

JOH 12:9-11 Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 10 So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, 11 for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him.

Last week we left our Lord enjoying a banquet prepared in His honor to thank Him for the wonderful work He did in the life of Lazarus by bringing him back from the dead. And in the course of such thanks, Mary, the sister of Lazarus, takes costly perfume to anoint Jesus.

This is when Judas Iscariot becomes indignant as he points out that the ointment could have been sold and the money given to the poor, as if it was any of his business since the costly ointment belonged to Mary.

But Jesus responds by saying that Mary was doing the better thing as she demonstrated her love for Him through her anointing Him for burial, whether she fully understood all of the implications of her actions or not. And that's where we stopped last week.

JOH 12:7-8 "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. 8 You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

As we come to our text this morning we find that the scene changes to where a number of people who had heard about this miraculous raising of Lazarus, decide to seek Jesus out.

JOH 12:9 Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

This large crowd of Jews are not the ones who were already in Bethany. The ones in Bethany didn't need to find out that He was there and then come, they knew and had witnessed the raising of Lazarus.

This large crowd of Jews are the ones described in verse 12 who had come for the Feast. In other words, those who were coming from other regions including the area of Galilee who were making

their way to Jerusalem for the Passover. This tells us a number of things:

The word had gotten out in a very short amount of time that Lazarus had been raised from the dead by Jesus. The motivation for people from Bethany and Jerusalem, who had witnessed this miracle, to travel such distances would have involved the reality that Israel's long awaited Messiah had finally arrived and that this Feast would be the perfect occasion to come and spur Him on to victory.

After all, it was Passover which, among other things, celebrated Israel coming out from under the yoke of Egypt. And now, it was time to be delivered from the yoke of Rome. It's no wonder that every Jew outside of Palestine was seeking out Jesus. And they discovered He was in Bethany.

There is one other thing which should be noted here which is somewhat subtle but shows the contempt that those Jews outside of Jerusalem may have had for the Pharisees and Sadducees who made up the Sanhedrin.

You'll remember back in chapter eleven that after Lazarus was raised from the dead the Jewish leaders gave orders to those Jews in Jerusalem that if anyone found out where Jesus was they should report it to them. The inference was that not to do so would lead to serious repercussions.

None of these Jews wanted to get in trouble for not saying where Jesus was and so the last thing they would be doing was seeking Jesus out and then wanting to be with Him. What this tells us is that this large crowd seeking out Jesus were those who didn't have the same fear of the Sanhedrin since they lived outside of Palestine.

If these Jews outside of Palestine were told of the raising of Lazarus by those who were there or who had sent word to them, then they also would have been cautioned by these same Jews to be careful not to be associated with Jesus when they got to the area of Jerusalem.

And yet, what do we see? The large crowd is actively seeking Jesus out. Like any large crowd they must have thought, what is the Sanhedrin going to do, shoot every one of us? They also knew that the Sanhedrin feared the Romans and so they would not have

sent the Temple Guard to Bethany knowing that such a high profile move would have alerted the Roman authorities.

The Passover was a time of celebration as families were reunited and now with the announcement that a man claiming to be sent from the Father, who had power and authority to raise the dead, was also making His way to Jerusalem, became the perfect time to rally together for the new King of Israel to take back what belonged to them.

But what is interesting here is that like any curious person, not only were they interested in seeing this miracle worker, they are also excited to see the work of His hands, namely Lazarus whom He raised from the dead.

JOH 12:9 Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

This is human nature; to want to see and experience a person of notoriety. Why do people flock to get autographs of movie stars and professional athletes? Why do people, if given the chance, want their picture taken with famous people they admire, be it the President of the United States or someone like a Billy Graham?

There's a natural attraction to such people and these Jews in our text are no different. Now, as I mentioned earlier, they have other motivations for wanting to seek Jesus out, but to meet a bona fide miracle worker was no small thing then or now, especially to meet the evidence of such a miracle worker found in Lazarus raised from the dead.

Consider our own day. How many times have we seen on TV where someone goes forward in a healing crusade and claims to have been healed? Our natural reaction is two-fold. One which is hopeful that such a person really got healed, but the second one is doubt, that maybe it was part of the show, or that the person seeking a healing was only being hopeful himself.

What would change this? Unbiased corroborated evidence. In other words, having a couple of doctors who had treated this person and who knew their condition and then after examining them giving them a clean bill of health as they too marvel at such an instantaneous recovery.

I had recently watched a special program that one of the major networks did on Benny Hinn as they followed his healing show

through a number of cities across the country, and they did follow up on a number of people who had supposedly been healed by Benny.

It turns out that none of them had been healed and in a number of instances where these people had supposedly been healed of terminal diseases they had died only weeks or months after the crusade.

The Producers of this network contacted the Benny Hinn representatives and their response was that the sick people in question didn't have enough faith to hold on to their healing, which is to say, that apparently any fluctuation in faith automatically cancels out the mercy of God, or that God is a pretty cruel God when dealing with weak and frail people who may occasionally doubt.

To suggest that a lack of faith at times in our lives overrules the grace and mercy of God turns grace into a wage that we somehow earn by making sure we practice faith perfectly. This is not the God of the bible. He knows He's dealing with an imperfect people who need a perfect God to step in on their behalf, be it for salvation or healing.

Does this mean He doesn't expect His people to live by faith? Of course not. But even the most seasoned and mature saint will not live in his or her own perfection, because they have none; rather we live in the perfection of Christ who strengthens us to live by faith and obedience as we rely on the Spirit of God who indwells every believer.

Okay, so we've got a former dead man who is now very much alive and Jesus, who was responsible for his new life, as many witnesses were there to verify the incident.

And now, many Jews coming from other regions of Israel to celebrate Passover want to take the opportunity to see the two people everyone is talking about, Jesus and Lazarus, as they have high hopes that Jesus may be their deliverer from the hands of Rome.

This is precisely what the Sadducees concluded.

JOH 12:10-11 So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, 11 for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him.

Here's the problem from the Jewish leaders' perspective. If the Jews put their faith in Jesus they are out of a job. And not only are they out of a job but the whole nation of Israel will suffer as Rome descends on the leaders and the people for pursuing a path of war with their new king at the helm.

They need to put a stop to this. And of course this is why the high priest Caiaphas spoke those prophetic words back in JOH 11:50 "You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish."

Well, it turns out in cases like this that one man is never enough. Take Iraq for example. We can almost bank on the United States taking military action and eliminating Saddam Hussein. But taking out one man will not be enough. We've got his son whom some say is worse than his father.

We've got certain military leaders who will also need to be taken out because of their radical ideas. In other words, there will always be someone to fill the vacuum. And this country wants to make sure that someone friendly to our country fills it.

It's the same with the chief priests. Yes, Jesus must die, but now it appears that Lazarus must also go. Why? This is where it gets interesting. Lazarus is a threat in a couple of ways.

The first one is obvious and is full of irony. He is the living evidence to a miracle of Jesus. For this reason he must be put to death. Even if Jesus were to be killed Lazarus would go forward bearing witness to the validity of Christ's claims and therefore people would see Jesus as a martyr and continue the cause, as these Jewish leaders saw the situation. And so, you've got a political angle here.

But there's another reason they believe Lazarus must die which goes to the heart of a theological issue which they feel they must keep intact for them to continue to wield their power.

You'll notice that back in chapter eleven both the Pharisees and Sadducees showed concern for Jesus and His miracle.

JOH 11:47 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. "What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs.

The chief priests were all made up of Sadducees at this time in history. And so, when we come to our text notice who is making plans to kill Lazarus.

JOH 12:10-11 So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, 11 for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him.

Now why would the chief priests, who are Sadducees, make plans to kill Lazarus as well?

