

Funeral Message for My Father

John 11:17-44 -

By Russell Muilenburg

Tuesday, 17 August 2010 00:00

wasn't a hugger. ♦



But that's not because he didn't care—it's because he cared too much.



If it came to talking about how he felt, he ended up weeping. ♦ I remember at Grandpa and Grandma's 50

th wedding anniversary he tried to get up and say something—not a lot, just how much he appreciated his mom and dad and loved them—but nothing would come out. ♦ He couldn't talk. ♦ (I think Dad was shocked that I wanted to preach at his funeral. ♦ He couldn't imagine doing something like this.)



So, in his own way, my dad was a big softy. ♦ And I'm mad that he is gone.



Dad had an especially soft spot in his heart for hard luck cases. ♦ He loved to help people who were in a tough spot. ♦ Whether it was helping a friend check-in to rehab or helping a single mom pay some bills or giving somebody a second chance with a job—Dad was always helping somebody who needed help.



And he did it quietly. ♦ I don't think we kids know half of the things he did to help people. ♦ I remember when I was still living at home sometimes the phone would ring and it would be somebody whose voice I didn't recognize and whose name I didn't know; and I'd ask Mom who that was and she'd say, "Oh, that's somebody your dad is helping."



I know that some of you here today are people that Dad helped.



And now he's died. ♦ And that ticks me off.



My dad didn't suffer fools lightly. ♦ He was a big believer in common sense. ♦ And that made my decision to become a preacher an interesting one. ♦ Because as a class, Dad generally

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regarded preachers as lacking in common sense.



Now, don't get me wrong. ♦ Dad loved the church. ♦ He loved the Lord. ♦ And he respected each and every one of his pastors as teachers of the Bible and spiritual advisors. ♦ It's just that—when it came to leadership and the business side of the church—he felt we preachers tended towards the more complicated and out-of-touch answers when a little common sense would serve a whole lot better. ♦ It's what made him a good deacon.



But knowing this about Dad, it made it interesting the day I told him I felt called to become a preacher. ♦ I could see the look on his face: “Oh son, don't become a fool.” ♦ But he supported me. ♦ He encouraged me every step of the way. ♦ And I've got to say that since I've become a pastor my best conversations about strategy and leadership issues in the church have always been with him. ♦ He was always my best source of advice. ♦ Because he took my tendency to complicate things and be out of touch and he forced me to apply a little common sense. ♦ For the last 12 years, I've rarely made a leadership decision without wondering what Dad would think of it.



And now he's gone. ♦ And I'm not going to be able to ask for his advice anymore. ♦ And that makes me mad.



Cancer sucks. ♦ Death sucks. ♦



I hate death.



John 11:17-44

And, you know what? ♦ I think Jesus hates death too.



I'd like to take a few moments to consider a Bible story with you. ♦ It's a wonderful story. ♦ One of my favorites. ♦ The first time I ever spoke at a memorial service, this is the story I used. ♦ It's the story of Jesus and Lazarus. ♦ It's told in John 11:17-44.

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17

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

18

Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem,

19

and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.

20

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.



21

"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

22

But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."



23

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."



24

Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."



25

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies;

26

and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"



27

"Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God,

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who was to come into the world."



28

And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you."

29

When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him.

30

Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.

31

When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.



32

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."



33

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.

34

"Where have you laid him?" he asked.

◆ ◆◆◆◆◆"Come and see, Lord," they replied. ◆ ◆³⁵Jesus wept. ◆ ◆³⁶The n the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"



37

But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

□



38

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Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance.

39

"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." ◆ ◆⁴⁰Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"

◆

◆

41

So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me.

42

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."

◆

◆

43

When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"

44

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." ◆ **Je sus Wept**

There are two things I want to talk about from this story.

◆

I.◆First,

Jesus hates death.

◆Death made Jesus angry.

◆

And I say that because of what happened when Jesus stood with Mary outside of Lazarus' tomb.◆I say that because of the shortest verse in the Bible.◆The one we all got a gold star on when it was assigned as memory work in Sunday School.◆John 11:35 "Jesus wept."

