

Guest Preacher - Rev. Donald A Macdonald

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Date: 22 May 2022

Preacher: Rev. Donald A. Macdonald

- [0 : 00] And I'd like to take as our text this morning the words that you find in verse 44. The man who had died came out.
- The man who had died came out. And I have to say that every time I read these words, I am amazed.
- Because it's not what you expect when death takes place. You don't expect to see that person moving.
- It is John's Gospel alone that records for us the raising of Lazarus from the dead. In fact, it is the only account of the raising from the dead that is recorded by the Gospel writer John.
- And perhaps you have noted in your own reading how John draws our attention to the significance of this event. In the earlier part of the chapter, you find these words written, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.
- [1 : 37] It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it. Now, that does not mean that Lazarus' illness was not fatal.
- It was. But that his illness did not ultimately end in death, but in being raised from the dead.
- It is for the glory of God. Not so much that God might be praised, although that is implied, but that his glory be revealed through Christ.
- And in John's Gospel, you find that glory is not so much the praise that is due to God, but his revelation, his self-disclosure of himself.
- And of course, this takes place preeminently in his Son, Jesus Christ. You remember how John's Gospel begins. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.
- [2 : 49] And we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. No one has ever seen God, the only God, who is at the Father's side.
- He has made him know. And if the death of Lazarus takes place, that God's glory might be revealed, then this particular revelation of God's glory is so, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.
- It provides, in other words, an opportunity for God, in revealing his glory, to glorify his Son. You may remember what is written earlier in this very Gospel, regarding the purpose of the Father, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father.
- So, both the Father and the Son are mutually committed to one another's glory. And here, they are both revealed for who they truly are.
- There is one other factor I ought to mention before coming to our text. Remember, the chapters 1 to 12 of this Gospel can be called the Book of Signs.
- [4 : 09] Signs which John presents to us, attesting to the true identity of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is no imposter.

He is no pretend Messiah. He is, in truth, the predicted Messiah, the Anointed of God. And this miracle that is recorded here is the seventh miracle and the last that is recorded in the Book of Signs.

It points to the ultimate miracle in the Book of Glory, chapters 12, 13, rather, to 21. Which is, and that miracle is, of course, the resurrection of the Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Well, three points from our text. First of all, the pity of Jesus. Secondly, the power of Jesus. And thirdly, the purpose of Jesus.

The pity of Jesus. In this context, I believe we catch sight or given a glimpse of the true humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[5 : 27] There before us in words, the words of verse 35. Jesus wept. What a stunning, and astounding statement.

Jesus wept. If my memory serves me right, I think it was the famous preacher Spurgeon who made the observation that there is infinitely more in these two words than any preacher or student of the word will ever be able to extract from them.

Even though you applied the microscope of the utmost attentive consideration. And I can't help but personally wonder, how often did John stop and ponder the words which he wrote, Jesus wept.

Because you remember this gospel writer more than any other. Reaches back into the eternal realm as he sets before us the identity of this person, Jesus.

At the very first words of his gospel, every other gospel writer doesn't go as far back as this, but John goes right back into the eternal realm in the beginning.

[7 : 04] And you can see parallels there with how the Bible opens in the book of Genesis. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, or through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

So, John is setting before us in his prologue to the gospel at the very outset that this person is a person of the Godhead.

He is God the Son. And so, does it surprise you then that John reports Jesus wept? And Jesus wept. Some would contend that God cannot have feelings, that he is compassionless, that he is above all of that, and that emotions belong merely to man.

Well, the Bible, in my view, takes a different view. It demonstrates that God is full of compassion.

[8 : 21] For example, in the Old Testament, the book of Exodus, the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

Merciful, or it could be translated compassionate and gracious. It is not without significance that the detailed characterization of God begins with two related aspects of divine love.

The compassionate and gracious God. Now, compassionate recalls, perhaps, a mother's love for her child with a deep understanding of the child's weakness and need.

So that the mother keeps looking after the child, whatever the child's behavior or thanklessness. Does that sound familiar to mothers who may be here today?

