

Have you ever noticed how two people can look at the same things and have entirely different responses? We were driving down the interstate a few weeks ago and we saw a deer in a field. Addie said, “What a cute deer.” Hudson said, “That buck looks delicious!” Very different responses. He and I probably watch a few too many hunting shows together. I have a nephew and niece who are seven-year-old twins. Their parents took them out to eat last week and they ordered wings. Look at how my seven-year-old niece responded after eating her final wing: joy and delight. Look at how my nephew responded—every man here knows that look! (View the online sermon to see these photos.)

We all respond to things differently. Some people watched the Chiefs win the Super Bowl and were elated. Others watched the exact same game and were dejected. For myriad reasons, we could look at the exact same thing and respond in very different ways. As we move toward the final week of Jesus’ life, we are going to see that Jesus continues to reveal his identity through signs of power and love, and people continue to respond in very different ways. This passage will be like a window we can look through to see the identity and power of Jesus, as well as a mirror that reveals the character and condition of our own hearts.

When we kicked off this series, we said that John was centered around seven signs, seven miracles and proofs of Jesus’ identity and authority. So far, we have seen six of them:

- Turning water into wine
- Healing the nobleman’s son
- Healing the man at the pool
- Feeding the 5,000
- Walking on water
- Healing a man born blind

Today we’ll look at the final one: the resurrection of Lazarus. If you have your Bible, turn with me to John 11. This chapter begins with Jesus learning that his friend Lazarus is sick. Instead of rushing to Lazarus or healing him from a distance like he had before with other people, Jesus intentionally waited a few days to respond because he knew this situation was going to be used to display the glory of God.

Let’s pick up in John 11:17: “(When Jesus arrived at Bethany), he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.” This is a significant detail. Because of both ancient medical knowledge and ancient tradition and superstition, the people believed that if a person died, their spirit hovered over or stayed with the body for three days. But by day four, the spirit had departed, death was irreversible, and decay and decomposition begin to set in. So by day four, everyone there believed Lazarus’ spirit had departed the body, and even the greatest miracle worker or healer would be powerless to help.

When Lazarus’ sister Martha heard that Jesus had arrived, she went out to meet him. She expressed her frustration and confusion with Jesus. “‘Why didn’t you come right away when we sent you word that Lazarus was sick? If you had been here, he wouldn’t have died, and we wouldn’t be overwhelmed with grief and loss like we are right now!’” After a brief exchange, “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die’” (John 11:25-26). This is one of the boldest, strongest statements about the identity and power of Jesus anywhere in the entire Bible: “I am the resurrection and the life; I am the one who can conquer the grave; I am the one who can bring the dead back to life. If you believe in me, you will never

die; by believing in me, your last breath on this earth will be followed by your first breath in heaven. Your heart might stop pumping, but your spirit, the truest and deepest part of you, will never die and will be with God forever.”

What a claim! Some of us need to sit with the deep and powerful truth Jesus shares. I know so many people who have lost a loved one recently. We had a funeral at church for a dear, faithful saint just a few days ago. Our elder’s text thread has been as active as ever, as people are sharing about partners of this church who have lost loved ones. The pain and suffering of saying goodbye is so intense. But the Christian hope speaks directly to our brokenness and need.

Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14)

This is true because of what Jesus said: he is the resurrection and the life; the one who believes in him will live, even though they die.

So Jesus gives us world-changing hope. But that doesn’t mean that death and loss aren’t supposed to bring us pain. Look at John 11:33: “When Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.” These words—deeply moved and troubled in spirit—are word pictures. They can refer to a horse snorting in frustration or to white water churning in rapids. They are word pictures of what can happen inside a human spirit: anger, frustration, outrage, indignation. Those are not the sort of emotions we’ve come to associate with Jesus, are they? We expect Jesus to be calm, poised, and perfectly composed. We expect him to be always full of joy and peace. But here he is angered, outraged, and frustrated. Why such a response? This is God in the flesh, responding to the pain, brokenness, and heartache caused by sin and death in the world. Like us, when Jesus showed up to the funeral of someone he loved who died too soon, he wasn’t filled with peace and contentment; he was deeply moved and troubled in spirit. “‘Where have you laid him?’ he asked. ‘Come and see, Lord,’ they replied” (John 11:34). And when we came to the tomb, what do we see? “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). This isn’t Jesus shedding one tear. This isn’t a controlled, emotionally composed dabbling of the cheeks with a handkerchief. He was weeping—tears were flowing like streams, it was hard to control his breathing. He entered the totality of the human experience of grief and loss. This is God, in the flesh, coming near to us in every way, which means it’s not a stretch for us to imagine Jesus with us when we weep, too.

