

Title: 6 Days and Counting
Date: February 7, 2021
Subject: Walking With Jesus Christ to the Cross, the Empty Tomb and Beyond.
Scripture: John 12:1 - 11

Read John 12:1 – 11.

For context sake, most chronologies assign the story of Jesus being anointed with expensive perfume to the final week of His life instead of prior to it. The story seems to be inserted as John relates Jesus' connection with the family. Also, the chronologies have the bulk of chapter 11 preceding chapter 12 by several months.

Jesus arrives at the home of his good friends – Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Somehow the word has gotten out that Jesus has come to the little village just outside of Jerusalem. People had wondered if and when he'd show up to celebrate the Passover, one of three holy days when all Jewish men were to come to Jerusalem.

Their wonder was mixed with the knowledge that the chief priests and Pharisees had put out an alert. If anyone found where Jesus was, they were to report it to the authorities to facilitate an arrest. I'm sure there were incentives. The intent was more than just putting Jesus in jail and throwing away the key. The chief priests, other religious leaders and many of the Jews wanted to kill Jesus. Verse 10 tells us they intended to kill Lazarus as well.

The reason is Lazarus is special. He'd been raised from the dead by Jesus. Doesn't get much more special than that. People came to see the previously dead man walking. And many who saw placed their trust in Jesus. The religious leaders despised what was happening and more so the person who was behind it. The vindictive and mean-spirited men intended to cancel Jesus and anyone who had anything to do with him, starting with Lazarus.

The healing of Lazarus had taken place several months earlier from Jesus' recent arrival at the home in Bethany. The narrative fills John 11.

Lazarus became sick with...we're not told the cause. His sisters, Mary and Martha, send word to Jesus that the one he loved was sick. Jesus receives the news and tells the disciples the sickness won't end in death but it's for the purpose of showing God's glory so that God's Son would be glorified. Jesus stays where he is for two more days. Then he tells the disciples, "Let's go." They're fully aware he's a wanted man and remind him of this fact. They're incredulous Jesus wants to go some back someplace where people want to do him harm.

Jesus enlightens the disciples as to the mission. "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." The disciples don't understand. They think if he's sleeping that means he's on the mend, so there's no need for them to go. Jesus tells them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I'm glad I was not there, so that you may believe." Thomas responds with a mixture of devotion, courage and resignation to a bad outcome. He says, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." Sounds like a fun trip.

By the time Jesus arrives, Lazarus has been dead and buried for four days. Apparently, Lazarus, Mary and Martha were well known and thought of in Bethany and in Jerusalem which is only two miles away. Many people come out to share the sisters' grief at the loss of their brother. People are everywhere. The house and yard are buzzing with activity. Word gets to Martha that Jesus is coming. She breaks away from the crowd and goes to meet him. She greets the Lord with, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Ouch! Nothing like coming to the point and putting a little dig in at the same time. Playing the blame game? She may have said something more, but then again, maybe not. This is what made it into the sacred text. There's a little more. She also expresses her confidence in Jesus, "But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

Jesus tells her Lazarus will live. Martha thinks Jesus is talking about the hope of the resurrection at the last day. Jesus corrects her thinking by saying there's no need to look to the future. The future is now. "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Martha faces a choice. It's a yes or no question. She doesn't tell the Savior she'll circle back to him. She's known Jesus long enough and has been pondering who he is. She's come to the place where she can say, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." Martha expresses her conviction Jesus is the one who came into the world as the Messenger from God. She trusts he's the Deliverer who'll remove the punishment people incur because of their sins and moral crimes against God.

Martha goes to tell her sister Jesus is asking for her. Mary gets up quickly and goes to where Jesus is. She falls at his feet and says, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Sounds like Mary and Martha had rehearsed their little speech as to what they'd say to Jesus if and when he came. She delivers the line flawlessly -- "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." You wonder what's going through the Lord's mind. He knows what He's going to do and yet He's getting blamed for not caring, being tardy. Kind of like what happens today. He knows what He has in mind but we get impatient with his timing.

A crowd of people had come with Mary. They're weeping and wailing loudly. Mary's weeping and wailing loudly. Jesus is moved by the scene and the result is the shortest verse in the Bible - *Jesus wept*. The word is different from the passions of Mary and the crowd. Jesus expresses a quieter weeping as he sheds tears.

