



John 11:28-44
 So That You May Believe: John
 “For God’s Glory”

Rev. Brian North
 September 25th, 2022

Today is the last in a little three-part mini-series in John 11 that is also the last in our series on the Gospel of John for a few weeks. We started in John’s gospel near the end of this last February, we’ll take a break the next 6 weeks, and then return to the Gospel of John again in early November and be in it to the conclusion by the summer of 2026. Lol...just kidding. Next May.

Last week we looked at the question of: **Why do we have hope?** What is the basis for hoping that our future might be better than our present circumstances? When anyone in our family goes out our back door onto our deck, why does the dog come out with us every single time like it’s the greatest moment in the history of the world? Because she hopes we’ll throw a tennis ball for her. Why does she hope this? Because of the past. Frequently, we do throw a tennis ball for her, and she loves fetching that ball. Similarly, the hope we have for the future is based on the past – either our own experiences, or someone else’s.

And: **Last week we saw how Martha had hope that Jesus could do something about her brother’s death.** Lazarus fell ill, Martha and her sister Mary got word to Jesus about his condition, but Jesus didn’t come to do anything about it. He waited a couple days before coming, and in that time, Lazarus died. But even then, once Jesus got near Bethany, Martha came out to greet him upon his arrival...and she professes this hope that Jesus can do something. “I know God will grant you whatever you ask” she says. Even if she doesn’t know what that might be or is too afraid to voice her thoughts of what she might hope for. But because of what Jesus has done for others in the past, she has hope that Jesus can do something.

So, is her hope all for naught, now that Lazarus has died? Is it just wishful thinking, or does her hope in Jesus have a solid foundation? So, that’s what we’re looking at today, because we all need hope in our lives. Psychologists will tell you that hope has benefits for us – physically, mentally, emotionally, and more. But true hope isn’t just wishful or fanciful thinking. In fact, Psychology Today says that real hope is “not wishy-washy,” but

“acknowledging a full, realistic picture of the world.”¹ So, is hope in Jesus realistic?

Let’s pick up where we left off last week. We are in John 11:28-44. This is just after Martha expressed her belief that Jesus could do something, affirming that she believes he is “the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world” (John 11:27). We’ll begin with **John 11:28-34**.

So once again, we see that Jesus is still just outside the village of Bethany where Mary and Martha and Lazarus lived. A lot of their friends and relatives are there with them to comfort them and mourn with them. And also, just like last week, we see this same question being asked, this time by Mary rather than Martha: **“Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died” (John 11:32)**. When what we hope for doesn’t come to fruition, Jesus can handle our complaints and our grief and our pain. Jesus isn’t fragile. A couple weeks ago we talked about how he’s not a plastic Jesus that we can manipulate and use how we want, like a plastic doll. But we also see here that he’s not a china doll who will break if you get upset and tell him how you really feel. He can handle our emotions. He’s not going to leave us just because we’re upset.

Now, Jesus is strong enough to handle it, but he’s also sensitive enough to enter into our pain and grief. When Jesus sees her weeping, and the weeping of others, he is “deeply moved in spirit and troubled.” **When you think you’re all alone and Jesus isn’t with you, he’s actually as near as your next breath**. He’s with you in the valley of the shadow of death. I think I mentioned this a Sunday or two ago, but oftentimes when life is tough we think Jesus has abandoned us and we’re all alone, and when everything’s going great and we’re having successes in life we think we got there all by our own doing. We want the credit for the good times and we want to blame Jesus for bad ones. It’s a bit ironic, for sure. But Jesus is indeed with us in the dark moments and seasons of life.

We see this even more in the next verse, so let’s continue reading **John 11:35**. So, Jesus arrives at the tomb, and we’re told that “Jesus wept.” **(Sermon Title Slide)** First, how many of you know this as the shortest verse

in the Bible? Raise your hand. Ok. Sorry to burst some bubbles here...but you're wrong. How many of you have memorized Job 3:2? If you haven't, then you should. The verse, in its entirety, is, "He said." Those two words are shorter than "Jesus wept." For those of you who are new to Rose Hill, this is a great example of the kind of stunning insight into Scripture we get every Sunday. ☺

But, in all seriousness, this verse is powerful. **When verse 34 says that he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled, this is the proof.** For people who question the humanity of Jesus, and whether or not he was really, truly, fully human, this gives us some solid evidence to say, "yes." He has the full range of emotions, even grief and sadness, and the ability to enter into our grief and sadness with us. He is moved to tears.

