
Day 312 - November 8

Jesus the Christ (5 BCE-30 CE)
Return to Judea to Raise Lazarus

Readings: *John 11:1-54*

Reflections:

- Lazarus illness told: Lazarus, Martha and Mary are obviously close friends of Jesus from the various stories that appear in the biographies of Jesus. There is the story of Martha working and Mary listening (Luke 10:38-42). There is the story of Mary pouring oil on Jesus' feet and then wiping them with her hair (John 12:3). (Note: Interestingly John mentions this event before it happens in his biography expecting his readers to already know about this story. Most likely he anticipates that they have read or heard the stories of one of the other biographies prior to hearing his.)
- Now there has been a question raised since the writing of the biographies if Mary from Bethany who will later anoint Jesus' feet with perfume (Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8 – note: neither Matthew or Mark identify her as Mary, only John) is also the sinful woman who anoints Jesus feet in Luke 7:36-50 (most likely a prostitute) and Mary Magdalene who is mentioned as a follower of Christ, had seven demons cast out (Luke 8:1-3, Mark 16:9), stood at the foot of the cross (Mark 15:40; Matthew 27:56; John 19:25) and witnessed the resurrection (John 20:1-18). All three women are from Galilee. Magdalene means she was from Magdala, a prominent seacoast city in Galilee known for its wealth and immorality. In the Talmud, the word Magdalene is used to derive the word for "curling women's hair" which means prostitution. It would make sense then that Magdalene may be a way to associate this Mary either with wealth (Luke 8:1-3) or with prostitution or both. Some have wondered if the woman caught in adultery was also this Mary (John 8). It seems unlikely that Mary Magdalene is Mary of Bethany for two main reasons. First and foremost, both are mentioned in John's biography and are referred to specifically by the designation "from Bethany" or "Magdalene" (i.e. "from Magdala"). Second, the name Mary was extremely common (derived from Marion) and so obviously John would have to qualify which Mary he is speaking of and which he does. Now we can still wonder if there are more connections between the woman in Luke 7 who anoints Jesus with perfume and Mary of Bethany (e.g. is this Luke simply reordering the time table of the accounts as he does not mention Jesus being anointed before his death?). Or we can wonder if the woman caught in

adultery is Mary Magdalene? All we can do is speculate but at least it makes sense that Mary of Bethany is not Mary Magdalene, even as intriguing as this might seem.

- Jesus is told of Lazarus' sickness and his response makes it clear that he has complete foreknowledge of what is about to take place. Jesus allows Lazarus to die so that he can show his power to raise him dramatically from the grave and in a way demonstrate practically to his disciples what it looks like for a dead man to be raised and actually come out of a grave. Jesus is doing all he can to demonstrate what will happen to him. This is also a good reminder that at times God allows terrible things to happen so that he can be glorified through those tragic events. Death is not the end from God's point of view and so at times God will use tragic events in this life to reveal his glory and power. Now having said that, not all tragic events are by God's design or bring him glory. Sometimes they are just the results of living in a broken and fallen world. Yet, sometimes God will use events like this to reveal himself to people.
- The disciples fear returns: Many think that Jesus primarily loves Mary and Lazarus but Martha was not that deeply loved by Jesus. John 11:5 makes it clear that Jesus loves Martha and in fact in this verse gives her preferential reference. With tension mounting, the disciples become increasingly afraid. Jesus at first speaks cryptically about his impending death and Lazarus' death. The disciples don't get it and so Jesus now tells them plainly, making it clear the disciples are not able to discern what Jesus means. Thomas (who is associated with doubt throughout) doesn't get Jesus at all. Jesus says they should go to Lazarus and Thomas thinks it means that they are all going to be with Lazarus in death. In other words, we are all going to be with Lazarus by dying. Not one of Thomas' brighter moments.
- Jesus talks with Martha: Martha loves Jesus and goes to him when she hears he is coming. Martha demonstrates great faith in believing Jesus can do something to save her brother, even though he has died. Jesus responds to her faith by making another powerful declaration: "I am the resurrection and the life." Martha responds with a further demonstration of her faith by saying, "I believe... that you are the Christ, the Son of God...." Faith opens the doors for the miraculous power of God. The "I am" statements of Jesus recorded in John are well worth their own study. God declared to the Israelites that he was the great "I AM." Jesus builds on this name of God by declaring that he is God with us, giving further definition to whom this "I AM" truly is.
- Jesus talks with Mary: Mary on Martha's prompting goes to Jesus. Apparently she is too overcome with grief. She falls at his feet, a position she has often taken when listening to him. Her weeping and the weeping of others cause Jesus to weep. Although he knows he will raise Lazarus from the dead he still is moved deeply and enters into their grief. God doesn't stand back from our pain because he knows one day it will be better. He enters into our pain and feels the deep grief with us. Jesus mourns and is troubled by death, the curse that fell because of Adam and Eve. Even as he is weeping some understand that Jesus loves Lazarus deeply while others see it as defeat and his inability to save Lazarus. Faith and unbelief are both present.

- Lazarus raised: Jesus is again moved deeply and raises Lazarus from the dead. The scene is taken right out of the pages of a mummy horror movie with a man walking out of the grave wrapped up in grave clothes. We see in Jesus' simple prayer his interdependent relationship with the Father. Jesus is constantly modeling what it looks like to be intimately connected with God. His prayer is simple and reveals their relationship. He thanks his Father before he calls Lazarus out. Here we see too that once you know God will answer your prayer, you can thank him even before you see the answer to your prayer. This demonstrates our complete trust in God when we thank him before we see the answer to our prayer simply because we know his character and love for us.
- Council plots to kill Jesus: Many of the Jews present believe in Jesus (how could you not?) but a few still don't and they report the event to the religious leaders. They fear the growing movement behind Jesus and so they know they must act soon. Caiaphas, the high priest that year, doesn't even realize he is saying something prophetic. Here we see that God will at times have people say things that they don't even grasp the full significance of. God wants the truth to be spoken and so sometimes will use the most unlikely messenger. It is better for one to die than many. John goes on to point out that it is also true that Jesus would unite all the true children of God from across the world and make them one. It is awesome to think that even today the true children of God are united as one in Christ.
- Jesus must now increasingly move about quietly as the religious leaders plot his death. At night he remains in more remote places so they cannot seize him before his time.