Here's some perspective about Jesus crying. "Men have wondered to find in the Gospel which opens with the express declaration of the divinity of our Lord, and at a moment when that divinity was about to receive its fullest manifestation, these words, which point them still to human weakness. But the central thought of St. John's Gospel is *The Word was made flesh*, and He is for us the Resurrection and the Life, because He has been manifested to us, not as an abstraction which the intellect only could receive, but as a person, living a human life, and knowing its sorrows, whom the heart can grasp and love. A *God in tears* has provoked the smile of the stoic and the scorn of the unbeliever; but Christianity is not a gospel of self-sufficiency, and its message is not merely to the human intellect. It is salvation for the whole man and for every man; and the sorrowing

heart of humanity has never seen more clearly the divinity of the Son of Man than when it has seen His glory shining through His human tears” (Ellicott’s Commentary).

Another: “Jesus wept...as he was meditating upon the state of his friend Lazarus, the distress his two sisters were in, and the greater damnation that would befall the Jews then present, who, notwithstanding the miracle, would not believe in him. This shows him to be truly and really man, subject to like passions, only without sin” (Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible).

The crowd inwardly applauds Jesus display of emotions. They think it’s wonderful. They see it as an expression of his love. But there are some who have doubts and misgivings. “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

Makes perfect sense, doesn't it? If Jesus is who he claims to be and could do something as amazing as give sight to a blind man, couldn't he do something about somebody who died? They make it sound like death is a much easier fix.

They proceed to the grave site. Jesus is again deeply moved. He gives the order to take away the stone placed across the entrance to the cave which serves as the tomb.

Martha is apprehensive. It's been four days since Lazarus was put in the tomb. She raises this as an objection. Maybe she thinks Jesus has forgotten. She tells him again, “Um. Just a moment. My brother has been dead for four days and by now the course of nature has taken its usual course and he stinks. We don't want that foul odor. Did I mention he's been dead for four days?”

Jesus doesn’t have any reservations about a smell. He reminds her that he told her that if she believed, she would see the glory of God. The guys who’ve volunteered, or more likely, have been volunteered, may have approached the tomb with some trepidation. Think to themselves, “Move the stone quickly and get away.”

Jesus prays. READ John 11:41, 42. His purpose is clear – create belief.

Jesus exclaims, “Lazarus, come out!” Some suggest it’s good Jesus specifically named Lazarus. They assert that if simply said “Come out!”, all the dead would have exited their graves. Interesting thought and intriguing image. Maybe. Christ certainly has the power to accomplish that. He will do that when he returns.

All eyes peer into the darkness of the tomb. Someone notices something’s happening. It’s Lazarus. He’s moving. He shuffles his way out because his feet are wrapped in cloth strips (hands too) and a cloth is around his face. It could have happened that way. It seems more likely in this case that Jesus gives the command and Bam! Lazarus is out. He's alive and well. Jesus then says, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

Inquiring minds raise several questions. What happened to Lazarus during those four days when he was dead? Did he experience being with God? That would seem to be quite the rip off, if he was with God and then was forced to come back to earth and then have to die again. That doesn't seem quite fair. As great as earth is and being reunited with his family, it pales in comparison to being with God. So, was he in some sort of holding pattern, a state of unawareness, rather than being transported to the next life? Quite possibly that's the case.

Questions extend to the aftermath of coming back from the dead. What was Lazarus' life like now that he had a new lease on life? What did he do? How did he live? How long did he live? What did he say about Jesus? I don't know about the first four. I have an educated guess about the last question based on how others reacted from being healed. My guess is he told everybody about Jesus bringing him back from the dead and giving him new life. He pointed to Jesus as the one who can give life. When people pinched him to see if he was indeed alive, he gave the credit and glory to Jesus. After all, who deserves them more - the one who is raised from the dead or the one who raises the dead?