But perhaps the tears have another aspect to them, and that is that he weeps not only *with* Mary and Martha and the others who do so also, but *for* them as well. Some of you will recall in Luke 19:41 as Jesus approaches Jerusalem to enter into it for the last time, just a few days prior to his death...you may recall that he weeps over the city because they failed to fully grasp who he is...they missed God's presence among them, and that grieves him. **Perhaps his tears here are much the same, because they clearly don't fully understand the power Jesus has – and that grieves him.** When verse 34 says he was "moved and troubled" perhaps this is the "troubled" reason for his tears. They don't have hope. They think this is the end. Even with the bit of hope that Martha expressed that we looked at last week, most of them don't seem to have that same hope; they don't believe him. They are in their grief, believing that Lazarus' time has come to an end.

Let's continue reading **John 11:36-39**. So, they see Jesus' tears and understand them to be an expression of the love Jesus had for Lazarus. **(Sermon Title Slide)** Jesus and Lazarus were close. Along with Mary and Martha, those three are arguably the closest friends he had outside of the 12 disciples. Then we get another question along the lines of Mary's and Martha's, (Why didn't you get here sooner?) as some of the people wonder if Jesus could have done something to save Lazarus if only he had gotten there

sooner: he'd healed the blind man earlier, so couldn't he have done something to help Lazarus? That's their line of thinking.

And again, we see that Jesus is "deeply moved" in verse 38. Coming on the heels of the questioning some of them had about "could Jesus have helped if he'd gotten there sooner," we again see that his emotional movement is perhaps not so much for the loss of Lazarus or only for the fact that others are grieving, but perhaps more so because once again they doubt that Jesus can do something. Their inability to comprehend who Jesus is and the depth of his transformative powers grieves him.

We see that doubt continue with Martha's response to Jesus' command for the tombstone to be rolled away. She says, "By this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." The King James Version puts it succinctly and memorably, "**But Lord, he stinketh**" (John 11:39, KJV). ☺ Every now and then, the old English just nails it in a way that can't be beat. Like them, we often doubt Jesus and have our hope sapped from us. We only see what's in front of us: the obstacles, and the small slice of the picture. It's too easy to succumb to the lies we hear around us and believe that Jesus can't change or transform or revive or resurrect something. And when we believe that he can't, then evil has won. Now, perhaps he *won't* do something for some good reason known only to him. But that's different than saying he *can't*.

Do we have any "cat people" here this morning? I saw a sign the other day that said, "Cats can memorize 120 different commands. But, they don't want to." Explains cats pretty well! But that's *not* how Jesus operates. He has his reasons for what he does and does not do. For instance, he didn't go to Bethany when Martha and Mary first got word to him about Lazarus' illness. In fact, after Lazarus had died, he told his disciples that he was glad he didn't go at first. And the reason is that now he's going to go and do something "so that they would believe." Jesus has a purpose for his initial "no" because the "yes" he's going to ultimately answer with will be even more powerful, and is for the sake of their belief. Let's see how Jesus responds to her obstacle in the next verse (John 11:40).

So, this theme continues: that he's going to do something even more amazing than healing Lazarus from his illness, because there's a greater purpose:

What he's about to do is going to help them to see the glory of God.

They're going to see God at his best, on full display. But they keep doubting. So now, Jesus is like: "Hey, do you want to see a miracle, or not?" "Do you want me to do something here or not?" "Do you trust me here, or not?" If we believe Jesus and let him work as he sees best, then God will be glorified. God will be magnified. God will be lifted up. His presence, his power, his love, his grace...the truth of who he is...all of this will be more evident and more obvious because of what Jesus is going to do. Let's finish out the passage (**John 11:41-44**).

So, they're like, "Yes! We want to see God glorified. Forget about the smell!" Then Jesus prays – out loud so they hear him, so God his heavenly father gets the credit here, so they see the tight connection between Jesus and God the Father, so that they might believe in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. And then Jesus very simply tells Lazarus to come out.

