

Text: John 11:1-57

Title: Believe because He is the Resurrection and the Life.

Time: Easter morning, 4/20/2025

Place: NBBC

Introduction: The most prolific hymn writer the church of Christ has ever known was a woman who was struck with blindness at six weeks of age due to incompetent medical care. Her name was Fanny Crosby. "Once a well-intentioned Scotch minister remarked to her, 'I think it is a great pity that the Master, when He showered so many gifts upon you, did not give you sight.' Her rebuke came quickly, 'Do you know that if at birth I had been able to make one petition to my Creator, it would have been that I should be born blind?' 'Why?' asked the clergyman. 'Because, when I get to heaven, the first face that shall ever gladden my sight will be that of my Savior'" [Kenneth Osbeck, *101 Hymn Stories*, p. 167].

Fanny Crosby wrote a well-beloved hymn about this expectation of hers called, "My Savior First of All." The second verse emphasizes the anticipation for seeing the face of Christ that she felt:

"Oh, the soul-thrilling rapture when I view His blessed face,
And the luster of His kindly beaming eye;
How my full heart will praise Him for the mercy, love, and
grace,
That prepare for me a mansion in the sky."

Of the 8000 or so poems like this that Miss Crosby wrote, this stanza perhaps more than any other summarizes the faith that made this servant of Christ such a blessing to His church. She looked forward to seeing the glory of Christ, and in spite of her blindness those who read her work understand that she could already see plenty with her eyes of faith.

By way of contrast, John 11 is full of people who in a physical sense could see the Lord Jesus perfectly well, yet still they lacked the vision that Fanny Crosby possessed. They needed to see His glory as the Resurrection and the Life, not merely His physical appearance (11:1-4, 11:40, the glory of God is the glory of the Resurrection and the Life – 11:25). This kind of sight comes not from opening your eyes, but rather from believing in your heart.

I want us to examine the sight of the men and women Christ cares for in this passage – His disciples, Martha, Mary, the Jewish friends of Lazarus, and the Pharisees – and I want us to think about what they could and could not see, and why.

I. The disciples could not see the glory of the Lord's love because of their fear (vv. 1-16).

Illustration: Every loving parent knows what it is like to have to deal with a child's fear while encouraging him to try something new. The new thing promises to be a great blessing in the child's life, but all that the child can see is that which causes him fear and terror. If your kids were like mine, learning how to swim and to enjoy time in the water was a bit like this. Maybe it was riding a bike for the first time, or getting that child to join you on the rollercoaster.

Application: We adults can be like that as the Lord asks us to walk down a path that looks a bit troubling. For the disciples of the Lord in John 11, great blessing awaited in Bethany, but all that they could see were circumstances that caused them great fear. Note that their fears were not unfounded (v. 54).

The disciples try to express a concern for the Lord's well-being in these verses. They are very pious in their warning that Christ could be hurt in Bethany (v. 8), and they are seemingly unselfish in their relief about the sleep of Lazarus (v. 12). But in the end, Thomas blows their cover, and the truth comes out

(v. 16, “so that we may die with Him”). They were full of fear when it came to following the Lord, because they were focused on themselves. They did not want to die.

But they were talking to the Resurrection and the Life. Jesus says that following Him is kind of like knowing where you are going because you are walking in the daylight (vv. 8-9). God is the one who gives us 12 hours of daylight every day, and He is the one who determines how long the daylight of our life will last as well. We need not fear because His light tells us that He is in control.

Illustration: Some of the great hymns of the faith were written during serious pandemics, much worse than the COVID-19 issue we faced not long ago. The Swiss reformer, Ulrich Zwingli, contracted the black plague in the 16th century, but later recovered. He wrote a hymn that we remember today as Zwingli’s plague hymn. It expresses his faith in the Lord while walking in the valley of the shadow of death. Here is how Zwingli ends his song:

“My God! My Lord!
Healed by the hand.
Upon the earth
Once more I stand.

“Though now delayed,
My hour will come.
Involved, perchance,
In deeper gloom.

“Let sin no more
Rule over me;
My mouth shall sing
Alone to thee.

“But, let it come;
With joy I’ll rise,
And bear my yoke
Straight to the skies.”

Our hour of death will come, but not before our 12 hours of daylight determined by the Lord expire. And even then, we who know the Resurrection and the Life can say, “Let it come; with joy I’ll rise and bear my yoke straight to the skies!” This is Easter faith. We need not fear death with Thomas.

II. Martha could not see the glory of the Lord's love because of her disappointment (vv. 17-27, 39-40).

Illustration: Dr. Panosean summarized all theology with three truths: God is great; God is good; and thou God seest me. Martha seemed to understand the first two of these, but she was missing the last important one on this occasion.

Notice how she soldiers on with wonderful truth: the omnipotence of Christ (v. 22), the resurrection of the saints in the last day (vv. 23-24), the preexistence of Jesus Christ as the Son of God (v. 27). But in spite of all this truth, Martha still objects that the Lord has made a miscalculation in her particular case (vv. 21, 39). Her problem was that she needed to see in the Lord the glory of what she knew about the Lord (v. 40). She knew that she had a Lord who is omnipotent and preexistent, but she needed to experience what it is like to have a Lord who is omnipotent and preexistent. She needed to both know about Him and see Him in action in her behalf in a way that changed her life personally.

Did you notice how the Lord taught her that she had this need? He purposefully gave her some reason to believe the opposite (vv. 6, 21). Did you notice why? The *therefore* in verse 6 points us back to verse 5 to find out why the Lord did what He did the way He did. It was because Jesus loved Martha.

