

ALL THINGS NEW // From Death to Life

How many of you have experienced the reality that when Jesus enters into the story, everything changes? Relationships are restored, addictions are broken, burdens are lifted— Jesus changes everything. How many of us today would say, I want MORE life, more freedom, more joy, more redemption, more healing, more of the life that Jesus offers? Over the next several weeks, through Easter Sunday, we're going to be encouraged and challenged into the "MORE" that Jesus wants to give us.

My prayer as we head into today is that God would increase our faith. That we wouldn't just settle for an abstract belief in a God somewhere out there but that every single one of us would intentionally lean into, put weight upon, trust in, and apply in practical terms, the truth that our God is a God that makes all things new.

RELEASING OUTCOMES

In the beginning of chapter 11, we see that this family, two sisters and their brother are struck with some unexpected circumstances. Mary and Martha are deeply concerned for their brother Lazarus who was severely sick, and so the sisters send a message to Jesus pleading for help, and interestingly enough, the name Lazarus literally means, "God helps."

So, they send a message asking for Jesus to come to a place called Bethany to help their brother. The messenger goes, and several days later, the messenger comes back without Jesus. When Jesus hears of Lazarus' condition, it doesn't say He was too busy helping other people. It doesn't say He didn't care. It doesn't say, He really wanted to help Lazarus but couldn't. It says...

John 11:5-6, "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."

He loves them so much that He did nothing and just stayed put for two extra days. Why? Why in the world would he stay there and do nothing for two extra days when the people that He loved were in a crisis and needed His help? Jesus talking to His disciples and tells them...

John 11:11-15, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.' 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. 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....'"

Mary and Martha had a plan. They devised this plan... *"We'll tell Jesus that, not just Lazarus but, the 'one He loves' is ill. And he'll have to come then... He'll have no choice; how could he say no to that!?"*

You ever tried to manipulate God into doing something you want? When I was new believer I told God, I don't ever want to be a pastor or preacher. And for the last 20 years, that's all God has asked me to do. What I love about the story of Lazarus is it reveals our human tendency to try to control outcomes of situations. We want the story to go a certain way. We have a picture in our mind, but the more we try to control outcomes, the more exhausted, frustrated, and discouraged we become.

In fact, some of us in the room have been taught that faith is actually a way of controlling outcomes. That if you pray A and add it to B it will always equal C. But God is not a formula to be manipulated for our purposes. Faith pleases God. In fact, without faith, it is impossible to please God, but faith is far more about trust in every circumstance than it is about getting the outcome that we're after.

Faith is about trusting God in all circumstances—not just trusting Him when He fixes our circumstances. See, God can do all things. He is all powerful, He is all present, and He is all knowing! God can do all things... including bringing dead things back to life.

But church, do we still trust God even when Lazarus dies? Do we still trust Him when He doesn't show up when we want him to? Do we place our hopes in the outcomes? Or do we trust in Jesus no matter the outcome? We need to understand God is a perfect father, and as a Dad, it would be horrifically unloving for me to give my kids everything they wanted. My job is to give them what's best for them, which at times includes things that they ask for. And maybe right now you're in a spot where God isn't giving you what you want. Maybe He's taking too long to show up or He's not revealing Himself in the ways you need Him to. Maybe you just know that God has more for you in life—that's He's put a calling on your life, but the doors haven't opened yet. Or you feel like something is missing, that God has more for you but He isn't working according to your timetable. Why does God sometimes wait?

John 11:15, “...so that you may believe.”

So that we might see more of who God is and that our faith might increase. That we might learn to release control of the outcomes and have an unshakeable faith no matter the outcome.

TWO RESPONSES

Sometimes, God waits to act in order to bring us into a greater revelation of who He is. This is exactly what's happening with Mary and Martha.

John 11:17-21, “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 when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met Him, but Mary remained seated in the house. Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.’”

And then Mary says 11 verses later,

John 11:32, "...Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Mary and Martha, same situation, same level of grief and their complaint against Jesus, they even use the same exact words... "Where were you? Why didn't you do something?" And Jesus responds to both of them in radically different ways.

1st with Martha, look at His response....

John 11:23, "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 says to Martha, "Your brother will rise again," and she says, "I know Lord... One day... way off in the future." Jesus is looking at Martha going, "*Nope. You don't understand. I'm not waiting to intervene until the last day... I'm here now. I want to do something right now!*"

How many of us are putting off what God wants to do right now?

Martha is sitting in her sadness and grief. Jesus can change it. She says later, God says, **now!**

What is it in our lives right now that Jesus is pointing at and saying, I want to deal with that now! Don't wait until one day, because one day may be too late. What work is Jesus asking us to do? What relationship, what situation, what habit is the Holy Spirit highlighting right now? Where is the spotlight pointing? What change does He want us to make NOW?

Don't put off until tomorrow what God wants to address today.

Let's look at Jesus response to Martha...

John 11:25, "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die.'"

You know what He's saying to Martha? He doesn't really comfort her. He almost argues with her. "*Martha, I'm God. I'm the author of life itself. It's never too late when I'm involved. And I'm here now. I'm involved now. I want to do something now! I'm the resurrection and the life, I'm the God who makes all things new!*"

Now, look at His response to Mary! He doesn't confront her. He doesn't correct her. He doesn't say, "*Relax, I'm God, I got this!*"

How does he respond to Mary?