Most of you know that last May my mother passed away. It was so unexpected. She had just spent several days with us. I gave her a goodbye hug. We even talked when her plane landed. Everything was perfectly normal. But then the next day, late at night, I looked down at my phone and saw that my sister was calling. I just assumed she wanted to talk to Keren and me, so I put the call on speaker. Then she told me that mom had passed away. Keren immediately passed out. She just fell over. I talked to my sister for a few more moments to make sure it was real, because it was so hard to believe. The next several days were marked by intense grief, going through entire boxes of tissues in a thirty-minute stretch. Deep pain. Many of you have been in that place at some point in your life; for some of you, it’s very recent. One of the reasons I love this passage, and one of the reasons I love Jesus so much, is that, when we are in that place of emotional upheaval, weeping without the ability to stop, we can know with certainty, Jesus has been there with us. We are not alone in our heartache. Jesus is there with us.

Jesus is not only the one who can relate to us in our pain; he is the one who can do something about it.

Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "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." When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." (John 11:38-44)

This is considered one of the greatest miracles in the entire Bible. But as wonderful as this miracle is, the miracle points beyond itself to something even greater. Here's how I like to think about this miracle: *When Jesus wept at Lazarus' tomb, it showed us death is not the way things are supposed to be. When Jesus emptied Lazarus' tomb, it showed us death is not the way things will always be.* What Jesus did for Lazarus in calling him out of the grave was not only a display of his power; it was not only an act of mercy and compassion; it was not only a one-time display of the glory of God. It was a sign of what Jesus will one day do for all of us. In John 5:21, 25, Jesus said, "The Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. ... Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live." What Jesus did for Lazarus was just a foretaste, just a first installment, of what he will do for everyone who places their faith in him. Jesus has power over the grave and death. And like Jesus called Lazarus' name and gave him new life, if you believe in him, one day he will call your name, and give you not only new life, but eternal life—not coming back for ten more years, or one hundred more years of normal life on this planet, but given a new body, an eternal body that will last forever in God's glorious new creation where all things are made right and perfect.

So here we have the seventh and final sign in John. It's proverbial smoking gun, the nail in the coffin, the straw that broke the camel's back in proving that Jesus is the Messiah. Surely, upon seeing all these signs, and this final, climactic sign of Jesus bringing Lazarus back from the dead, surely everyone will respond in the same way, with faith, devotion, and worship. Not at all! A few weeks ago, Chad shared this quote from Charles Spurgeon: "The same sun which melts wax hardens clay. And the same Gospel which melts some persons to repentance hardens others in their sins." As we mentioned earlier, different people can see the exact same thing and respond in very different ways. We see four different responses to Jesus. We are going to look at each of them and see what we can learn from each.

Obstinate rejection

The Sanhedrin, the entire Jewish ruling body, got together and this what they discussed.

Here is this man performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation. Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." (John 11:47-50)

He is performing signs. He's doing things that prove he is from heaven, that he is the Messiah, that he is God in the flesh, and they are worried about what their political overlords will do, so they hatch a plan to kill him to eliminate the threat. And not to kill only Jesus—a few verses later, we read, "The chief priests

made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him” (John 12:10-11). They wanted not only to get rid of Jesus, but to also get rid of all the evidence that was causing people to believe in Jesus. Stop and think about that! A man has just been raised from the dead, and instead of going to him and asking about his experience (What was it like beyond the grave? Is heaven real? Is hell real? Did you see your ancestors?), instead of bringing doctors to investigate the miracle, all they want to do is kill him. Not this again! “Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him” (John 12:37). The leaders did not respond with faith because they had already decided in their minds and hearts that they did not want to believe. No matter the evidence presented, they came up with an alternative interpretation.

The same can happen in our lives today. I remember a time when I was talking about faith with a friend who left Christianity. We had conversations over the course of over a year. One time, we were talking for hours and he said, “I just can’t reconcile the presence of miracles in the Bible and the complete lack of miracles today. If I became convinced that a real miracle took place, then I could believe.” I then told him about a situation I was a part of where there was clearly a miracle. No doubt. No question. No other explanation—a certain miracle. He said, “Sounds like the universe was just singing a song.” He said he needed a miracle, but when I told him about a miracle, he did the same thing the people in this passage did: explain it away, because responding to the miracle would have been costly and called him to make changes in his life that he didn’t want to make. Jesus said in Matthew 11, “We sang a song for you and you did not dance. We sang a dirge and you did not mourn.” No matter what we do, you do not respond. Some of us, like Pharaoh, have hard hearts. Pharaoh saw ten miracles, but because responding to them would have been costly, he persisted in unbelief and ended up with a stone cold, calcified heart. We always have to be careful and ensure the same doesn’t happen to us.

