

With Jesus In A Place Without Hope

It was Labor Day weekend when I preached the first message in this series from John 11. That message was entitled, "It's Labor Day and Mary Won't Help." We followed that message with "Martha's Ever Increasing Faith", then "Martha the Evangelist", then "Have You Met My Good Friend Lazarus?" and finally, before we left for Israel I preached the message "The Delays of Love." I told you last Sunday that I was planning to get Lazarus out of the grave this morning, so once again, turn with me to John 11 and let's look at this incredible story.

I've called this message, **With Jesus In A Place Without Hope**. I started to call it **Lessons About Life From A Cemetery**. I guess we could make that the sub-title. I think both titles would be accurate and appropriate. We certainly learn something about life and living from Jesus as we accompany him in this story to the cemetery where Lazarus was buried. I decided to stay with the other title because not everyone would identify with the cemetery, but most everyone could relate somehow to the idea of a place or a situation that seems hopeless.

I can think of few places that seem more hopeless than a cemetery. I've seen some pretty hopeless situations in the Intensive Care Unit of the hospital, but I've also seen some of those supposedly hopeless cases get well and get up and go home. I saw Wilma Winterbower here last Sunday for our 75th anniversary service. It has been 18 years since she was given up to die in the hospital. They said it was hopeless, but she is still going strong.

I've seen some marriages that appeared hopeless. I've seen addictions that seemed hopeless, but the bible says where there is life there is hope. I've seen those hopeless marriages turn around, seen those hopeless addicts get delivered and set free. But a cemetery, that's a different story. I've been to almost every cemetery in Tulsa and several in surrounding cities and towns. I've been there with all kinds of people, trying to find the words to console grieving families, but there is something so final about a cemetery, a grave. It doesn't feel very hopeful. I've prayed and I've grieved but I've yet to see anyone get up out of a grave in a cemetery. It's a pretty hopeless place for all of us. But going to a hopeless place with Jesus, well that's a whole different story. Let me share some observations with you this morning about

being with Jesus in a cemetery, in a hopeless place. Notice the difference it makes when Jesus is present. First of all, notice:

1. Jesus' understanding of hopelessness and death is different than ours. It's interesting that when word came to Jesus about Lazarus and his condition, Jesus - the one who knows everything, who knows the beginning from the end said, **"This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."** (V4) Jesus said it will not end in death. It may not have ended there, but it sure did land there for four days. Jesus looks at life as it exists beyond the limitations of this world. Listen to his other statements about death in this chapter. **"Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to wake him up."** (V11) **"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."** (V25-26)

This sickness will not end in death, even though it may take us on a journey through death, death isn't a final experience for any of us, it is simply the door that we walk through to enter heaven and the glory of God's presence. We view death as the end, but Jesus knows it isn't the end, it's the beginning, or we might even say it's the middle, but it is certainly not the end. "He who believes in me will live, even though he dies." Death is not a hopeless situation when Jesus is our Savior and Lord. Death is not the end when Jesus is the giver of life.

Notice Jesus said Lazarus has fallen asleep. Paul uses this same euphemism in 1 Thessalonians 4 and in 1 Corinthians 15 among others. Neither Jesus nor Paul are talking about soul sleep. The glimpses we have into heaven in the bible show activity and involvement, not sleep. But the idea of sleep is appropriate for us in talking about death, because sleep is not something we fear. I talked about this Wednesday night. We aren't afraid to go home and take a nap this afternoon. Sleep is simply an opportunity to rest our body. The bible says "blessed in the sight of the lord is the death of his saints and they rest from their labor." Sleep sounds wonderful. We look forward to sleep, don't we? It isn't frightening and you know what else? It isn't final. We are going to awaken from our sleep and be rested and ready for whatever is next.

Jesus approaches death without fear and without a sense of finality. It's like falling asleep and then waking up. As the gospel song says, "death ain't no big deal."

When you are a child of God and have placed your faith in Christ as your Savior and Lord, then death isn't a hopeless thing, it is another event, another season, but as always, with Jesus there is reason for hope.

