



Outlined

John 11:1-45

SLIDES ON EXPECTATIONS IN LIFE

What happens when our expectations don't meet up with reality? We are upset, saddened, depressed, shocked.

What happens when our expectations are exceeded? The reverse of the above. We are pleased, elated, surprised, lifted.

EXPECTATIONS

What about our expectations of God? How often have we been deflated, even put in a crisis of faith when God didn't do what we wanted or expected Him to do? How often have we found God has amazed us, doing something unexpected or beyond all we could ask or think?

Apart from anything else, the story of the raising of Lazarus was one where Jesus didn't do anything that friends and people around Him expected.

SERIES SLIDE

This is the last in our series on the seven miracles of Jesus in John's gospel – signs given to us that we might know that Jesus is the Son of God and that in believing, we might have life in His name. The signs are all spectacular and defy all the natural laws, and none more so that the raising of Lazarus – a man who had been sick, who died, whose body was embalmed, wrapped in strips of cloth and buried in a tomb for many days. He was well and truly “brown bread” yet Jesus raised him from death. Jesus didn't just have power over nature, over the health of the living, but power over death too.

That in itself was amazing, yet it was how everyone got to this point is the main focus of John's story. Last time we saw how the Pharisees were just befuddled by Jesus. They never denied the miracle, but just couldn't understand one could be performed on the Sabbath and rejected Jesus despite the facts. They couldn't see that they were wrong.

This time we are looking at the expectations of those who did believe and follow Jesus.

MAP

So what happened? Jesus was out of Judea on the other side of Jordan – the Jewish leaders were after capturing Him and having Him killed. Jesus was safe on the other side of the Jordan as he was out of their jurisdiction, so for the disciples, not being in Judea was a pretty safe thing to do. Their common sense advice to Jesus was I'm sure to keep out of Judea until the heat is off. But then Lazarus, back in Bethany, near Jerusalem became ill. Death beckoned for poor old Lazarus. The family were close friends of Jesus, they had seen so many miracles, so it was not unreasonable that they should ask Him to heal Lazarus. So they send a message.

And what did Jesus do when He got the message? Did He rush to His dear friend? No. He stayed where He was for two more days.

VERSE

I'm sure the disciples were bemused by Jesus actions but were happy with His explanation. *"The final result of this sickness will not be the death of Lazarus; this has happened in order to bring glory to God, and it will be the means by which the Son of God will receive glory."* Lazarus was going to be OK it would seem. Jesus said so and that was good enough for them as He was always right anyway. Besides, there were risks going back to Judea so the disciples were happy with that – but then less so when Jesus then decides to return after two days.

This is shown by their reaction to Jesus wanting to go back after the two days break - they tried to stone you and you want to go back?

VERSE

But Jesus of course drops the bombshell: *11 Jesus said this and then added, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I will go and wake him up." 12 The disciples answered, "If he is asleep, Lord, he will get well." 13 Jesus meant that Lazarus had died, but they thought he meant natural sleep. 14 So Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, 15 but for your sake I am glad that I was not with him, so that you will believe. Let us go to him." 16 Thomas (called the Twin) said to his fellow disciples, "Let us all go along with the Teacher, so that we may die with him!"* (what a cheerful chap, but it does illustrate the worry they disciples had with the dangers in Judea).

This was probably a surprise for the disciples because Jesus said the sickness would not result in Lazarus' death and now He has said that Lazarus is dead and going back to Judea even though it was unsafe. What was going on? No wonder Thomas was so cheerful!

If we know Jesus as Saviour, we are His disciples, but how often have we been faced with being sure that we have been led by Jesus into something only to find it is fraught with problems and danger. Maybe you are in that place right now. What's Jesus doing? What's going on? Our expectations of Jesus are being brought under test – things aren't working out as we think they should.

In the story, the seemingly conflicting statements from Jesus were all part of God's purposes for this situation. We know the story, so we can see the end of it so we understand how it was to the glory of God and how it would raise the faith of the disciples. But at this point in time it was mystifying for them.

