

Love, Death and the Glory of God Part 2.

For those of us who were here when I preached my I think it was my second sermon ... that I did here at the Bridge - before I came as the pastor... If you remember - I did a sermon on John 11... Well, we are going to look at it again... I did say last week that we were going to start a new sermon series on the glory of Christ and RISK BUT ... just yesterday actually... as I was meeting with John - I decided to do John 11 again... There are a number of reasons for me doing this... but for the sake of time, I'll just share a few with you... I'll be honest - I ran out of time last time I preached this text and so I didn't get to say all that I wanted to say — its a long text and so we really do need to move along...

BUT the primary reason for me going back to John 11 is BECAUSE... before we take a look at the Glory of Christ and RISK - I want to take a look at what is perhaps the most VIVID presentation of the glory of Christ that I FIND in the Bible. There are other texts that I could go to BUT one of the reasons why I like John 11 so much is that IT PACKS A PUNCH.

And so... would you pray with me... as I ask God for help.

Father... use me now in this hour as I speak about the glories of Christ - that insofar as the words coming out of my mouth are words that are reflected in Your WORD that you would take it and NOT let it fall to the ground nor return empty - but rather, that you would use IT to glorify your Son by revealing His SUPREME GLORY to those who are gathered here. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

The great hope of the Christian life is not eternal life. Let me say that again. The great hope of the Christian life is NOT eternal life. Its much better than that.

Would you turn with me in your Bibles to John 11. That's John chapter 11.

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill.3 So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill."

4- - This illness does not end in DEATH... it is for the GLORY of God...

So there we have it. Love. Death. And the glory of God. That's the title of the message for today. A quick shout out to my man John - he came up with this graphic for our church yesterday at my request ... I don't know about you but I think it's positively BRILLIANT! LOVE, DEATH... and the GLORY of GOD.. That's what we're going to spend the rest of our time together doing... we are going to move through the story under these three headings.. So listen for these three words love death and glory and be on the lookout for how they relate to one another... Because what we have here is our Lord and Saviour shaping the way we ought to see love, death, and glory....

Love, Death, and the Glory of God.

Love

The text begins with love... Theres really only one point here... And that is to say that the love Jesus has for this family is not generic. This is not the common love Jesus has for the world... It is particular and unique...

Verse 1: Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. - This verse 2 is amazing because it hasn't happened yet. It happens in chapter 12... Which begs the question... why? Why did John choose to reach out into the future and insert this story here before it has even happened? Because this is by far the most intense display of affection for Jesus in all the gospels. John wants us to know just how UNIQUE and PRECIOUS this relationship is. Mary comes over with a VERY expensive bottle of perfume - which John later tell us is worth 300 denarii.. that's roughly a year's worth of wages... SO think with me for a second.. - I don't know what you make but image taking your annual SALARY ... and giving it ALL to JESUS. THAT'S what MARY here is doing.. She pours IT ALL ON HIM! And we are going to look at this text in more detail in the coming weeks when we talk about the Glory of Christ and RISK - but IT IS NOT A WASTE TO RISK IT ALL on Jesus like that! IT IS NOT A WASTE TO POUR your ANNUAL SALARY ON JESUS LIKE THAT! But the point I want to draw out here is that there is DEEP INTIMACY here.. MARY is even wiping the PERFUME off Jesus' feet with her HAIR... THIS was no ordinary relationship...

In fact John goes on to make that EXPLICIT - verse 3: "So the sisters sent to him, saying, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.' He loves them. Don't miss that word

there. Jesus loves them.. This request for help is not coming from a casual acquaintance. It is coming from the closest circle of Jesus' friends.

This love that Jesus has for Mary and Martha and Lazarus ... there's nothing vague or generic about this. This is NOT speaking about the general love that God has for the world... IT IS THE LOVE THAT GOD HAS FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM! God works all things for the good of EVERYONE? NO - God works all things for the good of those who LOVE HIM! This love is precious and unique - a Romans 8 kind of love ...: Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?....

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is the kind of love at work here in John 11...

DEATH

So He allows Lazarus to die. Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.. Therefore.. He waits..two days longer in the place where He was... and lets Lazarus DIE! After all that LOVE DEATH..

And now, perhaps, we are ready to see a bit of what's really going on here...

It is clear that the moving force behind this story is love.. Love moved Jesus to wait and allow Lazarus to die... Look again at the connection between verse 5 and 6: "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Therefore [this is the connection!], when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was." ... Lazarus is DYING and Jesus stays put... Just let that sink in. He waited two days longer in the place where He was and let Lazarus die... Let that hit you... FEEL the OUTRAGE of death in the face of love.

But... remember - this is Jesus we're talking about... JESUS who IS the embodiment of God's love - Jesus who is always doing the will of God - He waits... and lets the one whom He loves DIE...

How Is That Love?

How is this love? Is John playing a dirty trick here... LOVE AND DEATH?!?!? THEY JUST DON'T COMPUTE! At least in our natural understanding of LOVE and DEATH... But you see... this is intentional...

