

See How He Loved Him!

John 11:1-47, 53

Sorrow, grief. Pain, loss. How many of us here today have experienced these emotions? What about anger and frustration? Or even rage?

These emotions are appropriate reactions to the many heartaches, tragedies and trials that we face here on earth. Sadly, just yesterday, there was another tragic mass shooting. This time, it was Jewish people attending a synagogue in Pittsburgh. 11 lost their lives, and 6 others were wounded.

Just a few weeks ago, a tragedy of a different kind struck the family of one of my Aunts. Her brother lost his life to cancer. One minute he was living a normal life and the next he collapsed at his workplace and was put on life support and barely conscious just a short time later. Within a week he had died.

How unfair! How tragic! Sad, devastating. Gut-wrenching! This would be your reaction and mine, if it was your husband, wife or child who was shot or who was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer.

It is not just loss of life that draws such a strong emotional response from us. Who hasn't experienced the pain of rejection or betrayal? Loved ones who are lost, wayward children, divorce and broken homes – these are tragic in their own right.

In today's sermon, we are going to meet some people in the midst of deep grief, and we will find Jesus at work in their dark situation – and even sharing their deep sorrows Himself.

Now, this kind of grief often leads to despair. The message of

Christianity declares that God cares. But our sinful hearts and the fallen world combine to entice us to stop believing that God listens or cares. Instead there are plenty of worldly pleasures available for us to dull our pain. Why not just slink away and stop trying? Isn't God to blame anyway? *If He really cared, wouldn't he have done something?*

It is exactly these questions we see in the story from John chapter 11 today. May God's Word and the Gospel shed light on our pain today. May we be spurred on toward a lasting faith in our Loving Savior as we look at the text together this morning.

READ: John 11:17-37

TITLE: See How He Loved Him!

TRANSITION: Now I didn't read the whole story – and some of you know what comes next. But I want to tell the story as a story. The Gospels were written in story form and if we look at the story closely we will perhaps gain more from any list of points we can pull from it. We will look at the story from the vantage points of different groups of characters as we build toward the climax.

I. A Sorrow Seen

A. Through the Eyes of the Mourners from Jerusalem (v. 18-20a, 31-37)

1. Custom was to have at least flute players and a few mourners at a funeral.
2. Mary and Martha were well to do (the anointing) and had "many" who came from Jerusalem (1.7 miles away) to mourn with them.
3. Their mourning is sincere (nothing in the text indicates it is a show)
4. These mourners knew who Jesus was – they believed he had opened the eyes of the blind man (Jn. 9).
5. They saw Jesus weeping and concluded: he loved Lazarus (& his family) very much.

6. They wondered aloud – “Could Jesus not have prevented this man from dying?”
7. We shall see that Jesus could have (from the verses earlier).
8. But this view of Jesus underestimates who He is. As we shall see, Jesus is more than a wonder-worker, and compassionate teacher. Jesus is the Savior – who truly is equal with God.

B. Through the Eyes of Martha & Mary (v. 1-7, 20-30)

1. We know Martha and Mary from the story where Martha is busy serving, but Mary sits at Jesus’ feet. Martha complains to Jesus that Mary isn’t doing her part – but Jesus commends Mary for sitting and listening to Jesus’ teaching – see Luke 10:38-41. We see the same picture here, Martha is more active and Mary is more docile.
2. Together they were “loved” by Jesus – vs. 5. Their brother Lazarus (who likely was married and lived separately from them, but in the same town) is “him whom you love.” And later when Jesus leaves to go to them, he calls Lazarus “our friend” (v. 11).
3. The sisters send a message to Jesus (they are close enough that they know where he is). But they don’t directly ask Jesus to come and intervene. (They may be concerned for Jesus’ safety – as per ch. 10; or they may be trusting Jesus and not direct in their requests of Him.)
4. **They expect Jesus to come and heal Lazarus.**
5. Jesus doesn’t come. Instead he stays put!
6. In fact, they have a funeral without Jesus arriving. Then Jesus shows up!
7. Both sisters have the same statement to say to Jesus: “Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” – Why? This is eating at them both.
8. Martha makes sure to speak with Jesus before Jesus is seen by anyone else. She adds that she trusts in Jesus even now: “But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” She knows Jesus could have rescued her from the trial –

but He didn’t! Yet she believes. [Now – even though we know what happens, Martha doesn’t and the rest of the story makes clear that she doesn’t expect Jesus or even think that He could, raise Lazarus from the dead. But she is still believing even though she doesn’t understand the why.]

