

Sermon Series: “The Good News for Life”
The Great Miracle: The God of the Can-do Who Really Cares
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Sunday, September 20, 2020

Have you ever met someone who was “can-do” and really caring? Those types of people are so great to have around! E.g., I recall on one youth trip we had a wonderful guy named Arland Daniels, and while we were stopped at a gas station we noticed that the front bumper on one the vans were taking was suddenly sagging, about to fall off on one side. I was thinking, “Man, I haven’t a clue what to do now.” But Arland calmly looked in the van he was driving, got out some bungy cords he thought to bring, and tightly attached the bumper to the car for the rest of the trip! Some people just have a knack for fixing things. E.g., Randy Roberts is like that— I think of him as a jack of all trades, master of many! He is a great help at the church if something is broken— a tile on the floor or roof needing to be patched, or even helping me get a dent in my van’s bumper pulled out! When something goes wrong, it is nice to have a go-to, can-do person who cares. Jesus was like that.

READ John 11:28-44 (p. 105)

CONTEXT: Jesus has just delayed His trip and then arrived at Bethany outside of Jerusalem to visit Martha and Mary, whose brother Lazarus had just died. He has spoken to Martha, and now He is ready to enter the situation at Bethany.

READ vv 28-32. “Mary expresses as well a feeling shared by Martha and the Jews mourning with them: disappointment as well as acknowledgement of Jesus’ abilities.” Martha has left Jesus after their conversation. Jesus has not yet entered the town of Bethany, a suburb of sorts outside of Jerusalem by a mile or two. Martha comes to Mary and tells her quietly that Jesus would like to see her, and she immediately leaves. The Jews who are mourning there follow Mary, thinking Mary is going to mourn at the tomb. The fact that people were there mourning in the house was a common occurrence, apparently. In the Mishnah, “Ketuboth“ 4:4, it was said that someone should hire at least two flutists and a professional wailing woman for every funeral. When Mary arrives at Jesus she falls at His feet and acknowledges that if He had been here earlier Lazarus would not have died, and the Jews acknowledge this as well in v 37. Again, we observe the awkward delay in this passage, a delay Jesus intentionally does to show God’s glory and to teach them to have faith in Him. God still does that. E.g., I was speaking with someone this week who shared with me how every step of the way in her life God had provided for her, from jobs in teaching to working in churches to a husband. She was amazed at how trustworthy the Lord is! As we spoke we also lamented the fact that often when we feel we are in a bind from which we feel there is no way out, we often forget how faithful He is. E.g., I have seen that with this church’s ministry— where there have been times at the end of the year when we could not pay apportionments and all our obligations, and yet the Lord uses someone to help us come through that time.

READ vv 33-37. “Jesus showed the depth of His love for Lazarus, but why did Jesus feel “greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved” in v 33?” Different scholars have come to different conclusions. The reason is that one the verbs in v

33 (also used in v 38) ἐμβριμάομαι is harsh in meaning, and is used of horses snorting in anger and one in an indignant, harsh mood. What would cause Jesus to be moved to anger or a harsh reaction? Rudolf Bultmann (*The Gospel of John*, p. 406) thinks that Jesus is angry at the women's and the Jews mourning with them lack of faith. But if this is so, Jesus never says it, and the Jews who are mourning remark on how Jesus loved Lazarus in v 36). C.K. Barrett (*The Gospel of John*, p. 399) thinks Jesus is upset because He knows if He does this miracle-- raising Lazarus— then this will be the cause for His death, which as we see is the case at the end of this chapter. But we have already seen in John 5,8, and 10 Jesus' life is in jeopardy, but this does not prevent Him from healing and speaking in a way that results in such negative reactions. F.F. Bruce (*The Gospel of John*, p. 246) suggests that Jesus is deeply moved by the sorrow and tragedy of human death and the missing of a deceased loved one. Hence, Jesus' weeping before the tomb in v 35-- which probably should be translated not "Jesus began to weep" (NRSV) or "Jesus wept" (KJV) but "Jesus burst out into tears" (Bruce, Barrett). As a side note, this verse 35 is often said to be the shortest verse in the Bible— "Jesus wept"— and my Dad's Mom actually won a radio contest by answering the question what is the shortest verse in the Bible. But as we can see, this verse should probably be translated in more than two words. In the original language it is actually three words— ἐδάκρυσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς— but from what I have found the shortest verse in the Bible which is usually translated in two words as well as the original language is 1 Thessalonians 5:16, πάντοτε χαίρετε, "rejoice always" (the next verse is also two words in the original language, ἀδιαλείπτως προσεύχεσθε, but often translated in three words "pray without ceasing"). Don Carson (*The Gospel of John*, p.) sees two reasons for Jesus' emotions— not only a grieving over death, but also coupled with a disappointment in lack of faith in Him. Carson may well be right, but I think the evidence points to at least what Bruce is saying, that Jesus is grieving over death, especially the human tragedy death causes.

