

Explore: Dealing with death?

November 8, 2013

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Nov. 24 focuses on John 11:1-57.*

What would you say is people's No. 1 fear? Their ultimate fear is public speaking, according to multiple sources. It does not make me nervous at all that my job requires me to tackle everyone's greatest fear several times a week (sarcasm intended). Truthfully, however, I believe the real No. 1 fear for most people is death.

And, if for just a moment, you can imagine your life apart from a relationship with Christ, I'm sure you can understand this fear. With that assumption also come questions such as: "What happens to us when we die?" "Where do we go?" "Is there something else out there?" "Is it a wonderful place worth looking forward to or not?" "What about the separation we feel when it is one of our loved ones who is gone?" These are questions people always have had throughout history. In today's Bible study lesson, Jesus meets these fears head-on.

God's will

Before we can focus on what happened in Bethany, however, we first need to start with something that happened at the beginning of the chapter. Think for a moment about what is said in John 11:5-6: "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days."

This has to be one of the strangest combinations of sentences in the history of writing. However, these words tell us some things about both God's love and his sovereignty. First, we have to realize God's love is so much greater and different from the way we show love to each other. Jesus so loved this family, he stayed away for an extra couple of days. He did nothing. That is

hard for us to understand, but God's love was working here to bring about a higher purpose.

We can couple this with what his action or inaction tells us about God's ability to be in control. Even someone dying was within the scope of what God allowed in order to have his will accomplished. God desired to do something that would bring him the ultimate glory and also cause more people to believe in his Son. In his way of seeing things, allowing Lazarus to die was both the loving and right thing to do. Sometimes, we have to take a step back and remember God is in control, and it is our job to surrender to his plan, knowing he has our good and his glory in mind at all times.

Relate-ability

The book of Hebrews reminds us many times how much better Jesus is than any former system of religion. He is seen as superior to the law, the priests of the Old Testament and all other objects people would look to for help with issues of eternal life. One verse that stands out is Hebrews 4:15: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin."

I believe John 11 is one of the clearest examples of Jesus "empathizing" with the people of this world—putting himself in their place and being caught up in what they felt. When Jesus did show up in Bethany—four days too late by human standards—he was engulfed in this tragic scene. While Martha and Mary confronted him, everybody was asking the same question: "Why did he not come? He could have made the difference." The anger of verse 33 is the result of Jesus confronting and then empathizing with the culture.

Jesus saddened by sin

Jesus was saddened greatly at what sin and death took away from people. Those who were in Bethany that day were just like people today. Their focus was on loss, death and separation. This greatly affected Jesus. Did he want people to “just have faith?” That is part of the answer. But really, he was just saddened by the humanity of it all—that this is what people are forced to deal with because of the sin in this world.

Jesus can relate to our sorrow and weakness. The good news is he came so our fear of death would not have ultimate control over our lives. There is something stronger than fear, and it is hope. Not hope like the world defines that word, but hope like God reveals in his word—a guarantee of future promise. Jesus promises his followers will enjoy his presence for all eternity. Even in this passage, he calls himself “The Resurrection and the Life.” And then he proved what he said by his actions. He raised Lazarus from the dead.

We always will be sad when we lose a loved one, but it simply is different for those who are believers in Christ. It is different because we trust Christ has come to get them and bring them home. We also trust this same Savior to work peace in our hearts and lives while we live out his purpose for us while we are still here on this earth.

Again, the book of Hebrews helps us: “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death” (Hebrews 2:14-15).