So, when you read in the Bible about the compassion of God, it's not a response to human merit, but a display of divine sympathy which shows favor when punishment might well have been expected.

[9 : 58] But you, O Lord, are a God merciful, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. The Lord is gracious and full of compassion.

For a brief moment, I deserted you, but with great compassion I will gather you. So you can find many examples of compassion in God in the Bible.

And the reason to gather is found within the being of God himself. And the reason for which he gathers sinners to himself.

And that reason is his great compassion. Depths of compassion in God. It speaks of an overflowing love in God. It cannot be quantified love in its passionate reality.

One of the American theologians some time ago now, a man by the name of B.B. Warfield, we have a God who is capable of self-sacrifice for us.

[11 : 06] Men tell us that God is by the very necessity of his nature incapable of passion, incapable of being moved by inducement from without that he dwells in holy camp and unchangeable blessedness, untouched by human sufferings or human sorrows forever.

And Warfield goes on to write, let us bless our God that it is not true. God can feel. God does love. We have scriptural warrant for believing that God has reached out loving arms, gathered to his own bosom that forest of spears which otherwise had pierced doors.

Jesus wept. Here is an example of Christ's compassion. No, many of us have not, all of us have an occasion to weep at some point in our lives, maybe several times.

Maybe many times and for different reasons. Sorrow is usually the main reason we associate with weeping.

But there are times when people have literally wept for joy. The Greek word that is translated in Old English verse and wept, it means to shed tears.

[12 : 42] So, when we read Jesus wept, we are to understand that he literally shed tears. It wasn't something hidden, it wasn't something private.

You know, sometimes we're able to hide our grief from the public eye. We're able to restrain our tears and keep them hidden.

But here he publicly shed copious tears. They were visible to those who were around him. That is obvious from the comment and observation of the Jews who were present.

They saw his tears and they drew their own conclusion, see how he loved them. And although they may have misunderstood the reasons for his tears, there is no doubt whatsoever, but that Jesus loved Lazarus.

John makes that very plain at the outset of this chapter, that Jesus loved the family that Lazarus belonged to.

[13 : 56] Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. In fact, the message sent to Jesus by his anxious sisters as they watched their brother's symptoms gradually worsen, emphasizes that.

Remember the message that was addressed to the Lord. Lord, he whom you love is ill. There's no name mentioned, as if Lazarus was the only person in the world whom Jesus loved.

Now, I don't believe there's anything arrogant about that description. I suppose of anything, to be loved by Christ is often marked by brokenness and humility in the lives of those who are loved by the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is such a constant source of wonder to the recipients of his love. You may have noticed the criticism that is leveled against Christ in light of his tears.

some of them said, could not this man who opened the eyes of the blind also have kept this man from dying? And what comes across from this comment is not just their puzzlement, but their massive unbelief.

[15 : 14] Their faith does not rest on who Jesus is, but on the displays of his power. What then caused his tears to stream down his face?

Now, you may offer several explanations. Some would say that he shed tears because he was moved by the grief of the mourners.

He identified with them. And I don't think you can exclude that because that is the kind of Savior who is set before us in the Bible.

One who identifies with people. You know, when we too identify with those around us, it is then too that our witness or our message becomes most credible and compelling.

Others would suggest that his tears are flowing because he is angry with sin, sickness, and death, forces that wreak such havoc and generate so much sorrow in our fallen world.

[16 : 33] and that too may be true. Others that his anger is directed at unbelief itself.

The men and women gathered there were grieving as those who have no hope. So, whatever may be the cause of the tears, I don't think that you can say that they were shed for Lazarus.

since Jesus knew that he was about to raise Lazarus from the dead. But I do think that based on the context, we can say that these tears reveal an earthquake of emotion in the heart of Jesus.

Verse 33, when Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. And the translation that we have is scarcely adequate for words that express the deep inner disturbance and anger of Christ in the face of Satan's reign in sin and death.

One theologian makes the observation that Jesus' emotion is the revulsion of everything that is in him against the power of death.

[18 : 07] Well, what we cannot doubt or get away from is that the person who shed copious tears is no less than the second person of the Godhead who has taken to himself true human nature.

You may want to say, or you may be tempted to say that it was his human nature that shed tears, but that would not be scripturally correct. Remember, what you attribute to a nature, you attribute to the person.

It wasn't the nature that shed the tears, but the person of Jesus. Jesus, says John, wept. so, his experience as a man are truly his experiences as the second person of the Trinity.

In the incarnate Christ, he draws near to us. Therefore, the writer to the Hebrews tells us he had to be made like his brothers in every respect so that he might become a merciful or a compassionate and faithful high priest in the service of God.

So, based on that, I think we can safely say that his holy humanity experienced heights and depths of emotion unknown by sinful humanity.

[19 : 43] He sees human need with perfect clarity. Our senses, by comparison, are numbed. The pity of Jesus, his identification with people, his understanding of their needs, and his pity or his compassion, they are grounds for encouraging us to draw near to him.

You remember how the writer to the Hebrews puts it, for we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sin.

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

do you find the pity of Christ grounds for encouragement today for you to draw near to him.

You know, you don't need any special qualifications to draw near to him. All you need is to come just as you are in your sin.

[21 : 11] in your helplessness, in your weakness, in your powerlessness, come to the one who is truly compassionate.

Secondly, the power of Jesus. We read how he reveals his power to give life to the dead. Just one command is spoken.

Lazarus, come out. And we read, the man who had died came out. Some would contend that if Jesus had not mentioned Lazarus by name, that more might have come out from the grave.

Well, I don't know about that. But what I think is worth noting is how this miracle was accomplished. it was done by two means.

And the first means was prayer. Note how John draws our attention to this. Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, Father, I thank you that you have heard me, and I know that you always hear me.

[22 : 26] But because of the people who are standing by, I said this, that they may believe that you sent me. He lifted up his eyes.

John records what he remembers of the action of Jesus. He obviously considers that the bodily gestures in prayer and the worship of God to be of significance, and therefore he records it.

Matthew Hendry, the commentator, posed the question once, what is prayer? And then he went on to answer his own question. It is, he said, but the ascent of the soul to God and the directing of its affections and motions heavenward.

Lifting up his eyes would suggest that he was looking above and beyond the grave of Lazarus, fixing his eyes on the divine omnipotence.

and you notice how he addresses God, Father, as the only begotten Son. He comes with filial reverence before God.

[23 : 43] There's a holy boldness and adoration in his approach. There is the expression of confident faith. I thank you that you have heard me, and I know that you always hear me.

How many of us can claim to come in this way before the Lord? And it's interesting to note the emphasis in the Bible just in passing on how frequently Jesus engages in prayer.

and particularly at certain moments in his life, at his baptism, the time when he was transfigured on the cross, in Gethsemane and on the cross.

But there are many other times that are recorded in the Gospels where he spent time in prayer before he chose his disciples, before he approached them, when they were struggling on the Sea of Galilee, and so on.

And the Bible tells us that when he was engaged in prayer on one occasion in Luke's Gospel, that one of his disciples remains nameless, the actual place where Jesus was praying, the location is not mentioned either.

[25 : 17] And this disciple came with an urgent request, Lord, teach us to pray. Lord, teach us to pray.

And I believe that was prompted by the example of Jesus' praying, because his praying was not something that was done silently, but vocally.

They saw praying. they heard and prayed. And that prompted them to come with the urgent request, Lord, teach us to pray, because the urgency of the request is couched in the language.

In the original there it's what's called a nearest imperative, the word teach. And that sort of transmits a sense of urgency on the part of the disciples for the necessity to be taught prayer.

Well, it reminds me of something I read by an American preacher, a man by the name of J.M. Boyce, who's no longer in this life.

[26 : 32] And he tells a story of an old man traveling by foot in the days, pre-mechanized transport, to attend a meeting in Aberdeen.