◆

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Let me ask you a question: why would Jesus weep? ♦Why do you suppose Jesus cried that day?

♦

I understand that the situation was ripe for tears. ♦Everybody around him was carrying on with weeping and wailing. ♦One of his best friends was standing before him broken and filled with sorrow. ♦Another of his best friends was dead in a grave. ♦I get that the whole production was set up for weeping.

♦

But consider what Jesus already knew: ♦He knew that He was about to raise Lazarus from the dead. ♦He knew that 4 days earlier when the messenger first arrived to tell Him that Lazarus was sick and he said "This illness will not end in death". ♦♦ He knew it two days later when He told his disciples it was time to go and wake Lazarus from his sleep. ♦He knew it when He talked to Martha and told her "Your brother will rise again."

♦

So what was going on? ♦If Jesus knew He was about to call Lazarus out of the grave, why did He weep?

♦

I think John gives us a clue. ♦In verse 33 he writes that "When Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled." ♦That expression, "deeply moved in spirit" comes from a Greek word which describes the sound a horse makes when it is angry. ♦It's almost a snort of indignation. ♦It's a release of air from the body in such a way that expresses extreme outrage and emotion. ♦

♦

In other words, Jesus was angry. ♦Angry, not at Mary and the others for crying, but angry that they needed to cry at all. ♦Jesus was rip-snorting mad about death.

♦

That's why he burst into tears in v.35. ♦ Jesus hates death. ♦ He's sees it and he is deeply moved in his spirit. ♦ He hates how it leads to grief and a sense of loss. ♦ He hates how ♦it rips apart families. ♦ It makes him cry and shake to see death.

♦

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You see: if Jesus was the Son of God as the Bible says He was (and is) then He knew all about the creation of humanity—He was there. ♦ He knows that the intention is for us to live, not die. ♦ He knows that death only exists because of sin—Adam and Eve and the serpent, and all the consequences of that—so He is truly bothered by death. ♦

Death sucks. ♦ It is a part of our existence that does not belong. ♦ We were made for life. ♦ Death is only here because of sin. ♦ And so it is an enemy that must be defeated. ♦ You and I, we were made to live. ♦ This world is fallen, death is something we are all going to experience. We'll all know the pain and loss of losing loved ones. ♦ But don't let anyone tell you that death is natural, or good. ♦ Never let anybody tell you that death is a friend. ♦ It isn't. ♦ Death is a real, relentless, pernicious, pain-inflicting-on-all-who-come-in-contact-with-it enemy. ♦ It's a pitiless, merciless bully.

♦

Death sucks.

♦

And as Jesus stood there that day in the midst of that funeral He knew that His friend Lazarus was going to live again, but He also knew that death is an aberration in God's good creation and He was outraged by it. ♦ It made him shake and tremble and weep.

♦

He was mad. ♦ Mad as hell. ♦

♦

And I think as He stood there that day He was deciding that it was time for somebody to stand up to death.

♦

The Resurrection and the Life

II. ♦ And that's my second observation from this story, and the good news:

Jesus stood up to death

. ♦ He is the victor over the enemy death.

♦

That's the focal point of this story. ♦ When Jesus comes to Martha and identifies Himself as the "resurrection and the life" He is saying that He is the key to beating the pain that is death. ♦ He tells her: "He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die."

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The reason Jesus came to earth was to defeat the enemy of death, to overcome its power upon us. He is saying that, by believing in Him, there is life after death. "Though he die, yet shall he live." But more than that, He is saying that within Him there is also the power to overcome death, to remove its sting in the assurance that death will not have the final say. "Whoever lives and believes in me shall never die."



And then, just so it would be clear that He was not merely talking, Jesus went to Lazarus' tomb and uttered those simple words, "Lazarus, come out."



He demonstrated, in a concrete and tangible way that He is the solution to death.



You know, it is interesting that if you read through all the stories of Jesus you will never find Him preaching a funeral sermon. Every funeral He ever attended He broke up by raising the deceased back to life. There's Lazarus in this story. There's the daughter of a man named Jairus, a 12-year-old girl who had died and Jesus took her hand and raised her back to life. And there's the son of a widow woman in a town called Nain, where Jesus just happened to be passing by as the funeral procession went through and he raised the boy back to life.



