

Text: John 11:1-45

Title: “Believe and Live” Pt.1

INTRODUCTION

You'll be hearing more about this later in the service but I want to encourage you to come back this evening at 5:30 to share in our Celebrate the Mission experience. We've had 165 of our members go out on short-term partnership missions so far this year. You have prayed for these teams, given generously to the Wings scholarship fund and we'd like for you to rejoice in the amazing things God did this summer through our teams. So please join us.

ILLUSTRATION – Yesterday Nan and I were at the hospital visiting with Matt and Bethany Lee. Doctors had discovered a benign tumor on the brain of their little baby Chara and this week the doctors performed a very serious procedure on little Chara's brain. Matt and Bethany are strong in their faith but they still have questions. They know that somehow God is going to use this for His glory, but how? Chara won't remember anything about this, but Matt and Bethany will certainly look back and see the faithfulness of God and give Him glory. Perhaps it will be as their family and friends trust God for Chara's healing and give Him glory for that. Or perhaps the doctors and nurses will see the Lee's confidence in God and somehow come to give Him glory.

You see, the Lee's understand that God is always working to bring glory to Himself, and we see that on an occasion when Jesus turned the death of a close friend into a stage on which would be displayed the glory of God. Open your Bibles with me to John 11:1-44 ... to perhaps the most spectacular miracle our Lord Jesus ever performed, the raising of Lazarus. To get us into the text I'll read just the first three verses.

READ JOHN 11:1-3.

Now I plan to take two weeks to unpack this miracle of Jesus, but let me give you a quick glimpse of where this is going. We're talking about something that happened over a period of four days.

Day 1 – Martha, Mary and their brother Lazarus were some of Jesus' dearest friends, who live in a town called Bethany. Lazarus becomes critically ill and the sisters know his only hope is Jesus. So a messenger is sent to Jesus who is in a place called Perea, a day's walk away.

John 11:4 - When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it.”

Day 2 – The messenger returns to Bethany. By then Lazarus is dead. But then Jesus did something that was hard to understand.

John 11:6 - Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.

Day 3 – Jesus is silent as far as Lazarus is concerned. The disciples, knowing how close Jesus was to Lazarus, must have wondered why Jesus didn't go immediately to his friends.

Day 4 – Finally Jesus goes to Bethany. By now Lazarus has been in the tomb four days. Martha runs out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. Jump all the way down to...

John 11:21 - “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

John 11:22 - But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

Later the other sister, Mary, comes to meet Jesus and together they all go to the tomb where Lazarus was laid. Jesus commanded the stone to be rolled away. Martha says, “Uh, Jesus I wouldn’t do that if I were you. He’s been there four days.”

John 11:40 - Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?”

Jesus prayed, and called for Lazarus to come out. Out comes Lazarus all wrapped in his burial clothes. Jesus said, “Take off the graves clothes and let him go.” Amazing! Remember, Jesus called His shot. He’s orchestrated all of this. Remember when Jesus first heard the news about Lazarus Jesus said...

John 11:4 - “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.”

Now the glory of God is the outshining of all of His marvelous attributes. Jesus is saying that as a result of this heartbreaking situation they will see things about God and about His Son that they would not have otherwise seen. There are some things that God cannot show us about Himself without our going through suffering. We would not have seen the glory of Christ’s resurrection had we not also seen the pain of His crucifixion.

So what attributes of God in the person of Jesus did they see in this tragic episode? What attributes of God in the person of Jesus should we expect to see in the darkest moments of our lives? In this amazing miracle the glory of God is revealed in two marvelous attributes. I’ll deal with one today and the other next week. First, in this suffering we see...

1. THE LOVE OF JESUS FOR US (John 11:1-20).

Now I know that’s probably not the first thing you would think about if your brother got sick and died. “Oh, God must love me.” No, this will not be your first thought, but in time you will see and know the love that Jesus has for you in your suffering.

The verses we read earlier show us that there was a deep relationship between Jesus and these three people. He was a frequent guest in their home and there were a lot of sweet times with them. So we’re not surprised when it says...

John 11:3 - So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.”

Notice that: “The one you *love* (Lazarus) is sick.” And down a couple of verses it says...

