**Life in a Culture of Death**

**John 11:1-57**

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We are taking a break from our series in Ephesians to address Sanctity of life this week. Sanctity of life is not a political issue, but a moral one. Sanctity of Life sees human life as valuable and sacred. Whether that life be in the womb or out. Many of you may have read about the recent court case over life support for baby Tinslee Lewis. Because all human life is sacred, it deserves to be protected from the from every form of evil and injustice in the world today, from the womb to the grave. Especially the weak and the vulnerable. My goal today is for us to see Jesus as the answer to human suffering, to offer hope and healing in the gospel. Let’s look at John 11. It is a long passage so we will not read it but I want to walk us through the story and highlight four observations.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Lazarus is deathly ill so his sisters sent word to Jesus to come heal him. Jesus tells the messengers that Lazarus’ death will display God’s glory (4). Then we are told that Jesus loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus so he waited two days until Lazarus died to go to him (5-7). *Jesus demonstrates his love by delaying*. One of the great human needs is to experience love. That is what God wants for each of us. Not just know that you are loved but feel that love. Paul says such in Ephesians 3, where he prays that they be strengthened to grasp the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ’s love and to know this love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God (3:18-19). In others words, he prays they we might be solid and mature. His point is that you cannot be spiritually solid and mature unless you experience more fully God’s love. Jesus picks up this idea here. So, Jesus waits the two days and finally goes to Lazarus (11-13).

Arriving in Bethany, they find that Lazarus has been dead four days (17) and a group of Jews are consoling his sisters (19). His delay also had a purpose, to display his glory so that they would believe. “I am glad that I was not there,” Jesus said, “for your sakes so that you would believe (15).” He wanted them to see and believe that he really had power to raise people from the dead. Jesus demonstrates His love in this case, by delay. Too often we don’t want nor like delays. We want God to answer us now, we want him to work now, and on our on our terms. But that is not always the way God works because it is not in our best interests. So sometimes in suffering Jesus demonstrates his love by delaying.

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to him and complained, “If you had been here, my brother would not have died (20-21).” In other words, if you loved us, you would have come in time but she catches herself, but I know that whatever you ask, God will give you (22). Then we see our second observation, *Jesus comforts by pointing to himself*. Jesus tells Martha that her brother will rise again. Martha knows this, she is confident that Lazarus will be resurrected in the last day (23-24) to a future life after death. But Jesus is promising more. Martha's pain and suffering points to our greatest issue, sin. All suffering is because of sin; all violence against the weak is because of sin. Devaluing human life is because of sin. Death and suffering is a reminder that there is something terribly wrong with our world. Jesus came to defeat sin and death (1 Cor 15:5). So, Jesus tells her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he dies, yet he will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me, shall never die (11:25-26).” Jesus is more than a good moral teacher. All the great religious teachers point people to God but Jesus points her to himself. Jesus is the comfort to human pain and sin and death. Jesus is the answer to your pain and suffering and sin. Jesus makes two claims here. As the resurrection, Jesus promises hope for eternity, death does not have the last word. As the life, Jesus promises life, human flourishing now and you will never die. Jesus is the answer in life and in death. He asks Martha and us, do you believe this (26)?

Our third observation is that *Jesus responds to death with outrage*. Martha directs Mary to Jesus (28). As Mary goes to him, those consoling her follow, thinking she is going to the tomb to weep (29-31). She too blames Jesus, Lord, if you have been here, my brother would not have died (32). She is sweeping and all the Jews with her are too. Now this is not just sniffling, this is wailing. Jesus sees this and is indignant and very troubled (33). Jesus asks where the tomb is, then he weeps, is again indignant and went to the tomb (34-38). He is not weeping for Lazarus, he is about ready to raise him from the dead. He is outraged, a holy and righteous indignation, and troubled over sin and death. Sin causes all suffering and pain and death and Jesus sees death as the final enemy he came to defeat. It is appointed for all of us to die and face judgement. There is no escaping it but Jesus came to defeat death and free us from judgement. Jesus triumphs over sin and death. Then Jesus commands them to remove the stone from the cave where Lazarus is laid but Martha objected, it will smell because he’s been dead four days! Jesus chides her, I told you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God (39-40). Jesus prays and then called out, Lazarus comes forth. In the same way that God created life in creation by the power of his word, he once again created life by his word. Jesus responds to sin and death with outrage because it is the final enemy. Jesus came to defeat sin and death.

Finally, our fourth observation is *that we see* *Jesus gives life by dying*. The response of the crowd is that some believe but others turn him in. You read in the gospels that Jesus divided people. All were amazed at his teaching and his miracles but in the end they killed him because he was a threat to their way of life. Even at birth people sought to kill him because he was a threat. Our culture tends to think that killing the weak and helpless and the less that perfect is progress but it really displays the deception of sin. Jesus died at the hands of those he came to save and in the greatest display of evil the greatest good was accomplished. Jesus gladly and willingly gave his life defeat sin and death. He could say he was the resurrection and the life because he secured that promise in his death and resurrection.

Questions for Life Groups:

1. Why was Martha disappointed in Jesus?
2. Have you ever been disappointed in God? Are you willing to share that with us?
3. Why did Jesus not go immediately to heal Lazarus?
4. Why does God sometime demonstrate love by delays?
5. Why does God sometimes delay our prayers?
6. Are you dealing with tension and disappointment with God right now?
7. How does Jesus resolve Martha’s pain?
8. What does Jesus mean by he is the resurrection and the life?

1. Don Carson’s sermon on this text clarified my four observations, See <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/conference_media/lazarus/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)