

John 11:38-57 “The Glory of God in the Face of Death”

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

What a joy to celebrate God is at work, right? Powerfully, He's at work. Gloriously, He's at work. We're going to celebrate this morning the glory of God in the face of death. Now, I'll admit we've already seen some glorious things about God in John 11, this story of Lazarus we've been in for the past couple weeks.

In the darkest moments, in the midst of our greatest enemy, we have the presence of God. Jesus here promising He's the resurrection and the life, so we stay near the one with the keys to death. We've had the tears of God who cries with us in our grief, in our anger because He loves us so much.

[1 : 09] Jesus wept at the grave of His friend. There's no other God like that, is there? There's not. Another part of His glory here for sure. But now this week we come most directly to the glory of God on display in the face of death.

See, Jesus told us from the beginning of the story that Lazarus' illness was about the glory of God. Remember verse 4 when He said that?

That means that it's about God's glory, means it's about showing us who God really is in the person of His Son. Death looms large in our lives.

Death looms, illnesses, wars, lost loved ones, the fear of its certainty and its finality.

[2 : 08] It casts an imposing shadow. It seems overwhelming. But our God is bigger and greater and overcomes death to give life.

We're going to see this in the rest of John 11 this morning. Spoiler alert. God's glory actually goes beyond bringing a dead man back to life.

It's even bigger and better than that. But we're going to read that part now before we pray and the rest of it later. Let's pick up the reading of God's Word at verse 38.

Remember Jesus, full of emotion, showing us the passionate heart of God, now stands weeping before the tomb of Lazarus.

Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, take away the stone.

[3 : 09] Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, Lord, by this time there will be an odor for he has been dead four days. Jesus said to her, did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?

So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.

When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, Lazarus, come out! The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips and his face wrapped with a cloth.

Jesus said to them, unbind him and let him go. Let's pray. God, we need to see your glory.

We're starting to sense it. We long to know it more. Show us by your word, by your spirit, the glory of Jesus we ask in his name.

[4 : 20] Amen. Around two or three years old, my kids started to flex their biceps and say, feel how strong I am.

And most of the time I just said, wow. But sometimes I did that and I said, wow. And then I said, now feel daddy's muscles.

A couple years later, when the coach pitch players weren't listening to me about how to hit the ball, I grabbed the bat at the end of practice and knocked one over the fence.

Why? Why? Well, partially, I was showing off, which is not my point here. But mostly, what I was trying to do was to tell them that they should trust me.

That they should listen to me. I wanted my girls to believe from an early age that their strong dad would take care of them, right?

[5 : 29] That if any boy was bothering them, that they could know for sure that their strong dad could take him. Just like all those boys that lined up here this morning know that I could still take each and every one of them, right?

Yes? Hey, no lying in church. Be honest. No, I could take you. Feel how strong I am. Trust me. Right? Similarly, seeing the glory of God is always for our good so that we know him and trust him more.

That we would stand in awe of him and worship him for his greatness and goodness that goes beyond what we could imagine. That's what Jesus is doing here with Lazarus.

Notice as he flexes his muscles, so to speak, he says over and over that what he wants is for the people there to believe. Those who already do believe, like Mary and Martha and some of his disciples who are there, to have their faith in him grow.

[6 : 45] To have their vision of his greatness expanded. That's what he wants for them. And then for those who don't yet believe, to believe that he is the son of God sent to save them.

To come to know the real Jesus for the first time, he wants them to believe too. That's what he wants for us. Okay? To see the glory of God clearly for the first time or afresh that we trust him in a new way in our lives right where we are today.

That's where this is going. We'll see three glimpses of God's glory in this story and consider each time what impact it should have in our lives.

The first glimpse is the most obvious one. It's the one we've already read. It's Lazarus' resurrection life. The man dead four days comes walking out of the tomb.

Don't miss this. This never happens, right? Martha makes it clear what a hopeless situation it is. He is dead to the point of stinking.

[7 : 56] And Jesus says, didn't I tell you the glory of God was coming? Right in the midst of the most hopeless situation, you're going to see my strength, my grace, my glory.

And he calls, Lazarus, come out! And Lazarus comes out. He hears the voice of his good shepherd and he follows him even out of the grave.

That's how it works with Jesus' sheep. This is some kind of unique shepherd, isn't it? We see that here. It's hard to miss.

This is a story of God's glory and Jesus is the resurrection and the life. That's what this sign points us to about him, that we would know and believe that.

He is the one with the keys to death and hell. The one we must stay near. The divine life giver. The only one in whom we find life.

[9 : 00] So we're never hopelessly trapped. Stuck when the one with the keys is near, right? That's what Jesus is raising Lazarus to show us, isn't it?

