

JESUS OF NAZARETH IS PASSING BY

What Is He Doing Here?

I. He intercedes for the people gathered here,

II. He does this that we might believe.

John 11:41-44

TEXT: *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."*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

This moment in time is such an amazing lesson for the Church. It's a lesson because it reflects all that God says that He does in behalf of all its members.

It's an amazing lesson because it involves a miracle of which all of us will be personal partakers: The Resurrection from death.

Lazarus, however, is one who will have experienced this miracle **THREE TIMES**. **THREE TIMES?** It only seems like twice: the one recorded here; and the one that will occur at the end of the world, at Christ's coming when He will raise up Lazarus again and all of us with him.

Let us not forget, however, that resurrection of which this same Jesus often spoke when He once told Nicodemus: ***You must be born again!*** That is because all humanity is born spiritually dead even though we come out of the womb physically alive. It is this "born again" reference that the Revelation calls "the First Resurrection": ***Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them...*** Re 20 At your baptism, the Holy Spirit made you spiritually alive! You have taken part in this "first resurrection." Like Lazarus, you also will take part in the resurrection of all the dead at the end of the world.

The Lord did something special in the life of Lazarus. In between Lazarus' spiritual resurrection to faith, and the resurrection that is yet to come at the end of the world, Lazarus died and was brought back to life by Jesus. He will have experienced **THREE RESURRECTIONS**: The first, spiritual resurrection from spiritual death to spiritual life, the one yet to come at the end of the world, and this amazing extra one recorded in John 11 that serves as today's text.

Why? Jesus himself tells us why when he first learned that Lazarus was sick and dying: ***This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it.*** Jn 11 Jesus tells us what He was doing there 2000 years ago in that cemetery in Bethany, just a few miles outside of Jerusalem. From Scripture we learn that this is also why Jesus has passed by and into our lives even today. From this event 2000 years ago, we also are assured that this same Jesus I. He intercedes for the people gathered here; II. He does this that we also might believe.

I. Just before Jesus gave that command for Lazarus to come out of the grave, he prayed: ***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.*** All of this was a set up by God for the purpose of bringing glory to God and to Jesus whom He sent into this world to be our Redeemer. From the moment that Jesus

received the message that Lazarus was sick, to the intentional delay in Jesus' getting to Bethany in time to heal Lazarus, to this moment when He stands outside the grave after Lazarus had already been rotting in the grave for four days, all had been part of a divine plan to perform this miracle.

Don't think for one moment that this had not been a most difficult experience, not only for Lazarus who had suffered so much from some sickness that resulted in his death, but for Mary and Martha who languished in the fleeting hope that Jesus, their personal friend would arrive to heal him. They waited and prayed, but Jesus arrived four days too late. Why? Why does God let his friends suffer like this? ***It is for this same reason: it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it.*** There can be no greater honor on this earth than to be used by God to bring glory to His saving name!

But while we, just like Mary, Martha and Lazarus, are so often dismayed at how suffering and hardship can be a good thing for us and for others, our Lord does what He did for Mary, Martha and Lazarus 2000 years ago: he prays for us. He intercedes in our behalf. Listen carefully to what the Apostle Paul writes to us: ***The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs-heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. ... In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*** Ro 8 This truth puts each and every one of you in the same camp at Lazarus and his sisters. As He "passes by" in this generation in our lives, what is He doing but using us to bring glory to His name, even through our sufferings and hardships. But this is not without His intercession and Spirit's power to make all things work out for our eternal good.

All this is for the benefit of our faith and salvation. At the graveside of Lazarus He prayed: ***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.*** He does this that we also might believe in Him and be saved.

II. The unbelieving souls of this world cannot understand this, nor will they accept these truths. Because they are spiritually dead and blind, they also are hostile to all of God's gracious ways. They are like the unbelievers who also were at Lazarus' funeral. The Bible says that when Jesus finally arrived at Bethany, they ridiculed Him. The Bible says: Some of them said, ***"Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"*** Jn 11 We also are surrounded by many who say that if this Jesus we worship isn't able and willing to hop, skip and jump to the earthly desires that we covet and want, then what good is He? They like the idea of a Jesus who loves them even while they live sinful lives, indulge their passions and lusts, and put worship on the lowest priority if it's even at all on their list of things to do.

Jesus said that in the days before Judgment Day they will be like it was in the days of Noah: ***As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be***

at the coming of the Son of Man. Mt 24 In Noah's day everyone was busy with everyday living, but there was no concern for worship and God's Word. Then it was too late for the Flood suddenly came. Look around at the size of those congregations that still put worship and God's Word and Sacraments at the top of their list of life's priorities and see that our numbers are growing smaller and smaller.

Jesus was not going to let that happen to His friends from Bethany. So even after allowing them to suffer pain and sadness, He suddenly offers them relief. The Bible says: ***"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."*** When the unbelievers saw this they did not believe. Instead they ran to Jesus' enemies who began to plot His crucifixion.

Don't be disheartened or deceived by the unbelief of this world! Yes, Lazarus came out of the grave to live again for a few more years in this world. But the day would come when he would have to go through that process of dying all over again. You and I can be thankful that we will only have to go through that process but once. Yet we know that because this same Jesus is still with us as our God and Lord. This same Jesus who declared that day in Bethany: ***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. Do you believe this?*** Jn 11 ...is also the one to whom we declare: Yes! I believe! And so we are able to endure all of life's hardships with the full knowledge that our Savior will raise us from death to eternal life when He comes on Judgment Day.

Until then, we can know that our lives on this earth are being used in ways that bring glory to our God. We believe this because Jesus has prayed that this should be so. Amen.