Keep in mind that the Sadducees were the secular arm of the religious group which made up the leadership in Israel. They didn't believe much of their own Scriptures. They didn't believe in miracles, they didn't believe in angels and they certainly did not believe in the resurrection of the dead.

The apostle Paul used this knowledge to his benefit when having to defend himself in front of the Sanhedrin for his stance on the resurrection.

ACT 23:6-9 Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead." 7 When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. 8 (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.) 9 There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. "We find nothing wrong with this man," they said. "What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?"

So, why is this important for the Sadducees to put Lazarus to death from a theological standpoint? Because if there is a resurrected man living in Bethany it proves without a shadow of doubt that they are absolutely wrong and it discredits them as spiritual leaders in Israel.

And even if Jesus is put to death the evidence of His miracle remains and shows them to be false leaders in a post-Jesus world. And so, even if Rome doesn't step in, the masses of Jews would force these Sadducees to step aside in favor of more theologically astute leaders who believe the Scriptures.

What this tells us is that up to this point few Jews seemed to be concerned with this. Few Jews seemed to care whether one group of leaders believed in the resurrection while the other group didn't. As long as they kept Rome off of their backs they didn't care, which shows how secular the entire nation of Israel really was at this time.

But if the entire nation began to get back to its spiritual roots and get serious with God then they would have another revival akin to that which King Josiah of Israel, (some 600 hundred years earlier), started as they began to rebuild the temple when they inadvertently rediscovered the book of the law which had been lost when Israel was taken into captivity.

2KI 22:8, 10-13 ***Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the LORD."*** He gave it to Shaphan, who read it. 10 Then Shaphan the secretary informed the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king. 11 When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes. 12 He gave these orders to Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Acbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the secretary and Asaiah the king's attendant: 13 ***"Go and inquire of the LORD for me and for the people and for all Judah about what is written in this book that has been found.*** Great is the LORD'S anger that burns against us because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written there concerning us."

After King Josiah appealed to the Lord for forgiveness and mercy the Lord responded and told Josiah that He would bless him and Israel and then gave these commands.

2KI 23:3-5 The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the LORD - to follow the LORD and keep his commands, regulations and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, thus confirming the words of the covenant written in this book. Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant. 4 The king ordered Hilkiah the high priest, the priests next in rank and the doorkeepers to remove from the temple of the LORD all the articles made for Baal and Asherah and all the starry hosts. He burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron Valley and took the ashes to Bethel. 5 He did away with the pagan priests appointed by the kings of Judah to burn incense on the high places of the towns of Judah and on those around Jerusalem - those who

burned incense to Baal, to the sun and moon, to the constellations and to all the starry hosts.

The Sadducees in our text knew that this revival would not start from the leadership as in the case of Josiah, but would be a grass roots movement of the people which meant the sure elimination of the chief priests who were the spiritual and political equivalent of the pagan priests of Josiah's day.

Lazarus had to go. Destroy the evidence and the problem goes away, was their thinking. But for people who are deceived, as were these Sadducees, killing one person is never enough, killing two people is never enough. In fact, the killing has never stopped.

The blood of the martyrs has often been the seed of the church. And the enemy will use any and every means to try and snuff out the truth and the testimony of Christ, whose Spirit is in each and every one of His people.

This is why we should never be surprised when we face opposition in this world as we stand up for Christ and His truth. But this should never be an excuse to cower in some corner because someone might take "offense" to the truth.

Like a light set on a hill we need to shine for Christ no matter what. And this is essentially what Lazarus was doing in a most dramatic way. When people came to see Lazarus they knew that they were not meeting with a dead man, but one who had life and was vibrant and one who gave all the credit and glory to Jesus Christ.

There are those who would try and destroy the church, thinking that if they can get rid of all the witnesses to the truth that somehow the truth will just go away, but we know that our King and Lord will never let that happen, as Jesus told Peter, the gates of hell will never prevail against the Kingdom of God.

