

John 11:1-44 – Resurrection Preview

Intro

- Happy Father's day to all the father's here as well as all the men who fulfilled a fathering role in the life of children born to someone else.
 - o Thank you to those whose words and actions reflected the love and care of our Heavenly Father in a way that has helped others know him better.
 - o Today's sermon is not Fathers' Day themed, but it does include having to wake someone up who is dead to the world, so there is that...
- If you go to a movie, about the time the movie is supposed to start you'll get one of these screens followed by 15-20 minutes of previews...
 - o ...because when a new studio is working on a new movie, they want to make sure that as many people as possible are excited about it and come to see it.
 - First, they make sure that people know a little bit about what is coming up.
 - As the release date gets closer, they usually have a trailer/preview that gives you glimpses of the best parts of the movie to get you really excited.
 - o What Jesus is doing in this chapter is a kind of preview.
 - Jesus has made some spectacular claims for himself: not least of all, that he will be the one to raise the dead at the last day (5:21, 25, 6:39).
 - In this chapter, Jesus gives a preview of his power to do so.

(1-16) Death

Lazarus' Sickness

- (1-3) Lazarus, Mary, and Martha are Jesus' close friends, so naturally they turn to Jesus for help when Lazarus becomes dangerously sick.
- (4) When Jesus gets the message, he assures those who are with him that this sickness will not end in death.
 - o What he does not tell them yet is that it is going to go *through* death.
 - o The reason that it has occurred is to glorify God the Father and God the Son.
 - This is very similar to what Jesus said about the blind man in chapter 9.
 - The bad thing that is about to happen will allow God to do something better than if he had prevented that bad thing from ever happening.
 - o When painful things happen in your life, do not assume that God has abandoned you. He is still at work for your good and his glory.
 - He uses all things to make his children more Christlike (Romans 8:28-29).
 - One day we will have the heavenly perspective to see that the sufferings of this earthly life were "light and momentary" compared to what we have gained (1 Corinthians 4:16-17)

- The glory of God's goodness and wisdom will be more fully revealed as we see how he has worked in our life.

(5-6) Jesus' Delay

- We are assured that Jesus loves these three very much – what happens next is not the result of unconcern or callousness on Jesus' part.
- Jesus does not immediately rush off to help Lazarus or speak a word and heal him.
 - He knows that is not the Father's will, and in his love for Martha, Mary, and Lazarus he is going to follow God's perfect timing.
 - If we know that something is against God's will and try to rush ahead with it anyway (usually be doing a supposedly good thing in a sinful way) it does not bring God's approval or blessing, and frequently brings pain, conflict or disaster.
 - Abraham sleeps with Hagar to try to get the promised son (Genesis 16).
 - Jacob steals Esau's blessing because he knows someday it will be his (Genesis 27).
 - Moses murders an Egyptian in an attempt to be Israel's savior (Exodus 2).
 - Very frequently God does not work on our timetable, and when that happens we need to have patience rather than rushing to do our will by any means possible.
 - E.g., Ignoring God's principles & commands for sex and marriage because I want to experience it right now.
 - E.g., Acting dishonestly or unlawfully for the sake of speed, efficiency, or some other personal gain.

(7-10) Jesus' Determination

- (7-8) Finally, after what must have felt like the longest 2 days ever, it is the Father's timing for Jesus to continue to Bethany, but the disciples are worried.
 - Bethany is only about 2 miles from Jerusalem (kind of a "suburb").
 - The religious leaders in Jerusalem want Jesus dead.
 - Things seem to be going so much more smoothly here in the North.
- (9-10) Jesus is determined to do the will of the Father.
 - He will continue teaching, healing, and performing miracles until the time comes for him to lay down his life.
 - Just as he is not going to run ahead of God's plan to gratify his own feelings, he is not going to lag behind to avoid suffering.
 - Doing the Father's will is walking in the light rather than stumbling through the dark.