2. Death comes to everyone, even those Jesus loves. Let me make it clear, if Jesus tarries his return, all of us will die. It comes to everyone, even those he loves. The bible says “...**man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.**”

Hebrews 9:27. The bible also says that death is an enemy, the final one to be placed under Jesus' feet (1 Cor. 15:26). The writer of Hebrews (2:14-15) tells us that Jesus, through his death and resurrection, “destroyed him who had the power of death, that is the devil” and released us from our bondage to the fear of death. Death is still an enemy, but it is an enemy that has been defeated. It still causes pain and separation and sorrow, but it no longer has the power to hold us, to keep us. It is no longer a finality for us. Jesus has redeemed us from our bondage to death. So even though it is an enemy, the bible can declare, “blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.”(Rev. 14:13). That enemy of death has been defeated.

I don't think death for a believer is a defeat. That's only if we view it as fearful and final. I hear people talking about rebuking the spirit of death. I don't think death is a spirit to be rebuked or an angel to be avoided. “What about the death angel that passed through Egypt?” Is that what the bible says? There was a death angel? Look it up, Exodus 12:12.

Death brings an end to our time and our labor here, but it does not bring an end to our influence nor our existence. Revelation 14:13 says the dead “rest from their labor for their deeds will follow them.” For the believer in Christ, we live on in his presence because we are in Christ and our deeds, our influence follow us. Listen again to what Jesus told Martha in verse 25, “**I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.**” Jesus knows there is a life after this one. As I said, death is not the end, it's the beginning. You are going to die and then you are going to spend eternity somewhere, either with Jesus in heaven or apart from God in hell. There is no getting around it and if you've not made Jesus your Lord and Savior, then death means an eternity without Jesus and without hope, but if Jesus is your Lord and Savior then death is nothing to be feared. You are going to live, even if

you die and even if you die physically, spiritually speaking, Jesus says you will never die. You are going to live forever in his presence. Jesus knows death is nothing for a believer to fear.

3. Never forget His promise in a hopeless place. It seems like hopeless situations have a way of making us forget his promises. Death comes, troubles come and we get so focused on the trouble we forget his faithful words to us. Mary and Martha were grieving over the death of their brother when Jesus told Martha, “Your brother will rise again.” Some moments later, standing in front of Lazarus’ tomb, Jesus told those standing by to roll away the stone and Martha immediately protested, “Lord, he’s been dead four days.” “You’ve already forgotten what I said? Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God? Didn’t I tell you that if you believed in me, even if you died you would live? Don’t you understand that I am the resurrection and the life? My promises are good, even in hopeless times and places.”

You may feel like you are in a hopeless place, like Martha and Mary but hear it again this morning – his promises are certain and sure. **What looks and feels hopeless when Jesus is present becomes a place of promise and possibility!**

Not even death can separate us from his promises. Death is not the end. There is a resurrection ahead. It is the promise not just for a physical resurrection from the dead, but I believe it is a promise to be remembered in any and every hopeless situation. Regardless of how bleak the circumstances Jesus gives us his promise of resurrection and life. The impossible is going to happen. Life and hope come to you in the midst of the mess you are in. Don’t forget his promises if you feel like you are in a hopeless place. Then #4, If you find yourself in a hopeless place, remember this:

4. Keep trusting and believing and you will see the glory of God, even in a place without hope. As I said at the beginning, cemeteries are not known for being hope-filled places, but it was in this place that Jesus calls the sisters to their place of hope. Keep trusting. Keep believing, even when death is present. You see, the truth is, even if Lazarus hadn’t risen from the dead, even if Jesus had decided to let Lazarus stay in heaven, God’s glory was being revealed. Jesus, God’s son, the Savior of the world, the giver of life was present in that cemetery, and even if Lazarus is still dead, Mary and Martha have experienced a new life, a resurrection in their souls. I believe because

they chose to believe in Jesus they were going to see the glory of God regardless of the outcome with Lazarus.