The middle of Zwingli's hymn recounts what it was like for him to experience the black death in his darkest days of sickness, a sickness that the Lord allowed him to endure:

"My pains increase;
Haste to console;
For fear and woe
Seize body and soul.

"Death is at hand.
My senses fail.
My tongue is dumb;
Now, Christ, prevail.

“Lo! Satan strains
To snatch his prey;
I feel his grasp;
Must I give way?

“He harms me not,
I fear no loss,
For here I lie
Beneath thy cross.”

Disappointment is never the right response to the Resurrection and the Life. We need eyes of faith to see His personal care for our situation in love, and with Zwingli to see that we need not fear any loss, for even in the valley of the shadow of death, we lie here—beneath our Savior’s cross. He loved us enough to die for our sins to give us salvation full and free. He will not fail to care for us now.

III. Mary could not see the Lord’s love in her weeping (vv. 28-38).

Application: Ordinarily, Mary could see far more than others. John credits her at the beginning of the chapter with being the one who later anoints Christ before the scolding disciples (John 11:2, 12:3-8). The Gospels present Mary as someone with a penchant for sitting at the feet of Jesus (Luke 10:39). Here we learn that she knew Christ as Teacher and fell again at his feet in her great sorrow (John 11:28, 11:32). Do you know Jesus Christ as Teacher this morning? Have you heard his call to come and sit at His feet and hear Him teach? What a glorious privilege is ours! How can we not avail ourselves daily of it?

This time, however, sorrow kept Mary from seeing the glory of her Teacher (v. 32). She mourns as though she has lost hope. The Lord expresses tremendous emotion in this passage as well, but His weeping is different than Mary’s. Mary weeps (v. 33); Jesus Christ sheds tears (v. 35; a different word in the original). Mary despairs; Jesus Christ rises up in the hot emotion of scolding anger at the forces that make Mary and her friends despair and weep. His tears came from his groaning (11:33, 38 – ἐμβριμάομαι), a word that refers to stern warning and scolding in the NT (Matt. 9:30, Mark 1:43, 14:5).

Jesus confronts this situation with the emotion of a warrior whose loved one has been forced to needlessly suffer. The early 20th century Princeton theologian, B. B. Warfield, writes this about Christ's emotion here: "It is death that is the object of his wrath, and behind death him who has the power of death, and whom he has come into the world to destroy. Tears of sympathy may fill his eyes, but this is incidental. His soul is held by rage: and he advances to the tomb, in Calvin's words, 'as a champion who prepares for conflict'. The raising of Lazarus thus becomes, not an isolated marvel, but . . . a decisive instance and open symbol of Jesus' conquest of death and hell. . . . Not in cold unconcern, but in flaming wrath against the foe, Jesus smites in our behalf. He has not only saved us from the evils which oppress us; he has felt for and with us in our oppression, and under the impulse of these feelings has wrought out our redemption" (Tasker, 140).

This is the glory of the love of Christ. May our weeping never cause us to fail to see the glory of His compassion for us.

IV. The people who stood by saw the glory of the Resurrection and the Life for the very first time (vv. 41-45).

Application: The reason God put this account in His Word for us to read is as plain as the reason Jesus prayed out loud to the Father as He called Lazarus from the dead. It is because of the people standing around—in our case sitting around—so that they and we may believe that God sent Him (v. 42). We are told that many believed in Him when they saw dead Lazarus come out of the tomb.

Having seen the glory of the Resurrection and the Life, Jesus Christ, from our passage this morning, will you believe? Listen one more time to what Zwingli could see right from the start of his plague hymn:

“Help me, O Lord,
My strength and rock;
Lo, at the door
I hear death’s knock.

“Yet, if thy voice,
In life’s midday.
Recalls my soul,
Then I obey.

“Uplift thine arm,
Once pierced for me,
That conquered death.
And set me free.

“In faith and hope
Earth I resign.
Secure of heaven.
For I am Thine.”

These Jews believed. Zwingli believed. Do you this morning?

V. Some Jews could not see the glory of the Resurrection and the Life because of their religion (vv. 46-57).

Application: A man’s body, dead and decaying for four days, walked out of the tomb. Jesus Christ had demonstrated His ability to conquer the last enemy, death itself. He did so showing men His glory that they might trust Him as their glorious Savior. And upon hearing this news, some could think of nothing more than what all this was going to cost them politically (v. 48).

Rather than rejoice in the Messiah’s victory over death, they wanted to kill the Messiah – rid themselves and their world of His influence. This is the tragic response of many today to the offer of salvation in Jesus Christ. They respond this way because He proves their religion wrong.

The Apostle John, who was there, has written this account for us. What will we do with the fact that he writes of a man who caused his friend to come out of the tomb four days after that friend had died? What will we do with His claim that we must believe on Him to have eternal life? Will we believe what John has written and what Christ has done and claimed, or will we think we have little need of this, trusting that our

religion tells us that we are already good enough without Him?

Conclusion: The unbelief of the Jews could not conquer the glory of the Lord. Caiaphas's cold political calculations are actually used by the Lord to prophecy the coming victory of Christ (vv. 49-52). Because Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life, those who killed Him could not keep Him dead. Instead, they only facilitated His purpose, "to gather together in one the children of God."

Have you been gathered, or are you still scattered abroad? Is He gathering you even now, letting you see His glory as your Resurrection and your Life? If so, in faith thank Him for your salvation. Thank Him for dying on the cross and rising again. Thank Him for saving you from your sins.

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching