

**The Unexpected Ways of Jesus - John 11:1-46**  
**Argyle – 10/23/16 – 52 Key Bible Stories**

**Introduction to Scripture**

Why did Jesus do miracles? Why did he heal people and walk on water and multiply the loaves and fishes and change water into wine? What was the purpose of Jesus' miracles?

We often think that Jesus did miracles to meet human needs and solve problems. His miracles enabled the blind to see and the lame to walk. One of his miracles fed a hungry crowd. Another got him from where he was - on the shore, to where he wanted to be - in a boat with his disciples. There is no doubt that Jesus' miracles did meet human needs and solve problems, but there was a deeper purpose to Jesus' miracles. After his first miracle where Jesus turned water into wine, John tells us, "This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus preformed in Cana of Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him." (John 2:11) "He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him." The main purpose of the miracles was to reveal Jesus' glory and to encourage faith in him.

John records seven of Jesus' signs or miracles. This morning we will be looking at the seventh and greatest of Jesus' miracles - the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Since this is such a long passage, I am going to break up the reading into three sections. (Pray - see Jesus' glory and grow in our faith) (Read 11:1-16)

Bryan spoke a few weeks ago about the challenge of giving a title to a sermon on Thursday for the bulletin when you don't write it until Friday or Saturday. If I was giving this sermon a title today, it would be The Unexpected Ways of Jesus. There are four unexpected ways of Jesus that I would like to point out from this passage.

### **The Unexpected Timing of Jesus**

The first is the unexpected timing of Jesus. Jesus' friend, Lazarus, was very ill. So, his sisters, Mary and Martha, sent word to Jesus about the situation. Jesus was on the other side of the Jordan River, a day or so journey away. What we would expect Jesus to do when he got this news? Drop everything and rush to his friend's side. Yet, unexpectedly, he didn't. Jesus told his disciples, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." John tells us, "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. <sup>6</sup> Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days." He stayed where he was two more days. Even if he had left immediately after getting the news about Lazarus, it is unlikely that Jesus would have gotten to Bethany before Lazarus died. But still the delay is unexpected.

This passage confronts us with an unsettling truth. God's timing is different than ours. We see this all throughout Scripture. Why didn't God respond to the effects of the fall right after Adam and Eve's sin? Why did he wait several centuries until he sent the Savior? And why hasn't Jesus returned yet, when his

coming will bring the end of evil and the healing of our world. We experience the unexpected timing of God in our lives, as well. Why hasn't God answered those prayers we have prayed for the salvation or healing of our loved ones? I have been praying for decades for some people.

You may be familiar with the verse in Isaiah 55 where God says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts and neither are my ways your ways," declares the Lord. "As high as the heavens are above the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:6 & 7). God's timing is an example of that. His timing is not our timing. Yet, his timing is always right. As the creator of time, he is never late.

The delay in going to Bethany led to the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Jesus' timing, although unexpected, was perfect. It always is.

### **The Unexpected Promise of Jesus**

The second thing I would like you to notice is the unexpected promise of Jesus. We'll see this in the next section of John 11. (Read 11:17-37)

By the time Jesus arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had been dead for four days. Martha came out to greet him and said, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died." Interestingly, when Mary came to see Jesus a little later, she said the exact same thing. Perhaps the sisters had talked about the difference Jesus could have made if he had gotten there sooner. Jesus assured Martha that her brother would rise again. She acknowledged that she knew this was true.

Jesus went on to make an unexpected promise. I quote this at every funeral I do. “Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; <sup>26</sup> and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.”(Please leave on the screen until the next slide)

I want us to reflect for a minute on this unexpected and incredible promise.

The Jews had a vague belief in the resurrection that would take place at the end of time, but Jesus connected that hope to himself. That is what was unexpected in this promise. If Jesus had said, “There is a resurrection and life...,” that wouldn’t have been surprising. But he said, “**I** am the resurrection and the life...” He went on, “He who believes in **me**...” Lazarus’ death became the opportunity for Jesus to teach some important truths about death that have comforted and encouraged Christians ever since.