Superficial devotion

There were a lot of people who saw what Jesus did, got caught up in the excitement, and initially responded with worship and praise. “The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, ‘Hosanna!’ ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’ ‘Blessed is the king of Israel!’” (John 12:12-13). They are quoting Old Testament scriptures, looking to Jesus as the fulfillment of Messianic promises, and calling him the King of Israel! That’s perfect, right? That’s what we would hope for, right? It is, but the only problem was, it was just the emotion of the moment. The same crowd that praised him as Israel’s King on Sunday would, just five days later on Friday, call for his execution. When Pilate, the governor of the region asked the crowd who should be released to them, they yelled, “Give us Barabbas.” “What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?” Pilate asked. They all answered, ‘Crucify him!’ ‘Why? What crime has he committed?’ asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, ‘Crucify him!’” (Matthew 26:22-23). They were all in one day, ready to crown him king. A few days later, they were calling for him to be put on a cross. They were just reading the room and doing what everyone else was doing. No conviction. No roots. No depth. Just flapping whatever direction the wind happened to be blowing.

The same can happen today. There are people who become bandwagon fans when a team starts winning, and as soon as they stop winning, all their supposed die-hard fans go away. The same thing can happen to someone’s faith. A person might think their faith is strong and vibrant in high school, as they go to youth group and have a hundred other friends who are Christians, but after just a few months on a college campus, without being under their parents’ roof, with professors who are antagonistic toward the faith, with few Christian friends, with temptation always knocking at the door, their faith can crumble like an empty soda can. That’s not the kind of response God is looking for.

Sincere curiosity

A third response, which is far more commendable, is sincere curiosity. We see this in John 12:20-21. “Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. ‘Sir,’ they said, ‘we would like to see Jesus.’” They were Greeks who went up to worship at the festival, which means they traveled to Jerusalem from a long way away to participate in the Passover. When they got there, they heard about Jesus, maybe they even met people who had been healed by Jesus, or met Lazarus, who was raised from the dead, and they came up with one of the great requests of the Bible: “We would like to see Jesus.” They heard about him, and they wanted to know more. They didn’t dismiss the stories of life change. They weren’t cynical. They weren’t close-minded. They weren’t hard-hearted. They were curious. They were interested. They were intrigued. They didn’t have all the evidence they needed or all the time they needed to make a faith-decision that would alter their entire lives. But they wanted to know more, and they took the best step they could to move in the direction of faith. I love that! God is pleased by that. The only way to get to true devotion, to deep, conviction-oriented faith, is to ask good questions, explore the answers, go on the journey, and do the work of getting to know Jesus better. The well-known saying is true: what matters most is not the size of your faith, but the size of God your faith is in. Jesus says that faith the size of a mustard seed can move mountains. These people had sincere curiosity and a growing faith.

Costly worship

That leads to our fourth and final response, costly worship. We see this response from Mary, the sister of the man Jesus brought back to life.

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus’ honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. (John 12:1-6)

A pint of pure nard was worth an entire year’s salary. It would have been the most expensive thing she owned. In modern terms, this would be like someone in their retirement years cashing out their entire 401(k) to give a lavish gift, or someone doing a cash-out refinance on their home, not to make upgrades on their kitchen or bathrooms, but to, in a single moment of passion and devotion, lay it all at Jesus’ feet as an expression of gratitude and worship. Some would look at this and call it a waste; they’d call it excessive and poor stewardship. Even when it happened, one of the disciples said it wasn’t a good use of money. Jesus silenced him and said, “Leave her alone. She has done a beautiful thing.” In Mark’s gospel he specifically says: “Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her” (Mark 14:9). You might think it’s excessive or wasteful. Jesus thinks it’s beautiful. Jesus said her act of devotion would last throughout all of time and be told to everyone. His story and her story will become intertwined and inseparable. Why did she do it? Why did she excessively lavish so much love on Jesus? Jesus had just brought her brother back from the grave, and Mary knew what was getting ready to happen; she knew that Jesus was getting ready to enter the grave himself, to save her and to save the world from the power of sin and death. To someone who has done so much, given his very life so that you can be saved, the question is not, “What price is too much?” but rather, “What price is enough?”

This is the legacy of faith we are being called into. In their book, *The Power of Moments*, Chip and Dan Heath say, “Beware the soul-sucking force of reasonableness.” When it comes to our response to Jesus, the right reaction isn’t to be calculated, reserved, and technically precise. We don’t bring out a calculator and punch in a few numbers to decide what we are going to give to Jesus. We go to the manger and we

look at this baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes and say, “God came from heaven to earth for my salvation. How can this be?” We go to the cross and we say, “God paid the price for my sin. He took the death and judgment I deserved. How can this be?” We go the empty tomb, where the stone was rolled away and Jesus conquered the grave, and we say, “God defeated our greatest enemy and promises to give me eternal life. How can this be?” And then, like Mary, we take that which is of greatest value to us, which simply represents our entire life, all that we have and all that we are, and we offer our entire selves to Jesus! Costly worship. Here I am; I hold nothing back. My identity—it’s yours. My character—it’s yours. My marriage—it’s yours. My family—it’s yours. My calendar—it’s yours. My checkbook—it’s yours. My entire life—it’s yours. Romans 12:1 says, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” There are a lot of ways we could respond to Jesus, but this is the ultimate way.