

Responding to Sin and Death

John 11:28-37

We are in the midst of a five-week series in John 11, the chapter that records Jesus raising a man named Lazarus from the dead. When Lazarus became deathly sick his sisters, Martha and Mary, sent word to Jesus. Instead of hurrying to their hometown of Bethany to heal Lazarus, he delayed two days until Lazarus had died before making the four-day trip to Bethany. Why? Because he wanted to do something deeper and more profound than heal a man from an illness. He wanted to raise a man from the dead so that the glory of God would be on full display. When people see the glory of God, they believe.

When Jesus approached the village of Bethany, Martha went out to meet him. As they talked Jesus turned the conversation to faith/believing. He didn't want to know if Martha "believed in God" in some vague sense. He wanted to know what Martha believed about HIM.

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

In the middle of her grief, Jesus turns the conversation to faith - to whether or not she believed that he was the resurrection and the life (whether or not a person who believes in him will live even if they die). In response, Martha makes this remarkable confession:

27 She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

That description of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, ***who is coming into the world*** informs what we see in today's passage. We'll see that Jesus experienced the death of Lazarus and the grief of his sisters as someone who was "fully God and fully man."

You may have noticed as today's passage was read that John emphasizes the emotional response of Jesus: he was "deeply moved in spirit," he was "greatly troubled," "Jesus wept." Of course Jesus' emotions reflected the deep convictions of his heart. Today we are going to consider how Jesus responded to sin and death; then we'll talk about how we should respond to sin and death.

We all notice sin in our own lives and in the lives of people around us. But many times we don't know how to respond. Today's passage will help us. We'll take our cues from Jesus.

Jesus' Response to Sin and Death:

Outrage (*John 11:28-33*) The word "outrage" may surprise from a first reading of these verses; but I'll explain in a few minutes why I'm using that word. We pick up the

narrative in verse 28, right after Martha confesses that she believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who has come into the world.

28 When she [Martha] had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.”

Verse 29 tells us that she was eager to go to Jesus.

29 And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. 31 When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

Since Martha had spoken to her “in private” about going out to Jesus, they mistakenly thought she was going to the tomb to weep. It’s very likely that some of those who went with her were “professional mourners.” Families with money hired people to mourn along with them.

We tend to keep a stiff upper lip and show as little emotion as possible when we’re grieving the death of a loved one. My father died in 1990 at age 59. As I was walking from his graveside to my car, I was rather weepy, and a longtime friend came up and said, “Don’t cry, Steve. It’s going to be alright.” He was well-meaning and trying to comfort me, but sometimes you need to fall apart and let it out. In many cultures, death is something to mourn loudly and openly. That was certainly the case in first century Israel.

32 Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

It’s really striking how Mary is always at the feet of Jesus. In Luke 10:39 Mary is “sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to his teaching.” In John 12:3 Mary “took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair.” Here she “fell at his feet.” Her devotion to Jesus was unparalleled.

Mary and Martha must have talked about this at some point because they both said the same thing when they saw Jesus: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died” (see v. 21). This was a statement of **faith** in Jesus’ power (he **could** have healed Lazarus) AND in Jesus’ **compassion** (he **would** have healed Lazarus).

At this point in John’s narrative, he begins focusing on Jesus’ emotional response. The first thing we see is:

33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was **deeply moved** in his spirit and **greatly troubled**.

Many commentators have pointed out that our English translations struggle to reflect the meaning of the term that is often translated “deeply moved” as here in the ESV. This term is also found in verse 38 where we read that when Jesus came to the tomb where Lazarus had been laid, he was again “deeply moved.” The ESV notes that this term could be translated “was indignant” (which means anger/annoyance when something is horribly wrong). That apparently was how the term was commonly used in John’s day. D. A. Carson, who is one of the foremost biblical scholars of our day, suggests that the best translation is “outrage.”

[The Message (a paraphrased translation of the Bible) renders verse 33 this way: “When Jesus saw her sobbing and the Jews with her sobbing, a deep anger welled up within him.”]

Therefore, in the most probable reading of the text, John is saying that Jesus “[was outraged] in his spirit and greatly troubled” at the scene that he saw before him. We don’t get the sense that he was upset in any way with Mary and the others weeping; after all, we’ll see down in verse 35 that Jesus himself “wept.” Rather, it makes the most sense that Jesus was “outraged in spirit and deeply troubled” **at the reality of sin and death**. Think carefully with me about this. . .

Remember that Jesus was the fully God and fully man. All things were made **by** him (or **through** him) and all things were made **for** him (see 1:Colossians 1:15-16). And humanity was the crown of all Creation. God (Father, Son, and Spirit) created them male and female **in his image**, “and behold it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). But when Adam and Eve disobeyed, sin entered the human race with devastating consequences. Throughout this life we all experience hardship and turmoil. All of the joys of this life are tainted with sorrow. The ultimate consequence of sin is death. We weren’t created to die; death is the curse of sin.

So when God the the Son became God the man and “came into the world” and saw firsthand how his friend Lazarus had succumbed to the ultimate consequence of sin and died, he was outraged. It’s not that he was surprised or caught off guard. This reaction to sin and death reflects the holiness of God. Jesus was the light of the world, and his friend Lazarus had been swallowed up by the darkness of death. He was “outraged in spirit.”

John tells us that he was also “deeply troubled.” It’s significant that the term translated “troubled” here in 11:33 is found both in John 12 and John 13. In both cases John tells us that Jesus was “troubled” because of his impending crucifixion. In 12:27 Jesus prays this:

27 “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour.