There is paradox in this promise. First, Jesus said that someone who believes in him will live even though he dies. Then he seemed to contradict himself by saying that whoever lives and believes in him would never die. Which is it? Do we live even though we die or do we never die? The key to sorting this out is to recognize that there are two kinds of life and two kinds of death. There is physical life which all people have and there is spiritual life which only Jesus’ followers have. This takes us back to John 3 where Jesus told Nicodemus that in order to enter the kingdom of God he had to be born again. Being born again leads

to being alive spiritually. So, all people experience physical life, but only those who are born again experience spiritual life.

Likewise there are two deaths. Everyone will experience physical death, but only those who have rejected Christ will experience spiritual death. Jesus had said earlier in his ministry, “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and he will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.” (John 5:24) There is an old saying I learned as a teenager. (Picture) “Born once, die twice. Born twice, die once.”(elaborate) That is why Jesus told his disciples that Lazarus was “asleep.” Although he had died physically, it was not a permanent state. He would be resurrected. Jesus had said, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.”

So, following the example of Jesus, the New Testament authors referred to believers who had died as having fallen asleep. So the Apostle Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, “Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.” (I Thessalonians 4:13)

When I meet with a family to plan a funeral, most of them have some vague notion of the resurrection. Often they picture it like a family reunion and the way you get there is by dying. But Jesus said the resurrection is not a vague hope that

we grasp for in our grief. No, it is certain hope that is rooted in him. Those who have trusted their lives to Jesus in this world, can count on living with him in the world to come. His followers have already crossed over from death to life and can look forward to waking up in eternity when having fallen asleep in this world.

### **The Unexpected Emotion of Jesus**

I want to quickly comment on the unexpected emotion of Jesus that we see in this passage. The doctrine of the Incarnation teaches us that 2000 years ago, God the Son, the second person of the Trinity became a human being. It is hard for us to grasp that God became a human being and at the same time was both fully God and fully human. Yet, we see in Scripture Jesus getting tired and hungry like we do, which reminds of his humanity. Still, the emotion we see in this passage is unexpected from the eternal Son of God. He wept with his friends. John 11:35 is the shortest, but one of the most revealing verses in the Bible. It reminds us of something the psalmist wrote about. God is near to the brokenhearted; so near, in this case, that he cries with them.

Jesus' unexpected emotion reminds us of God's love and mercy toward us in our suffering. He cried with his friends in their grief.

### **The Unexpected Power of Jesus**

The last thing we are going to look at is the unexpected power of Jesus. We see this in the climax of this story. (Read 11:38-46)

Jesus asked for the stone to be rolled away from the tomb, but Martha had a very practical concern. I like the New Living Translation of this verse. “But Martha, the dead man’s sister, protested, ‘Lord, he has been dead for four days. The smell will be terrible.’” Martha was not expecting Jesus to raise her brother from the dead.

But Jesus was not deterred. He prayed and simply yelled into the tomb, “Lazarus, come out!” Try and picture what happened next. John tell us, “The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.” Lazarus didn’t come running out of the tomb or even walking. He would have slowly waddled out blindfolded, with his hands and feet still bound. Now it was Jesus’ turn to be practical. “Unwrap him and let him go!”

Unexpected! Jesus not only had the power to heal people, but he had the power to raise them from the dead. Lazarus would eventually die again, but in raising him from the dead that day, Jesus demonstrated that he had the power to permanently raise people from the dead. In his death and resurrection he would defeat death once and for all, making resurrection and eternal life a reality for his followers.

### **Conclusion**

In closing I want to go back to the question Jesus asked Martha earlier in this passage. After declaring that he was the resurrection and the life and that those

who believed in him would never die, Jesus asked Martha, “Do you believe this?”

That is really the issue for us this morning. Do we believe in Jesus?

To believe in Jesus means when his ways and timing are not our ways and timing, we still trust him. To believe in Jesus means that even though physical death is scary, we have complete confidence that we will “wake up” beyond the grave in Jesus’ presence. To believe in Jesus means that when we are suffering, we know that we have a Savior who is present with us and cares for us. To believe in Jesus means that we look forward to that day when we will hear our name and the words, “Come out!”

Do you believe in Jesus?