And then, there's His own funeral.



Just a few days after Jesus raised Lazarus He took death on directly. Carrying the burden of all the sins that make death necessary in the first place, Jesus picked up a heavy wooden beam and He walked to the top of a barren hill where angry men drove spikes through His wrists and ankles and hoisted Him up to the top of a post where He was left to suffer and strangle under the merciless sun. And on that cross, Jesus wrestled with death. He fought and struggled with it until the breath of life was gone and the blood was poured out and his broken body was taken down and laid in a cold, dark tomb.



And then, three days later, He walked out of His own grave.



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Death cannot compete with the life that is found in Jesus. ♦ He IS the resurrection and the life.

♦

Death sucks. ♦ It is the enemy. ♦ Your enemy. ♦ My enemy. ♦ Jesus' enemy.

♦

But Jesus stood up to death. ♦ He went to the cross. ♦ He died. ♦ And then He kicked the bully in the knees. ♦ 1 Corinthians 15:54-56 says:

♦

"Death has been swallowed up in victory."

♦⁵⁵"Where, O death, is your victory?

♦♦♦♦♦Where, O death, is your sting?" ⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

♦⁵⁷But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

♦

Jesus is stood up to death. ♦ Death doesn't have to get the final say. ♦ If we recognize Jesus, as Martha did, as the "Son of God who is coming into the world" we are promised that "though we die, yet shall we live." ♦ We are promised that the final say will go to the one who is the resurrection and the life. ♦ The one who stood before a dead man's tomb and called "Lazarus, come out." ♦ The one who looked death in the eye and then walked out of his own grave.

♦

Final Words

I hate death. ♦ Death sucks. ♦ My dad is dead, and I'm mad about it.

♦

But to death I say this:

♦

You can have my father now. ♦ But you can't keep him.

♦

I know how the story ends. ♦ You don't win.

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Somebody stood up to you, and you lost. ♦ Jesus has beaten you. ♦ The sting is gone. ♦ The grave has been defeated. ♦ Jesus is the resurrection and the life. ♦ He's the champion of the cross. ♦ He's the risen Son of Man.



And nothing—absolutely nothing—can stand between us and our Savior. ♦ Not cancer. ♦ Not sorrow. ♦ Not sickness. ♦ Not Satan. ♦ Not the gates of hell.



Death—you lose. ♦ You suck. ♦ And you lose. ♦ I hate you. ♦ And you lose.



You can have my dad now, but you CANNOT keep him.



Someday, he's walking out of that grave. ♦ Just like Lazarus. ♦ Just like His Lord.



You are the enemy. ♦ You are a bully. ♦ And you've lost. ♦ Swallowed up in victory.



Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory in Jesus Christ.

♦ AFTER FINAL SONG And so, the question for us is the same question Jesus posed to Martha: ♦ "Do you believe this?" ♦ This really is a matter of life and death. ♦ The Bible teaches that every person must give an account of their life after they die. ♦ A kind of "exit-interview" with God. ♦ And according to what Jesus says in this story, the main question that will be asked us by God is, "Do you believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life? ♦ Did you put your faith in Jesus alone as Savior and Lord of your life?"

That's what He will someday ask of every person here this morning. ♦ That's what He asked my dad. ♦ That's what every human on the planet needs in order live, even though we die. ♦ To

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have eternal, spiritual life.

I would be foolish to think that everyone here has placed their faith in Jesus Christ and has gotten His free gift of eternal life. ♦ But the Bible says you can do that today. ♦ A simple prayer can express the desire of your heart to trust Christ for salvation. ♦ He will today forgive you of your sins so that you will not perish but have eternal life with Him. ♦ And he will take over your life and be your Lord and Master and Savior. ♦ ♦ That's what John 11:25-26 says. ♦ That's what the Bible says. ♦ That's what God says.

♦ 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. ♦ Believe in the one who stood up to and beat death. ♦ ♦

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