

**[1]**  
**Always On Time**  
**John 11:1-44**  
**September 9, 2018**

It's hard to believe it's already September. The summer flew by so fast. I don't know about you, but I so enjoyed all the sermons from everyone who preached this summer: Pastor Adrian, Chris Coon, Leora, Jaden Welsh, Brian Down, Benny McGrath, Derek Bird, and Ryan Davis. They all did such a great job of pointing us to Jesus. They took a look at Hebrews 11 at all the men and women listed in what is often called the Hall of Heroes, or something like that. The focus of many sermons on this chapter tends to be on the amazing faith of those men and women and, like Ryan said last week, there is often a call to muster up more faith. "If you just had more faith, your prayers would be answered." "If you had enough faith you would be healed." "If you had enough faith your marriage would be fixed or your kids would be obedient, or you'd win the lottery," or whatever....

Each one of the sermons from that series brought our attention back to Hebrews 12:1-2.

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**Hebrews 12:1–2 (NLT)**

***<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. <sup>2</sup> We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne.***

Each one of the sermons brought us back to Jesus, the Champion (or "the author" as some translations put it) who initiates and perfects our faith. All the men and women listed in Hebrews 11 were broken just like we are. The author of Hebrews invites us to let go of all those things that weigh us down and keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the Champion.

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**God is not calling us to be amazing.** The pressure is off. He is pointing us to Jesus who was and is amazing for us. He's the hero. As Ryan said last week, he is calling us to authentically walk with Jesus. We have One who has gone before us who made the way.

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***Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame.***

This leads perfectly into our sermon for today. We are jumping back into our sermon series, *Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God Is*. Prior to the summer we had been doing a bird's-eye-view of the entire Bible looking at three major threads that weave their way through every page.

**[5]**

1. **God is up to something.** He is restoring the *shalom* that was lost in the Garden of Eden at the beginning of time. His desire is to call us back into relationship with himself through the work Jesus did on the cross two thousand years ago. The entire Old Testament points ahead to the cross of Jesus. All of the New Testament is very clearly about Jesus and the work he did to reconcile us to God. The New Testament is a call to join him in his work in Campbell River and around the world.

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2. **Satan is up to something.** He is all about destroying the *shalom* of God. He wants to bring you down. He wants to isolate you. He wants to discourage you. He wants to destroy your relationships. He wants to heap shame on you. He is doing everything he can to destroy the peace that God wants you to have. He wants to get your eyes off of Jesus and onto yourself.

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**3. Left to our own devices, without the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, we most naturally move away from God.** We are our own worst enemy at times.

We are going to see these threads in the passage we are going to look at today. We are in the New Testament.

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We are going to look at, I think, one of the most moving passages in the Bible. Jesus had been heading to Jerusalem for quite some time. He had been preparing his disciples for the fact that when they would finally reach Jerusalem things would get tough for them all. He told them several times that he would be betrayed, arrested, beaten and whipped and then crucified on a cross, but that he would rise again on the third day.

In Luke's Gospel the writer says,

**[9]**

**Luke 9:51 (NLT)**

***51 As the time drew near for him to ascend to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.***

As he got nearer to Jerusalem things began to intensify. It was like there was a spiritual battle that was heating up in the unseen world of the angels. The religious leaders ramped up their efforts to accuse Jesus and find a way to have him arrested. Jesus' teaching became more and more pointed.

He said some pretty crazy things about himself in his last days on earth.

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He said that he had come from heaven to earth on a mission (John 3:13). People don't come from heaven to earth on missions. Angels do. And Jesus did.

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He said that his mission was to save the world and that anyone who wanted to be saved had to believe in *him* (John 3:15-17).

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He said he was the Messiah (John 4:26).

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He said *he* had the ability to give life to anyone he wanted (John 5:21).

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He said that *he* had absolute authority to judge (John 5:22).