He tells his father, he prays not for his own benefit. God's already heard and answered him. But for the crowds looking on like us.

So we will believe that he comes from heaven with divine power to give life. He delayed coming to Lazarus for that very same reason.

So we would believe who he is and how strong he is. He doesn't just heal sick people, he raises dead people. So we will know that the father sent the son and we'll find our hope and our life in him even in the face of death.

I don't want any of us to miss the impact of this miracle for us. Because it's showing us who Jesus is, who Jesus still is.

[10 : 04] Listen, when Jesus prays, dead people come to life. And you know something? You know what the Bible tells us? Jesus prays for you.

When Jesus calls, dead people start to walk in new life. And Jesus calls you by name.

Like he did Lazarus and death becomes life. When Jesus works in someone, dead people come to life. And Jesus is working in you. And as Bill said earlier, he promises to carry that work that he started on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

He won't leave you hanging. Amen? Amen? That's who Jesus is in your life. That's the kind of king you have. That's the kind of shepherd you have.

That's the strong savior you have. So why have you given up? Settled? Where have you lost heart? [11:07] What situation have you decided is hopeless? Sometimes the view from where I stand is heavy because there's so much hurt, so much suffering.

But sometimes the view I get is glorious. I share some of the heavy things with you. So I just want you to know some of the glorious part too.

It's why we share stories of God's grace at work in our lives. And you've heard those over and over. But just this week, every time I turn around, it feels like Aslan is on the move.

For those of you, that means something too. It means this week I've talked to people who are seeing God's work in their lives in ways they never even dreamed possible.

Against alcoholism. Several months sober. To heal wounds from sexual abuse and addiction plaguing them for years and most of a lifetime.

[12:12] To shine light into depression and darkness that they thought would never lift. To repent when they felt they deserved the apology.

To persevere through divorce and remarriage and then more struggles and still to be walking together. Actually, to meet Jesus and receive his love for the first time after sitting in church for 30 plus years feeling like I'm not enough.

And Jesus brings life. I'm not saying these battles are all one overnight. They're not. I'm not seeking to minimize them.

They are big battles. Okay? Which is showing us we have a bigger Savior.

That's where he shows up. That's where his power is so clear in our lives. If you've decided that your spouse will never change. That your loved one is too hardened ever to come around.

[13:20] That your situation will never improve. You haven't met my Jesus yet. You haven't seen what he does to people in those kinds of situations. He casts out demons.

He wakes the dead. He speaks and listening to his voice. New life the dead receive. He breaks the power of reigning sin and sets the prisoner free.

And sometimes that prisoner is you. Sometimes it's in your life that he shows up and does those things. Friends, we have a gloriously powerful God.

And I'm telling you, he's at work. He's alive. He's in our world. He's in our lives. Do you believe that? Do you believe in this Jesus?

Do you believe in the Jesus of the Bible? Who brings life out of death. Light into dark. Hope in the midst of hopelessness.

[14:20] If he can bring Lazarus out of the grave with a word, what can he not do in your life?

He has power over death eternally, forever as the resurrection and the life so that you don't have to fear death anymore. There is someone so much stronger than that great enemy.

His resurrection power is at work in us who believe. So sin no longer has dominion over you. Even when you have succumbed to temptation, yet again, he gives more grace.

He sends you his spirit again. Greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world. Do you live like that? Do you pray like that?

Do you offer hope to others like that? Friends, it is true and it is so good that Jesus weeps with us.

[15:26] Because sometimes the pain persists a long, long time. And some of you know that all too well. But even then, even here where Jesus weeps with us, his tears are not of some disappointed deity who wishes that he could help but can't.

Some sad savior who feels stuck but unable to rescue. No. He weeps because the brokenness and pain are real.

Yes. And because he longs and loves to make it right. To set it straight. To wipe all of your tears away. And he will today or one day.

He will do that. That's why we sing, our God is greater. Our God is stronger. Our God is mighty, worthy of all praising. He opened the prison doors.

He parted the raging seas. My God, he holds the victory. So what? We won't be quiet. We'll shout out your praise. Amen. We won't be fearful.

[16:37] We'll live in your strength. We won't be hopeless. We will trust in your grace. My God's still rolling stones away. Isn't that good news?

That's who he is. Jesus doesn't just want you to know he does that for Lazarus. He wants you to know that's who he is. The resurrection and the life. Don't read the story of Lazarus and miss who Jesus is.

That's the glory of God. See, that's easy to do. There were a lot of people who actually were there when Lazarus walked out of the tomb.

They witnessed this miracle. From what we can tell, none of them doubted its reality. We're about to read that a bunch of them believed in Jesus because of it.