In 13:21 John records:

21 After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.”

Surely Jesus’ impending crucifixion was on his heart when he was deeply troubled at the death of Lazarus. Matthew records that in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before his crucifixion Jesus “began to be sorrowful and troubled” (Mt. 26:37).

When we keep reading we see that Jesus not only responded to sin and death with outrage; he also responded with tears. This is a powerful combination.

Tears (John 11:34-37)

34 And he said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” 35 Jesus wept.

I think the best explanation for Jesus’ tears is that he was moved with compassion. Jesus was simply doing what we all do when we’re in the presence of people we love who are experiencing heartfelt grief. We enter in and we “weep with those who weep” as Paul urged in Romans 12:15.

When the Son of God came into the world and saw people whose lives were turned upside down by the reality of sin and death, he wept. At the tomb of Lazarus we see “God in the flesh” with tears running down his face. God weeps with those who weep.

Notice how the Jews who had come to console Mary interpreted Jesus’ tears:

36 So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

This is the fourth time that John makes mention of Jesus’ love for Lazarus in this chapter (see also vv. 3, 5, 11 [where Jesus refers to Lazarus as a friend]). They interpreted Jesus’ tears as evidence of his love for Lazarus. Surely his tears also reflect his sadness over the grief of Mary and Martha.

37 But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?”

This echos the statements of Martha and Mary, “. . . if you had been here, our brother would not have died. . .” Everybody agreed that if Jesus were present he could have “kept Lazarus from dying.” This realization reminds us of the first paragraph in first paragraph in this chapter where Jesus, out of love, ***delayed*** when he heard that Lazarus was sick. He had something deeper in mind than simply healing his sickness; he was going to raise Lazarus from the dead to display the glory of God. Jesus wanted people to see how glorious God is (and how glorious he is) so that they would believe!

Let’s think about:

Our Response to Sin and Death. I’ll mention two responses.

The first response is to **believe**. When we look at all the sin and death in the world, our normal human response is despair. There are no human solutions to the wars that rage around the world . . . or to the wars that rage in human hearts all around the world, including our own. But if Jesus really is the Christ, the Son of God, who has come into the world, we have another option. If Jesus really is the resurrection and the life, we can believe in him and experience the remedy for sin and death, namely eternal life. Jesus said that if we believe in him we will never die.

Jesus' outrage reflects the wrath of God toward sin (Romans 5:9, Ephesians 5:6, Psalm 90:7, etc.). Every single one of us is sinful and there's not a thing we can do about it. The good news is that Jesus' tears reflect his compassion that compelled him to go to the cross to die for our sin.

When John saw Jesus coming to be baptized, his exclamation was, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29) Being fully God he was the spotless, sinless Lamb of God. Being fully human, he could give his life as a ransom for humanity.

First and foremost, our response to the reality of sin and death is to **believe** in Jesus so that our sin is taken away and we experience eternal life. He alone is the remedy to sin and death.

The second response is to **imitate** Jesus. I'll have to qualify what I'm saying because we are flawed humans with indwelling sin and blindspots. But if you believe in Jesus and follow him, you progressively have the mind of Christ. You progressively think about sin and death the way he did. And you will instinctively respond with outrage and tears. Let's take those one at a time.

Outrage. As you're probably aware, we live in what has been called "a culture of outrage" in which many people are perpetually angry at everyone and everything they disagree with. Consequently, such persons basically become like the Pharisees: judgmental and joyless and useless to God. As James tells us in no uncertain terms (James 1:20), "The anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God." We're certainly not talking about the kind of outrage that leaves you devoid of love, joy, peace, and patience. We're not talking about being outraged at people.

Rather, we're talking about an outrage toward sin itself and its ultimate consequence, death. . . while simultaneously having compassion for people who are ravaged by that sin (even those whom we might consider to be enemies). Proverbs 8:13 tells us that "the fear of the Lord is to hate evil" (see also Psalm 97:10 and Romans 12:9). We're talking about the type of outrage that flows from our fear of the Lord.

The place to start is with outrage over your own sin and the devastation it has caused in your life. For example, perhaps you've fallen in love with some sin. It could involve sex, alcohol, (or maybe sex and alcohol), anger, contempt, gluttony, sloth, greed (which is idolatry). Instead of being "willfully ignorant" about your sin, take ten minutes sometime and list all the ways that sin is wrecking your life: relationships, wasted time and money,

making you lethargic (instead of alive), how God is being robbed of glory in your life, etc. Be outraged by what sin and Satan and the world have done to you, a CHILD OF THE MOST HIGH GOD, created in his image. This is not God's plan for your life. First, respond with outrage.

Second, respond with tear (literal or metaphorical). Weep tears of godly sorrow (2 Corinthians 7) that leads to repentance (a change of life). When was the last time you wept over your own sin and the devastation it's caused in your life? If you've ever taken an inventory of your sin and wept genuine tears of repentance, I think you'll agree with me that such tears don't produce self-condemnation; they produce humility.

Once you've been humbled by responding to your own sin with outrage and tears of repentance, you're now in a position to respond to the sin you see elsewhere. . . as Jesus did: with holy outrage and tears. You can enter into situations with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control and legitimately lead people to Christ and the healing that only can bring into their lives. You first take the log out of your own eye, and then you'll see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. Let's start there and see what God does.