John has gone out of his way to set this up... And this is the very TENSION that Jesus is going to resolve for us... Jesus loves them. He loves them. Therefore, he does not go but lets him die. How is this love?

verse 4: "This illness does not lead to death.. It doesn't end with DEATH ... It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

So there it is.... in God's sovereign will, the purpose of all this is that through DEATH, we might see more of God... And this is love.

Really? Surely someone is thinking... well, when I think of the love of God, I don't think about John 11... I go to John 3:16... "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." AMEN! God's love is the gift of eternal life at the cost of his Son.

But what is eternal life? IS IT IMMORTALITY MERELY ... Or is it something MORE...

"This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." John 17:3...In other words... The essence of eternal life is the glory of God. It's to KNOW GOD and BEHOLD HIS GLORY and STAND IN AWE OF HIM AND WORSHIP!

Is that not what we SEE in the glimpses we have into heaven in the book of Revelation? HEAVEN is HEAVEN because of the GLORY of GOD! WE PURSUE ETERNAL LIFE NOT BECAUSE WE WANT TO LIVE FOREVER MERELY BUT BECAUSE WE WANT TO BEHOLD THE GLORY OF GOD FOREVER!

For God so loved the world, that He gave his one and only Son... so that whoever believes in Him might see the glory of God! FOREVER.

The love of God is really, at its core... the gift of Himself.

The great hope of the Christian life is not the hope of eternal life merely... if what you mean by it is literally that ... eternal life. That's not it. And it's not just that Jesus has conquered sin and death and that there will one day be no more

sorrow and pain. These things are all true, BUT our hope is much better than that! Rather... our great hope is that we will forever gaze upon the glory of God...

You know what makes eternity worthwhile? I'll be forward here.. but THINK with me for a second.. eternal life only ever means anything because we GET God! Forever! 24/7 unlimited access to INFINITE glory! IMAGINE HOW QUICKLY we will get BORED of EVERYTHING... ETERNITY IS A LONG TIME... guys... Its things like this that MOVE the Psalmist to SING - WHOM HAVE I IN HEAVEN BUT THEE - AND ON EARTH THERE IS NOTHING I DESIRE BESIDES THEE!! I DON'T WANT TO GO TO HEAVEN IS GOD IS NOT THERE!

That's because the great hope of the Christian life is the glory of GOD! That's the only way we are ever going to make sense of all this. The gospel, the cross, the ... Its not just John 11...

THE REALITY OF LOVE AND DEATH COEXISTING TOGETHER ONLY MAKES SENSE IF OUR GREAT HOPE IS THE GLORY OF GOD...

Let me put it like this.. what makes the gospel good news is not that we are saved from sin and death. IF THAT'S ALL THAT THE GOSPEL IS - IT WOULD NOT BE GOOD NEWS... BECAUSE I AM STILL ALONE! I'M STILL LEFT TO FEND FOR MYSELF AND SOMEHOW ARRIVE AT HEAVEN'S DOOR... BUT... what if THERE WAS MORE TO THE GOSPEL! AND THERE IS! What makes the gospel good news is that we are saved from sin and death YES. BUT WE ARE at the same time SAVED TOWARD GOD! Saved into His Kingdom as SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF GOD! WE ARE NOT JUST FORGIVEN - BUT WE ARE LAVISHED WITH THE GIFT OF GOD HIMSELF!

WE GET GOD! I attended a conference this week at which John Piper was speaking.. I LOVE that man.. and he talked quite extensively on INHERITANCE... Brothers and sisters.. the Bible says that EVERYTHING is going to be OURS.. One day... I will own this WORLD. BUT, in a very real sense... in the purest sense... GOD HIMSELF IS OUR INHERITANCE. GOD IS OUR GREAT REWARD. HE IS OUR TREASURE! WE GET GOD!

So.. this illness does not END in death.. it is for the glory of God...SO THAT the Son of God may be glorified through it. How does God get glory? God is glorified when His Son is preeminent. When Jesus Christ is supreme.. And that's where John's headed.

He goes on to give us three snapshots of the GLORY OF CHRIST in response to all the confusion, sorrow, and doubt surrounding death...

First snapshot

Jesus is finally making his way down to Bethany... and Martha goes out to meet him...picking up at verse 21...

Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. I'm confused... Why are you late.... I thought you loved us... Jesus replies...do you believe that your brother will raise from the dead? Yes Lord. I believe that in the last days....

Martha, the future is now. What you look forward to is standing right in front of you.

And then He says something that if you or I were to say, we'd be taken over to the loony bin pretty quick. Jesus is the only Person who can say these words. And in that, we see the supremacy of the Person of Christ... Here it is... I AM... I AM.. I AM the resurrection and the life. I AM life! And at the same time, I'm far greater and more precious than life as you know it. Lazarus is dead... and you Martha, are alive - and I'm exactly what both of you need! Whoever believes in me, even though he die, YET shall he live! That's for your brother.. And everyone who lives and believes in me... shall never die...that's for you..

Second snapshot

At the end of verse 32, Mary is at Jesus' feet, weeping... "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." ...

And in response we have the shortest and one of the most vivid verses in the entire Bible... Jesus wept. Don't assume you know what's going on here... TREMBLE at this sight you behold... The Godman weeping...Don't assume you know what this is...

