

# John 11.38-46—Seeing the Glory of God in Death and in Life

- I. Introduction
  - a. This text is full of the pain and the stench of death. It is grotesquely dark. And like the text we read earlier in Isaiah. Oftentimes it's in those darkest moments that God's glory is most visible. Indeed, God works in mysterious ways...painful ways...ways that we would rather avoid and would not recommend ourselves. But everything God does is good!
  - b. But why? It's been my experience and countless others that I know that have grown in the relationship with the Lord in the midst of suffering. He knows all things so He knows what we need and how to get us there. As A. W. Tozer says, "God never learns anything." If He were in need of learning things, then He would be limited in many respects and therefore He would not be God. But that is not so with the God of the Bible. You are not a test project. He's not like us when we had kids and we learn as we go. He knows the end from the beginning. That is something I was taught in SS growing up. God is all-powerful, all-knowing and all-present. Those are three basic attributes of God that all of us should know.
  - c. Certainly there are many more but those three are very comforting in one sense and frightening in another. Yet, for Him to be all-knowing is to know all possible outcomes too. This whole story is clear on its purpose and that would not be possible if God were not all-knowing and all-powerful.
  - d. I think we need to be reminded of how this story began: (Jn. 11:1-6) Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup> It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. <sup>3</sup> So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." <sup>4</sup> But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." <sup>5</sup> Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. <sup>6</sup> So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.
- II. Main Point—that you might see the glory of God and believe that Jesus is the Christ
  - a. The main point of this text is clearly in line with the overall purpose for which John wrote this Gospel.
    - i. Jesus told his disciples why this whole event with Lazarus was about to happen: (Jn. 11:4) It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.
    - ii. (Jn. 11:40) Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"
    - iii. (Jn. 20:30-31) <sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; <sup>31</sup> but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.
      1. I think this has both those who have never believed and those who say they believe but their faith is faulty and for those who believe that they might continue to believe.
  - b. The story of Raising Lazarus from the dead was and still is fulfilling this purpose. It might even happen today.
- III. Outline
  - a. Jesus enters death's sting
  - b. Jesus directs the crowd to the Father
  - c. Jesus Raises Lazarus from the dead
  - d. The People Respond
- IV. Exposition—Revelation
  - a. Let's take a look at how Jesus enters death pain.
    - i. Depending on what translation you have, this section begins with the word "so" or "then" or "therefore." That means we must remember what just came before v. 38 because John is about answer the question raised in v. 37.

1. (Jn. 11:37) <sup>37</sup> But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?"
2. Let's watch how John answers this. Because, it sounds a lot like Israel after they crossed the Red Sea...the One who brought us out of slavery in Egypt is going to let us die in the wilderness.
3. Do you think Jesus had the ability to keep Lazarus from dying?
- ii. But how does Jesus respond when he approaches this tomb? V. 38 says that Jesus was deeply moved *again*. This comes on the heels of the first instance it happened in verse 34 when he saw Mary and those with her weeping.
- iii. Some people take issue with Jesus' groaning here. They are like, "why is he troubled when he is about to raise him from the dead?" That's a good question. How would you answer that?
  1. Let me ask this. What would you think of Jesus if he had laughed at their misery? Appalling, right? His weeping, groaning and troubled heart is the right response to death and pain.
  2. It wasn't meant to be this way! That's why Jesus is there! That's why God sent His Son into the world! If you cannot hear the hope of a new creation at the beginning of this Gospel then I would love for you to consider it.
    - a. (Jn. 1:1-5) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and the life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
    - b. (Jn. 1:9-14) <sup>9</sup> The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup> He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. <sup>12</sup> But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. <sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.
    - c. In the beginning was the Word and Word became flesh and dwelt among us. He came that we might have life in his name. And by the will God, we were given the right to become children of God. We were born again! We became part of God's family!
    - d. Did you notice "light shines in the darkness?" The scene at Lazarus' tomb is dark. This world is broken. We need a new creation. We need forgiveness. We need a new family. And all of that is, in part, why Jesus came. He came to fix this broken world. And we get a glimpse of what that looks in this story of Lazarus.
  3. Indeed, Jesus enters death's sting! He weeps with those who weep and rightly so even though he's about to show us what it looks like to put death to death.
- iv. Jesus came to the tomb where his friend's dead body lay. He is groaning. And I don't think anyone there expected what happened next. If we are right in that Jesus has responded exactly right up to this point, he then does something unexpected...seemingly something unacceptable when he says, "Take away the stone."
  1. I doubt most of us feel how wrong this must feel for those grieving family members and friends.