John 11:35, "Jesus wept."

He weeps with Mary, but he confronts Martha.

**With Martha, Jesus claims to be God.
With Mary, He reveals Himself to be human.**

Jesus gives Martha the Truth. But He comforts Mary with grace.

John 1:14, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

Jesus responds so differently in the exact same situation because He understands that people in the same scenario may need to be met in radically different ways. One with truth, the other with grace. He does this to meet them where they are.

It tells us that God understands where we are, what we're facing, and He knows what we need from Him if we'll make room. And if Jesus gave truth to both, it would have devastated Mary. And if He only comforted both, Martha's faith wouldn't have increased at all.

Because people in certain moments need truth to challenge their assumptions and others need comfort and grace. Some need encouragement and some need challenge. Some need hope, and we all need both in different moments in our lives and what we see in both the divinity and humanity of Jesus is that He's the perfect embodiment of both grace and truth.

Dave brought a great word about being people of both the Word and the Spirit. If we lean toward one, things can get unbiblical quickly. And if we only lean into the other, we can become rigid and legalistic. We need both.

The same is true here. If we're all truth and no grace, we can become cruel, rigid, uncaring, a resounding gong, painful to hear. But if we're all grace and no truth, then we're in danger of not really loving anyone, of loving conflict, or even just sharing the truth of the gospel. We want to be people of the Word and Spirit, and of Grace and Truth. Because that's who Jesus is and if we're following Him, we should become like Him.

THE DEATH OF DEATH

John 11:38-39, "Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it."

One translation says he was deeply moved and troubled. And in the original Greek, Jesus was not sobbing with self-pity. He's not groaning in weakness. He's filled with fury.

"Jesus advances to the tomb not weak and sniveling, but as a champion preparing for conflict. John uncovers the heart of Jesus as he wins our salvation, not in cold unconcern but with fiery wrath against our enemy."

- B.B. Warfield

What we need to understand is that Jesus isn't angry about people's lack of trust in Him. He's not angry with the people grieving. You know what he's raging against? Death.

1 Corinthians 15:26, "The last enemy to be destroyed is death."

Jesus is groaning, deeply troubled, filled with WRATH against death itself. Because death is an enemy. I love the Bible because it just says it. We're not messing around. The Bible doesn't romanticize death. It doesn't ignore the reality of death... it says death is an enemy!

John 11:39, "Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, 'Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been *dead* four days.'

The four days is incredibly significant. In a source of Jewish tradition called the Talmud, there was a belief that a person is not truly dead until the fourth day, that for three days the soul returns to the grave wanting to return to the body, but on the fourth day it's past the point of return. It's almost as if Jesus waited until the situation was hopeless—that it was past the point of no return, that the people gathered had resigned themselves over to defeat. It's as if Jesus allowed the third day to come and go, not just to show them what He can do, but to show them who He is.

John 11:39-44, "Jesus said to her, 'Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?' Then they took away the stone *from the place* where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up *His* eyes and said, 'Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said *this*, that they may believe that You sent Me.' Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come forth!' And he who had died came out..."

If Jesus can raise a man from the grave, what can't He do for you?

Our God is a God who stands over what is dead, declares new life, and it lives! Our God is a God who makes all things new...

Some of us hear this story and we think God can't do a miracle like that in my current situation.

What might happen if you brought whatever seemingly hopeless situation and brought it before the Author of Life itself? Jesus Christ is in the business of bringing dead things to life. Is there anything too dead that the Author of Life cannot resurrect it? And look, sometimes, God brings new life into dead situations. And other times, like with John the Baptist, John was killed and there was no miraculous intervention. But here's what we need to remember: In life, and even in death, our God is a God that makes all things new.

Do you realize that when Jesus said, “Lazarus, come forth,” and called His friend out of the grave, Jesus had signed his own death warrant? When Lazarus came out of the tomb, Jesus was guaranteeing Himself a place in the tomb. Because before this point, the religious leaders saw Jesus as a nuisance, but after the resurrection of Lazarus, they viewed Him as an imminent threat to their power and control.

John 11:53, “Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death.”

When Jesus Christ gave life to Lazarus, He brought death upon Himself. When death was brought upon Jesus Christ, it gave life to every single of us. When Jesus Christ gave life to Lazarus, He gave Himself up to death. When death killed Jesus Christ, death signed its own death warrant, guaranteeing that one day, death will be no more. Death itself will be destroyed.

I’ve read before, the “Dialogue-Anthem,” that great poem by George Herbert, in which the Christian and Death are having a conversation with one another. The very last interchange goes like this. The last thing Death says is:

*“These arms shall crush thee. Spare not, do thy worst.
I shall be one day better than before;
Thou so much worse, that thou shalt be no more.”*

1. What outcome do I need to release so God can do something new?
2. What have I ‘put off until tomorrow’ that God wants to deal with today?
3. Over what dead situation does Jesus want to resurrect/increase my faith?

Church, our God is still in the business of bringing dead things to life. Jesus Christ has done all these things, why? **John 11:15**, “...’so that you may believe.”