

SEEING, BUT NOT SEEING

The Gospel of John, Chapter 11

Introduction

What do you think when you witness a disaster? When you experience great grief? When death comes close? Our experiences are different. Our reactions are different. Our emotions are different. The intensity we feel today is different than before. What we feel tomorrow will be different. What is common to all, what is true of all of us, we have and will face difficult days, perhaps days of great grief.

John's Gospel, chapter 11 brings great encouragement to those who face heartache. John's Gospel is an evangelistic Gospel. He wrote it so that the reader would believe that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God; and that this belief would be saving faith (John 20:30–31). John recorded 8 events in the life of Christ to lead the reader to that conclusion. These events are called "signs". All of us know what a sign is. We see signs every day. They point to something. John's signs point to a reality that takes faith to understand. I want you to remember that statement. I'm going to come back to that. A sign points to a reality that requires faith to recognise.

The last sign in the Gospel of John is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In John 11 we have the 7th sign, the sign that precedes that one. In the 7th sign we have the account of the raising of Lazarus. We might think that this sign indicates that mighty power of Christ over death; and it does, but there's more.

The story of the raising of Lazarus isn't that complicated. Jesus' friend Lazarus dies. He's been dead 4 days. Jesus goes to his grave and calls him into life. This event really occurred, and we have record of it today because ...

Jesus wants us not to see what we see, but to see what we don't see.

Notice verse 40: *Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"*

Here's the point so you don't miss it: The raising of Lazarus is not only evidence pointing to the power of Jesus over death; it was a manifestation, a display of his glory. If we see a miracle of death becoming life, and that's all, we miss the sign!

Let me show you where I get that. I didn't make this up. I didn't hatch this out of mid-air. It bounces off the pages of the text. Note: Jesus said to Martha, "I told you that if you believed you would see the glory of God." Now we know, that what Martha "saw" was her brother being resurrected from the grave. That's what she saw. Her sister Mary saw it. The Jews saw it. We see it on the pages of Scripture. But you don't have to have faith to "see" it. It happened right in front of all these people. Everyone saw what happened. Everyone believed what he did. But not everyone believed what it meant –what it

pointed to! Jesus said to Martha, “If you believe you will see something greater than a dead man coming to life; you will see the glory of God.”

Jesus is on the other side of the Jordan when he hears that his friend Lazarus is sick. Lazarus is in Bethany. Jesus delays his departure to Lazarus by 2 days. This is amazing. Let’s read the text: “*Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.*” (John 11:5–6, ESV). Did you see that word “So”? Because Jesus loved Mary, Martha and Lazarus, he delayed his coming. You could say it this way, Because Jesus loved Mary, Martha and Lazarus, he wanted them to see his glory.

What was it about the glory of God that Jesus wanted these people to see? There’s a clue in the story as to what that was. We don’t get it from those who believed, but we do get it from those who didn’t. Look at verse “*But some of them said, ‘Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?’*” (John 11:37, ESV). Notice those who only saw a resurrection but didn’t see the glory. Notice what they said, “Why didn’t he just heal him? He had the power!” They knew that he could have healed him. They saw or heard of the blind man that was healed. ***These people saw a resurrection but didn’t see the glory.***

What is the glory that only eyes of faith see? Here, on the pages of this story we have an aspect to the glory of God. What is that aspect? It is this: ***God gets to choose who he heals and who he doesn’t.*** He gets to choose who he allows to die and who he doesn’t. Notice what Jesus said in John 5: “*For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.*” (John 5:21, ESV). That’s his glory.