What a beautiful thing. That can be you today. You can see Jesus for who he is and trust him. But some of them saw Lazarus walk out of the tomb and they saw a problem.

[17 : 42] They did not embrace Jesus. They clung to control and fear. Let's read the rest of the story. Verse 45.

Many of the Jews, therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, What are we to do? For this man performs 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 place and our nation. But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, You know nothing at all.

Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish. He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation.

[18 : 46] And not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. So from that day on, they made plans to put him to death.

Jesus, therefore, no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there to the region near the wilderness to a town called Ephraim. And there he stayed with the disciples. Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves.

They were looking for Jesus and saying to one another as they stood in the temple, What do you think? That he will not come to the feast at all? Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where he was, he should let them know so that they might arrest him.

Do you see what I mean that the specter of death hangs all over this passage? Lazarus lives now, but raising him now will lead to Jesus' death.

It's just as Thomas feared in the beginning when Jesus wanted him to go to Mary and Martha and Lazarus, but it's happening a bit differently. Notice, though, how deceived we are when we think we can maintain control and not trust Jesus.

[20 : 07] Jesus, the Sanhedrin, that's this Jewish ruling council, is faced with a problem. Their fear is that soon everyone will believe in Jesus.

In fact, in the next chapter, this makes a living Lazarus walking around and talking to people himself a major problem, so they look to kill him because he's causing too many people to believe in Jesus. And if people start getting too excited, creating too big a stir about this messianic figure, the Romans will come and take away our place and our nation.

Emphasis on our. We will lose our power, our comfort, our controlled lives that go the way we want them to.

See, the Jews lived here with a tenuous compromise with Rome, who holds the real power. And they fear that Rome will destroy the temple and the Jewish people, taking away their autonomy in order for Rome to reassert control over them.

[21 : 18] So Caiaphas says, don't you know it's better to let one man die than all of us? It's very practical. Here's the solution they land on.

This guy who just raised someone from the dead, who has power over death, we really need to kill him. Hmm. Seems unlikely to work, but blinded by our selfish control, we chase after it to the point of putting Jesus to death.

Jesus will face death in Lazarus' place. And God allows the high priest to speak ironically, prophetically.

Jesus will die instead of the people, the whole nation. See, what's previewed here is Jesus' substitutionary death.

In John's gospel, the pinnacle of the glory of God, the moment we see it most clearly, where he most reveals who he is, is the cross.

[22 : 29] He will die in the place of all his people. It will work like the Passover lamb that they understood so well.

Instead of so many people being killed, the lamb will be killed, and its blood put on the door frames, and so the people inside will be spared. They live, right?

The life of the lamb taken instead of theirs. A perfect substitute. Let me give you a picture of this. Many of you have seen a version of this before.

But this time, not a real egg, nothing messy, okay? But a plastic egg with Smarties. Lots of Smarties in it. Can you hear them? This represents the many people in the Jewish nation.

And their leaders are afraid that what's going to happen is the wrath of Rome is going to come down on them, and it will crush the Smarties to powder.

[23 : 33] You won't even be able to eat, right? They'll be utterly destroyed. They will lose everything they have. So they start searching to apprehend Jesus.

Just, you know, bear with me. Paint can. They want to find Jesus for what purpose? They want to place Jesus on the chopping block so that he dies instead of all the people, so that he will protect the people from needing to die.

Only what they don't know is that Jesus is actually going to throw himself on the chopping block in front of the people to protect them, not merely from some rubber mallet of Rome, this mere human wrath, but from the metal hammer of the wrath of a holy God's divine justice against sin that would destroy people way more than any human power would, right?

If the wrath of God were to come down on people, they would be in big trouble.

There would be a problem. Unless somebody stands in the way. So on the cross, Jesus absorbs the blow of God's wrath on our sin in order to cover us, to protect us, to give us life once and for all.

[25 : 09] That is what theologians call substitutionary atonement. And you need to know that it's not just theology and it's not just a silly picture.

It's at the heart of your relationship with God. It's the way that you actually have life with him because Jesus took the death that you earned.

Do you believe that? Then that means that death will never touch you. You are safe in Jesus.

The worst thing that could ever happen to you, being separated from God, will never happen to you because you are with him in Jesus. The end of your life will never be the end because the moment you breathe your last year, you will breathe and live with Jesus.

Jesus, oh, don't fear death. But say with Tim Keller, all that death can do to me as a Christian is to make my life infinitely better.

[26 : 16] Don't give in to sin. But say with John Newton, I am a great sinner, but I have a greater Savior. Oh, don't surrender to Satan when he accuses you and throws your sin in your face and tells you you deserve death and hell.

