

The Plot that Brought Salvation

John 11

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To wrap up our time tonight, I just want to put one more event for you in context again. So when you approach Holy Week, there's a couple of different things that I think are good in terms of preparation for Holy Week, but there's a little bit of a preface to Holy Week. Now, if I were to do this chronologically, I'd have done it last Sunday night and so to try to get us to understand what's the setting that Jesus goes into, it could be a little misleading to focus on Palm Sunday morning and then try to figure out what on earth happened. It was going so good on Sunday. How did everything fall apart? So turn your Bibles to John, Chapter 11, and we're just going to walk our way through this passage. We will just take a few minutes to do this much the way you might do it in your own study at home or do it together as a couple or a family. In John 11 we get this kind of the preface of Holy Week. This is a significant event that sets the stage for what's going to unfold and it begins in verse one.

Now, a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary, and her sister Martha. It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters went to him saying, Lord, he whom you love is ill and stop there. So this is Mary and Martha. You remember Mary, Martha and Luke, Chapter 10. You remember, some of you do, have a "Mary" Christmas? Okay, This is that Mary.

All right, so here's Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Lazarus is not named back in Luke 10. And Lazarus is sick, and we find out that Jesus had a very close relationship with them. That makes sense now that we see him visiting their house in Luke 10.

And so they send to him and say, the one that you love your good friend, that's would be a way of putting it is ill and you need to come and see him. In verse four, 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. Now, Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, so when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. You're supposed to catch that. That makes no sense. Okay. So when Jesus loved them, he loved the whole family. He loved both of the sisters. He loved Lazarus. So because he loved them when he heard that he was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Whoa, whoa, whoa. Hold on a sec. Let me guess. This is supposed to say because he loved him, he dropped everything right then and headed that way. Or Jesus could have said, because he's done it before, "he's healed" He could have just said, I don't need to go there. He's healed. We had a sermon on that just a few weeks ago, and so Jesus could have done that, but he chose not to. And he explained why. He said the illness does not lead to death. Now that's a little bit coded statement that he makes for it is that it is for the glory of God. So the Son of God may be glorified through it. This is going to be a difficult, challenging, heart wrenching, terrible thing that's going to take place. But it's intended for the glory of God. And it has a purpose. It has a greater purpose than you can possibly imagine. Continuing with Verse 7...

Then after this, he said to the disciples, Let us go to Judea again. The disciples say to him, The rabbi, The Jews were just now seeking the stone. You and you are going there again, Jesus answered.

Are there not 12 hours in a day? If anyone walks in a day, he does not stumble because he sees the light of the world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles because the light is not in him. After saying these things, he said to him, Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep. But I go to awaken him.

Then the disciples said to him, Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover. Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He meant taking rest in sleep, meaning literal sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, 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. So Thomas called the twin, said to his fellow disciples, Let us also go that we may die with him.

Okay? Don't you just love the honesty of scripture that gets laid out before us? So basically Jesus says, okay, now we're going to go see Lazarus. I've waited enough time. Now we're going to go see Lazarus. And I'm glad that he has fallen asleep because I'm going to go awaken him. They misunderstand that completely. And basically it's now he's actually dead. And Jesus says, I understand that. And he said, I'm going to explain this to you plainly. Here's more plain talk from Jesus. Lazarus is dead, okay? And for your sake, I'm glad I wasn't there because he died for a purpose. And I go to make that purpose actually take place, to which Thomas, bless his heart, says, Then we'll die with him. Okay, So if you're going to do it to him, do it to us, and we'll do this together. Verse 17.

Now, when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother.

