

RUF Large Group Bible Study
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Healing of Lazarus (John 11:1-44)²

11:1 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. 3 So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." 4 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."

5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. 7 Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." 8 The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?" 9 Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. 10 But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." 11 After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." 12 The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." 13 Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. 14 Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died, 15 and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." 16 So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

17 Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 18 Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, 19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. 20 So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. 21 Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." 23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" 27 She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

28 When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." 29 And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. 31 When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 32 Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. 34 And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." 35 Jesus wept. 36 So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" 37 But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?"

38 Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. 39 Jesus said, "Take away the stone." 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." 40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" 41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 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." 43 When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." 44 The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

I have just finished reading *American Jesus*, a new book by Stephen Prothero. Its subtitle says it all: How the Son of God Became a National Icon. Prothero traces the American heritage of Jesus from its Calvinistic roots to its present day status. Today, everyone loves Jesus. Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Atheists, Liberals, Conservatives, Fundamentalists, Mormons – all can agree that Jesus is essential to their faith. How is that possible? Because Jesus has been redefined; he's been ripped out of his historic context, stripped of his creedal backdrop and removed of the theology that has always accompanied him. This is extremely troubling. This is why a megachurch pastor who is a true Christian and a liberal theologian who preaches the Death of God theology can both say, "It's all about Jesus."

You may hear on campus or in our nation "Jesus only" talk. *Solus Jesus*. These people usually mean well. They are attempting to repudiate denominations and what they would call "churchianity." Assuming the best, we want to affirm that loving Jesus is at the core of Christianity. But there is an extreme danger as well. If you love "Jesus only" what Jesus are we talking about? The Jesus that showed up and preached to the American Indians, as per the Book of Mormon? The Arian Jesus, who was adopted by God but who didn't exist before the beginning of the world? The liberal Christians' Jesus, who was a mere man, a great teacher, but who did no miracles and certainly wasn't resurrected from the dead? The fundamentalist Jesus who never drank, swore or hung out with riffraff? Do you see the problem here?³ Do you see that if we take a *Solus Jesus* approach, that we are tempted, swayed to form Jesus in our own image to serve our own needs?

What is the answer? I believe the answer is *Sola Scriptura*. The Scriptures alone define who Jesus is. We have to have a high view of Scriptures in order to see what they say about him. This view needs to involve the whole canon. We must not excise certain texts from our view. We also must not concentrate on only the books and passages we most like – God has given us these 66 books for a reason – to show us himself. This comes back to a view of scripture that involves inspiration and inerrancy.

Thomas Jefferson claimed to be a Christian. He is one of our most revered Americans, and he took an American view of his faith and the Scriptures. Here are a few quotes from *American Jesus* to show you Jefferson's approach to his faith and the Bible, and the downstream consequences that has had on our society's view of the Son of God.

As Jefferson sat down in the White House, razor in hand, and began to cut and paste his own Bible, the American Jesus was born. Soon Christians were emphasizing Jesus' humanity over his divinity... Inspired by revolutionary rhetoric of liberty, equality and fraternity, evangelical Protestants popularized Jefferson's revolt against Calvinism by Christianizing it. Whereas Jefferson had embraced Jesus without Christianity, they

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² My sources are: *Harmony of the Gospels*, J. Calvin; Tim Keller sermons found at redeemer.com and preached to Redeemer Presbyterian Church; John Piper sermon manuscripts found at desiringgod.org; *The Gospel According to John*, DA Carson; *The Gospel According to John*, L Morris; *Exposition of The Gospel According to John*; A. Pink; *John*, Hughes; *Getting to Know John's Gospel*; R Peterson;

³ Early in the nineteenth century, Restorationists began preaching "No creed but the Bible." "We neither advocate Calvinism, Arminianism, Arianism, Socianism, Trinitarianism, Unitarianism, Deism, or Sectarianism," Alexander Campbell explained, "but *New Testamentism*." (49) Friends, this is a scary quote. This quote makes no sense. What sort of New Testamentism will you preach? It shows a complete lack of understanding of the way thinking and theology works. The difference between Calvinism and Arminianism is an intra-Christian debate. The difference between both of those and Arianism or Socianims or Deism is the difference between Christianity and not Christianity.

embraced Christianity without Calvinism, rejecting the doctrine of predestination as an offense to human liberty and divine mercy. Jesus had come to earth not for some but for all, they insisted, and each was free to accept or reject the salvation he so graciously offered. . . .

