

SERIES: Gospel of John: Seeing is Believing?
 SERMON: *Jesus' Love, God's Glory, Our Belief*
 SCRIPTURE: John 11:1-44
 DATE: January 29, 2012

Eleven years ago, Malcolm Gladwell, a staff writer for The New Yorker, wrote the best seller entitled, *The Tipping Point*. In that book, he explains the previously unexplainable phenomena of why major changes in society tend to happen so suddenly and unexpectedly. We have all witnessed how ideas or products can ignite so quickly and spread in popularity like a wild fire or epidemic. He examines incidents like the resurgence of Hush Puppy shoes back in 1995 as well as the dramatic decrease in crime in New York City from 1992 to 1997. He notes that all have what he calls a "Tipping Point." Gladwell defines the "Tipping Point" as "the moment of critical mass, the threshold, the boiling point."

The Apostle John's account of the death and resurrection of Lazarus in John 11 represents the "Tipping Point" in John's Gospel narrative. This incident is the moment of critical mass and the boiling point for the Jewish leaders in their growing intolerance for Jesus and his ministry. This incident is literally the last straw for the Jewish Council. John reports in verse 53, "*So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.*"

As Josh has previously explained, Jesus and the Jews have been on a trajectory or a collision course that ultimately intersects at the cross. But this trajectory has not occurred in a vacuum. It has been driven along the way by man's unbelief. And it is here in chapter 11 that Jesus is once again confronted with unbelief, this time in the form of news that his close friend is dying.

Sermon in a sentence: Jesus loves us so that we will see God's glory and believe in him.

I believe there are four main points John wants to communicate. I want to unpack these four points by anchoring them to five major, two-word verb phrases.

1. "Jesus loved" (Martha, Mary and Lazarus – verse 5)
2. "He (Jesus) stayed" (two days longer – verse 6)
3. "Jesus answered" (are there not twelve hours in a day – verse 9)
4. "Jesus said" (I am the resurrection and the life – verse 25)
5. "He (Jesus) cried out" (Lazarus come out – verse 43)

The Siblings

We know from verse 1 that Lazarus and his sisters lived in the small village of Bethany. Bethany is less than two miles from Jerusalem. Jesus probably stayed with this family every time he came to Jerusalem. So he was very familiar with Bethany and he knew Martha, Mary and Lazarus very well.

Who are these siblings? While this is the first of few references to Lazarus, we already know the sisters. Luke describes one of the best-known stories about Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-44). This is the incident where Martha, the "type A" hostess, is anxiously rushing around trying to

serve Jesus (and complaining), while the more contemplative Mary sits occupied at Jesus feet. Jesus admonishes Martha about Mary choosing what was most important. This previous dinner will come up again.

What is interesting about John's identification of the siblings is his special mention of Mary in verse 2. "*It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill.*" What is fascinating is that John identifies Mary by an incident that has not chronologically happened yet. John records Mary's anointing of Jesus in the next chapter, John 12:1-8.

This type of narrative technique is quite unusual and rare. So we need to ask why does John identify Mary by singling out an incident that has not chronologically occurred yet? Hang on to that question, we will attempt to answer it at the end of the message.

Let's pick up the story at verse 3 where Jesus is presented with a crisis.

John 11:3 (ESV)

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.*

JESUS LOVES US BY DEMONSTRATING GOD'S GLORY.

This first main point is anchored in the first verb phrase, "***Jesus loved***" (5).

Right off the bat, John wants us to understand a very critical truth: Jesus loves these siblings! John emphasizes this love two ways. First, he mentions it twice. Once in verse 3, "*So the sisters sent to him, saying, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.'*" And again in verse 5, "*Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.*" Second, he also underscores this love in verse 5 by identifying the three siblings individually.

So what is the nature of this love? Is it an extra special love—unique to these siblings? Is his love for them any different than his love for you and me? No, the text does not say that. Jesus personally knew this family and had a close relationship to them. He knew their individual quirks and personalities. He understood their strengths and weaknesses. He probably had laughed with them, and may have shed some tears with them. Jesus knew them like he knows you and me. And I believe his love for you is every bit as intense as his love for these siblings.

The perfect storm

Five verses into this story, John brings us to a point of climatic tension:

- Lazarus is dying – he will die unless there is intervention.
- Martha & Mary are hurting and desperate.
- They know Jesus and they love him.

- Jesus knows the siblings and he loves them.
- Jesus knows of their crisis.
- Jesus can do something about it—he is the Great Physician.
- Martha & Mary are communicating with Jesus – they are asking for help.