There's a song that imagines an episode from Lazarus' life after being raised. It seeks to encourage us as to what the Lord can do with the challenges and problems we face. It's "My Name is Lazarus" by the Southern Gospel group Greater Vision. Lazarus is one of four men carrying a crippled man to Jesus for healing. The others have been healed (blind, withered hand, leprosy) but have expressed their doubts about what Jesus can do for someone in more serious condition. They turn to hear what the fourth man has to say. "My name is Lazarus, could I testify? My name is Lazarus, it feels good to be alive. When I in chains of death was bound, This man named Jesus called me out. If you think your little problem is too big for Him to solve. Take it from the one who's heard the mighty voice of God, A living testimony of His death-defying touch, my name is Lazarus."

Many of the people who came to visit Mary and Martha placed their trust in Jesus. They understood that this person who demonstrated his love and power was the Savior.

We might think everybody who witnessed the miracle at the mausoleum would be ecstatic. However, there were others who weren't so impressed. They didn't place their trust in Jesus. Instead, they went to the religious leaders to raise a stink. A quick meeting of the ruling council was called. The complaint was Jesus was doing many miraculous signs. If he's allowed to continue everyone will believe him and the Romans will come and clean house by destroying the temple and their nation. The high priest spoke up, "You know nothing at all! You do not realize that is better for you that one man died for the people than that the whole nation perish." The text tells us he didn't completely understand what he was saying but had prophesied that Jesus would die for Jews and non-Jews to bring them together and make them one. The apostle Paul refers to this fusion as the church. The upshot from the meeting is the religious leaders conspired to take Christ's life.

This is the back story that leads up to Jesus coming to the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus in Bethany six days prior to the Passover. I think some of the gawkers were genuinely interested in Jesus. But there were others who came because they were hoping for "the greatest show on earth" to do something else utterly amazing – more miracles, healings or another raising from the dead, perhaps.

The chief priests got wind of the building excitement a few miles outside of town. They'd been plotting since the day Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead and even prior to that. They were biding their time for the right moment. Then they'd pounce. Now, it felt time was running out because several months had elapsed and many people were putting their trust in Christ. They needed to put a lid on this Jesus person and do so quickly.

The next day is the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Jesus joins the crowd making their pilgrimage. But his motivation and reactions are different. It's another occasion when he sheds tears. Jesus has the emotional outburst in the middle of a throng of people who're ready to celebrate one of the high feasts of Judaism.

As Jesus approaches Jerusalem and his eyes sweep over the city, he weeps over it (Luke 19:41). This time it's a more intense and demonstrative crying. He weeps knowing he'll be rejected as the Messiah, the Christ, the Deliverer. People won't turn to him and the resulting judgment on the city will be devastatingly horrendous. The destruction will cause the misery index to go through the roof.

Previously, when Jesus approached the city, he spoke words of compassion and warning, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who killed the prophets and stoned those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.*" (Luke 13:34). This was fulfilled at the triumphal entry.

Fast forward to the actual event. He weeps over the city. It's not about what's going to happen to him. He doesn't have self-pity. He's not like the Greek and Roman gods who cried for themselves when they were injured or hurt (not sure how that could happen). They had no sympathy for human beings. Jesus wept over the spiritual blindness and needless loss. Jesus was marked by tenderness, compassion, sympathy. Jesus was marked by tenderness, compassion, sympathy.

There may be a third time in God's word when Jesus cried. "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death" (Hebrews 5:7).

This likely references Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. He goes there to pray with his disciples whom he implores to pray with him. His frame of mind is described as troubled, deeply distressed, overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death (Matthew 26:37, 38; Mark 14:33, 34). The anguish is so intense his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground (Luke 22:44). He prays to God the Father about alternatives to the cup of death he would experience the next day on the cross. But he knows there isn't another way...for us to be with him. Jesus isn't crying for himself but he's weeping for us and what has to be done so we can be with him.

Jesus wept over us.

He gave his life so he could give us the gift of new life, of having a right relationship with God. It's like Lazarus coming from the tomb. This is expressed in a song by siblings who formed a group using the family's last name Cain – Rise Up (Lazarus) "When He said your name, the thing that filled your veins, Was more than blood. It's the kind of love that washes sin away. Now the door is open wide and the stones been rolled aside. The old is gone, the Light has come, so Come on and rise up, take a breath, you're alive now. Can't you hear the voice of Jesus calling us, Out from the grave like Lazarus? You're brand new, the power of death couldn't hold you...He's calling us to walk out of the dark. He's giving us new resurrected hearts."