9. Martha then is challenged by Jesus and she comes through with a clear confession of her belief that Jesus is Messiah, Son of God, and the promised one who is to come – this may be the clearest and fullest confession of belief in Christ in the Gospels prior to the cross of Christ.
10. Mary meets Jesus after she hears Martha’s message that He has come. Mary throws herself in sorrow at Jesus’ feet – (she does this again in chapter 12 when she anoints Jesus feet). She is humble and believes in him – but she is broken.
11. Jesus doesn’t challenge her – but instead weeps with her.

C. Through the Eyes of the Disciples (10:39-42, 11:8-16)

1. [For sake of time – may not have time to read all these verses or spend much time here.]
2. Disciples know Jesus’ has withdrawn from Jerusalem for safety – it is not his time yet.
3. They see the message arrive and then Jesus decides to do nothing for two days!
4. When he plans to return – the disciples don’t understand why he’d go where it is dangerous again.
5. Jesus eventually tells them Lazarus is asleep (dead) and he goes to wake him. They still don’t understand.
6. He says plainly Lazarus is dead. (Still don’t understand what is coming).
7. They say let us go and die with him. (Ironically prophetic).

II. A Savior Sought

A. Background – They are in a region called Batanea, likely – the other “Bethany” (where John was baptizing at first – 1:28) likely 4 days journey to Bethany near Jerusalem. Jesus’ waiting did not mean he could have come in time – it meant that when he came, Lazarus would be dead long enough that everyone would think him beyond hope (4 days)

B. Motive – Jesus knew from the start that Lazarus’ sickness had a purpose: that God would be glorified through it (which hearkens back to why the man born blind was blind – 9:3)

1. We don’t see the reasons why, but God does and Jesus does too (since He is God).
2. Jesus waited 2 more days for a reason (to enhance this glory).

C. Counselor – Jesus responds to Martha with counsel and teaching – he instills hope and he challenges her to a greater level of faith.

1. Jesus speaks truth to Martha in her trial.
2. Jesus goes beyond and declares that He himself is the Resurrection and the Life.
 - a. Resurrection – corresponds to “whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.”
 - b. Life – corresponds to “Everyone who lives and believes in me, shall never die.”
 - c. Jesus affirms there is a resurrection (and a restoration/setting-things-right). This can be a great comfort for those who have lost friends or experienced rejection and hurt.
 - d. Jesus also claims there is an eternal life (a life that never ends) that can be our possession even now, such that we never truly die.
3. Then Jesus says, “Do you believe this?” – not truth for truth’s sake, but he calls her to respond – to grow in faith.

D. Comforter – Jesus responds to Mary with tears. He “weeps with those who weep” (Rom. 12:15b).

1. Jesus knows that Mary doesn’t need truth-telling but rather sympathizing.
2. Jesus is fully human and able to share her sorrow perfectly.

E. Warrior – Jesus responds to the blackness of death with anger and rage, coupled with sober determination.

1. The translation of “deeply moved in spirit” (v. 33) does not fully capture the true sense of the Greek here. Look at the footnote in the pew Bible: “or was indignant”. Anger or outrage might be closer. Very few translations bring out this (as it almost seems improper for Jesus to be so angry here) – the NLT, HCSB, and The Message with a few others. The Greek word involves “anger or outrage or indignation”, according to D.A. Carson; Tim Keller translates it as “to bellow with rage.”
2. Why is Jesus so angry?
3. The context leads us to see he is angry at what Death (and sin) does to people he loves.
4. Jesus is looking past Lazarus’ death to his own, as we will see soon here. With what Jesus does next, he will again be outraged at Death and will be gearing up for the confrontation through which he “destroys[s] the one who has the power of death.. the devil” (Heb. 2:14)

III. A Salvation Signified (v. 38-47, 53)

A. The Miracle:

1. Now Jesus arrives at the tomb of Lazarus, and once again he is outraged (at the unbelief of the crowd perhaps? But mostly at the death symbolized here at the tomb).
2. Jesus demands the stone be taken away. (Sound familiar – a tomb that is in a cave, sealed by a stone?)