**[15]**

He said that anyone who dishonoured *him*, as the Son of God, dishonoured God the Father (John 5:23).

**[16]**

He said that those who listened to *his* message and believed that God sent *him* would have eternal life (John 5:24).

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He said that the entire Old Testament was about *him* (John 5:46).

That's just a small sampling of what Jesus said about himself from a couple chapters in John. Read all of John and you will see that there is a whole lot more.

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C.S. Lewis was right when he wrote this in his book, *Mere Christianity*:

**“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things**

**Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell.**

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**You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”**

So, leading up to the passage we are looking at today, Jesus had been making some very calculated moves on his way to Jerusalem. He taught in the synagogues along the way. He healed people of all kinds of diseases. He was becoming extremely famous and the religious leaders had been getting very perturbed because he was disrupting their well ordered religious system. He continually butted heads with them, teaching against their legalistic interpretation of the Law. They wanted Jesus dead.

The timeline of events leading up to our passage can be a bit confusing. The Gospel of John has Jesus going in and out of Jerusalem for a period of time while staying with his friends Lazarus, Martha and Mary in the small village of Bethany, just under three kilometres away from the city.

The main thing we need to keep in mind as far as context goes, when reading our passage, is that things were heating up. And it was an event in our passage this morning that was the final straw leading to the arrest and ultimate crucifixion of Jesus.

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**John 11:1–44 (NLT)**

***<sup>1</sup> A man named Lazarus was sick. He lived in Bethany with his sisters, Mary and Martha.***

This is the only occasion in the Gospels where we hear about Lazarus. There are other stories of his sisters, Martha and Mary, but Lazarus sort of remains in the background. His sisters are more prominent than he is in the ministry of Jesus. It was at their house where Jesus would often stay when he was ministering in Jerusalem. Bethany was over the Mount of Olives, less than three kilometres from Jerusalem.

***<sup>2</sup> This is the Mary who later poured the expensive perfume on the Lord’s feet and wiped them with her hair.***

This account of Mary pouring expensive perfume on the feet of Jesus is one of the few stories that are recounted in all four of the Gospels (Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; Luke 7:36-50; John 12:1-11). In Matthew, Mark and Luke the writers don’t reveal that it was Mary. They simply say, “A woman.” In Luke, Simon, the Pharisee in whose house Jesus and the others were eating, scorned the woman and said that if Jesus really was a prophet he would know what kind of sinful person she was and wouldn’t let her touch him. Some scholars believe that Mary had been a prostitute until she encountered Jesus.

This is the same Mary who sat at Jesus’ feet listening to him teach while her sister Martha was slaving away in the kitchen preparing a meal for them (Luke 10:38-52). Martha, the busy, goal oriented, “get it done” sister was ticked off at Mary because she wasn’t helping, so Martha asked Jesus to make her help. It’s a great story. Make sure you read it if you haven’t done so yet.

***Her brother, Lazarus, was sick. <sup>3</sup> So the two sisters sent a message to Jesus telling him, “Lord, your dear friend is very sick.”***

Next to Jesus' twelve disciples, these three siblings were some of Jesus' closest friends. Had this been in our time they would have sent Jesus a Facebook message telling him that their brother was very sick. Literally, what the Greek says is, **"The one whom you love is sick."** They were obviously very close friends. The passage doesn't say that they asked Jesus to come. They just informed him that their brother was very sick. The implication, of course, was "Your dear friend whom you love is sick so please come and heal him."

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***4 But when Jesus heard about it he said, "Lazarus's sickness will not end in death. No, it happened for the glory of God so that the Son of God will receive glory from this." 5 So although Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, 6 he stayed where he was for the next two days.***

Put this little bit on the sticky side of your brain because we are going to come back to it later. I want to take a look at the reason Jesus allowed Lazarus, Martha and Mary to suffer.

