

The Unwavering Hope of Jesus

Hope for the Dying

John 11

April 20, 2025 (Easter)

On Death and Dying

This year, our family watched a biographical film titled *Temple Grandin*. If you were in ag, you probably know all about Temple Grandin. She is well-known as a scientist, teacher, and supporter of people with autism and animals. She was born in Boston in 1947, and was diagnosed with autism when she was young. At that time, not much was known about autism, and experts suggested that she be institutionalized. But with the help of her mom and teachers who believed in her, she overcame many challenges and achieved much.

Being autistic, Temple had trouble with talking and being social in childhood. She didn't speak until later than most kids and was very sensitive to things around her, including loud noises and being touched, but in high school, she found out that she loved being around animals: horses, cattle ... all the ranch and herding type.

The film includes two experiences Temple had with death. The first was while she was in high school. The school was an alternative, residential type, and Temple had access to lots of different kinds of learning experiences, including with horses. She became very close with one of the horses, but the horse suddenly passed away in her stall. When Temple saw the horse after it had died, she clearly had trouble understanding what had happened. She asked those around her, "Where did the horse go?" Though the body was right in front of her, she intuitively recognized that there was more to a horse than its body, and that what the horse actually was had gone somewhere else.

The second experience she had was when her beloved high school teacher passed away. With the casket open, she sees him ... she sees his body ... but she also recognizes that he's not there. She wants to know ... "Where did he go?"

Temple wanted answers to her questions about death. Unlike many of us who are doing many things to avoid death ... doing things to avoid looking like we are dying ... Temple leaned in. Which made me wonder:

What if—instead of doing all kinds of things to avoid dying or avoid looking like we're dying—we spent real time and energy seeking to know God through the topic of death?

I believe it would radically change our living for the better to deeply contemplate what we can learn about God through a story about dying, and the story of Jesus and Lazarus in John 11 provides us just such an opportunity.

Body

You are probably familiar with the story. John tells us that Jesus—who was very close to a sibling group by the names of Marth, Mary, and Lazarus—received word from the sisters that Lazarus, whom Jesus loved, was quite ill. And the reason they sent word was because they recognized the illness as severe and they believed Jesus could delay his death by healing him of the illness.

But Jesus has other plans. He deliberately stayed two more days with his disciples before heading back to the village of Bethany in Judea where the siblings lived. By the time Jesus and the disciples arrived, Lazarus had been dead for four days—his body wrapped in burial clothes and placed in an above-ground tomb.

All present—the disciples, the sisters, the Jews who'd come to mourn with the sisters—assumed death had the final say. But Jesus had other plans. After having others remove the stone blocking the entrance to the tomb, Jesus prayed and then shouted for all to hear, "Lazarus, come out!" And, still bound at his hands and feet with burial clothes, and with his head wrapped up as well, Lazarus worked his way out of the tomb as if death had only kidnapped him, and people helped him remove his burial clothes.

It's a truly remarkable story that teaches us some wonderful things about God.

God Seeks Glory through Faith

The main thing that we learn is that **God seeks glory through faith**. God is all about getting glory through our faith, and you can see this running throughout the story in both the conversations and the experiences. The first place I noticed this was in v. 4.

*4 When Jesus heard it, he said, "**This sickness will not end in death but is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.**"*

Jesus said something similar to his disciples two days later in v. 15, only in this conversation Jesus reveals HOW he will get glory. Look at v. 15.

*Jesus then told them plainly, "Lazarus has died. **I'm glad for you that I wasn't there so that you may believe. But let's go to him.**"*

Jesus put these two things together when he finally arrived at the tomb. He tells some folks to remove the stone that sealed Lazarus' tomb, but Martha discourages Jesus from doing that because she doesn't want the smell of death to come flooding out of the cave. He'd been dead for 4 days. But Jesus said this to her in v. 40.

*Jesus said to her, "Didn't I tell you that **if you believed you would see the glory of God?**"*

But then, of course, Jesus doesn't just talk about showing his glory. He actually does something that shows it to us, and many believed it. Look at vv. 43-45.

(Jesus) shouted with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out bound hand and foot with linen strips and with his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unwrap him and let him go." Therefore, many of the Jews who came to Mary and saw what he did believed in him.

Through this whole account, Jesus is after one thing – **being glorified through faith. Jesus is seeking glory through faith.**

There are multiple accounts in the Gospels of Jesus healing sick people, even from a distance with just his word, and in those accounts, he got glory and belief. But in this account, Jesus intentionally let Lazarus die in order to get glory and belief. By allowing Lazarus to die and then by raising him from the dead, Jesus is proving himself to be something more than a healer. ***It is one thing for Jesus to get glory through belief in him because of his ability to delay death, but it is another thing entirely for him to get glory and belief because of his ability to defeat death. Jesus doesn't just prolong life. He IS life.***

The Resurrection and the Life

He says as much in a conversation with Martha, one of the sisters. Martha is a fascinating person. She's been grieving for 4 days over the death of her brother, and when she sees Jesus, she doesn't ask him for a hug. She asks him for answers. She says in v. 21, *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died."* Some people are "hug first" people, some are "truth first" people. Martha is the latter.¹

And Martha is also a theologian. What she believes about God is very real and practical for her, and Jesus leans into this side of her telling her, *"Your brother will rise again."* Martha took that statement like a good Jew. Her response in v. 24 shows us this. *"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."* Martha rightly believed that there is going to be a great and glorious day of resurrection coming at the end of the age, when all believers will be given new bodies and raised from death. But Jesus means more. Look at vv. 25-26.

