

## ***WHAT WERE THEY THINKING?***

Well, it is Sunday morning and it is a very special day. It is a special day not because the calendar and the world tell us that this morning is Easter Sunday. That isn't the reason at all. In fact, that has almost nothing to do with the fact that this is a special day. You see, God is the one who has told us that this is a very special day—in fact, in Revelation 1:10, it is given a name. God calls it “*the Lord's day!*”

And although every day is a gift from God, this particular day, and I'm talking about this day as the first day of the week, not the 20<sup>th</sup> of April, this is the day that since the time of the apostles, Christians have gathered to remember the death and resurrection of Christ. And so we came this morning to do that and it renews our spirit and faith to do as we have done, sharing in the Lord's Supper together. In doing that, we remember that it was for our sins that He died. And we are thankful that in this weekly observance we can proclaim to the world not only His death and resurrection, but also that we have received God's mercy and forgiveness. As Christians striving to let God's Word direct our every word and work, we pledge ourselves to keep on proclaiming the Lord's death in this way until he comes again, or He calls for us to come to him.

I do want to talk about the resurrection this morning. Some of you may have come expecting or wanting to hear a message on the resurrection, and I don't want to disappoint you. However, I am going to be mostly talking about someone else's resurrection; that of a man named Lazarus. We are going to take our lesson today from the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> chapters of the gospel of John. It is going to be a lesson on the resurrection, but it won't be the lesson you might have expected! You might want to open your Bibles to John, chapter 11 and take note of some things that are recorded for us.

First of all, let's recall what was going on in that chapter. This is about the time Jesus was called to come to Bethany which was the home of his friends Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Bethany was situated just a few miles to the southeast of Jerusalem and had become a regular stopping place for Jesus when he traveled from Galilee to Judea. From Capernaum in Galilee to Bethany in Judea, Jesus had to travel about an hundred miles or a little further. So it wasn't the kind of trip you could make in an afternoon. It was a trip that took several days.

Chapter 11 begins by telling us that Lazarus had become ill. Verse 3 tells us that the sisters, Mary and Martha, sent Jesus a message that his friend, their brother, was sick. They may not have said it so many words, but we would be safe in assuming that they were really saying, “Please come quickly!” Surprisingly, verse 6 tells us that when Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, he did not leave immediately. He waited a couple of days. We aren't told just how much time was involved in all of this, but we do know that after two days Jesus decided to go to Judea. After addressing some of his disciple's fears about returning to Judea where the Jewish leaders had wanted to have Jesus killed, Jesus told them that Lazarus had died. So they made the journey; verse 17 telling that by the time they arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had been in the tomb four days.

When they arrived, the first person to meet Jesus was Martha. Mary had remained behind at their home. **Verse 21** says Martha said, *“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.”* And Jesus said to her—this is **verse 23**, *“Your brother will rise again.”* *“Martha said to him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.’”* And at that point, Jesus says something very interesting, look at **verse 25**: *“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”* That’s what I want you to see and think about this morning. I want you to get your mind and heart wrapped around that. What does that mean that Jesus said, *“I am the resurrection and the life?”* What does that mean to us? I’m telling you, this is good news! You won’t hear anything better today, or for the rest of your life? I think Jesus was trying to show us something here, but we have to be willing to see it. We have to take the time to see it and to think about it, or we will just miss it. And if we miss it . . . well, God doesn’t want us to miss it!

It’s a riddle, really. Jesus said, *“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”* What does that mean, *“I am the resurrection?”* We know Jesus was raised from the dead, and we know he had divine powers, but what did he mean, *“I am the resurrection?”* Well, he says, *“I am the resurrection and the life.”* I think the one explains the other. What is life if it is only going to end in death? There’s not much to it, is there? I think that is what is bothering so many people today, those who drink the kool-aid and have convinced themselves that God does not exist. It bothers them that life is so short, that it ends in death. If one lives with that sort of worldview, they can muster up all the courage they can and talk about dreams and destinies and purpose and meaning, but they know—deep down inside of them—that the grave turns all of that into a bunch of nonsense. Unless there is life after death and unless there is a resurrection, then life is a cruel joke. As Shakespeare put it, *“much ado about nothing.”* Jesus said, *“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”*