***7 Finally, he said to his disciples, "Let's go back to Judea."***

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***8 But his disciples objected. "Rabbi," they said, "only a few days ago the people in Judea were trying to stone you. Are you going there again?"***

Remember, things are getting very intense in Judea, which is where Bethany and Jerusalem are. The disciples know it is not safe for them to go back there. Jesus answers them in that sort of enigmatic or mysterious way he often does.

***9 Jesus replied, "There are twelve hours of daylight every day. During the day people can walk safely. They can see because they have the light of this world. 10 But at night there is danger of stumbling because they have no light."***

I can sort of picture the disciples with a dumbfounded deer-in-the-headlights kind of look after Jesus said this, wondering if they should understand what he just said. They asked him a simple question and he answered with what seemed like a riddle. I think what he was saying was that the time was right for them to go to Judea, even if it would be dangerous. He, Jesus, is the light of the world. They needed to do this now while he was still there. This event in Bethany would be the precursor to him finishing his work on earth by going to the cross. He was setting this up perfectly. He resolutely set out. It was "go time."

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***11 Then he said, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but now I will go and wake him up." 12 The disciples said, "Lord, if he is sleeping, he will soon get better!" 13 They thought Jesus meant Lazarus was simply sleeping, but Jesus meant Lazarus had died. 14 So he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. 15 And for your sakes, I'm glad I wasn't there, for now you will really believe. Come, let's go see him."***

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***16 Thomas, nicknamed the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let's go, too—and die with Jesus." 17 When Jesus arrived at Bethany, he was told that Lazarus had already been in his grave for four days. 18 Bethany was only a few miles down the road from Jerusalem, 19 and many of the people had come to console Martha and Mary in their loss.***

You've got to picture this scene in your mind. Lazarus is dead. He's been dead for four days. There is a steady stream of mourners dropping by Martha and Mary's home consoling them in their grief. They have already prepared his body for burial and placed him in a tomb.

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***20 When Martha got word that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him.*** Remember Martha's personality. She is a force. She says what's on her mind and doesn't normally soften the blow.

**But Mary stayed in the house. <sup>21</sup> Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup> But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask.” <sup>23</sup> Jesus told her, “Your brother will rise again.” <sup>24</sup> “Yes,” Martha said, “he will rise when everyone else rises, at the last day.”**

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**<sup>25</sup> Jesus told her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. <sup>26</sup> Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha?” <sup>27</sup> “Yes, Lord,” she told him. “I have always believed you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who has come into the world from God.”**

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**<sup>28</sup> Then she returned to Mary. She called Mary aside from the mourners and told her, “The Teacher is here and wants to see you.” <sup>29</sup> So Mary immediately went to him. <sup>30</sup> Jesus had stayed outside the village, at the place where Martha met him. <sup>31</sup> When the people who were at the house consoling Mary saw her leave so hastily, they assumed she was going to Lazarus’s grave to weep. So they followed her there.**

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**<sup>32</sup> When Mary arrived and saw Jesus, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died.” <sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping and saw the other people wailing with her, a deep anger welled up within him, and he was deeply troubled.**

There are only a couple English Bible translations that translate this Greek to say that **“a deep anger welled up within him.”** Most translations simply say something like, **“he was deeply moved and troubled in his spirit.”** I think the NLT is correct in its rendering though. The Greek word is *embrimaomai*. It’s a very strong word meaning to sternly scold, to be indignant and rebuke. Jesus was getting ready to do battle with death.

When my dad died a couple years ago I had similar kind of anger well up inside me. I had been at Camp Homewood using one of their cottages to do some prep for our upcoming Growing Leaders on Purpose course when Ruth contacted me and told me that my siblings were having a conversation about Dad’s health on Facebook Messenger. He was apparently in severe pain and the ambulance was taking him to Regina from the small town they were in. I packed up my things right away and got off Quadra Island so I could communicate with them. The cell signal was too spotty there.