So of course, Lazarus dies and the community pours out just the way we would -- they pour out into this family. And so we're there with them in their morning with them, and they're grieving with them. And they've actually come from Jerusalem because it's just a two mile walk. Now, take note of that, because all throughout this week, that little walk from Jerusalem to Bethany to Jerusalem to Bethany is going to be repeated. Now, it's not a flat walk, but it's just a two mile walk over the Mount of Olives. And so they've all come out and come to Bethany, to where Martha and Mary are. And Jesus has now intentionally waited four days because that would be the point of ultimate declaration of death. Okay. So there was this belief that the spirit of a man would hover over that man's grave for three days, but by the fourth day it would be acknowledged both accurately, biblically and inaccurately, in the custom of the day that he was truly, truly dead at that point. Verse 20.

So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him. But Mary remains seated in the house. Martha said to Jesus, 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. Jesus said to her, Your brother will rise again. Martha said to him, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection. On the last day, Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection in the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die yet shall he live? And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die? Do you believe this? She said to him, Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God who is coming into the world.

When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, The teacher is here and is calling for you. And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. Jesus had not yet come into

the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. So Martha goes out, meets Jesus, and she says, basically, and in typical Martha fashion, she says here, You should have been here. If you'd have been here, he would not have died. So she's kind of putting it before Jesus. But you have to give Martha credit. She is confronting Jesus with -- if you'd have been here, he wouldn't have died. But at the same time, she believes Jesus' teaching, so she's not throwing out who Jesus is. She's just saying if you'd have been here, you could have fixed it. It's actually a reflection of her faith that she believes that Jesus could have healed him and I think believes that he would have healed him had he actually been there. When Jesus says he'll rise again, she actually interprets it in light of a good biblical world and life view. She says, Well, I know that he'll rise on Resurrection day, meaning I know that he'll rise again when the resurrection takes place. Now, that's great faith. Here she is believing in the resurrection day, believing that Christ is going to redeem all those that are his and Jesus is trying to help her understand. No, he's going to rise here just shortly. Martha gets some version of her answer but doesn't appear to understand the whole answer, runs and gets Mary and Mary comes. And she also wants to convince Jesus that she wishes that he had been there. Verse 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. 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 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.

And he said, where have you laid him? They said to him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. So the Jew said, See how he loved him. But some of them said, "Could not. He, who opened the eyes of the blind man, also have kept this man from dying?"

Point to make here. Jesus loves us. He really does. He really does feel our pain and he really is committed to the will of God. And he really does understand that sometimes the will of God hurts us tremendously. And he feels that -- he even literally felt it himself when he saw Mary weeping, when he saw the crowds that came, they were all weeping. He knew that this event had to take place. He knew what was about to take place. He knew Lazarus was about to be raised from the dead. And instead of chuckling and going, Y'all don't get it. Watch this. I'll just tell Lazarus to come out of the grave and everybody will be fine. He felt their pain. Don't ever let Satan tell you that Jesus doesn't feel our pain. Don't ever let Satan convince you that the harsh will of God has no emotion. Of course it does.

God calls us to difficult and challenging things, and there's pain in our life involved in the various trials that he puts us through. But he feels that pain for us. He's a gracious God. He's the God you want. He won't end that pain and to the extent that his will not be done, he'll be committed to doing the will of God, but he'll be committed to doing the will of God and never leave us, nor forsake us and always be with us through whatever that will may be. Verse 38

Jesus deeply moved again, came to the tomb that was a cave and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, Take away the stone, Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, Lord, by this time there'll be an odor, for He has been dead for days. Jesus said, Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God? So they took away the stone and Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, Now pay attention to this prayer. He says to the Father, Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me. But I say this on account of the people standing around that they may believe that you sent me when he had said these things. He cried out with a loud voice, Lazarus come out. And the man who had

died came out his hands and feet, bound with linen strips, his face wrapped with a cloth, and Jesus said to him unto them, unbind him and let him go.

Jesus prays to the Father. And it's not a prayer. He doesn't ask the Father; Will you raise Lazarus from the dead? So, he's not beseeching a prayer of the father. He's communicating to the father -- I know what you are doing. But we need to do this for the sake of these people, for them to see and to believe that you sent me. There's the point for them to believe that you sent me. We need to do this. And then Jesus declares for Lazarus to come out. And He does. He walks out of the grave, all bound up in the burial clothes. Verse 45.