This American revolution proceeded in three overlapping stages. In the early nineteenth century, evangelicals liberated Jesus first from Calvinism and then from creeds. . . .

The second stage culminated in the decades immediately following the Civil War. This time liberal Protestants were in the vanguard. Informed by Darwinism, comparative religion, and biblical criticism, they disentangled Jesus from the Bible, replacing the *sola scriptura* (Bible alone) rallying cry of the Reformation with *solus Jesus*: Jesus alone. . . .

The third stage in this revolution fulfilled the promise of Jefferson's vision for Jesus, liberating him from Christianity itself. . . .

In *From Jesus to Christ* (1988), Paula Fredriksen has described how the early Church transformed Jesus the man into the Christ of the creeds. In the United States, Americans reversed the process. As they made it possible to reject the Calvinist Christ, the creedal Christ, and the biblical Christ, Jesus became accessible to Americans who could not believe in predestination, the Trinity or the inerrancy of the Bible. As they disentangled Jesus from Christianity itself, Jesus piety became possible even for non-Christians. To be sure, not all Americans went this far. . . . But the genie was out of the bottle, and Americans of all religious persuasions (and none) now felt free to embrace whichever Jesus fulfilled their wishes. (13-14)

[Jefferson] praised Jesus as "meek, benevolent, patient, firm, disinterested, and of the sublimest eloquence," and his system of morals as "the most perfect and sublime that has ever been taught by man." Then he blasted "the corruptions of schismatising followers, who have found an interest in sophisticating and perverting the simple doctrines he taught, by engrafting on them the mysticisms of a Grecian sophist, frittering them into subtleties, and obscuring them with jargon, until they have caused good men to reject the whole in disgust, and to view Jesus himself as an imposter." Jefferson's list of these corruptions was long, extending to dogmas such as original sin, the virgin birth, the atonement, predestination, salvation by faith, transubstantiation, bodily resurrection and above all the Trinity." (22)

Noting that Jesus had written nothing himself, he argued that the Gospels were drafted by "the most unlettered and ignorant of men." As a result, Jesus' teachings had come down "mutilated, misstated, and often unintelligible." It took a discerning man to dig back through "the metaphysical abstractions of Athanasius, and the manic ravings of Calvin" to the true teachings of Jesus, but Jefferson saw himself as just the fellow for the job. (22)

Jefferson rejected the Nicene Creed, the Council of Chalcedon, predestination, and the Trinity, calling Athanasius, Calvin "mere Usurpers of the Christian name, teaching a Counter-religion, made up of the deliria of crazy imaginations, as foreign from Christianity as is that of Mahomet. The nation's Federalist ministers were no better. These "Pseudo-Christians" and "mountebanks," Jefferson fumed, were "the real Anti-Christ." (27)

Jefferson's religious genius was his ability to imagine Jesus apart from historic Christianity. (27) Jefferson was a deeply religious man. To be sure, Jefferson was no traditional Christian. But he was no atheist either. In fact, he saw atheism as irrational, and monotheism as the only natural faith. . . . What he was was a follower of Jesus, or at least of the rational sort of Jesus a leader like Jefferson could follow. (28)

The spirit of Jefferson lives on mightily in academia and liberal Christianity today. It is carried today by a group of liberal professors called The Jesus Seminar, and its many followers and disciples.