3. After four days, decomposition has begun. It is likely that a common idea held that for up to 3 days the spirit of a dead man was present (during the grieving and funeral) – but once decomposition of the face was seen – the spirit left (by day 4). So, all agree Lazarus is beyond hope.
4. Jesus is undeterred – we will see the glory of God!
5. Jesus' prayer does not ask for Lazarus to be raised. Instead he thanks God. (John 5:21 "For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will... 25 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.")
6. Jesus wants this miracle to not only bless the family, but to spur "the people standing around" to believe in Jesus.
7. Jesus calls out – because he assumes Lazarus can hear him (maybe) – he uses a name, else all the dead would rise!
8. Don't think of a mummy, there was a sheet over-all and arms/legs bound to the body, with a separate smaller wrap over the head.
9. Lazarus' was hobbling/shuffling and needed help – big contrast with Jesus' future resurrection where he had a spiritual body and didn't need help unwinding himself.

B. The Response

1. Martha & Mary (and Lazarus):
 - a. had their faith increased – they were assured of Jesus' love for them – and they were led even more to understand that Jesus is no mere teacher – he is God incarnate.
 - b. The miracle acted out resurrection life being given by Jesus.
 - c. And the miracle pointed to the fact that life comes from death and overcomes death (more on this in a bit).
 - d. Mary gets all this and the next thing she does is anoint Jesus' for his coming burial.
2. The disciples should better understand what Jesus is teaching about his imminent death.

3. The people standing around
 - a. Some believed in Jesus.
 - b. Some betrayed Jesus.
 4. The religious leaders
 - a. Plotted Jesus' death
 - b. So, this resurrection, assured that Jesus' death was now being plotted (and his own greater resurrection would happen).
- C. The Sign
1. This is the seventh sign in the Book of John and is centrally located – after this point, in chapter 13 the last week of Jesus' life begins.
 2. Jesus left safety to come and reveal himself to this crowd and his special friends in Bethany.
 3. The only way Lazarus could be raised, and he and his sisters could truly be saved from death's power, was by Jesus being willing to face death and enact his own resurrection.
 4. To raise Lazarus, Jesus' had to look at his own coming death and accept it. His anger was toward the Devil who loves death, and Jesus' struck a mighty blow here (with more to come on Golgotha's tree).

Closing:

This story reveals the greatness of our Savior. He is God – able to raise people from the Dead in power; and He is Man – able to weep at the grave of a friend. He is wise and true, and he has a shoulder upon which you can cry. And he is angry at sin, unbelief, and the havoc that Death and the Devil has brought into His World.

Jesus loves all of his children and cares for them in their trials. He knows what you're going through – and He will be a rock for you.

Trust him, no matter what. He is life – resurrection life.

If you are weighed down with burdens, just fall at his feet like Mary. If you are full of questions, come to Jesus for answers like Martha.

If you are tempted to be cold toward God when trials come, know that He is a wonderful counselor and the God of all comfort. Don't be tricked into just masking your pain with games or drugs or harmful behaviors. Don't grow bitter and withdraw from God's church and fellow believers. Don't rest in a faith that knows who Jesus is, but doesn't throw yourself at his feet in times of sorrow.

If you are watching and hearing, but you don't know the true life, resurrection life that Christ offers. Will you believe? Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life – do you believe this? Jesus has a reason for your sorrow, and a purpose for your life. Jesus can provide eternal life if you forsake all and follow him in faith. Do you believe?

For many of the children in our church, and perhaps some of the adults in the pew, I fear that we are content to know about Jesus and learn facts about him – even believe those facts, but stop short of fully trusting him. We are like the people standing around – who have heard of Jesus, but don't experience Him in their life. You are called to make a decision. Will you believe and receive Jesus as Lord? Will you follow God's call to be baptized and to be an active member of His church? Or will you remain as just another person who "stands around"? Don't you want to be one who is His friend? One Whom He Loves?