Jesus, being God incarnate, knows our human condition well. It reminds me of Hebrews 4:15, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.” Have you ever lost a precious loved one? If so, then you know what it is like to grieve the loss deeply, down to great tears. E.g., I recall one of the first persons I lost in my life who was a friend, Jeff Beeler, who was about 10 years older than I was, and who regularly went to church and lunch afterwards for about three years. He eventually moved back to Tennessee, from where he was, and one winter day his car skidded off the road and hit a bridge and killed him. I was in college at the time. I recall sitting on my bed weeping not only at the loss of Jeff, but also at the whole bitter tragedy death is. Suddenly, I sensed Jesus weeping right beside me, and it surprised me, and comforted me. That was God’s special grace to me at that time. We too can know, whether we sense it or not, that in our deep grief, Jesus is weeping beside us.

READ vv 38-44. “The raising of Lazarus involved active belief and the glory of God. In what ways? The active belief came from Martha having to allow herself to be inconvenienced because Jesus asked her to have the stone covering the tomb entrance removed. We can all relate to Martha— I know I can— when she responds to Jesus, “Lord, my brother’s dead body has been in the tomb for four days— and the stench is already obvious. So You still want us to remove the stone?” We need to remember that belief in Jesus is not merely intellectual assent, but also active change in our lifestyle. E.g., I recall reading in *Sports Illustrated* about a football player who was getting his life right with God and meeting with a minister of a non-denominational church regularly, and the article shared how he had three children out of wedlock, and there was no repentance over this or acknowledgement in his life of the contradiction. I am *not* saying a person has to have his or her life in order to proclaim a relationship with Christ, but it is imperative that we acknowledge our repentance over those areas that are

inconsistent in our lives with a relationship with Christ. Jesus wants to change you and me for the better, and he calls us to act on our belief. E.g., I know of someone who struggled a lot with pride, and God called her to a humble heart and to apologize when necessary, and the transformation in her life was impressive! Also, the raising of Lazarus shows the glory of God because it *really* happened. E.g., I had a friend of mine in Aberdeen who came back from chapel and said the minister who preached was a skeptic, and asked why was this miracle of Lazarus' raising— really, a resuscitation, which is seen as the greatest of all Jesus' miracles, only found in John? We only have time for a couple of responses. First, Jesus has resuscitated someone in the synoptic gospels— a little girl in Matthew 9:18ff./Mark 5:21 ff./Luke 8:40ff.— so perhaps this is not the greatest miracle Jesus did. Second, if this story is made up, then the one who made it up went to a lot of effort to make it easy to disprove-- for we find the village Bethany named, and certain people who lived there. God is glorified in this story because He resuscitated Lazarus from the grave, because Jesus is the resurrection and the life. One day Lazarus would have to die all over again, but He could die in the hope of the resurrection. Have you ever seen someone die in that hope? E.g., I was treated to that with Edna Salzer; a couple weeks before her death, she talked openly about her impending funeral and who would do it and the arrangements she had made with the funeral home, and nothing could diminish her joy during our visit. She would tell me in the past, "I am not afraid of death". She loved Jesus, and He was her strong support. God was glorified in her death, because her faith was active.

“What does it mean for our daily lives that God is like this? Let us be sure to take notice of the line from Keith Green's song, 'If You Love the Lord': 'Instead of questions why, there'll be praise for all He brings you through.'" Let us live like people who serve a God of the resurrection. This means such things as: (1) for those in Christ Jesus, all our "good=byes" are really *au revoir*; (2) the

way we define success is based on the Lord's will for our lives, because His will is the only one that matters. And let us not start thinking, why doesn't Jesus do in my life what He did for Lazarus and his family. As Keith Green sang, let there only be praise for all He has brought us through!