Like Jefferson, the Jesus Seminar is quintessentially American. Its method is democratic, its goal is freedom and its obsession is Jesus. (33)

The first [aim of the Jesus Seminar] was to free the real Jesus of history from the fetters of traditional Christian creeds – to enable Jesus to be himself rather than playing the roles forced on him by Peter or Paul or the writers of the Nicene creed. A second aim was to liberate the real Jesus from the chains of born-again mythology. . . . Finally, the Seminar sought to free Jesus from the cloistered confines of the academy, by bringing cutting-edge research about him to the attention of the media. (33)

In 1909, the Irish Catholic writer George Tyrell evaluated their [earlier enlightenment attempts at the historical Jesus] contributions, observing that whenever liberal Protestants tried to dig down the well of Catholic history to the real Jesus, they succeeded only in finding their own reflections. "Whatever Jesus was," Tyrell demurred, "he was in no sense a liberal Protestant." (34)

Only 18 percent of the reputed sayings of Jesus received the coveted red or pink ratings; the remaining 82 percent were deemed inauthentic (gray or black). (37)

Out of all the events the Fellows considered, only 29 (16 percent of the total) received pink or red ratings. (38)

In *Honest to Jesus*, Funk speaks of "giving Jesus a demotion" and emptying him of iconic status. . . . The "creedal Christ" must die, Funk argues, so that the real Jesus can rise again. (39)

The professors of the religious studies department here at OU and at universities across the country full-heartedly endorse this approach. The creedal Christ has to die. This sentiment is alive and well on campuses and in churches. There is a progression here – one that is directly connected to removing Christ from his creedal and theological moorings.

Evangelicals had championed the Bible over the creeds, downplaying or denying doctrines long considered essential to the Christian faith. Liberals jettisoned it even more. While evangelicals continued to affirm the twin authority of Jesus and the scriptures, liberals weaned themselves off the Bible, which they increasingly viewed as a good book rather than God's Book. Ultimately, their faith came to rest on the authority of Jesus alone. (78)

Over the course of the nineteenth century, American Protestantism effected a second Reformation. As biblical criticism, evolutionary science, and comparative religion chipped away at the authority of the Bible, and the Civil War dealt it a near-lethal blow, some turned to alternative sources of authority, including reason and experience. Many more turned to their Savior – the Jesus of history for some, and the Jesus of experience for others. While Reformation standard-bearers had retreated from tradition to the Bible, evangelicals began to retreat from the Bible to Jesus. By the time liberalism emerged out of evangelicalism in the decades after the Civil War, this retreat had become an all-out withdrawal. (80)

As liberal Protestantism ascended, Jesus did too. In fact, the more these liberal Protestants disentangled Jesus from controversial Calvinist dogmas and restrictive creeds, the more prominent and popular he became. (80)

While Calvinists had maximized the distance between God and humanity, and evangelicals had narrowed it, liberal Protestants all but obliterated it. Drawing on the doctrine of the imago dei, They argued that humans were created good, in the image of God, not sinful, in the image of a fallen Adam. As for God, He dwelled in the world, rather than standing aloof from it. (83)

More a moralist than a miracle worker, their Jesus came to earth not to satisfy a legal judgment or pay a debt owed to an angry Father, but to reveal to human beings the loving character of God, and to prompt them to develop the same sense of character in themselves. His death saved sinners not from hell (which few liberals believed in anymore) but from selfish solitude. The new birth he offered was essentially moral, an awakening to a life of sympathy with all of God's children. (83-84)

But it's not just the liberals. It's the conservatives who have continued to fuel this fire by their rejection of creeds, confessions and the studying of theology.

Nondenominational megachurches may be the most important institutional legacy of the Jesus movement. This influence is ironic, given the opposition of many early Jesus People to the institutional church. But in keeping with their roots in the Jesus movement, the megachurches billed themselves as the 7-Ups of the Christian world – unchurchly alternatives to the vast denominational bureaucracies. (147)

Vineyarders [a denomination that epitomizes this unattached approach] also insist on knowing Jesus. One Vineyard pastor says, "The apostles didn't know theology. They just knew Jesus." (150)

In fact the elimination of the cross [from churches, sometimes replacing that symbol with a dove] may free Jesus up to be everywhere rather than somewhere – to allow him to reside in each believer's heart, in keeping with each believer's needs. It's tempting to discern a bit of Gnosticism here. Disembodied and de-historicized, the evanescent Jesus of these churches seems to exist only in the mind, as an object of believer's feelings, experiences, and desires. It may be more accurate, however, to see the Jesus of the Vineyard and the Calvary Chapel as a twenty-first century baby boomer rather than a first-century Gnostic... The Jesus they [Smith and Wimber] preach isn't just seeker sensitive, he's boomer-sensitive. To a generation suspicious of organized religion, he offers friendship rather than membership. To a generation skeptical of dogma, he accents experience. To a generation obsessed with the first person singular, he offers realization as well as salvation. (151)

So ends my diatribe. What is the solution to this dilemma?

