

Hello Summit church. Its great to be back.

Next to having the Sovereign God of the universe behind us as we planted City Church, having the Summit Church behind us was the best thing that ever happened to me.

You gave generously, you equipped us, and when we left, you continued to pray for us. On behalf of City Church, I want to say thank you. We love you. You have been and continue to be instrumental in making Jesus famous in Middle Tennessee. Keep praying.

On an even more personal note, I love this church because you were my family in the darkest time of my life.

Almost 2 years ago to the day, our son Chai was born. Then he died a day later. Our Summit family cried with us, prayed with us, reminded us of hope, and took care of our physical needs.

Even to this day, my wife and I will get a text from one of you with a picture of flowers next to my son's grave and message that says "Remembering your son today."

- We love you because our pain has been your pain.

We also love you, because our joy has been your joy.

7 short weeks ago, we had another son. Simon Elliot Atwood was born on May 18th. When he was born, and through 2 excruciating weeks in the Intensive Care unit at Vanderbilt, I don't think I can count the number of emails, messages, cards, gifts, and phones calls that rejoiced with us in Simon's life and God's goodness.

So on behalf of my wife, and all my sons....and from the bottom of my heart, thank you...and we love you.

INTRO

But in the light of our great pain and recently, our great joy, one question still haunted me. "Is there a point where death becomes too much for me? Is there a point where because of the pain in my life and the death that surrounds me that I will be compelled to walk away from God?"

- I walked around the campus of Vanderbilt on the day that the doctor told us that Simon may have an infection. The same thing that killed our son two years ago.
- And I honestly asked "What if my son dies? What if I lose another child?"
- Then what if we have 2, 3, 4 more children and they all died? What is the breaking point for me? When do we say "That's it God! No more! We are through with you and this pain."

When does death win the day and when do I give up on God?

I'm going to answer that question today. But first I want to show how God deals with death and pain...and how that fits with his love.

If you have a Bible, open it up to the book of John, chapter 11.

We are going to look at the account of the death and resurrection of Lazarus. One of Jesus' good friends.

This passage is one of those passages that is easy to look at from our vantage point and say "Oh yeah, I can totally see how God was at work." But tonight I want us to get into the shoes of the characters in this story a bit.

For some of you, that may be easier than others. If you have ever had someone you love die, you may be able to identify really well with this story.

For those that haven't, I assure you it will happen. The chances of death are pretty high.

So I hope what we see about Jesus tonight will ring true when death happens around you, and especially when it happens TO YOU.

My goal today: to show you the glory of God in the way he loves us. Especially in the midst of pain and death.

So here we go....**John 11**

John 11:1-6

There is a MAJOR problem in these first verses.

Does Jesus love Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, or does he let them experience pain and death?
Our minds and hearts say "Can't be both! If he loved 'em, Lazarus would not have died!"

But here, in **v 6** we are told that it is BECAUSE Jesus loved Martha that he waited two days before he left to help his dying friend. HOW IS THAT LOVE?

When I ask that question, One of 2 things have to be true. Either my understanding of love is wrong, or God's is.

So here is the first revelation about God in this passage.

1) Love is seeing and showing the glory of God, not the removal of pain.

There is no doubt that John wants you to know that Jesus loves Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

Starts in **v 2** where John tells us that it was Mary who wiped Jesus' feet with her hair.

- There is only one reason she would do this. Jesus has first loved her in a very deep, personal, and extraordinary

Then 2 other times, John specifically mentions Jesus' love for them.

John doesn't want to leave us with a shred of doubt regarding Jesus' love for Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

But at the same time, **Jesus just lets Lazarus die.**

Right? I mean, we know Jesus could have healed him, that is what he has been doing, miraculous things. He has fed 5,000 people with loaves and fish, he's healed a blind man, a lame man, walked on water, healed a sick kid, and turned water to wine. He could have left when he got the message and healed Lazarus. He could have made it on time.

But he didn't. And he loved him.

So, if its true that Jesus REALLY loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, but consciously and willing decided to let him suffer and die, then we have

to re-define what we understand about love according to God's definition, rather than what we would choose.