I love how John then narrates the rest: "**The dead man came out, still wrapped in his grave clothes**" (**John 11:44**). This was the customary Jewish burial coverings. There can be no doubt he was dead. But now he comes out. And John narrates it very simply. No extra commentary, no superfluous words. Just the facts. The miracle speaks for itself. It is enough. It reminds me of the great Vin Scully, the radio broadcaster for the Los Angeles Dodgers for 67 years, who passed away this last August 4th. He was known for letting the crowd tell the story of the game to the radio listeners. He would give just enough of a description of what was happening on the field so the listener knew that a home run was hit over the centerfield wall, or it was a double into the gap in left field or the ball was a line drive down the right field line...but then he'd get out of the way and let the crowd tell the story, so to speak.

When he did the nationwide television broadcast of the 1986 World Series and the Red Sox' first baseman Bill Buckner committed his infamous error in the bottom of the 10th inning that allowed the New York Mets to win game 6 (a Boston victory would have given them the World Series Title; New York

won it in game 7), Vin Scully literally had a one minute and 45 second stretch where he didn't say a single word, once he'd finished calling the play. You just hear the crowd and see what the cameras show you. Can you imagine if I just stood here and didn't speak for that long? You'd start to think something was wrong with me. Vin Scully wanted the listener – or in the case of a television broadcast, the viewer – to feel like *they were at the game; not listening to him tell them about the game*. John is much the same. The dead man came out of the tomb. Other than describing his graveclothes, which is important to note because it helps verify the state he had been in, nothing more needs to be said. The weight of the moment and of the miracle is enough.

So: Through this miracle, Jesus validates the hope that Martha had, that Jesus could do something. She may not have known *what* he'd do; she might not have hardly known what she even *hoped* he would do...but she believed he could do something, and trusted him. She had hope in him because of what Jesus had said and done previously – not necessarily what he'd done for her, but what she'd heard about him. And so, she had her hope in him, that the future could be better than the past or the present, and Jesus validates her hope.

And now, thanks to those same things Jesus has done, including now this raising of Lazarus, this gives us reason to hope in him as well. Our hope in Jesus is not wishy-washy. It *is* realistic. He backs up his claims of who he is and the hope we can place in him, with actions like this. And as we continue on in John's gospel in a few weeks, we'll see that Jesus gives us even more reasons to hope than just this and what's come before; Even greater than raising Lazarus from the dead. But it all tells us that we too can have hope for something greater as well.

So what we see in this passage is that when Jesus brings resurrection into our life...when transformation happens...when do-overs happen...when a new beginning comes about...when forgiveness is extended...when joy comes in the morning after a night or season of grief...when the valley of the shadow of death is passed through into the light of day and the light of life...When God moves in ways that make us say, "that's why I had hope" then the end

result is for even more than our own happiness. It's for more than our own joy. It's for more than our good feelings.

Ultimately, it's so that people would see the glory of God. Jesus said before it happened that if they believed, they would see the glory of God. If they believed that Jesus could do something...if they had hope that was rooted in him...then they would see the glory of God. And it's not that his "doing something" could only happen if they believed – as if the miracle is dependent upon their belief. It's that without belief, they won't recognize what he does as showing the glory of God. And "the glory of God" is what this is about. In verse 45 John tells us that because of this miracle, many of the Jews there put their faith in Jesus. They believed, as Martha proclaimed earlier, that he is the Messiah, the Lord, the one sent by God into the world.

So: What we see here is that hope – particularly hope in Jesus, believing that he can and will do something to make our future better than our past or our present – that hope lets the glory of God shine through. So, I want to end with this question: **How is your belief and your hope in Jesus “rolling back gravestones” so that the glory of God may be seen?** The showing of his glory isn't something we do – it's what God does. But Jesus invites us to believe in him, to hope in him, to roll back the gravestones in our lives so that Jesus can do a resurrection work and bring life out of death. *That's what he does.* Death is the enemy's domain, while Jesus is about life. Resurrection. New Beginnings. Do-overs. Second chances. Let's hope for more of those in our lives, and in the life of our church, so that the glory of God may be seen. Let's pray...Amen.

¹ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/friendship-20/202103/the-health-benefits-hope>