I would suggest that if you truly want to know Jesus, you need to understand him through the Scriptures first. You must avail yourself to the whole Bible, read it for yourself, sit under good Bible teaching, watch to see if you are always happy with Jesus (bad) or if he ever gets in your face about things (good).

Then you must go back to the early creeds – Apostles and Nicene especially. These are the earliest formulations on what is and what isn't orthodoxy. These were hammered out by honest and sincere men in the early church who cared deeply about what was at stake. Some of what you and others believed was condemned as heresy in 321 A.D. Most of what we see has been dealt with long ago, but we are oblivious to it. A dose of church history would help immensely.

Next, you should read and study a Confession. I suggest the Westminster Confession of Faith, written in the 1640s. The London Baptist Confession is a very similar document (that uses the WCF as its base, in fact). You would do well to memorize the catechisms associated with these (you can find the WCF and catechisms at http://www.pcanet.org/general/cof_preface.htm).

You should also join a church thoughtfully. I am extremely leery of churches that will not align themselves with and submit themselves to a certain denomination. It feels way too "American" to me to be so independent – independency can be a very bad thing, and I would suggest that the Scriptures do not point to such an approach to life. We make commitments and associations, and that is for our good. You need to look at your church seriously and critically and see if it is under the lordship of Jesus Christ in its documents, statements and confessions. This should be comprehensive and not a bare bones approach. Of course, every church has its faults, and since every church is filled with sinners, we will always struggle with purity of heart, faith and doctrine. But the least-common denominator approach of many evangelical churches is wrong. And the empty-words about Jesus approach of many liberal churches is deceitful. And the independency of fundamental churches is unconnectionalism.

I have filled three pages without getting to the text of John 11.

"It has been long wondered why the stunning miracle of the raising of Lazarus is not mentioned in the Synoptic gospels. It was, after all, a miracle that must have been among the most significant of all the Lord's miracles, leading as it did to the final determination of the religious leadership to kill him. Any number of reasons have been proposed, but perhaps the most convincing is that Peter was not present on the occasion of this miracle and so did not include it in his account, in the Gospel of Mark - which, you remember, is Peter's gospel - because he was not himself an eyewitness. He wanted his Gospel to be an eyewitness account and he had not seen the raising of Lazarus with his own eyes. The absence of this account in Matthew and Luke may well be due to the fact that it was omitted in Mark. Peter is absent by name in the Gospel of John from 6:68 to 13:6. It appears not unlikely that he remained behind in Galilee taking care of his livelihood when the others went to Jerusalem. This also is a likely explanation for the unusual role of Thomas in this account. We expect Peter to speak for the group, but someone else would fill that role if Peter were not there."⁴

⁴ Dr. Rayburn, Faith Tacoma, from the website with his sermons: <http://www.faithtacoma.org/Sermons.htm>

Let's look at what John 11 tells us about Jesus.

1) *He responded with profound words*

We have quite a dramatic set up for this miracle. We read in the first few verses of Lazarus' relationship with Jesus ("he whom you love is ill"), and his sisters come to Jesus and tell him that Lazarus is ill. Lazarus is the New Testament form of the name Eleazer, which means "God has helped." In verse 5, John writes, "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus." We have friends here, friends who have gone to Jesus for help.

Jesus says this: "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." This is rather odd, since this illness *will* lead to death. But Jesus says it doesn't. Obviously, he is saying something that we're missing. He's saying that physical death is not the end of things. That there is life after death, which he will later prove by postponing even our physical death. And all things come together for the glory of God.