Many of the Jews, therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done so the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the counsel and said, what are we to do for this? Man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone who will believe in him and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.

They didn't give a rat's tail whether those people believed in Jesus. They did not want to lose their position. They did not want to lose the power and the influence that they had. That's what this is all about, them losing the power and the influence that was before them. Verse 49

But one of them, Caiaphas, who was High Priest, that year, said to them, You know nothing at all, nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish. He did not say this on his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

Well, let me make this one point here before we move down to the last section.

When they look at him, it says that that many of the people who came out and saw Lazarus raised from the dead believed many. Not all that many. What's it going to take? You see, it's not how big the miracle is. It's whether or not the spirit opens someone's eyes. They'll look for a sign and one may not be given. And even if a sign was given, they will not believe it's not. It's not that if such and such would happen, then everybody would believe God if you would do this and so on. So is life. Then they would believe, no, it's not the size of the event or the miracle. It's God. Would you open their eyes? It can take a pebble to turn their life around if they'll if the Lord opens their eyes to him, that's the prayer.

Then the last section. This is verse 53.

From that day on, they made plans to put him to death. Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews but went from there to the region near the wilderness to a town called Ephrem. And there he stayed with the disciples. Now the pastor over the Jews was at hand, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves.

They were looking for Jesus and saying to one another as they stood in the temple. What do you think? That he will not come to the feast at all? Now, the chief priest of the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where he was, he should let them know so that they might arrest him.

This little qualifying statement that gets made here by John is that for some period of time Jesus wandered around, not walking openly among the people. I've tried to do the math to figure out how

many days this would be. I could almost figure out how many hours this would be. It didn't last long. This is probably less than a week that he, in a sense wouldn't walk openly among the people because what happens on Palm Sunday morning, he's riding on a donkey openly amongst all the people. Where does he go? Right into the heart of Jerusalem, to the temple. What does he do? He goes into the temple so he's not hiding anymore.

So now we get to today (Palm Sunday). The people have been told that the Jews, the people of Israel, been told, if you see him, let us know so that we can come and arrest him. Well, every one of them just saw him this morning. They saw him riding on the donkey coming into the town, but they're scared to death to turn him in, that he would be arrested. And they're singing Hosanna! And all the people are trying to figure it out. And the Scribes and the Pharisees, the Elders, they are perplexed because they know this thing is about to unfold.

People are flocking to him because Lazarus has been risen from the dead and it's provable. You can actually see Lazarus. So, this one we can't explain away. And so, there is tremendous tension. There is this plot that's beginning to unfold now so some way, somehow we've got to arrest Jesus. We've got to arrest him, because if we don't, he is going to take our place. He is going to mess up what's going on in our lives.

That's the world in which we live. And yet the followers of Jesus have been told they've been plainly told what they don't quite understand, they don't quite digest. So let's all embark on a Holy Week journey on trying to hear Jesus talk to us plainly and to ask Jesus, Would you soften my heart? Would you allow me to set aside anything that would distract me from my focus being on myself, the focus being on the things of man that I could hear from you and know you at a deeper and more intimate level than I ever have before.

Let me pray for us.

Father. I do thank you so much for your word, Lord. Thank you for your spirit gives us insight and understanding into your word or thank you for the many, many times and the many ways that you speak to us plainly. Forgive us when we do not hear. Forgive us when we do not listen. Lord, forgive us when we are so caught up in ourselves. So caught up in the world that we're distracted from your teaching or to guide us by your spirit. This week, as we go into your scriptures, as we engage in fellowship and worship together for our different worship services, Lord, may you reveal yourself to us yet anew each and every day. Teach us of you that we may take steps to be more like you. And we pray that in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.