John 11:5 - Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

Now there's an interesting play on words here. When Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus about Lazarus' sickness they said, “The one you *love* is sick” (v.3). The word they use for love is the word that means the emotional affection among family and friends. And truly that is what they experienced with Jesus. But Jesus loved them more than they realized. Because when John makes the statement “Jesus *loved* Martha and her sister and Lazarus” (v.5), he uses another word for love. It is the highest kind of love which means to seek the absolute best for another, no matter what one gets in return. One is *emotion*, the other is *devotion*. Write this in your notes:

JESUS LOVES YOU MORE THAN YOU REALIZE.

And this explains why Jesus did He did in v.6:

John 11:6 - Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.

Why didn't Jesus go immediately when He learned that Lazarus was sick? If Jesus had just had affection for them He might have gone immediately. But because His love for them was greater than that ... because there was something greater He had in mind for this serious situation ... Jesus delayed.

God's love for us is not a pampering love. It is a preparing and a perfecting love. His love does not guarantee that we will be shielded from problems or pain in life. The fact that we love Him and He loves us does not shelter us from problems and pains. But even though God is silent and His delay seems unbearable, no matter what you are tempted to believe, you must never forget that He loves you more than you know.

Romans 8:37 - No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Romans 8:38 - For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,

Romans 8:39 - neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So we come back to v.4...

John 11:4 - When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it.”

That doesn't mean that Lazarus won't die. He *does* die. It means that death will not be the last word. It means that there is something greater at work. This illness is not mainly about Jesus' good friend dying; it's about God being glorified through it.

Well, after three days...

John 11:7 - Then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

And in the next few verses the disciples protest because they know that Jesus' enemies back in Bethany are waiting for Jesus in order to attack Him. But Jesus knows that as long as the Father has work for Him to do He is immortal and unstoppable. He is not afraid. So...

John 11:11 - After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."

"Our friend Lazarus..." There you see the affection of Jesus toward this family. The delay of Jesus in going to His friends was not a denial of His love for them. That's the next thing I want you to see about Jesus' love.

JESUS' LOVE GIVES WHAT WE NEED MOST.

ILLUSTRATION - There are times when what God takes us through doesn't seem like love. Parents, you know about this. You take your child to the pediatrician to get their shots. You love your child and want them to be healthy so they must have their shots. But there in the examining room at the doctor's office after the nurse sticks them with that first needle, your child looks up at you with tears in their eyes thinking, "Mommy, please do something to stop this." But you have to let them go through that pain because you love them. Your love gives them what they need most. And God loves us in the same way.

What we need most is to see and experience the glory of God ... to see the outshining of His excellent qualities that will make us love and worship Him more. So Jesus doesn't always keep bad things from happening to us when He knows there's something greater and better He will bring out it. So what is that? Well let's continue on.

John 11:12 - His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better."

John 11:13 - Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

The disciples didn't believe that Lazarus was really dead.

John 11:14 - So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead,

John 11:15 - and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

There it is! That's what Jesus is driving at in all of this ... "for your sake ... so that you may believe." Jesus is glad because He knows that He is bringing to His followers what they really need most ... that they would see the glory of God and trust in Him. Write this in your notes:

WHAT WE NEED MOST IS FOR OUR FAITH TO BE INTENSIFIED.

Jesus is about to do something that will reveal the glory of God. He is going to give life back to a man who has been dead for four days. And as a result of that His disciples will believe like they have never believed before.

Most of us will not get to see the miracle of a family member being brought back to life. But all of us have seen a greater miracle, when God sent His only Son to come to rescue us from our sins. He did that by allowing His Son to die in our place with our sins heaped upon Him. Jesus died and three days later God raised Jesus from the dead demonstrating that Jesus was God. Lazarus, after he was raised from the dead, died sometime later. But not Jesus. Jesus rose again and lives forever to save all who put their trust in Him.

Jesus knows that the greatest good that can come into our lives is for us to know how to tap into the powerful resources of God through faith ... through believing.

ILLUSTRATION – Do you remember the last time you were on an airplane and the flight attendant went through her little speech about what to do if the plane suddenly loses pressure? Most of us tune that out, we've heard it several times and we don't think that will ever happen anyway, so we don't listen. The flight attendant says something like, "In the event that the plane suddenly loses pressurization an oxygen mask will drop from the compartment above you. Secure the mask over your nose and mouth and breathe normally." Now that may be the biggest challenge of all when there's something really wrong with the plane that the oxygen masks drop out of the ceiling, the hardest thing to do is to breathe normally.

When tragedy hits Jesus doesn't say "breathe," He says, "Believe!" Put your trust in Him that somehow He is going to work through this for our good, but more importantly for the glory of God, which has to be the greatest desire we have as believers.