I got back to the church and went to my office and messaged with my sister who was with him. I arranged for a flight to Regina in the meantime. I had a strong sense that I needed to go home right away. My sister messaged and said that they had gotten to the hospital and they thought he was just constipated. That put my mind at ease and I wondered if I should change my mind about flying home.

The doctor told my mom and sister that they might as well go home and come back the next day. So, they headed out, but were called back a few minutes later. My sister messaged us, “He’s gone into cardiac arrest.” I prayed, as I’m sure all my siblings and mother did. Just a few short minutes later my sister messaged, “He’s gone.” Several of us messaged back, “What do you mean he’s gone?” “He’s dead,” she said.

All of a sudden a feeling of inexplicable anger welled up inside me. I don’t know what I was mad about. I think I was mostly mad that my dad couldn’t wait until I got there so I could have one last visit with him. It was a strange emotion. I was deeply angry at death.

I don’t know if that’s what Jesus felt. Whatever kind of emotion it was, it was deep. He was angry at death and he was going to do something about it.

<sup>34</sup> ***“Where have you put him?” he asked them. They told him, “Lord, come and see.”***

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<sup>35</sup> ***Then Jesus wept.***

Put yourself into the story. Feel what the characters were feeling. Jesus felt the full range of emotions that you and I feel while he walked the earth. He was fully man and fully God at the same time.

<sup>36</sup> ***The people who were standing nearby said, “See how much he loved him!”*** <sup>37</sup> ***But some said, “This man healed a blind man. Couldn’t he have kept Lazarus from dying?”*** <sup>38</sup> ***Jesus was still angry as he arrived at the tomb, a cave with a stone rolled across its entrance.*** <sup>39</sup> ***“Roll the stone aside,” Jesus told them. But Martha, the dead man’s sister, protested, “Lord, he has been dead for four days. The smell will be terrible.”***

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<sup>40</sup> ***Jesus responded, “Didn’t I tell you that you would see God’s glory if you believe?”*** <sup>41</sup> ***So they rolled the stone aside. Then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, “Father, thank you for hearing me.*** <sup>42</sup> ***You always hear me, but I said it out loud for the sake of all these people standing here, so that they will believe you sent me.”***

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<sup>43</sup> ***Then Jesus shouted, “Lazarus, come out!”*** <sup>44</sup> ***And the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound in graveclothes, his face wrapped in a headcloth. Jesus told them, “Unwrap him and let him go!”***

I think this is one of the most moving stories in the Bible. We see the humanity of Jesus so clearly along with his awesome power over death, disease and sin. There are so many emotions evoked in this passage from Martha and Mary, from the disciples, and from Jesus.

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I want to focus on Martha and Mary’s question to Jesus when he didn’t show up on their timeline. “Why? Why did you wait?” Both Martha and Mary said the same thing to Jesus when he arrived four days too late, according to their agenda, ***“Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died.”***

How many of you have ever been disappointed with God’s timing? Be honest. God, if only you had intervened and saved my marriage. If only you had given me that job I needed. If only you had saved me from making stupid decisions so I wouldn’t be in this financial trouble. If only you would have kept those people from hurting me. If only you had intervened and stopped the terrorists from crashing the jetliners into the World Trade Center.

I cannot tell you how many times I have heard people say things like that. I’ve heard Christians say them and I’ve heard people say things like this to justify why they don’t believe in God. “If there was a God he would not have let that happen.” Or, “Maybe there is a God, but he is either distant and uninvolved or he is not a loving God because a loving God would not let bad things happen to good people.” We don’t have time to adequately deal with these questions this morning, but I do want to touch on them indirectly.

We need to go back to those three threads that weave their way through history.

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- 1. God is up to something.**
- 2. Satan is up to something.**
- 3. We most naturally move away from God.**

We’ve talked about this a lot. Because of our orientation to life we tend to think that we are the main characters in the story of life. It’s the most natural way for us to think. Things happen around us. We

see ourselves as the pivot point. In order to really make sense of life we need to zoom way out. When we zoom in to our story it feels like our story is the main story. If we zoom out we see that I am one of 7.6 billion people in the world. Each one has a story. No story is the main story. There is a bigger story that we are a part of. God is up to something. The larger story is his and we have subplots in his meta-narrative, or his big story.