Jesus defines love for us in **verse 4**.

He says that Lazarus' illness and temporary death is "**for the glory of God so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.**"

Jesus love for us is whatever it takes for us to see his glory. Even death.

What's his glory?

- It is whatever gives him ultimate weight.
- It is everything that makes God worth worshipping and loving and treasuring...forever.
- That is the meaning of life. To worship God.
- See, Eternal life is knowing more and more deeply, tasting and experiencing, everything that makes God beautiful and powerful and worthy of worship.

So Jesus allows Lazarus to die when he had the power to heal him, and he deeply hurts Mary and Martha. But he does it because he wants them, and others to see his glory. He wants them to HAVE LIFE.

And ultimately, that is what Love is. **Seeing and showing the Glory of God that leads to life.**

TRANSITION:

So we have our definition of love. Now let's see **HOW** Jesus loves.
Read John 11:17-36

2) Jesus loves specifically.

Think about this for a second. The Bible says that God knew you before you were born. He knit you together your innermost parts. Not only that, he knows exactly how many hairs you have on your head.

With all of that knowledge of your physical being, he knows your heart that well too.

- I mean, you know that everybody thinks differently, and everyone feels differently, right?
- One of the most naïve things that we do to each other is act like everyone is just like us. But we're not. God made us different.

One of the most glorious things about Jesus, is that he knows that. He is the one who made you. So when he comes to you in your lowest moment, in the middle of pain and death, he does whatever it takes to help you see his glory....TO LOVE YOU.

BIBLE ILLUS: Look at Martha and Mary. In case you have never heard of these ladies, there is a story in the Bible where Jesus goes to their house and they have prepared a dinner for Jesus.

- In the story, Martha is getting the dinner ready, and she looks around for her sister to help her and she is just sitting at Jesus' feet listening to him talk.
- So Martha goes to Jesus and says, "Ummm, Jesus, gonna need you to tell my sis to come help. I mean, she's just sitting there listening to you...while I'm doing all the work. Give her a smack for me."

And right there in that little story we see the personalities of these two women.

- **Martha** is Type-A, she is a go-getter. She sees a task that needs to be done, and she gets it done. She doesn't have a lot of time for sitting around. You use a dish, you clean it. She's a doer. If it makes sense logically, then she pushes ahead.
- **Mary**, on the other hand, is wearing her Toms and her V-neck and she likes to sit on the grass with friends and listen to vinyl records of bands you have never heard of...and if you had heard of 'em, she'd stop listening to them. She's a feeler. If it feels right she goes ahead with it.

So how is Jesus going to show his glory to Mary and Martha.

- Cuz remember, that's the whole reason he didn't come when he found out Lazarus was sick.

Well, Martha comes first. And we should expect that. She's the go-getter

V 20- Martha comes out and Mary stays behind.

But watch, Martha and Mary say the EXACT SAME THING to Jesus

V 21 and v 32

The death of their brother has caused them both to question the love of God.

But Jesus answers them in VERY DIFFERENT WAYS

To Martha he gives TRUTH.

- See Martha is a thinker. She needs this to make sense logically.
- She needs to understand how Jesus is working, because this makes no sense.
- So he tells her **"Your brother will rise again."**- v 23
- But she doesn't get it.

V 24

- She just thinks Jesus is talking about the final resurrection. This is like when folks say to you at a funeral, you'll see him again in heaven. "Well, yes. But I want him now!"
- See, I really identify with Martha right here. Because I have this theological kind of mind. And what I like to do with death is reason it away with theology.
- "OK, I don't have to worry because I know that Jesus died for sin and if that person died believed in Jesus, then even though they are dead, they will be alive again, so I don't really have to be sad, just study more about heaven."
- But Jesus won't let Martha just stop at a "pie-in-the-sky" idea about the resurrection.

V 25 (don't read)

- Jesus says to Martha, "Stop. We aren't just talking about a theological idea. I AM THE RESURRECTION. I AM THE SON OF GOD standing in front of you. The resurrection is not just something that happens at the end of days, IT HAPPENS IN ME. RIGHT NOW. TODAY. For anyone who will believe."