Then we get this strange comment – "So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was." Huh? Jesus heard that his good buddy, a friend that he dearly loved was sick, and he stayed two days longer? Why? Does he not care about healing him? Does he not care that Lazarus might die?⁵

Apparently he does, as we'll see later. But he has other things to do as well. Charles Hummel has written a little booklet entitled "Tyranny of the Urgent" in which he discusses this passage. He says that Jesus never let the urgent thing keep him from the important thing. He always was, if I might say so, "Purpose Driven." DA Carson puts it this way: "The decision to delay is therefore to be explained as the deliberate refusal to be manipulated, but await his Father's timing. After all, the delay ensured that Lazarus had been dead long enough that no one could misinterpret the miracle as a mere resuscitation, effected before the man's spirit had properly left the area. The miracle that Jesus actually performed therefore confirmed the faith of his disciples and friends with dramatic power that would have been lacking if Jesus had responded immediately to the plea for help."⁶

He could say no to things, postpone things, even hurt people by not doing for them what they wanted, all because he knew best what would and should happen. Can you say the same thing? What would it mean for you to live this sort of purpose driven life? How does the tyranny of the urgent creep into your thinking, into your actions, into your plans and desires and day? Do you even know what might be important instead of urgent?

Jesus knows that Lazarus has died, but he also knows that God's glory will be all the greater because of what will happen next. He says, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." The disciples didn't get what he was saying. You see, they didn't think that people could raise from the dead either. They weren't stupid. They weren't so superstitious that they believed someone could actually resurrect people. So they thought Jesus must have been talking about sleeping (even though that was a common idiom for death). Jesus sets them straight: "Lazarus has died, and for your sake, I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."⁷

I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. I am glad that Lazarus has died so that you may believe. I am glad that pain and suffering has entered your life, entered the world so that you may believe. That is a hard saying. That is not what we want to hear. Can you say that? Do you rejoice in pain and suffering? Do you see this as God's tools for you so that you might believe?

P.T. Forsyth writes:

"It is a greater thing to pray for pain's conversion than for its removal. It is more of grace to pray that God would make a sacrament of it. The sacrament of pain! That we partake not simply, nor perhaps chiefly, when we say, or try to say, with resignation, 'Thy will be done.' It is not always easy for the sufferer, if he remain clear-eyed, to see that it is God's will. It may have been caused by an evil mind, or a light fool, or some stupid greed. But, now it is there, a certain treatment of it is God's will; and that is to capture and exploit it for Him. It is to make it serve the soul and glorify God. It is to consecrate its elements and make it sacramental. It is to convert it into prayer. God has blessed pain even in causing us to pray for relief from it, or profit. Whatever drives us to Him, and even nearer Him, has a blessing in it. And, if we are to go higher still, it is to turn pain to praise, to thank Him in the fires, to review life and use some of the energy we spend in worrying upon recalling and tracing his goodness, patience, and mercy. If much open up to us in such a review we may be sure there is much more we do not know, and perhaps never may. God is the greatest of all who do good by stealth and do not crave for every benefit to be acknowledged. Or we may see how our pain becomes a blessing to others. And we turn the spirit of heaviness to a garment of praise. We may stop grousing and get our soul into its Sunday clothes. The sacrament of pain becomes then a true Eucharist and giving of thanks."⁸ [The Soul of Prayer, 42-43]

A few more things before Jesus gets to the miracle. He arrives in Bethany and sees the crowd who had come to console Mary and Martha. Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. There was no doubt that he was dead. His body had already begun to decompose.

Martha approaches him and says, "Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." This is a little bit of frustration talking, as Martha both displays her faith and her

⁵ Some might say that Jesus' delay makes him responsible for Lazarus' death. But if he would have left immediately, considering the traveling time involved, Lazarus would have been dead two days instead of four. That would have not been enough time to offset the superstitions associated with resuscitation within the first three days. Carson, p. 408

⁶ Carson's John commentary, p. 407

⁷ Interestingly, in verse 17, we get one of only a few glimpses of Thomas. We normally think of Thomas as Doubting Thomas for his skeptical view of the resurrection, but here we see a Courageous Thomas, speaking up of following Jesus to death. "On this occasion Thomas reflects not doubt but raw devotion and courage, even though it was courage shot through with misunderstanding and incomprehension: misunderstanding, in that he had not grasped the assurance implicit in vv. 9-10, and incomprehension, in that the death Jesus had to face as the Lamb of God (1:29, 36) could not possibly be shared by his disciples. Yet there is another sense in which Thomas, like others in this Gospel, spoke better than he knew: his words have become a clarion call to would-be disciples, after the resurrection, to take up their cross daily and follow Jesus." Carson, p. 410