There is this sick attitude festering in a growing number of professing Christians that says, "It can't be fair or loving for God to allow millions of innocent people to die each year...." HOW IS GOD LOVING IF HE ALLOWS THOUSANDS OF NEPALESE peoples TO DIE... As if they somehow care MORE about human life than God.... And to that, I say God is INFINITELY more CONCERNED by sin and

death than we are... I wish these people would just shut up and stop pretending to be better than God... Because your outrage at death is as nothing before God.

Is Jesus here sad that His friend died? maybe. Is He angry at death and sin? Probably. Is He troubled by the unbelief of people questioning His love? That's where I tend to land because of the focus of the gospel of John. Jesus is on His way to the cross. ... Jesus is on His way to die for our sin and people question His love.... Deeply moved and greatly troubled indeed.

In any case, hear Him say to Mary... I am not removed emotionally from the suffering of my creation. No, I am right there, ... with you...I have come down for this.. I AM life and at the same time, I KNOW death more intimately than anyone ever has or will...

Third snapshot...

Verse. 37... And to all the onlookers doubting.. and asking amongst themselves.. could not Jesus who gave sight to the blind and healed the sick and cast out demons.. Could He not have also saved Lazarus? Therefore... deeply moved.... there we see that again... JESUS IS DEEPLY MOVED... not primarily by DEATH - WE ARE ALL GOING TO DIE SOONER OR LATER... THAT'S NOT THE ISSUE. THE ISSUE THAT DEEPLY MOVES GOD IS OUR UNBELIEF! BECAUSE IT IS UNBELIEF - NOT AN EARTHQUAKE that will DAMN US. UNBELIEF KILLS US.

And so...DEEPLY MOVED at the unbelieving grumbling of the Jews... Jesus proves His love and dispels all doubt through a manifestation of His power... Jesus stands at the tomb and He exercises His authority over death as He calls.. Lazarus, COME FORTH. By His life giving Word, Jesus calls the dead. And the dead obey...

This isn't about Lazarus. You'd be completely missing the point if all you see here is Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead... Rather, this is a foretaste of what Jesus is doing and will do - Jesus is calling out a people for Himself from death to life - so that HE would be the firstborn from among the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent.

Here's what Jesus is doing - Just as in Genesis 1, He called something forth from nothing, NOW... Jesus is calling out a people for Himself so that He might be the firstborn from among the death. But He will not be alone. He is saving a vast multitude and calling them to Himself. Calling them out of death into life and out of darkness into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

And see here... it was loving for God to let Lazareth die because not only did Mary and Martha get see all this, BUT because many people also believed in Jesus on account of his death! It's right there... in the Bible... verse... This is the very theme Paul later picks up in 2 Cor. 4 where he says that we who live carry around the death of Christ in our bodies all day long so that His life and power might also be manifest in us! If through our suffering and death, people see Jesus and repent and believe and be saved! How much more loving can you get? Seriously... Because at the end of the day... we have to ask ourselves - ARE PEOPLE BEING SAVED? Are people bringing glory to God by repenting of their sins and believing in Jesus Christ??? I Don't know about you.. but I an think of NOTHING more LOVING than for GOD to DISPLAY HIS GLORY to LOST SINNERS AND IF THAT MEANS GOD HAS TO KILL ME... IF THAT MEANS I HAVE TO SUFFER FOR HIS SAKE... IF HIS GLORY.. IF THE LIFE AND POWER OF THE RISEN CHRIST IS MADE MANIFEST IN MY MORTAL FLESH WHEN I SUFFER - THEN LORD - BRING THE RAIN! BRING ME ANYTHING THAT BRINGS YOU GLORY!

The GREAT HOPE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS THE GLORY OF GOD. It is NOT LIVING FOREVER. IT IS NOT LIVING AL OGN LIFE HERE.. IT IS DEFINITELY NOT LIVING A COMFORTABLE LIFE! Our GREAT HOPE IS THE GLORY OF GOD...

Don't measure God's love for you by how much comfort and health He gives to you. That's BLASPHEMY! AKA - the prosperity gospel! Rather, learn to measure God's love for you by how much of Himself He gives to you and those around you..Even if that means suffering and death

If this is true... then it is loving for God to destroy your hopes of a long and healthy life and to destroy your hopes of an early retirement... and to even allow things like cancer, blindness, or an earthquake... if that means you come to know more of Him and you REPENT of your sins... then if you were to be free from these things and know him less... and CONTINUE in your sins...

Are we thinking this way guys? Are we taking up our cross DAILY and following Jesus to His death? Or are we just interested in playing RELIGION at church while we FILL UP our BANK ACCOUNTS for a BIG FAT COMFORTABLE RETIREMENT.

I ran out of time again... but let me ask you this morning... What is the great hope of the Christian life? What makes following Christ on the calvary road compelling for you. What is it about Him that you'd be willing to lose everything to be faithful to Him? Is it the hope of the glory of God.. or something else?

The great hope of the Christian life is not eternal life.. It's much, much better than that...

Let's pray.