Do you see the glory that he is showing to Martha?

- He comes to a woman trying to make sense of what she believes in the midst of pain, and he answers her with the truth she needs.
- Because Martha's brother died, she was forced to make real, practical sense of her theology. Before, it was just an idea that she had learned.

- Now, Jesus said that “idea” about a resurrection, it comes from me. So don’t trust in your ideas, trust in me! **Don’t trust in a principle, but in a person.**
- **APP:** I don’t know how many people I have talked to over my years as a pastor, heck, as a Christian, who have told me “I know what the Bible says, and I know all the right answers, I just don’t know if its ever really made in a difference in me.”
- I don’t know if I can really say I have peace because I “Believe in Jesus”.
- I don’t know if I would even call my life a joy.
- I do a lot of stuff, but I just don’t find I am really happy.
- Sigh- I guess that’s what Heaven is for.
- If that is you, Jesus is saying, specifically to you, NO. Seeing the glory of God is not reserved for heaven. It is not something for later. Joy is not on hold until Jesus comes back.
- Jesus says to you now “I am the resurrection and the life. He that believes in me shall live....NOW. TODAY.” You can be changed...and not later, today.
- **You can have joy...today.**
- **You can have peace...today.**
- **You can have rest...today.**
- **But you won’t get it by Jesus fixing your circumstances, you’ll get it by seeing who he is and how he loves.**

**So, Jesus loves Martha by giving her Truth,
But to Mary he gave Tears. (In the trenches, Down low)**

Now remember, the beauty of this moment is that Jesus doesn’t have a “one size fits all approach” when he loves you, when he shows you his glory.

Because where he came to Martha with the truth that she needed...he comes to Mary with tears.

With Martha, he came from 10,000 feet. He said, Remember the big picture, I’m the point of life. I’m bigger than circumstance. Hope is not in the life of your brother, it is in me. I AM THE RESURRECTION.

But with Mary, he doesn't come from 10,000 feet. He crawls down in the trenches with her...and he cries with her.

V 33-35

- Mary had hung back with the mourners who had come from nearby Jerusalem. She was just there, crying. She didn't run out to meet Jesus, she stayed home, telling stories of her brother to her friends. Crying, maybe holding one of his cloaks in her lap, even bringing it up to her nose to smell it.

ILLUS: I remember July 2010, when my son died. I went into to Martha mode. My adrenaline kicked in, I pulled out my Bible, I read CS Lewis' "Problem of Pain", I arranged the funeral, I protected my wife, and I wrote blogs to explain where I saw God in all this mess.

- But my wife was Mary. She would sit on our bed holding pictures of our son, holding the little knit cap that had kept him warm and the blanket he was covered with. She would just sit there and cry.
- And I wanted to help, so I'd go in to have a conversation, but she didn't need a conversation. She needed to cry.
- **She needed to ask God "WHY?" through her tears, not through my textbooks.**
- So I learned, to love her during this time, sometimes I just needed to hold her and cry with her.
- Listen, Jesus knows our pain. And he knows Mary's pain here. That's why he doesn't say to Mary "I am the resurrection and Life!".
- He just cries with her. One simple verse with a profound truth about the Glory of specific way God loves you. **Jesus wept.**

Jesus knows that Mary needs to see not just a God with answers, but a God with empathy.

- Listen, you do not have a God who is above suffering. IN Jesus you have a God who suffered and died on a cross for your sin, in your place.

The gospel tells us that our God empathizes with us. He feels with us. He is well acquainted with pain.

He doesn't stand above us passing out a one-size-fits all faith, rather he knows us intimately and whether we need truth or tears...or both.

And that is GLORIOUS!

APP- There are two big mistakes Christians often make when dealing with death and pain.

- One is that we treat people going through suffering in a one-size fits all way. In other words we think "Everybody just needs to have a good cry, or we think everybody just needs to be reminded that Jesus is coming back."

That isn't Christlike. What is Christlike is to know a person and love them in a way that ministers to them in the midst of their pain.

