not just useless, it's also harmful. "Perhaps the bitterest grieves that men know come not from facts but from things which *"might have been,"* as they imagine; that is to say, they dig wells of supposition and drink the brackish waters of regret." In our text, the result is even worse than that. The "what if" thinking of the crowd actually determines their understanding of Jesus and His power. This is the same faulty premise that many people use today in regards to their understanding of God's power and love. They see all the sorrow, devastation and pain that run rampant in nature and humanity and wrongly conclude that if God truly loves, then He must not be all-powerful. Or, if God is all-powerful, He must not be very loving.

Faulty suppositions produce faulty evidence which leads to faulty conclusions. Again, Spurgeon provides insight: "Suppose that Jesus is willing to open the eyes of the blind and does open them; is He therefore bound to raise this particular dead man? If He does not see fit to do so, does that prove that He has not the power? If He lets Lazarus die, is it proven therefore that He could not have saved His life? May there not be some other reason? Does Omnipotence always exert its power? Does it ever exert all its power?" The obvious answer to these questions is no. God is not bound to act by anything other than His own will and glory. But, it takes faith to be able to see that.

The other reaction to the tears of Jesus was not necessarily an expression of belief or disbelief; it was merely an honest observation. These people

looked at His tears and rightly concluded that Jesus loved Lazarus (36). Most of here should know by now that Jesus loves people and that rightly includes each one of us. Since that is the case, it is surely correct to take this particular verse personally, “See how He loves me!” We know that Jesus loves us personally, not because we have seen Him shed tears over us but because we know that He has shed His life’s blood for us on the cross. While this is true, if we merely go back to the cross to see His love for us we will be selling short ourselves and His great love for us.

Thinking of all we know about Jesus, from past to present, where do we first see His love for us? Is it when we first became aware of His love? When He died for us? When He created us? Not really! Each of these is real but none of them constitute a true beginning of His love; in fact, there is no beginning of His love for us. For as far as we can look back into the past we find Him already loving us. It was in eternity past that He chose to identify Himself with us and He took up our cause as His own and determined to redeem His fallen people. Jesus pledged Himself to do what we could never do and so identified and united Himself with us that His death became our death, His life became our life and His resurrection became our resurrection. When did He do this? Before we were ever born, before there was even a physical creation, His love for us is great and it is eternal!

38-40- As Jesus arrives at the tomb, He is once again moved by deep emotion; the only difference between here and vs33 is that now He is ready to do something about it. He gives what is for Him a necessary command but for everyone else, a curious and even shocking command. Isn’t that usually the way the Lord works in our lives? The things He impresses upon us to do are at first shocking, or even frightening? True, and the longer we sit there and think about them, the worse they get. We may be God’s children but we all still possess the capability of talking ourselves out of obedience. It’s known as the paralysis of analysis. The danger here is that it moves us back into the land of “what if…” and hinders us from saying “Yes, Lord.” Somehow, we never seem to wonder what might happen if we simply obey His leading. That’s what Martha fails to do here. Jesus is ready to act but Martha protests.

Jesus firmly rejects Martha’s protest, as logical as it may have been, and He reminds her of what He had previously told her. This introduces a slight difficulty because these exact words have not been seen before in John’s

record. This isn't a major problem since we've seen that when John repeats a statement, he often does so with slight variations. Also, it's quite possible that Jesus sent this as part of His message to Martha and Mary in vs4 or that He actually spoke it to her directly at their first meeting in vs21-26 and John chose not to record it.

Regardless of the reason for this, we can easily recognize that His wonderful statement is first of all a challenge to faith but it also provides us with a reminder of what the central focus of Jesus' life truly was – the glory of God! I don't want to confuse anyone here but we need to make an important distinction between the actual miracle and the glory of God. True, the glory of God will be revealed through the miracle but it's also true that many of those who will see the miracle will clearly miss out on seeing the glory of God.

What was about to happen would be a spectacular miracle, an unmistakable display of the divine power of Jesus and an inestimable gift of joy to Mary and Martha. But notice, Jesus doesn't reference any of that. For Him, the important thing was the glory of God. This means that the real meaning of what Jesus was about to do could be accessed only by faith. All who were there would see the miracle but Jesus is promising Martha a sight of the glory. Without faith, the onlookers would observe the end result and be happy in that, but they would miss the glory of working together with God in the fulfillment of His plan.

This is where many Christians fail today. They have faith that Jesus has saved them but their faith fails to extend to their everyday life and thus, they fail to see the glory of God in the details and circumstances of their lives. They come to church and experience a "worship service" but fail to see the glory of God revealed in it. They see their needs provided for but fail to see the glory. They find that despite the difficulties, life goes on, yet they fail to see the glory. They fail to see it because they're not looking for it, they don't expect it, so they find themselves lacking in the area that was most important to Jesus – recognizing the glory of God in your life and revealing it through your life. Here, the whole crowd would see the miracle but only believers would understand its real significance – the glory.