Think about that, will you? I get amused watching the world get all worked up at this time of the year over the resurrection of Christ. Sure it was a great thing, but Jesus didn’t come to give us another holy day; another excuse for taking a day off. He didn’t come to make some big splashy headline! He came to give us a reason to live! He came to make it possible for us to never ever have to fear death, or worry about our mortality. He’s got that problem solved. He’s the resurrection and the life!

So, you can think about that and you can believe in him and let Him become the Lord of your life and the Savior of your soul, or you can act like unbelievers frantically trying to get in all the life you can in the few years you have left. You can devote your life to work and money and things that are not going to amount to a hill of beans when this life is over, or you can devote your life to being a follower of Christ and to the kingdom of God.

Well, going back to the story in chapter 11, after Jesus and Martha spoke for a little while, she arose and went to her sister and told her that Jesus wanted to see her. She came to Jesus and

essentially told him the same thing that Martha had said, *“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”* Verse 33 tells that Jesus was deeply moved by her sorrow, and verse 35 tells us that even Jesus began weeping. He then went to the tomb, which was really a cave, closed with a large stone. Even though he was warned by Martha that by now there would be a strong odor, Jesus told them to move the stone. **Verse 40** says Jesus said, *“Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?”* So the stone was removed—read with me **verses 41-44**:

*So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42) 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.” 43) When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” 44) 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.”*

Don’t you know that was something to see! This was something that those who were present would never forget! They would be telling people and their grandchildren for years to come what they saw that day!

But, it wasn’t such a great day for everybody. I don’t know why not! I think it is strange. It’s a mystery! Why didn’t everybody with a fifteen-thousand mile radius jump for joy that day! I don’t know why, but they didn’t, and verses 47-53 tell us that when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard about this, it was very upsetting news to them. They weren’t in awe! They didn’t feel inclined to believe. They weren’t attracted to Jesus. Instead they said, *“What are we going to do? For this man performs many signs!”* Now isn’t that an amazing confession? They said, *“He does many signs”* which was another word for miracles. You would think that miracles would have convinced them that Jesus was the Son of God. You know what they say: “Seeing is believing!” But of course, blind people cannot see, and there are none so blind as those who will not see.

These people understood that Jesus performed many signs, but all they could see was this was likely going to lead to more trouble for them. **Verse 53** says, *“So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.”* **Verse 57** says, *“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.”* Now what were they thinking? Think about that! How do you put to death someone who is the resurrection and the life? I use to read the Superman comics and wonder, why did those stupid crooks and bad guys continue to waste their bullets on Superman? Bullets could not stop Superman, and death could not stop the Lord! I’m not suggesting that Superman was real or that Jesus is just a made-up story. I just think it is amazing that they thought they could put to death the One who is the Resurrection and the life!

Well, that isn’t the end of the story! Jump with me down to the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter, beginning in **verse 9**. There is something here that is when you read it, you just have to wonder, “What were they thinking?” Look at **verses 9-11 of chapter 12**:

*When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 10) So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, 11) because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.*

I want you to see, first of all, there in verse 10 that it says, “*the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well.*” Did you hear that, “the chief priests.” That’s a plural noun, which is very interesting! It is interesting because that tells us that this wasn’t the deranged thinking of an isolated person. This was a conspiracy! This was a conspiracy involving several people. We cannot be exactly sure who these high priests were, but likely they were those who were authorized to carry on the duties within the Temple. They were the leaders of all the priests who served in the Judaistic religion. They were the ones who controlled what happened, and when, and for whom, and by whom. Furthermore, these were the people that the Jewish people looked to for spiritual guidance. They were supposed to be the moral and spiritual models for everyone to follow.