⁸ From Dr. Rayburn's sermon

doubt at the same time. The faith is more prominent and in greater view though, so we don't want to cast a bad light on Martha here. "Verse 23 is a masterpiece in planned ambiguity."⁹ "Your brother will rise again," he says. Yeah, yeah, yeah, Martha says, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus interacts with her a little more, instructing her and revealing himself to her all the more. We'll return to what he says in a minute.

But then Mary comes up to him, after Jesus had called to her. Mary is completely broken up. She goes to Jesus and says the very same thing that Martha had: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Jesus had rebuked and engaged Martha, but with Mary he says, "Where have you laid him?" And then he wept.

Two different responses to two people in the same situation. Jesus does not deal with us the same way, and we cannot necessarily predict how he will handle our lives and hearts. Here's another one – John the Baptist is in prison asking for and praying for his release and so is Peter. Peter gets out with a miracle. John gets beheaded. What's the deal?

God is not tameable like that. He surely works in patterns and covenants and families and his ways are discernable. But he is not bound to treat two people the same way. He uses each of our circumstances to bring about the greatest amount of his glory.

Why?

It goes back to what he said to Martha, words we need to hear and we should be so glad he told them to her: "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." Jesus is leading Martha, and us away from a focus on an abstract belief in heaven and hell, but to a personalized belief that it is he alone who can provide heaven for us. This is one of his great "I am" statements found in the book of John. He's not just saying that if you follow him you can find resurrection and life, but that HE IS resurrection and life.

Jesus is life. Death has no hold over the Christian. We all will die, but if we are in Christ we all will live. We can take the ultimate in pain – death – and put it in perspective. This should allow us to take the lesser pains in our lives and put them in perspective too.

Jesus turns to Martha and asks her, "Do you believe this?"

Jesus turns to you and asks the same question: "Do you believe this?" Do you believe Jesus is the resurrection and the life, that you will be raised on the last die, your soul reunited with your body so that you can live and worship and glorify God for eternity? If you do, then you also need to believe that Jesus can raise Martha's brother from the dead. Lazarus' resurrection then, in some sense, becomes a living, real parable for the transformational power of Jesus to raise the dead to life.

2) *He realized human suffering*

Let me quickly point out that Jesus is not saying these things in a stoic or unpassionate way. Just as he taught Martha, he also grieved with Mary.

You know this verse. John 11:35. The famous shortest verse in the Bible¹⁰ - "Jesus wept." And the verse that follows: "So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!'" Think about it. Jesus knew that he was about to raise Lazarus from the dead. He has said as much for the past few days. He is about to reveal his glory in a way that is absolutely incredible. And yet, he still is there, present at that moment, weeping with his friends. The verb here means a quiet weeping, a deep grieving. It's different from the verbs used to express what Mary and Martha were doing – they were showing loud, demonstrative mourning and wailing, a show of expression totally appropriate as well.

I think Jesus is deeply grieving for two reasons. The first is because his people don't understand him. That is why he grieves in Luke 19:41 when he looks out on Jerusalem. They just don't get it. They continually misunderstand him. Look what is about to happen in the next passage – the Jews plot to kill Jesus, even after they saw him raise Lazarus. Unbelief is not fun for Jesus.

But the other thing is that death isn't fun for Jesus either. Jesus hates death. He understands its role after the fall in the greater purposes of God, but that doesn't mean he has to like it. Sometimes when we think of a sovereign God or a sovereign Jesus, we tend to make him dispassionate, uncaring, totally rational, unmoved by suffering, pain and death. But here we have both together. We have sovereignty and suffering. We have power and pain. That is especially seen in the cross.