41-44- Notice that the prayer Jesus offered here was a prayer of thanksgiving. Apparently, this miracle had already been worked out between

Jesus and the Father through much prayer and seeking. Now, He offers thanks to the Father but He does so for the benefit of the onlookers. His thanksgiving was for their sakes. This means Jesus always wanted people to know that He did nothing of Himself. His desire was not that the crowd would think Him important or special but that they would recognize and believe that He was sent to them from the Father. He desires for them to have faith and that the content of their faith would be focused on His mission of being divinely sent. It is important they understand that He's not acting on His own volition but out of complete dependence on His Father.

Now, Jesus' statement in [vs40](#) links faith to seeing the glory of God which refers to the miracle of raising Lazarus. But, what we need to see here is that clearly, Martha didn't have that faith ([39b](#)). Obviously, the crowd didn't have that faith either ([37](#)). I'm pretty sure that even His disciples were just there waiting to be arrested and executed for being with Jesus ([16b](#)). We can deduce at least one indisputable fact from our text – there was nobody present who really expected a miracle. Since this is true, where then was the faith that would result in seeing the glory of God? If it's not in Martha or Mary, not in the crowd or even the disciples then there's only 1 place left to find it: Jesus Himself.

He is the One who believed and saw God's glory.

In a sense, this entire chapter is about faith. Jesus told the disciples in [vs15](#) that He was glad Lazarus was dead so that their faith in Him would be enlightened and strengthened. Jesus was met by Martha in [vs21](#) with a limited faith and He immediately set about not to chastise her for it but to inform her faith. Of course, it was Mary's faith that caused her to fall at His feet and worship Him even in her sorrow and loss. Now, we are presented with Jesus' faith and the consequence of His trust in God at this point is that His faith in God becomes a model for our own.

What is the nature of Christ's faith? What lessons can we glean from His great faith that can be applied to our own? 1st) His faith was personal. It's not a belief in some abstract concept or some simple truth that Jesus knew about God. His faith was in God Himself, which He shows by calling Him "Father." Is your faith like that? Is it personal? Biblical faith certainly involves unseen things, but that's not all it is. Biblical faith is faith in a person. So, for salvation we are able to say, "Lord Jesus Christ, I love you and want you to be my Savior." Or in the matter of prayer, "Father, I lay such and such a

need before you.”

2nd) It was a perfect or totally trusting faith. This is shown by the fact that Jesus offered God thanks for the miracle even before it had taken place (v41-42). I don't know from personal experience how close we can come to that total belief of Jesus. Sure, we regularly fail to express a full confidence that God hears and answers our prayers and many times, our prayers are filled with mere presumption. Yes, we often fail in this area of perfect, total trust but that's no excuse to stop praying. We must continue to pray, despite our failures, because prayer is first and foremost an act of obedience to God and, as we pray, we will continue to grow towards that point of perfect trust.

3rd) His faith was public. Jesus didn't express His faith quietly in a corner; He did it openly and audibly before men.

We see this in His public prayer and in the miracle itself. John says, “He cried with a loud voice.” This wasn't because Lazarus was hard of hearing but so the crowd would know that this was no work of magic but the very power of God. Sorcerers mutter their incantations and spells but not Jesus. If we are walking with the Lord and are seeing His hand in the circumstances of our lives, we should be willing to both thank Him and praise Him publically when possible. If we do this, at least occasionally, then others may also be encouraged to believe as a result of our indirect testimony and God's action in our life.

The prayer of Jesus leads to the miracle itself. Lazarus- Jesus can speak to Lazarus as if he were alive because He is the, “God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did.” (Rom 4:17b).

The climax of this miracle can also be applied spiritually both to the unbeliever and the Christian. Lazarus was raised but this is also what happens spiritually when Jesus speaks to a lost child of Adam. According to Scripture, anyone without Christ is spiritually dead. He's “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1b). In this condition he is helpless. There is nothing he can do to improve his condition. But Jesus comes. He calls. He calls the dead one by name. And the one who hears his voice responds and rises from his grave to meet Him. Is He calling you? Will you respond?

There's something in this for the believer as well. Will you also play your

part in Christ's miracles? "But, no one can raise the dead but Jesus, right?" Yes, that's true. But, although it was Jesus alone who brought the dead back to life; still, He was pleased to involve bystanders in the miracle. First, they were told to move the stone. Then, after the miracle, they were told to unbind Lazarus. True, we can't bring the dead to life. But we can bring the Gospel to them. We can do preparatory work, and we can do work afterward. We can help to remove the stones of ignorance, error, prejudice, and despair. After the miracle we can help the new Christian by unwinding the graveclothes of doubt, fear and discouragement. The miracle definitely belongs to Jesus. But there is work for us to do if we will do it.

Jesus used Ananias to reach Paul after he had been laid out on the road to Damascus. He used Peter to reach Cornelius; He used Philip to preach the Ethiopian. Will He not use each one of us if we are ready to do such work? Then, stay ready or get ready! "There is no higher privilege this side of heaven than for us to be used of the Lord in rolling away gravestones and removing grave clothes" (Pink).

See how He loved him! See how He loves me! We understand both the spiritual and physical evidence of His love for us but what is the evidence of our love for Him? Can others see how much I love Him? Can others declare, after observing my life, "Behold, how he loves Jesus?" 😊