And so we have the perfect storm—the most fundamental of human need intersecting with the most divinely authoritative ability to meet that need.

And what does Jesus do?

That brings us to the second verb phrase, **“He (Jesus) stayed”** (6).

Verses 5-6 are two of the most important verses (maybe in all of Scripture) that talk about Jesus’ love for us and how that love relates to God’s glory. What makes these two verses such a significant statement about divine love comes down to one small, two-letter word. If we miss this word, we run the risk of missing John’s main point.

John 11:5-6 (ESV)

⁵Now 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.

The word “so” is a conjunction or connecting word. It means “therefore” or “as a direct result of.” Let me restate it a way that I believe accurately emphasizes its meaning:

“Jesus loved Martha, and her sister and Lazarus and therefore, as a direct result of that love, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.”

But why did Jesus stay two days longer? John is clear in verses 11-14: Jesus stayed away from Bethany two days longer so that Lazarus would die.

But why did Jesus want Lazarus to die? Jesus is equally clear in verse 4: *“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.”* Lazarus’ death is for the glory of God. Lazarus will die so Jesus can demonstrate and display God’s glory!

Let me paraphrase verses 5-6 to capture John’s point:

“Jesus loved Martha, Mary & Lazarus and therefore, as a direct result of that love, he stayed away from Bethany two days longer so that Lazarus would die in order that God would be glorified.”

John is saying this: If we are weighing Jesus’ options in the light of divine love and glory, letting his friend Lazarus die and allowing the sisters to suffer in grief, is more loving if it shows them God’s glory. Said differently: Demonstrating God’s glory is more loving than healing Lazarus and sparing the sisters from anguish and pain.

This feels a bit awkward. Honestly, it does not feel like love. Parents do not stay away from a child that has fallen and scraped a knee any more than doctors do not avoid their patients when they are called to an emergency.

Love is demonstrating God's glory

If the goal of love is to minimize trials, heal illness and prevent death, then on the surface, Jesus does not love these siblings. But if the object of Jesus' love for this family is the demonstration of God's glory, then Jesus' love for these siblings could not be more perfect and complete!

It comes down to what love really is. Author and pastor John Piper describes it this way (and this is the Apostle John's main point):

“Love is doing whatever you have to do to help people see and treasure the glory of God as their supreme joy—to help people see and be satisfied with the glory of God. It means giving us what we need most. And what we need most is not healing, but a full and endless experience of God's glory. Love means giving us what will bring us the fullest and longest joy. And what is that? What will give you full and eternal joy? . . . a revelation to your soul of the glory of God—seeing and admiring and marveling at and savoring the glory of God in Jesus Christ. When someone is willing to die—or let your brother die—to give you that, he loves you.”

Jesus loves you. He knows you and he knows your circumstances. But do not gauge his love for you based upon those circumstances. Because more than wanting to relieve you from the trials and crises in your life, Jesus wants you to behold God's glory, and to see that glory displayed in Jesus, so that your joy will be made full and complete.

“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” (5-6). Now Jesus loves you. So, when he considers your circumstances, he will do that which demonstrates the fullness of God's glory, so that upon witnessing it, you will find complete satisfaction and joy in the glory of God.

GOD'S GLORY, AS REVEALED IN JESUS' RESURRECTIVE POWER, CANNOT BE FRUSTRATED BY MAN.

This second main point is anchored in the third verb phrase, ***“Jesus answered”*** (9).

After two days passed, Jesus told his disciples that he was now ready to go back to Judea. This did not go over well with his disciples. It was only months earlier they had narrowly escaped arrest and stoning (10:22-42). I cannot blame them. “Attempt to stone me once, shame on you. Go back to the scene of the stoning, shame on me.”

It is here that Jesus responds with a cryptic statement about 12-hour days and walking in the light and darkness.

John 11:9-10 (ESV)

⁹Jesus 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. ¹⁰But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.”

What does Jesus mean?

In ancient Rome, the 24-hour day was divided into 12-hour periods. Most people worked during the 12 hours of daylight. Work stopped after dark. Jesus was illustrating to his disciples this truth: Jesus’ divine mission will not be cut short of its appointed time. Jesus, and his followers, will be kept absolutely safe and free of the schemes of man until God’s perfect will dictates otherwise. God’s glory cannot be thwarted by man.

Jesus’ glorious appointment—with a dead friend—in a tomb—in Bethany, will no more be altered by the plans of man, than his scheduled meeting—with the sin of man—on a cross—in Jerusalem!