But say with Martin Luther, I admit I deserve death and hell. What of it? For I know one who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God, and where he is, there I shall be also.

I'll be with him. Glory, right? Glory, resurrection, life. Look how safe you are under the protection of Jesus, friend.

Look how safe you will always be there. Oh, oh my. What do we have here? It's spilling over everywhere. It's a much larger egg.

This is way beyond what I anticipated. Jesus' death has protected so many more than I realized.

Can you hear it? You hear all the smarties in there?

[27 : 30] Caiaphas was thinking only of the Jewish nation. That one man would die for them, but God had much, much bigger plans. His glory wasn't merely bringing Lazarus out of the tomb, was it?

It wasn't merely one man dying for one nation. His glory, verse 52, is in Jesus dying also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

Yes, he loves the Gentiles, the nations. This is how most of us in this room get in, get a substitute, get a good shepherd. Just as he said in chapter 10, I have other sheep who are not of this fold.

I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice, so there will be one flock, one shepherd.

And now, just as then, our good shepherd makes this a glorious reality by laying down his life for

the sheep.

Friends, the death of Jesus has far-reaching implications. It's not just you and your friends.

[28 : 46] It's not just Southwood. It's not just America. Look at all of these multicolored Smarties. You can have some later, kids. I'll leave them here. Look at all of these.

Jesus is bringing into one family from all nations, from every tribe and tongue and language and nation, from all religious backgrounds and spiritual experiences, one family, children of God, born not of anything human that they did, but born of God.

Do you see the glory of God again? It's always been the plan for his glory. It's bigger than we could have ever imagined. It's been the plan for his glory to fill the earth, for it to go to the uttermost parts of the world, to every nation, and especially to happen through the Messiah.

Isaiah 49. It's too small a thing for the Messiah to be my servant, to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept.

I will also make you a light for the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.

That's where God wants to see his glory go.

[30 : 06] Listen to Isaiah 56. You're gonna have to work on this one, but it's worth it. Foreigners, foreigners, these, verse seven, I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer, for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.

The sovereign Lord declares, he who gathers the exiles of Israel, I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered.

I will bring all peoples to my house, God says. Everybody's coming over. Everybody in one family, he says.

Isn't it ironic that the Jewish leaders here in this passage are protecting the temple from foreigners while Jesus is providing the temple to foreigners?

That's always been God's plan. That's always been his mission. It is so wonderfully gracious and glorious. He doesn't merely reward the deserving who have made their way to him.

[31 : 12] No, he goes and gathers in those who have been scattered far from him and he makes them one with those who have grown up around him their whole lives. Jew and Gentile, black and white, Arab and Israeli, rich and poor, moralistic good kid, lifelong rebel, protester and president into one family.

Why? How? Hold on, are you serious? Because they come to believe not in themselves, not in their agendas, not in their politics, not in their performance, not in their ethnicity, not in their theological savvy, but in Jesus, the resurrection and the life, the one who calls them by name from death to life. They're united by listening to his voice. It's all that matters. So hopeless cases and lost causes and dead to rights people like you and me are great candidates for sons and daughters of the king who gathers outcasts into his family, aren't we?

Anybody in here? You're a good candidate for that if he's the one who gathers the outcasts. I hope you know his love and I hope you know his reach goes to you and beyond you. Do you believe this? Are you living today like you have eternal life with Jesus that has already begun now in relationship with him? Well, are you living today like you have an eternal family with all sorts of people in it that you should start now treating like family?

[32 : 56] Inviting to the dinner table. Learning to love even if it's hard. And I mean there are no limits. But, but, but, no, but nothing.

This is about the glory of God who gives dead people life. Remember? Don't set limits on him. You're not going to invite anyone to your house this week in a stinkier, more hopeless situation than Lazarus.

I guarantee it. and you love and you pray and you hope for them like there's a God who can give them life now and forever like he gave it to you.

How awesome is our God? Even when death flexes its muscles, it doesn't stop our God. It is yet another occasion for him to showcase his glory.

Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God? You're grieving, weak, fearful.

[34 : 08] this glorious God is with you, promises you hope, knows your weakness, cries your tears, shows you his glory, gives his life to give you life.

Let's pray. We praise you, Jesus. Oh, would you give us grace to trust you more.

Don't let us make you small. We believe in you. Help our unbelief. Strengthen our faith. Stir our hearts.

Fill us with hope. Awaken our zeal for you, King Jesus, our great King of glory so that we can be a part of seeing the earth full of the glory of God, of seeing your family, Father, your dinner table full of all those for whom Jesus shed his precious blood.

That is our only hope. Send us to that work with joy because you are with us. We ask it in your name. Amen.

[35 : 31] For more information, visit us online at southwood.org. Thank you.