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Here Jesus reveals his glory with his words—with the truth. He says, "You believe, Martha, that there is a great and glorious day of resurrection coming at the end of the age, when all believers will be raised bodily from the grave. You are right. But here's the mystery: ***I am the arrival of that day. I AM the resurrection and the life.***

¹ Derived from Tim Keller

Now folks, this isn't ivory tower philosophy stuff detached from reality. Jesus is speaking on earth to a grieving, crushed woman who misses her brother. Verse 25 and 26 are principally true, but they are also immensely practical for the moment Jesus, Martha, and Lazarus are in. I think verse 25 is directed at Lazarus. *"The one who believes in me, EVEN IF HE DIES, will live."* That's getting ready to be true for Lazarus.

But verse 26 is directed at Martha. *"Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do **you** believe **this**?"* Remember what Jesus is after! He's after glory through belief? And if we believe, He gets glory and we get HIM. We get LIFE!

Conclusion

But on what basis could Jesus make this claim? What gives him the right and the power to defeat death, either temporarily for Lazarus in this story, or permanently for any who believe in Him? The answer is found in his own death and resurrection.

The only way that Jesus could get Lazarus out of the grave and you and I out of the grave was if Jesus put himself into the grave. The only way Jesus could have the power and the right to turn our funerals into a celebration was by causing his own funeral and having his own celebration.² In this way, Lazarus' death and subsequent resurrection point us to a greater death and greater resurrection that prove Jesus really is the resurrection and the life.

There is no question about his being worthy of glory. The only question is the same he asked Martha: **Do you believe this?** Do you believe that he is God who became a man? Do you believe that he lived a sinless life? Do you believe that he willingly gave his life as a substitute the punishment that you deserved? Do you believe that he beat death in his resurrection? Do you believe that he is the resurrection and the life? And I'm sure you understand based on the gravity of the story we've looked at today, this is no mere intellectual acknowledgement we are talking about when we say "believe." Do you stake your life on these truths about Jesus?

Application 1 – You Will not Die nor Fear Death

If so, there are immediate and long term implications for you. Jesus states one of them plainly: **You will never die**, and that has immediate implications for Christians. Your victory over death doesn't begin as you pass—it begins right away! Turning 50 has helped me see that the fear of death had weaseled its way into my life more than I would have liked to admit. Are you looking at your life and all that it's missing ... the relationships you don't have, the experiences you probably won't have, the places you probably won't go, the career that inevitably falls short ... Are you looking at all of that and carrying some anxiety or sadness over it? Part of that is because we are fearing death. That's making death bigger than He who beat it. So right away, the moment you

² These statements derived from Keller, Timothy J. The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive, 2014–2015. New York: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2014. Print. March 2, 2014.

believe in Jesus, YES, you will never die, but death need not be something that controls you because Jesus has defeated it for you.

Application 2 – You will Suffer Well

Another thing that will be true for you when you believe is that ***you will suffer well***. Like Martha and Mary in this story, perhaps you are suffering right now. And when things are really hard, it's very easy to question God. Jesus' death and resurrection doesn't explain ***why*** any of us suffer the ways that we do or ***the extent*** to which we do, but when we see that God has come down and involved himself in suffering so that someday he can end all suffering, ***we know that our suffering is not because he doesn't love us***. And because we know he loves us, we can suffer well. We can have joy.

Application 3 – You will Love Well

Yet another thing you will be able to do is ***love well***. Jesus loved perfectly, and it cost him. All love is costly. There is no way to really love people without suffering. Jesus shows it at the most perfect level, but it happens at every level underneath that. To believe in Jesus as the resurrection and the life will inevitably lead to live as one who gives life to others with your own. That's love. As we say at BH, that's being engaged in relationships and loving beyond ourselves.

Application 4 – You will Live Boldly

Finally, ***you will live boldly***. Some of us are living Christian lives as if Jesus isn't God and didn't beat death. We're living like he was a philosopher. We're living like he was a sage. We're living like he was a good teacher. We're treating him like Chat-GPT – seeking wisdom from him when we think we need it. But here's the thing: Jesus is God. He did beat death. If you believe it, you'll live far more boldly than you might think. Is the Jesus of the Bible the kind of person you ask into your life to be your personal assistant? Your consultant? Is this the kind of person you bring into your life as a consultant and you call him when you need him; otherwise, you're just very happy to go along your own way? No. You take all the limits off your allegiance and you live for him utterly.

Jesus is the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in him, even if he dies, will live. Everyone who lives and believes in him will never die. Do you believe this?