- The other thing Xians do is they think that having joy means smiling a lot.
- We think "If I go through pain, I can't show I am sad, or weak or even questioning God."

But here's what's amazing about Jesus. **HE KNOWS HE IS ABOUT TO RAISE LAZARUS FROM THE DEAD.** And he still weeps.

- He knows the beautiful outcome of this event. But he doesn't plaster on a smile and say GOD IS GOOD! All the Time! Amen?
- He weeps with his friends....and so should we.

The glory of God that we see in Jesus through this death is that he loves us specifically.

If you want others to see his glory through you, love others specifically in their pain.

Give them truth and give them tears.

TRANSITION: Let's finish the story

READ John 11:37-45

So Jesus let Lazarus die. That is the way he loved Mary and Martha...and Lazarus. Because that is what he had to do to get them, and us, to see his glory. But what kind of God do we have if that's the end?

Not a very glorious one.

So these last verses show us that

3) Jesus hates death, so he died to kill it.

In v. 33 and in v. 38, Jesus is described as "**deeply moved**".

- Now, I don't think this is the greatest translation of this Greek word.
- The word here in both verses is a word that means "to scold"
- It was often used to talk about the snorting of horses when they are angry or upset. When it is used in other places in the Bible, which is not very often, it always refers to scolding in anger.

So if Jesus is angry, with whom, or what, is he angry?

- Well, Scholars differ on this answer
- Some say Jesus was angry at death itself.
- Some say Jesus was angry at the people who didn't believe. The people who were questioning his goodness.

And honestly, we just don't know. The Scripture doesn't tell us.

- But I'll give you my best understanding about what I think is going on here and how I think the glory of God shows up in his anger at not one or the other of these things, but at **BOTH OF THEM.**

First, here's why I think Jesus is angry at death.

Have you ever wept at a coffin? Have you ever been angry next to the tombstone of a loved one?

- Death sparks anger in all of us.
- There is a reason for that
- Death is not a part of God's original design for man.

It came as a part of a curse for our rebellion against God.

When Jesus sees the death of his friend Lazarus, he sees more than a friend that "passed away". He sees the gross effect of sin...and it has hit so close and so personal to him.

The perfect Son of God. God in the flesh. Now experiencing the pain of sin and death in a very personal way. **THIS IS NOT RIGHT.**

But it is not just Lazarus funeral that he weeps about here. It is yours and mine.

- I think Jesus sees in the death of Lazarus all of our funerals, past and future.
- **ILLUS:** It's like a parent watching your child being ravaged by Cancer. You would be angry. You would want to do everything you could to cut out the cancer. To destroy the killer.
- **Jesus here sees your death and my death.** And he is thinking, "THIS IS NOT RIGHT! THIS IS NOT THE WAY IT SHOULD BE!"

And Jesus is angry about that.

But he doesn't just see your funeral. He sees his own.

- See from this point forward, the Jewish leaders were no longer just plotting his death, they were putting their plan into action. And Jesus knew it.
- If he steps into to this situation and performs a miracle, one that reverses death itself, they will surely kill him. Because for the Jewish leaders, it would mean that they lose their power.

In other words, if Jesus stops Lazarus' funeral, he begins his own.

If Jesus gives life to Lazarus, he takes death onto himself.

But isn't this exactly what we all need?

- I don't need a God who just weeps, I need a God who does something about death.
- I need a God who gets angry and goes after death itself.

And that is exactly what Jesus does. He hates death so much, he is willing to die to kill it. He is willing to take death onto himself, with all of the sin that caused it, and die in our place so we can live.

See, there is something worse than physically dying once. Namely, dying spiritually, over and over and over. Eternally

And that is the other reason Jesus is so angry here.

Look at v. 37- . Lazarus' death caused the onlookers to doubt in disbelief.

In short, "We thought this guy was special, but he either doesn't really love Mary and Martha, or he has been faking it this whole time. Just another magician"

- See, The thing that is worse than death is unbelief.
- Why? Because death is just a passing into eternity.
- But how you spend eternity is entirely dependent on who you trust.
- It is entirely dependent on whether or not you believe Jesus died in your place.