When humankind fell in the Garden of Eden, God set in motion a great rescue mission to save us. That mission continues today and it was the bigger story in what was happening in the story of the raising of Lazarus. Jesus waited to come to Bethany until well after Lazarus was dead so he could raise him and reveal his glory and power and victory over death. He purposefully did it to build their confidence in him and their knowledge of who he is. That one act triggered the Jewish religious leaders to make their moves towards Jesus. Scroll down to verse 53.

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**John 11:53 (NLT)**

***53 So from that time on, the Jewish leaders began to plot Jesus' death.***

It was the raising of Lazarus that triggered the religious leaders to move into action to arrest Jesus and ultimately get him crucified. Satan was at work attempting to thwart God's plans. We know the rest of the story. If Jesus hadn't died we would all be lost and without hope.

Martha and Mary, naturally, being in the middle of their own story, felt that their story was the main one. It wasn't. It was a subplot that God used to fulfill his purposes in his great rescue mission.

We are no different than Martha and Mary. Everyone here has a story. God wants to use each of our stories to further his bigger story and reveal more of who he is. What he wants to do in each of us as we walk with him is teach us to trust him in the middle of our story.

If you haven't already memorized Romans 8:28 you should. We need to marinate in this truth.

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**Romans 8:28 (NLT)**

***28 And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.***

Some people misunderstand this to mean that everything that happens to us is God's will. That is not true. There are lots of things that happen in the world that go totally against God's will. It is God's will that nobody would perish, but everyone would come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). That's what the Bible says. The truth is that many will not trust God and will perish.

Jesus taught his disciples to pray in what we call *The Lord's Prayer*, that his will would be done on earth as it is in heaven because on earth his will is not always done. Because God loves us and wants authentic relationship with us he has given us free choice. And with that free choice we often make poor decisions that go against God's will.

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**We cannot blame God for our bad decisions or choices.** We sometimes, I sometimes, make stupid decisions. God does not make me make those decisions.

I had a conversation with a friend about twenty years ago. He was into extreme downhill mountain biking. I saw him one day with his arm in a sling and a cast and walking on crutches. He told me what happened. He said he loved to do crazy downhill biking and continually push his limits. And then he said, "I've been trying to figure out why this happened." "What do you mean?" I asked.

"What is God trying to tell me?"

I had my own little conversation in my mind in which I responded to him like this, “What, are you daft? You were reckless. Use your head, buddy.” I didn’t say it like that.

When Paul said in Romans 8:28 that all things work out for the best for those who love God he was saying that no matter what happens to us, God can make something good out of it, if we let him.

When we are going through difficult times instead of asking why, a better question is, What can I learn, or how can I grow through this? How can I allow God to use this thing I am going through in his bigger story to tell his greater story of Jesus?

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We need to know that even though it might seem like God is not involved in our story, he is. **He is never late. He is never early. He is always on time.** He is trustworthy and the number one thing he wants us to learn through the tough stuff of life is to grow our faith muscles so we trust him more and so that others will see Jesus through us.

Let’s rewind to verse 15. Jesus had gotten word that Lazarus was sick. He had decided not to go right away. When Jesus knew Lazarus was dead he decided to go to Martha and Mary and he said this to his disciples:

***15 And for your sakes, I’m glad I wasn’t there, for now you will really believe. Come, let’s go see him.***”

What is Jesus’ goal for us in everything we are going through? He uses everything to build our faith muscles. He wants us to learn from him in the crucible of life. He is the Champion. The Author and Perfecter of our faith. He is trustworthy.

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**Matthew 11:28–30 (NLT)**

***28 Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.”***