And on the way to that meeting he was overtaken on his journey by a young theological student who was also traveling to the same meeting.

They stopped off on their journey to share a meager lunch. But before resuming their journey, the old man suggested that they engage in prayer, to ask God for his provision that evening.

And the old man prayed and he had three requests. First, he reminded the Lord that he was, perhaps like some of ourselves, hard of hearing.

And that if he didn't obtain a seat near the speaker, he would get little from the sermon. So he asked for a seat to be kept foreign.

[27 : 43] Secondly, he told the Lord that his shoes were badly worn. They weren't fit for purpose. He needed a new pair, but he didn't have the money to pay for a new pair.

And thirdly, he also requested that the Lord grant him a room for the night, because he didn't know of anyone in the city. He could ask for accommodation.

And as he made each request, he thanked the Lord in advance for answering them. Well, the divinity student was most unimpressed by this, and he thought it was impertinent of the old man.

He determined to keep an eye on this old guy. When they arrived at the location where they were going, the building was full.

No seats were left. And the student thought, well, now I'll see what becomes of his prayers. But by some means, the old man managed to get inside the door of the hall, and he stood with his hand cupped over an ear.

[29 : 00] A young woman in the front row turned and saw. She called to one of the office bearers standing in the aisle. She said to him, my father asked me to keep a seat for him, but if he was late, to offer it to someone else.

And yes, you've guessed it. Please tell the elderly man with his hand on his ear to take this seat. Request number one granted.

When it came to time for prayer in the service, as the practice then was, some stood and some knelt. The old man knelt, but the young woman stood, and as she looked down, she noted the poor state of his shoes.

Her father, you may think this was very strange, managed a shoe store. After the service, she politely raised the subject, and took him to the store, though it was closed, and he received new shoes.

Petition number two answered. And while they were in the store, she asked him where he intended to stay the night. His response was that God had not yet revealed to him where he was to stay.

[30 : 22] and she said to him, well, we have room for you. We were expecting Reverend Dr. so-and-so to use our guest room, but he has sent word that he is not able to come.

Request number three answered. The next day, the student discovered how his traveling companion's requests were all answered.

You see, God is not indifferent. to the believing prayers of his people. And although the student was surprised by the unfolding of providence, I doubt very much if the old man was surprised.

In my view, he was frequently at the throne of grace. And so, in this episode where Christ comes before the Father, as I said, Christ is set before us in the Bible as one who is frequently in prayer.

And did you note the additional comment? But because of the people who are standing by, I said this, that they may believe that you sent me. You see, those who are opposed to Christ were claiming that his miracles were done through satanic power.

[31 : 45] and here he sets before them that his miracles are performed and undertaken through divine power. And he makes the statement, I believe, also to strengthen faith in the lives of others, that they may believe that you sent me.

And I believe his example led to prayer featuring regularly in the ministry of the apostles. Remember in Acts chapter 6, we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.

So, prayer is something that features largely in the teaching of the Bible. Well, here Jesus speaks to a dead person.

Four days in the grave, his sister reminds us, and Christ. But Christ calls with divine authority, authority. Remember, here is one who had called the cosmos into being by the word of his power.

And here he calls the dead back to life. In him, the Lord's words are fulfilled. Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and is now here when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.

[33 : 10] Now, that refers primarily to spiritual hearing. And this miracle of miracles is very like what took place in the Old Testament in the sense that Jesus is like Ezekiel of old who spoke to the bones, the dry in the valley of the dry bones.

You remember the instruction that was given to him, prophesy over these bones and say to them, old dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. And the Ezekiel story illustrates for us that the gift of new life is a sovereign act of God.

He alone is the agent. The bones didn't cooperate in receiving new life. And yet the New Testament teaches that it is through the word of God the spiritually dead receive new life.

Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth since you have been born again not of perishable seed but of imperishable through the living and abiding word of God. Does that mean because of the instrumentality of the word to which we actively respond, does it imply an activity on our part?

Do we contribute to being born anew? Well, this miracle surely illustrates that the command of Jesus does not imply that Lazarus contributed life energy to his own rising from the dead.