God’s glory cannot and will not be delayed, held back, circumvented or made vulnerable by the will of man.

GOD’S GLORY, AS REVEALED IN JESUS’ RESURRECTIVE POWER, IS PRESENT FOR ALL BELIEVERS.

This third main point is anchored in the fourth verb phrase, “Jesus said” (25).

Jesus arrives just outside of Bethany (17) where he is confronted by his friend Martha (20). In Martha, we find the sum total of our greatest fear and our worst pain as she is grief-stricken over the death of her brother. Martha is a genuine Believer. We can see her belief in her exchange with Jesus.

But I suspect she would join in with the father of that demon possessed boy (as recorded in Mark 9:14-32), when he told Jesus, *“I do believe, help me in my unbelief.”* Martha believes in Jesus, but in her pain and grief, it is unbelief that rises to the surface as she scolds and reprimands Jesus for being late to the scene of her suffering.

It is in this exchange between Jesus and Martha that Jesus reveals who he is to Martha.

John 11:23-26 (ESV)

²³Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” ²⁴Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” ²⁵Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

Jesus tells Martha that Lazarus will rise again (23). Don Carson calls this statement by Jesus “a masterpiece of planned ambiguity.” Certainly, Jesus could have been referring to the restoration of the believer’s body at the final resurrection. That is what Martha thought he was referring to

(24). It was the mainstream view of first-century Jews, and it represents the truth. There most certainly is a resurrection to come.

But Jesus was not referring to end-time resurrection. Jesus tells Martha he is the resurrection of the dead—that as she stands in the very shadow of death, Jesus is light and life. What was once a future, detached, and abstract event is now a present and personal reality. Before Martha stands the embodiment of her doctrinal belief. In the very person of Jesus, Martha can find the real and wholly personal resurrection—a resurrection that presently is, and one that is certain to come.

For no longer is physical death most important—it is not the critical thing! Believers like Martha (and us) no longer need fear this great enemy called death. Martha's brother who has died will live. And as for Martha, who now lives, she will never die. Jesus gives life to believers regardless of the condition of their physical bodies.

“Martha, Lazarus has died but he is not dead! Go get your sister. For you are about to witness his life!”

JESUS REVEALS GOD'S GLORY SO THAT WE MAY BELIEVE IN HIM.

This fourth main point is anchored in the fifth and final verb phrase, ***“He (Jesus) cried out”*** (43).

Martha did go get her sister. Mary came to Jesus, accompanied by her friends and professional mourners (Jewish funeral law required at least two flute players at least one professional wailing woman). We are not going to discuss the details of verses 28-37 because the point I want to make is Jesus' response in the following section, verses 38-44. Suffice it to say, Jesus got an earful from Mary, the Jews, and the mourners.

Let's pick up the story as Jesus now approaches the tomb.

John reports that as Jesus came to the tomb Jesus was *“deeply moved.”* (38). This is the second use of that term. It also is used in verse 33. The Greek word John uses literally means the “snorting” of an animal. John is telling us that Jesus was more angry and indignant than sad and empathetic. But why?

Most commentators say it was a combination of grief and anger—mostly directed at death itself. However, I tend to agree with John Piper who believes Jesus was mostly angry with the Jews who were questioning not only his divine power, but also his motives. Look at verse 37, *“But some of them said, ‘Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?’”* They were impugning his motives, and Jesus was not happy about it.

I also suspect he was angry with the professional mourners who were wailing, grieving and carrying on like pagans, like those who Paul describe in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, who grieve as those who have no hope.

Confronting Unbelief

As Jesus comes face-to-face with death, man's unbelief comes bearing down on Jesus. It is unbelief that keeps man from seeing God's glory. But it is in the demonstration of God's glory by which man may believe.

And so Jesus, with the cries of grief ringing in his ear, raises his voice, and cries out, "*Lazarus, come out*" (43). And the man who had died walked out of the tomb. Oh death where is your victory, where is thy sting? Oh doubt, suspicion, accusation, fear, pain, grief—Oh unbelief, where is your victory, where is thy sting?

As Lazarus walks out of the tomb, we see God's glory, and by that glory, we can believe.

We can believe in the resurrection of the saints, for in Lazarus, we see a picture of our own resurrection. It is not a complete picture, for unlike Lazarus who was still bound in burial cloth, and who would have to die again one day, our redeemed bodies will rise glorified, made incorruptible.