(11-15) Lazarus' Death

- (11) At this point, after they have delayed or two days, Lazarus has died.
 - *Falling asleep* was a common euphemism for death (like how we say someone has "passed away" or "gone to a better place").

- From an earthly perspective, a dead person can resemble a sleeping person.
 - When *asleep* is used in this way, you don't expect it to be connected with the idea of *awakening* that person.
 - It would be like saying "he passed away, but he'll be coming back tomorrow."
- (12-14) perhaps for this reason, the disciples completely misunderstand what Jesus means by *sleep*, and he has to bluntly tell them that Lazarus is dead.
- (15) Jesus repeats that this tragic situation will produce a better result than if he had prevented it – their faith will be increased (and not just theirs!).

(16) The Disciples' Determination

- Thomas, speaking for the disciples, declares that they will go and die alongside Jesus (since they can't persuade him to stay away from Jerusalem).
- This shows a lack of understanding about what is going on, but also a determination to follow Jesus whatever the cost might be (which Jesus requires of all true disciples).

(17-37) Faith & Compassion

(17-19) The Arrival in Bethany

- Jesus and his disciples arrive 4 days after Lazarus has died.
 - Even if Jesus had rushed off right away, he would not have been there in time.
 - He delays 2 day and arrives after Lazarus has been dead 4 days (more on this soon).
- Mary & Martha are surrounded by people who have come from Jerusalem to comfort them.
 - Probably includes both family friends & professional mourners.
 - The number of people present probably implies they are an important family.

(20-27) Jesus talks to Martha.

- (20-22) Martha sadly expresses her faith that Jesus could have healed Lazarus.
 - No reason to see this as any angry accusation so much as a regretful "if only..."
 - She continues to trust in Jesus' power...she might even be half hoping without putting it into words that he could still do something about this.
- (23-27) Jesus assures her that Lazarus will rise again.
 - (24) She declares her faith in the final resurrection.
 - This is taught in the Old Testament (e.g. Daniel 12:1-3).
 - Jesus has made it clear that he is the one who will raise those who belong to him "at the last day." (e.g. 6:40)
 - (25-26) Jesus declares himself to be the resurrection and the life.
 - Physical death has no power over those who believe in Jesus.

- Physical death becomes nothing more than a transition into new and better life – a perfect eternity with God that includes a physical resurrection.
- This is only true for those who believe (who trust Jesus to do this for them). Jesus asks Martha if she believes.
- (27) Martha unhesitatingly declares her faith.
 - She believes what Jesus has just said about being the only source of resurrection & eternal life for those who trust in him.
 - She believes that Jesus is the Messiah/Christ – the long-awaited Savior.
 - She believes that Jesus is the Son of God – he is not a mere human but God’s unique Son who is God himself (more on that on Wednesday).
- Do you believe?
 - Some preachers make a big point of “head belief vs. heart belief,” and I get what they’re saying, but I think that can be too abstract or confusing.
 - Martha’s declaration gives us a clear picture of saving faith.
 - Saving faith is confidence that certain things about Jesus are true plus personal trust in Jesus to give you true life on that basis.
 - Do you believe that Jesus is everything he claimed to be as revealed in the Gospels (God the Son who died and rose again to save us from our sins)?
 - Are you trusting him to provide eternal life? Have you asked him to forgive your sins and transform your life? Is that where your confidence lies?
 - Is your confidence in “I do such-and-such and try to be good” or in “Jesus my Savior died and rose again for me”?

(28-37) Jesus talks to Mary.