[34 : 48] He comes from the grave because Jesus raises him. Here then is the display of divine power as the one who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

He possesses the same power and still today he calls sinners to himself through the effectual call of the gospel. It reminds me when I was a young minister and I was preaching in the neighboring congregation in Shawbust at communion services way back in the days of my late friend, the Reverend Callum Matheson.

And present in the manse on Sunday afternoon was the late Reverend Mordom Macaulay. He used to be minister at back. My confidence was not exactly great at the thought that he was to be in the audience.

And just as we were going out the man's door, he growled to me and I mean literally he growled. You are going to ask people to do what is impossible.

And if my confidence was low before then, it was non-existent after that. But is this not what gives the preacher confidence and boldness that the voice of Christ that raised Lazarus still speaks in the word so that the dead and sin are brought to spiritual life?

[36 : 24] What Mr. Macaulay said was correct. I couldn't raise anyone. My voice couldn't raise anyone. But the Christ whom I set before the audience is able to raise the dead to life.

And that power raised Lazarus and that power ultimately involves the wiping away of all tears. You can imagine how the sorrowing was turned to joy through the demonstration of Christ's power.

And is it not yet the same for all who are in Christ and have come to experience the joy of salvation? For these at the end of life's journey, this is what is true, God will wipe away all tears from their eyes.

The power of Jesus, the pity of Jesus, and finally my time is going, the purpose of Jesus. You remember how John's gospel speaks of miracles as signs.

Signs are often, if you like, coded representations of the reality to which they point. And John in the prologue, in the opening verse of his gospel, writes, in him was life that is in the word, and the life was the light of men.

[37 : 51] The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. And you remember what Jesus said about himself, I am the light of the world. He shines in a way that irresistibly overcomes the world's darkness and says, this is who I am, and this is what I do.

I overcome the darkness. I bring the warmth of light into sin-blighted lives. Yes, and one day he will return in the full glory of his resurrection power, and then the light will be switched on permanently.

It will not be veiled or hidden. The Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world will be present in the new heavens and the new earth as their eternal lamp.

Then it will be true. What is written in the book of Revelation, the city had no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light and its lamp is the Lamb.

As he will be the life, so he will be the light of the new world. And so as I conclude, I address the personal question Jesus addressed to Martha when he stated, I am the resurrection and the life.

[39 : 17] Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?

Do you believe? What is your response? Do you believe this? The pity of Jesus, the power of Jesus, and the purpose of Jesus.

Let us pray. O eternal God, how can we ever express adequately our indebtedness to one who is full of compassion and who draws near to men and women and boys and girls dead in trespasses and in sin and who breathes life new life into their lives so that they are able to hear the voice of God, able to understand in a measure, able to see with new vision the Christ of God and able to praise the Lord himself.

O forbid that any of us be strangers to that power and the glory shall be thine. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.

Amen. Let us conclude by singing to God's praise from Psalm 16.

[41 : 05] Psalm 16, that's page 17 of the Psalm book verse 8.

Before me constantly, I set the Lord alone. Because he is at my right hand, I shall not, I'll not be overthrown.

Therefore my heart is glad, my tongue with joy will sing, my body too will rest secure in hope unwavering.

For you will not allow my soul in death to stay, nor will you leave your Holy One to see the tombs decay. Now, that verse speaks exclusively of Christ in the grave.

You have made known to me the path of life divine. Bliss shall I know. At your right hand, joy from your face will shine.

[42 : 04] Let us sing these verses. Before me constantly, I set the Lord alone. before me constantly, I set the Lord alone, because this had my right hand, I will not be over though.

Therefore my heart is high, my town with joy will sing, my body tear tam maste and love w island in the sand of forever.

For you live thus to stay or will you leave your holy one to see the tombs decay you have been known to me the powerful I derive this hour I know what you I join all your feet will shine now may the grace of the Lord

Jesus Christ the love of God the Father fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit rest on and abide with you all now and forever Amen Amen Amen M