Believe and you will see the glory of God, even in places without hope. Believe and you will see the glory of God, even when things don't turn out as you had expected. Not everyone gets healed, not every prayer is answered the way we had hoped, and certainly few get resurrected from the dead, at least right now - but God's glory is seen when we keep on believing. God's son gets glorified as we keep on trusting. God's glory is never shut out of hopeless places. He still shows up in power with mercy and grace available for his children.

5. Jesus has your best interest at heart, even in a place without hope. We are pretty quick to doubt or to panic when things seem hopeless, but slow down. Listen again. Listen to what Jesus says in his prayer in the cemetery. **“Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”**

(V41-42). Even in this place of no hope, Jesus was focused upon the interest of others. It was always about others. Everything about these events were for God to be glorified and for the benefit of all those concerned. It was for the disciple's benefit (v14), for Mary and Martha's benefit, for the benefit of the crowds that gathered, even for our benefit. Don't be so quick to give up or give in to hopelessness. Jesus is still at work. He is working all these things for your good and he does that by working all these things for his glory. Any way and any time that Jesus is glorified, that is absolutely in our best interest. Now I'm not about to start prescribing what those things or events or circumstances might look like. Some things, like a brother dying and being buried, sure don't look like they are for our good or are bringing glory to God, but we know from this story that is exactly what happens. Jesus has our best interest at heart, even when it seems like we are in a hopeless situation.

I suppose I might as well tell you what you have already figured out about hopeless places and situations:

6. If Jesus is there, there is no such thing as a place without hope. I told you earlier that the bible says where there is life there is hope and what you must realize is that Jesus IS life. He is the bread of life, the water of life, the giver of life, the sustainer

of life. Where there is life – where there is Jesus – there is hope! There is no such thing as a hopeless place or a hopeless cause if Jesus is involved. I've said it so many times over the past 25 years, paraphrasing slightly from Yoggi Berra, "**It ain't over til it's over and with Jesus, it ain't ever over.**" When the bible says with God all things are possible it means it. Not even death is over - it's not the end when Jesus is involved. Remember, "He who believes in me will live, even though he dies." To me that sounds like it ain't over til its over and with Jesus, it ain't ever over. Even if you die, you live.

If you are in a hopeless place – if you've given up on God or on yourself or your circumstances, hear me again - if Jesus is there, there is no such thing as a hopeless place or a hopeless case. All things are possible to them that believe. Believe and you will see the glory of God. Believe and you will live, even if you die. All things are possible. Believe Jesus and his word and have hope!

If you are in a place without hope, one last thing I would suggest to you:
7. Keep listening for his voice! Jesus has the perfect word for those in a hopeless situation. It is the perfect word and keep in mind, Jesus is going to have the last word. He has the final say. Not sickness or disease or death. His sovereign will and his voice will have the final word.

I'm not sure what Lazarus knew or where he was at that moment. Jesus described the place of the dead prior to his resurrection as Abraham's bosom with a gulf fixed between the righteous who were in a place of peace and blessing and the unrighteous who were in a place of torment. I doubt that Lazarus was expecting to hear his name or to hear the voice of Jesus, but what a moment it was when Jesus called his name. Look at the story beginning in verse 38-44.

It was a hopeless place, a hopeless cause. Lazarus was dead for four days, buried in that first century graveyard, but in the midst of the impossible and the hopeless comes the giver of life, working wonders in behalf of his children. The bible says Jesus called out in a loud voice. It was a voice of authority. It was a voice that assures us he has power over life and death and the grave. "Lazarus, come out!" And here came Lazarus, alive and well, still covered in the grave clothes in which they had wrapped him.

If you are in a hopeless situation, my advice to you is believe and you will see the glory of God and keep listening for his voice. Start listening for your name to be called. I believe he is going to call your name, call you to a new life, call you to a new place of victory. Don't give up, tune in. Start listening for his voice calling your name. He hasn't given up on you, so don't you give up on God or your circumstances. Don't you give up on yourself. Believe and you will see the glory of God manifested in your life - in your circumstances.

Can you hear him calling your name by faith today? Can you believe for that resurrection power to go to work in your life, in your hopeless situation? Can you believe for the miraculous in your life? It may look or feel hopeless, but if Jesus is with you, all things are possible and you are never without hope!