- (28-32) Martha sends Mary to talk to Jesus, and all the mourners follow her.
 - She starts by saying the exact same thing as Martha...
 - ...though in a more emotional way, which fits well with what we know of their personalities from other times they appear in the Gospels.
- (33-37) As Jesus sees the grief and despair around him, he reacts with great emotion.
 - The word translated *was deeply moved* is usually translated with the idea of being moved to anger. We see Jesus reacting with deep, even angry, emotion & crying.
 - The crowd interprets this as Jesus crying for the loss of his friend Lazarus, but I think that was only a small part of it (he knows he is about to resurrect Lazarus).
- Jesus is reacting to the whole scene: the grief & brokenness that death brings.
 - He, the one who created the universe, knows better than anyone that death was not part of the original creation.
 - Now, he is experiencing firsthand the emotional effects of it on himself & others.
 - He is probably also upset (angered even) at the despair that seems to be present, which is an indication of unbelief.
 - Everyone but Martha is acting as if Lazarus is gone forever...

- ...as if since Jesus did not heal him it is forever too late...
 - ...as if since Jesus did not act according to their expectations all is lost.
- Jesus' personal experience of grief and the temptation to despair makes him our perfect high priest (Hebrews 4:14-16).
 - Our God has lived as one of us and experienced this broken world.
 - This should give us confidence to walk in his footsteps and come to him in prayer with confidence that he hears, understands, and compassionately helps.
- They start out for the tomb...

(38-44) Resurrection!

(38-40) Jesus asks them to open the tomb.

- Martha objects that Lazarus has been dead long enough that decomposition will have started (wrapping in linen & spices was not the same as mummification or embalming).
 - Now we might see part of the reason for Jesus' two-day delay that caused him to arrive four days after Lazarus' death instead of two.
 - There is no doubt that Lazarus is dead.
 - A Jewish superstition that appears to go back to this time said that when a person dies, their spirit hangs around the body for 3 days hoping to reenter, but on the 4th day when decomposition sets in, it gives up and leaves.
 - Whether that superstition was in people's minds or not, it is clear that Lazarus is dead – this is a resurrection, not a resuscitation.
 - Jesus reminds Martha that if she continues to believe she will see the glory of Gd at work – and apparently she continues to trust because she has the stone removed.

(41-44) Jesus brings Lazarus back to life.

- (41-42) Jesus prays, making it clear that this is the power of the Father working through him, providing further proof that he is who he claims to be: the Son of God sent into the world.
- (43-44) All it takes is a command from Jesus and Lazarus comes out of the tomb as alive as ever (though having to shuffle or hop because of the graveclothes).
 - The command from Jesus reunites body and spirit and fully repairs any physical damage caused by sickness and death.
 - The most final and inevitable thing in human experience is dismissed at Jesus' word.
 - Jesus has authority over death itself, just as he claimed.
 - And this is only the “preview version” of the resurrection because Lazarus is raised merely to continued mortal life.
- The kind of glorious resurrection to immortality in the eternal kingdom is still future (see various verses in 1 Corinthians 15, the resurrection chapter).

- (22-23) Jesus will be the first to experience it within a few months from this time, to be followed by all who are his at his return.
- At his return, all believers will receive their glorified, immortal, resurrection bodies.
 - (51-53) That includes both those who have already died and are with him as he returns and those who are still alive on this earth at that time.
 - (54-55) On that day the lingering sting of death that we experience in this sin-cursed world will be fully and forever eliminated.

Applications

- Trust Jesus to save you. He is only the resurrection and the life for those who believe.
 - Believe that he is who he claims to be.
 - Ask him to forgive your sins and save you from death and hell.
 - Trust that his death and resurrection on your behalf gives you eternal life.
- Take comfort that loved ones who have died trusting in Jesus are with him even now, experiencing eternal life, and will be fully resurrected when he returns.
 - We may grieve that we are separated from them for now, but it is not despair (it is not sorrow without hope).
 - Knowing this should also motivate us to share the Gospel with loved ones who have not yet trusted in Jesus as their Savior.
- Look forward to the day when we get our new glorified bodies, & trust God's love until then.
 - Come to him in prayer with confidence, knowing that he sympathizes with your brokenness.
 - Don't panic and run ahead of his plan or despair and give up on following him.
 - His timing is perfect, and he is using all things for our good.