It's been happening in our country for a long time. Just take God out of the schools and the future generations of believers will eventually come to an end. And don't think for a moment that the enemy doesn't use such means as he uses people in this world to carry out the desires of their father, the devil.

I'm not suggesting that every member of the ACLU has grand plans to destroy Christianity, or that every individual in the teacher's unions are purposely out to brain wash our children away from Christ.

Now I'm sure there are individuals who may have such devious plans but most of these people have been deceived into thinking that for the betterment of the country it is better to take Christ out of the classroom, but whether they realize it or not they are being used by the enemy. And we know the enemy will not prevail.

God is still in control. He is sovereign.

But there's a bigger issue here, whether or not we get prayer back into the schools, which by the way has never really left if you've ever had to take the SAT's.

The issue here is are we going to continue to be faithful witnesses no matter what the enemy throws at us?

Will our testimony stand the test and will Christ be glorified through our lives? This was the case with Lazarus. He was seen as a threat for one simple reason. He was alive. And with the life he was given by Christ he could not deny where he got that life.

If we have been given eternal life through faith in Christ, then the question needs to be asked are we living that life out to the honor and glory of Christ, or are we seen by the world as something other than alive?

Can you imagine how long people would have stuck around in Bethany to get a glimpse of Lazarus if what Mary and Martha really did was to take their stone cold dead brother and prop him up in a chair with a sign around his neck which read, "I'm alive. Praise God!"

We might laugh at such a notion and yet people all over the world claiming to be Christian, which is to say, people who claim to be alive in Christ, are doing the same thing.

As I've always said, if we are alive in Christ, then let's live as though we are alive; not as though we're on spiritual Prozac. Yes life gets hard, yes life is sometimes inconvenient, but unless we begin to whole-heartedly understand that this world is not our home then we will always be looking down to the things of this world instead of looking up to heavenly things and we'll never look like we're alive.

And quite honestly, if that were the case, where the world was our only hope, I wouldn't blame anyone for being down in the dumps. But that assumes we have no hope. But for we who are in Christ that simply isn't the case. We live in this world for such a short

time and by comparison there is nothing that should keep our perspective from being eternal. This is what Paul understood.

PHI 3:8-9 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

You see Paul understood that his testimony was something the enemy wanted to snuff out early on in his ministry. It seemed the Jews were always trying to stone him or beat him or just run him out of town for one simple reason. He was alive in Christ and his life was a threat to the powers of darkness.

Lazarus was alive and was a threat to the powers of darkness. You and I who are alive by faith in Christ; are we seen as a threat to the powers of darkness by being the light of this world in Christ, or are we seen as people aimlessly cruising around this world with our lights out?

When that's the case it's no wonder we bump into things and trip over road blocks. But if we have eyes to see and ears to hear then we are Spirit driven people who rely on the only One who can enable us to move forward in this world as we look to the next.

PHI 3:20-21, 4:1 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. 4:1 Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!

And the only reason we are able to stand firm in the Lord and look forward to our Savior's return is because we have overcome death like Lazarus; only on a spiritual level at this point as we look forward to our bodily resurrection when Christ returns as He establishes the new heavens and the new earth.

Death is not our future because Christ is the resurrection and the life as He told Martha and Mary.

So, how do we respond to such great news? How do we view this life in the midst of trials and tribulations and the attacks from the enemy? We respond the way Paul did who was killed for his faith

and yet continues to be one of the greatest witnesses this world has ever seen.

1CO 15:55-58 "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

When we're tempted to sit instead of stand Paul does not say to go to the sidelines, but instead give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord.

There's a lot of work to be done for the Lord. But it takes a real commitment to the One who committed Himself to us by dying on the cross for our sin because He loved us so much.

Let's love Him back with all our hearts, souls and minds. And may we use the gifts the Spirit of God has given us to advance His kingdom, encourage the saints, and glorify our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.