The truth is that because of our sin, we have to be separated from a perfect holy God, and that our death is coming. And unless Jesus does something about it, that death will be eternal. Forever.

- Conscious separation from God. Never-ending.

That's why Jesus is willing to raise Lazarus from the dead here and draw the attention of the Jewish leaders on himself, practically writing his own death certificate. He is fighting against unbelief.

When Jesus was killed on the cross, he became sin and death for you so that you would not have to die for your sin. So that you can have eternal life.

But LISTEN, you do not gain eternal life UNLESS YOU BELIEVE that good news. Unless you believe the gospel.

- That's why unbelief is worse than death. Dying in unbelief is like 1000 deaths. Dying in unbelief is to be eternally separated from God. It is hell. And if Jesus hates death, he must hate unbelief even more.

So when he hears unbelief coming from people in the form a question of God's goodness. He wells up with a deep anger.

Jesus is angry because He knows that their entire eternal existence is on the line.

See, the reason I think Jesus is angry at both death and unbelief, is because his solution addresses both of them.

The glory of God on display here is that Jesus, angry at death and unbelief, goes all out to do away with both of them.

Watch this: he deals with the unbelief of the onlookers by calling them to be a part of the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead.

- He has THEM roll the stone away from the tomb. **V 38**
- Then he prays on "their account" so they may believe **v42**
- Then he calls Lazarus out of the tomb, and he has THEM take off his bandages. **V44**

Jesus is not content to let Lazarus stay in his death and he is not content to let the Jews stay in their unbelief.

AND THAT IS GLORIOUS. That is LOVE.

Conclusion

So here's what it comes down to for you and me. **(John 11:25-26 back on screen)**

Here is the answer to that question I asked at the beginning.

How much death is too much? When do I give up on God?

- While the death of my 3rd son is still painful, and the life of my 4th son gives me great joy...if I base my hope in either Chai's death, or Simon's life....I miss Jesus. I miss eternal life.
- Instead, Chai's death creates in me an anger towards the curse of death. The same anger that Jesus had.
 - And so There is no amount of death or suffering I can experience that will cause me give up on God, because death and suffering is creating in me a **greater longing FOR GOD** to bring life from it.

- And Simon's life is not the fulfillment of God's promise to us. It's a shadow of it.
 - God didn't have to love me by letting my little boy live.
 - I am thankful he did, but he did not promise me that.
 - Instead, he promised me that I would find real, Eternal life in HIS Son, not mine. Eternal life that starts now, and continues forever as I behold his GLORY for eternity.
 - ...with all 4 of my sons.

See, when Chai died, we learned something about my wife and the way her body deals with pregnancy. And so when she got pregnant with Simon, we were able to have a surgery that allowed Simon to live.

- In a sense, Chai's death gave life to his little brother Simon.
- For the rest of Simon's life, I'll see that gospel pattern.
- **That death in God's hands brings life.**
- Simon's life is a shadow of what is to come, a reminder that God will one day bring FULL life out of death. No more pain, no more dying. The resurrection of all those who trust in him.

So what about you?
What is death to you?

If your trust is in the God who has overcome it in your place, then Death and suffering are the worst that can happen to you.

- **This life is as close as you get to hell.**

But, If your trust is in yourself or someone or something else to solve your problem of pain and death, then death and suffering represent just a foretaste of something much worse.

- **This life is a close to heaven as you get.**

I would plead with you, **TRUST JESUS**. Believe that he took your place when he died to give you the life you don't deserve. And then live like its true.

And for those of you who claim to believe, remember that as you suffer now, you have the opportunity to see and show the glory of God. To love people.

So suffer well in death and in pain. Go to people in their suffering, meet them where they are.

- Offer truth AND TEARS
- Be angry with death...and then take the only action you can take to reverse it. By pointing people to the Resurrection and the LIFE. Jesus. Love them by helping them see the glory of GOD.

And I would simply end by asking you exactly what Jesus asked Martha.

“Do you believe this?”

Lets Pray.