Death is our enemy. We should hate it. We are resigned to it, for it is inevitable. But it is also an intrusion in our world. I think a Christian funeral should be a mix of these two things – the frustration that death has crept in and taken life, and also the rejoicing that this isn't the end of the story. So we need a proper mix. I don't want a balloon ceremony and party when I die. I want you to be sad I'm gone. I want you to cry and be mad at death and sin. But I also want you to look through those tears and know that I am in glory and that death is not the end. There is hope in the suffering. There is joy in the sorrow. Because of Jesus.

He enters into our suffering, my friends. How could he not? He is the Man of Sorrows. He is the Suffering Messiah. He is the One Who Bears Our Iniquity. It is not a fun time for him. He can relate to us. He knows pain. He knows. If you take anything from Gibson's *Passion of the Christ* movie, it should be that – Jesus suffered with and for you. Do not think he is not with you in your suffering, whatever it is. You need to remember this in your pain – your heartbreak, your physical pain, your losses, your shattered dreams, your degenerating body...

"But it is even more than simply that heavy things and dark days and discouragements will lead at last to light and glory for the children of God. It is even more than that troubles will bring their blessings while we are still in this world because God has appointed our troubles for good in our lives. No, when you confess that God is absolutely sovereign, infinitely wise, and immeasurably kind and merciful, it becomes necessary for us to go on to confess that as dark as our way may sometimes seem, there could be no better way for us to travel. As many wrong turns as we may seem to take, getting nowhere, in fact we are traveling the only way we shall want to have traveled when our traveling days are done. Samuel Rutherford once made this point in a letter to Lady Kenmure, a woman who more than once felt sorrows and bitter disappointments such as Martha and Mary felt in the death of their brother. 'Madam, when ye are come to the other side of the water, and have set down your foot on the shore of glorious eternity,

⁹ Carson, p. 412

¹⁰ Although in the NIV, Job 3:2 is shorter: "He said" – in the ESV it's "And he said".

and look back again to the waters and to your wearisome journey, and shall see, in that clear glass of endless glory, nearer to the bottom of God's wisdom, ye shall then be forced to say, 'If God had done otherwise with me than he hath done, I had never come to the enjoying of this crown of glory.'" [Letter XI, p. 52]¹¹

Have you ever wondered if God cares about your suffering? Sure you have. "Where were you, Lord? You came too late. Where were you when my loved one died? Where were you when my marriage dissolved? Where were you when my parents divorced? Where were you when my father became an alcoholic? Where were you when I was cheated out of my promotion? Where were you when my child went astray?"¹²

It's good and right to ask those questions. You need to voice your wonderings about God's presence. But then you need to hear his answer. "I was there," he says.

You know the cheesy footprints poem? How the author says that in the hardest times there were only one pair of footprints and Jesus says that that's when he was carrying him. The truth is – Jesus is always carrying us. His are the only footprints ever on the beach. In your hardest times and best times, he's all you got.

3) *He raised Lazarus from the dead*

And then you need to move past that and get to the resurrection. Jesus goes to the tomb and he asks them to take away the stone. They gasp. It's going to smell too bad, Jesus. Don't do it. He responds: "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" They nod their heads, but they have no idea what he is talking about.

Jesus prays, invoking the name of the Father and a higher purpose besides just seeing his friend again. Then he says, "Lazarus, come out."¹³

Silence. Nothing. Nobody moves.

"Then the man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth."

Notice how Jesus didn't go into the tomb and give him mouth to mouth or pound on his chest or give him the Heimlich. He merely spoke. By the word of his power the winds and waves were calmed, the paralytic was healed, there was light in the darkness. By the word of his power death came to life.

It's sort of interesting to speculate what was happening to Lazarus at the time.