Notice also that verse 10 says they “*made plans.*” This wasn’t just some immediate reaction brought about by something that had angered them. This was something they had had time to think about, and talk about, and meditate on. No doubt this was something they even took time to pray about!

They were making plans. They were thinking things through about the *who* and the *what* and the *when* and the *how*. The shooter up in Kansas City last week, killed three people. Why did he do that? What would lead a man to purposefully go out and kill people? Let me tell you what causes that? It is hatred that goes all the way to the bone. That’s what was happening with these chief priests. But notice **verse 10**, John tells us that they were making plans to put Lazarus to death “as well.” They were planning a double homicide!

Not only did they want to put Jesus to death, they wanted to have Lazarus killed as well. You see, they weren’t just planning on confronting Jesus, or having him arrested, or having him beaten, or giving him a stern warning. No, they wanted Jesus dead, even if it meant that they would have to close their eyes to murder in order to make it happen.

But why did they want to kill Lazarus? We know why, don’t we? In **verse 11**, it says, “*because on account of him*—that is, Lazarus—*many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.*” Lazarus had become a living billboard promoting Jesus! Even if they could get rid of Jesus, they couldn’t afford to let Lazarus go on living. He would have to die as well.

Keep in mind that many of these chief priests would have been Sadducees. And we know from places like Matthew 22:23, and Acts 23:8 that the Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection. So as long as Lazarus was alive, there was a pretty good argument they were wrong! He was a living, breathing one-of-us type of local guy that there was no explaining away. As long as

Lazarus lived, he was living proof that they were wrong, and amazingly, to them, killing him seemed better than admitting they were wrong!

Not only that, with Lazarus alive, he was living proof that Jesus really could perform miracles, undeniable miracles. That became conflicting evidence—so far as these men were concerned—that Jesus truly was divine. That’s why they wanted to kill not only Jesus, but also Lazarus.

Now I want you to think about what went down here. I mean, what were they thinking? First of all, who did they think they were dealing with here? Surely it was obvious as the nose on their face that Jesus was not just some rabble rouser, some over-zealous preacher! As Nicodemus, one of those “*rulers of the Jews*” mentioned in chapter 3, had said earlier, “*No man can do the signs you do unless God is with him.*” These people knew that!

This teaches us a very critical point: Unbelief is rarely ever due to a lack of evidence! Unbelief is usually driven by something else. Men do not reject the truth because there are no facts. They reject the truth because the facts get in their way!

Furthermore, what were these men thinking? They wanted to kill Lazarus as well as Jesus. Now, unless they figured on killing Jesus first, do you think it ever occurred to them that if Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead once, that he could do it again?

This teaches us another very critical point, and that is, don’t expect people with a biased agenda to be persuaded by logic and reason. Don’t expect them to be capable of coherent thinking and behavior. I mean think about it, they are plotting murder; double homicide! Does that sound like rational thinking? Does that sound like spiritual thinking? Do you get the idea that they had spent many hours on their knees praying about this? I don’t think so!

Oh, we read this stuff and we think to ourselves, “what kind of idiots were they!” Well, they were the same kind of idiots that too often, we are today. Tell me, what kind of idiot is it that thinks they are honoring God by remembering the resurrection of Christ once a year, and doing that with pretty colored eggs that an Easter bunny is supposed to have left all over the place? Now, I’m not against having an Easter egg hunt, let me make that clear! What I’m saying is that unless people really come to grips with who Jesus is, and truly let Him be the Lord of their life, they are going to do all kinds of stupid things.

- What are people thinking when they show up for worship on Easter Sunday but then go missing the rest of the year?
- What are people thinking when they live like the devil all week long, wearing a gold cross around their neck? Do they think God is going to see that and say, “Oh, what a good person that is?”
- What are people thinking when they come to places like this, to come into the presence of God, but refuse to let Him really get into their heart?

- What are people thinking when they have a chance to know, and follow Him who is the resurrection and the life, but think to themselves that is something they will think about more later?

So the question I leave with you this morning is this: Not, “What were they thinking?” but “What are you thinking?”