We can believe in Jesus' resurrection, for in Lazarus, we have a forward-looking view of what was soon to happen to Jesus. We know now what Jesus knew then: that every step Lazarus took out of that dark tomb and into the light of resurrected life, took Jesus a step closer to the cruelty of death on a cross, the darkness of his own tomb, and of course, his glorious resurrection that followed.

God's glory and man's belief

John wants us to understand that there is a vital connection between God's glory and man's belief. Sometimes seeing God's glory precedes belief (15, 42, 45). Other times, belief precedes seeing God's glory (40). I do not know if there is a formula when it comes to God's glory. Sometimes God meets us where we are, and at other times he takes us to where he is. Either way, John's point is this: there is a critically strong connection between witnessing God's glory and believing in Jesus.

For me it is sunsets. I will stop everything to see a sunset. It has been that way since I was a boy. I cannot tell you how many times I have literally wept in the changing colors and fading light of a Kansas sunset. But it is not the palette of colors, or the contours of the clouds, or even their subtle changes as they are pulled and stretched by air currents. That is not what brings tears to my eyes. It is belief! It is my all out assent to the truth of who it is that created those colors and shapes. When I see sunsets, I believe in Jesus. I cannot begin to explain the connection. But I don't have to – I will leave it to the Psalmist:

Psalms 19:1-4a (NIV)

¹*The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.* ²*Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge.* ³*They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them.* ⁴*Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.*

Jesus loved Martha and Mary and so he let their brother die in order that they would see the glory of God and believe in him. Jesus loves you in ways that reveal God's glory so that you may believe in him.

BELIEVE LIKE MARY!

Jesus asked Martha a question in verse 26 that I think is also meant for us: *“Do you believe this?”*

As you consider your response as a 21st century witnesses to Lazarus' resurrection, I want to look at the response of those who were there—the eyewitnesses. Did they believe after seeing God's glory?

John says in verse 45 that many of the Jews believed. They saw God's glory and believed. He also reports that some of the witnesses went to the Pharisees, presumably with ill intent. But, as we know, that led to the sovereign, God-ordained “Tipping Point.”

But what about the sisters? How did they respond to seeing God's glory? I want to conclude by picking up the story in John 12:1-3. This account probably happened just days after Lazarus' resurrection.

John 12:1-3 (ESV)

¹Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ²So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. ³Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

While I want to focus on Mary, let me say this about Martha. There does seem to be a difference about her, particularly when we compare her serving Jesus here, with the dinner she previously hosted that is recorded in Luke 10:38-44. Actually, now something is missing. Gone are the distractions that got in the way of serving Jesus. Now, Martha is no longer troubled or concerned that Mary is again not helping. Martha's focus is now solely on Jesus!

But what about Mary? While we don't know much about Mary's faith before Lazarus' resurrection, what we do know is not particularly impressive. It seems her faith is best defined by unbelief. But what about after she saw her brother walk out of the tomb? What affect did seeing God's glory have on her belief?

Remember earlier when we considered the question: why would John identify Mary by way of this anointing that he records in chapter 12—an incident that chronologically had not occurred yet?

While John does not tell us why, Matthew and Mark do as they also recorded Mary's amazing act of anointing Jesus. Not only do they report what happened, they also tell us what Jesus

thought about what Mary did. These are the words of Jesus—if you have a red letter Bible, this is in red, *“Truly I say to you, wherever this Gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her”* (Matthew 26:13 and Mark 14:9).

Oh, what an epitaph—and from the words of the Son of God!

I cannot help but wonder if in Mary’s anointing of Jesus, we see a picture of belief—belief after witnessing God’s glory. Before seeing her brother walk out of a tomb, it was her unbelief that dictated her response to Jesus. But now, after seeing God’s glory as revealed in Jesus, Mary does the unthinkable:

- She uses perfume, at the cost of one year’s wages, to anoint Jesus;
- She performs an act relegated to the lowliest of servants by pouring it on Jesus’ feet;
- She risks her status and reputation by letting her hair down in public to wipe Jesus feet.

Is this what belief looks like?

Jesus loved Mary. He loved her by letting her brother die in her arms so that four days later, Lazarus would stagger out of a dark tomb and into the light of resurrected life and fall right back into those same arms—only now with an embrace of joy. Joy in seeing God’s glory. Joy in witnessing resurrected life. Joy that comes from realizing, maybe for the first time in Mary’s life, that it is in Jesus and not her circumstances, that she will find true and everlasting satisfaction and fulfillment. That is belief—a belief that leads to life!

Jesus loved Mary so that she would see the glory of God, and believe in him...so that

“...wherever this Gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.”

Benediction

Romans 15:13 (ESV)

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

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