2. Our modern means of burial keep us from feeling the pain of this. But Martha feels it. (Jn. 11:39) 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."
    - a. Odor might not measure up to the strength of the smell but you must understand that his body was decomposing. The smell of death is atrocious.
    - b. It feels like Jesus is about to dishonor the dead and the family.
  3. We probably agreed with Martha's statement. But Jesus thinks her words lack faith. And I believe Jesus is working FOR HER FAITH AND THE FAITH THOSE WITH HER and for some of you. Faith is a gift from Jesus!
    - a. (Jn. 11:40-41) <sup>40</sup> Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"
      - i. I can't help but think that Jesus had sent word back to Mary and Martha in response to their letter about Lazarus being sick and he urged them to believe and they would see the glory of God.
    - b. <sup>41</sup> So they took away the stone.
    - c. Though he groaned deeply himself...though he loved this family very much...he had them do the unthinkable.
    - d. All of them are hit with the reality of death as the odor escapes the cave.
  4. At this point, you might be thinking that Jesus loves something more than his friends. What is most important to Jesus in this scene? It must be the glory of God, right?
    - a. What is most important to you? Does the glory of God rule your life? Do you act in such a way that, no matter how unusual, that God's get the glory in your life?
    - b. Life has purpose. It's not meaningless. But our greatest aim is to glorify God whether we eat or drink or whatever we do.
- b. So, we saw how Jesus entered death's sting but why did he demand that the stone be taken away? He now turns our attention heavenward—to the Father.
- i. It is very clear that Jesus intends for us to understand where this is coming from when he gazes into heaven. (Jn. 11:41) And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me.
  - ii. Before we consider the content and purpose of Jesus' prayer, let's consider why he would draw the crowd's attention heavenward.
    1. (Jn. 5:19-21) <sup>19</sup> So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. <sup>20</sup> For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. <sup>21</sup> For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.
    2. If Jesus intends to help them believe that he was sent from the Father then it makes sense that he lifted his eyes to the Father. And this does nothing to diminish the fact that Jesus is the eternal Son and equal with the Father. It's a matter of role. The Son submits to the Father.
      - a. We have much to learn about authority and submission from the Father and the Son.
  - iii. Now the prayer:
    1. He begins by giving thanks to the Father. Such respect and honor towards his Father on display here. Love is apparent in his words.
    2. Within the Trinity, there seems to be this constant cycle of glory-giving. The Son seeks to the glorify the Father and the Father seeks to glorify the Son.

3. He thanks the Father for hearing him.
    - a. Fathers...families...let's be good at listening to our kids and each other. It shows so much love and concern. I love hearing Jesus say this. The Father listens and hears.
  4. This next phrase seems to indicate that he had already talked this whole plan out. Notice what he says...(Jn. 11:42) <sup>42</sup> 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."
  5. They planned together to make known to the people that he had been sent from the Father. He's making the connections clear for them.
- c. Jesus was deeply moved by the death of his friend. He humbly turns their attention to the Father. And now he raises Lazarus from the dead.
- i. (Jn. 11:43) <sup>43</sup> When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out."
    1. First, let me say that this resurrection should probably be understood as raised to normal life as it was. He doesn't have the resurrected body like Jesus has when he is raised. Jesus is the first fruits of that resurrection. All others will follow after him.
    2. But guess what? That decaying body got up and walked out of the tomb. (Jn. 11:44) <sup>44</sup> The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth.
    3. What does this say about Jesus? Who alone can raise the dead?
    4. What does this say about death? Though death cannot speak, the fact that Lazarus is alive says that death has a Master. The One who created us and sentenced us to death because of sin can also undo death's sting!
    5. As this story continues, you will see Jesus take the death sentence for sinners like me and you so that we might have life in his name!
  - ii. But some will believe and some will reject it. It may seem impossible to witness this event and walk away from it in disbelief but that exactly what happened with some.
    1. (Jn. 11:45-46) <sup>45</sup> Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, <sup>46</sup> but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.
    2. As we will see next week, this results in the plot to kill Jesus.

#### V. How Should We Respond?

- a. When the crowd said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?"...should have said... "Here comes the One who opened the eyes of the blind and he can raise the dead because he was sent from the Father and he is God himself." Watch this ya'll!
  - i. This wasn't their response but for many of this group, they now believe.
- b. When Jesus told the people to take the stone away, Martha should have thought and said, "You're going to raise him now aren't you, Jesus?"
  - i. This wasn't Martha's response. Her faith had not been tested. And when it was tested it was found lacking. But Jesus made sure that she had faith.
- c. This group of Jews gets divided at the end by their response. Many believe but some do not. They saw the same thing everyone else did. They saw with their own eyes a man who had been dead for four days walk out of the tomb. So, if you were to ask them if they believe that Jesus can raise the dead they would say yes. However, belief is more than the acknowledgement of facts. The demons believe and shudder but they do not have saving faith. Saving faith believes that this Jesus is the Son of God! He is God in the flesh. Saving faith believes this is glorious! In other words, those with faith saw the glory of God. Those without faith saw Jesus, as we see next week, as someone who needed to be stopped.
- d. What is your response? Did you see God's glory? If not, I would plead with you to ask Jesus to help you see it. Repent and believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.

- i. If you did see it, then I would urge you to praise him as we sing this last song together.