Here is Alexander Whyte writes about this:

And thus it was that scarcely had Lazarus sat down in his Father's house: he had not got his harp of gold well into his hand: he had not got the Hallelujah that they were preparing [for] the Ascension of their Lord well into his mouth, when the angel Gabriel came up to him: "Hail! Lazarus: highly honoured among the glorified from among men. They Master calls up for you. He has some service for you still to do for Him on the earth." And the sound of many waters fell silent for a season as they saw one of the most shining of their number rise up, and lay aside his glory, and hang his harp on the wall, and pass out of their sight, and descended to where their heavenly Prince still tarried with his work unfinished. And Lazarus's soul descended straightway into that grave, where for four days his former body had lain dead, and towards which our Lord was now on His way. And the first words Lazarus heard were these, and the voice that spoke was the voice of his former Friend – "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me... Lazarus, come out!" [Bible Characters, ii, 57]¹⁴

We don't know what Lazarus was thinking or doing, but the affect on the gathered crowd must have been astonishment. No one knows what to do. This just doesn't happen. This man has raised someone from the dead.

Do you believe that? Do you think this is a made-up story? Do you take a naturalistic approach to the Bible and the world that would presuppose the supernatural couldn't happen? Do you think this was amended to the text?

If not, then you have to do something with this, for it has profound implications.

Jesus is God. Jesus is personal. Jesus is calling you. This means that Jesus makes dead people rise. I think this is a perfect picture of our spiritual death, and is perhaps why Jesus has done this miracle for us. He didn't raise other friends he had that died – John the Baptist for example. So his goal isn't to have all his buddies around all the time.

He is showing us that he has the power to bring the dead to life. To make dry bones walk again. If he can do it physically, surely he can do it spiritually, right? And what was Lazarus' role in this – he responded to the call of Jesus by coming out. But he had already been made alive by him, hadn't he? Did he ask to be brought back to life? Jesus took the initiative and resurrected him.

So it is for us. Jesus needs to get into the hearts of your friends and family. Pray for that. Go to Jesus and ask him to do it, just like Mary and Martha did. Express your frustration even. Trust in him.

And we also see a foreshadowing of Jesus' resurrection. In only a few short chapters Jesus will start his last week, he will begin the movements that will lead toward what the Passion of Christ movie depicted for you. But without the resurrection, it is utterly meaningless I tell you. Liberal Christians will say something different. They will say that the historic Jesus was perhaps crucified and then left to die. He may have been buried, but most likely not. He certainly wasn't resurrected from the dead in any literal sense. In a figurative sense, perhaps. He was "resurrected in our hearts."

Hogwash. If he wasn't resurrected from the dead in a literal sense, then I honestly have no use for him. And neither should you. But the burden of proof is to show that that didn't happen, for the story is too well-attested to and the results of it far too reaching to be easily dismissed.

¹¹ Dr. Rayburn's sermon

¹² From Kent Hughes' commentary on John, p. 284

¹³ "Though it is not John's point, it has often been remarked that the authority of Jesus is so great that, had he not specified Lazarus, all the tombs would have given up their dead to resurrection life." Carson, p. 418

¹⁴ Rayburn again

But if he did, then that makes all the difference. You are obligated to do something with it. You must grapple with the significance of the cross.

And if he did, then this resurrection is a precursor to that one, something that John would call a “sign” pointing to something greater to come.

We will all die. I would hazard a guess that none of us will experience a resurrection from the dead like Lazarus. Some of you may not even want one. But on your death bed, or in the seconds before you die, what do you suppose you will be thinking about? What hope will you have? Where do you think you will be going in the next days or hours?¹⁵

Imagine Lazarus on his second death bed, older now, having died once already. What would he say this time? Perhaps, “I’m sorry to see you go, my dear friends and family. I truly love life. I do not like death. But I assure you that I am going to a place that is wonderful. I have been there once already, though briefly and it is fine with me to go back. I hope I have lived a good life, one pleasing to the Lord by faith, one that helped make this world a better place while I was here. I am grateful for the extended time. But I will go. And I will see you soon enough with me. I am going to be with the Lord again, and that is sweeter than I can say.”

¹⁵ Do you think of your death?

“Fore-fancy your death.” Samuel Rutherford

“Let death be premeditated.” Nicholas Ridley the martyr

“Die speculatively.” Thomas Goodwin

“If a man would live well, let him fetch his last day to him, and make it always his company keeper.” Interpreter to Christiana in Pilgrim’s Progress Part II.

“I sometimes do it myself. I go into the Dean Cemetery and think I see the gravestone of Alexander Whyte...when his days are over for preaching Christ.” Alexander Whyte