The glory of God in the life of Jesus was his free will. This aspect to the glory of God is the freedom of his will. It is exactly what Moses experienced. Moses wanted to see God’s glory. God said that he would let his glory be revealed to Moses. Let’s see what happened by looking at Exodus 33:

“Moses said, ‘Please show me your glory.’ And he said, ‘I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The LORD.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.” (Exodus 33:18–19, ESV)

What was God saying to Moses: “My glory is my goodness; and my glory is the freedom to do what I choose to do.” Turn to Psalm 135. Notice: “*For I know that the LORD is great, and that our Lord is above all gods. Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.*” (Psalm 135:5–6, ESV)

The psalmist goes on to say that God does whatever he wants in the weather; he did whatever he wanted in the judgment of Egypt; he did whatever he wanted in the judgment of the nations during the conquest, etc. etc. Part of the glory of God is his freedom to do what he wants, when he wants, with whomever he wants. Turn also to Psalm 115:1–3 (ESV),

¹ *Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!* ² *Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?"* ³ *Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.*

The glory of God is that he does all that he pleases – but the comfort, the great encouragement, the steadfast hope to all who have faith is that all God wills to do is good. God does what he pleases but all that he pleases is good, holy, loving, righteous and beautiful. ***We rarely know why God wills one thing rather than another; and in some cases, it is not even right that we know.*** We don't know why God allows James to be executed, but Peter is set free. There are some things we just can't understand, but the eyes of faith know that whatever God chooses is the right choice – and God is free to choose what he wants.

Five Implications of this Doctrine

From the story of the raising of Lazarus, we can be certain of some important implications that I believe are intended for our comfort:

- #1. We can be certain that Jesus' will to not heal Lazarus but to allow him to die was motivated by love. The love of Christ for Lazarus and his sisters is emphasized in this text. The love of Christ for his disciples is noted. We can say with certainty, God chooses to do what he wants to do and what he wants to do is always motivated by love.
- #2. We are not certain why Jesus chose within his own freedom the course of direction he did, but we do know that it was to ultimately glorify God. Sometimes we can err by thinking we know what is best. The Bible is clear: *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord."* (Isaiah 55:8, ESV). Even though God's ways are unknown, we know that he will always work to bring himself the glory. He will not share his glory with anyone else (Isaiah 42:8).
- #3. We are certain, that if in God's will we are destined to suffer, Christ understands our pain and suffers even as we do (cf: John 11:33,35). Jesus weeps because of his love for these friends. Jesus shows contempt and anger for death which brought such pain. Jesus takes no joy in the pain of his people. As we certainly know, we can cast *"all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you."* (1 Peter 5:7, ESV). He sympathizes with our weakness and our suffering (Hebrews 4:14f).
- #4. We know that we can only see the glory of God, in life's circumstance through eyes of faith. We might see with our natural eyes suffering, pain and loss; but the eyes of faith enable us to see the all-surpassing glory of God in Christ Jesus. The glory of God in the face of Christ is hidden to those who are lost. But those of us who have heard and responded to the Gospel now see *"the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."* (2 Corinthians 4:4, ESV).
- #5. We also are certain of the mystery that the freedom of God's will does not violate the responsibility of man to make choices. We read, *"Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus*

had done." (John 11:45–46, ESV). Herein is a mystery that some fall to one side or the other. As the late R.C. Sproul roughly said, "Man has a free will; God is just freer!" Louis Berkhof correctly observes, "God determines *voluntarily* what and whom He will create, and the times, places, and circumstances, of their lives. He marks out the path of all His rational creatures, determines their destiny, and uses them for His purposes. And though He endows them with freedom, yet His will controls their actions."¹

Application

The first 6 signs of John revealed God's great power over life and nature. The seventh sign revealed his freedom to act in keeping with his own will. The eighth sign will prove both aspects, for in the previous chapter he said about his life, "*No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.*" (John 10:18, ESV).

What we see in the face of death, suffering and pain is an occasion to mourn. Jesus knew these human emotions (11:33-36) and they are not wrong. It is natural and right to mourn. It is right to be angry and sin and its consequences. But the story of Lazarus teaches us that there is more to see. The eyes of faith can see the glory of God. We can see that God is free to do what he wants; and what he wants is always good and holy, and for His glory. And what God wants to do he does.

¹ Berkhof, Lous, Systematic Theology, Wm. Eerdmans Publishing, Co., Grand Rapids, Mich., 1941, Page 78.