God sometimes places us in situations like this and we just can't make sense of His purposes but we have to trust Him, and sometimes that takes an enormous leap of faith because it isn't what we expected. The only thing I can say is to remind yourself of situations in the past where prayer has been answered and God changed things. The disciples found that day that they had a reference point to look back to which would remind them of just how powerful Jesus is when they faced strange situations and persecution later in their lives.

VERSE

Or at least remember this verse: Romans 8:28 (GNB) *We know that in all things God works for good with those who love him, those whom he has called according to his purpose.*

Let's go to Martha and Mary, Lazarus' sisters. They had a different expectation of Jesus. They both said this: "If you had been here, Lord, my brother would not have died!" It was not an exclamation of anger, just of resignation. They assumed Jesus would have healed him if He had get there in time. They didn't know that Jesus actually delayed to make sure he did. She then

said "But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask him for."

What did she expect by saying that? Probably something that would ease their sorrow and help them come without a man around the house. It certainly wasn't a request to raise Lazarus to life.

VERSE

"Your brother will rise to life," Jesus told her. 24 "I know," she replied, "that he will rise to life on the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will live, even though they die; 26 and those who live and believe in me will never die. Do you believe this?" 27 "Yes, Lord!" she answered. "I do believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

Great words from Jesus, but the reply doesn't suggest that she got it that Jesus was going to raise Lazarus there and then.

In one sense I find it strange that she didn't. We know of two previous occasions where Jesus raised the dead: Jairus' daughter and the son of the widow of Nain. That said, Lazarus was a step on from both. They were freshly dead. Lazarus was a well-off person who had died, been covered in embalming spices and put in a tomb four days previous. Could someone that dead be raised. In Martha's mind no. She was thinking resurrection on the last day. Jesus wasn't.

What is our expectation of what Jesus can do in our lives. I believe God called us as ordinary people to do extraordinary things, as individual disciples and as His church. But are we like the disciples who thought ordinary and couldn't fathom Jesus' intentions because they were worried about the risk to their lives? Or like Martha who was quite happy to spiritualise the words of Jesus for an amazing time in the future, and couldn't see that Jesus wants to do something now.

This is a theme I'm going to return to in the new year, because my theme for 2014 is realising the potential God has for us. What we think is encouraging is nothing compared to How God wants to encourage us.

Perhaps the person that most illustrates this is Mary. Unlike Martha, she was just too upset to say anything other than "If you had been here, Lord, my brother would not have died!" For the fact she says very little would tend to suggest that she felt a little like the people around who commented: "He gave sight to the blind man, didn't he? Could he not have kept Lazarus from dying?" Even if He was away, He could have spoken and Lazarus would have been healed. But Jesus had made no effort whatsoever – He just left Lazarus to die. On the face of it his statement to the disciples must have looked very wrong in those moments before Jesus went to the tomb. *"The final result of this sickness will not be the death of Lazarus; this has happened in order to bring glory to God, and it will be the means by which the Son of God will receive glory."* We know the end of the story. The final result of the sickness did not end in death – Lazarus was raised back to life.

The worse thing we can do is question why Jesus doesn't do things. The issue was that they expected Jesus to raise Lazarus to life. They were His friends, His disciples. They let Him know Lazarus was dead. And Jesus left Him to die. How could Jesus do such a terrible thing.

How many times have we questioned our faith because Jesus didn't do what we wanted even though it seemed a reasonable thing to us. How often have we been left in difficult and painful

situations and don't know why? Or something bad has happened and we just say "why Lord?" Or what of those people who have walked away from their faith already because they think God has let them down?

God does have His purposes. They are different from ours. We are fortunate with this story. We have the full tale. But we can also see in the heat of the moment that the disciples and the family only had part of the story. They never conceived what Jesus was going to do and how He was going to do it until it was done.

What do we learn from this story:

1. God through Jesus always does more than we can ask or imagine – allow Him to stretch your mind today.
2. Be patient. God has His own time and that isn't the same as mine!
3. Don't constrain God with our own expectations but allow Him to show you the potential in the situation He presents you with.

Eph 3: 20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

*Preached by Mark Reid
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Unpacked

John 1:1-45

We looked at the broad strokes of this passage this morning, so I thought this evening that we would look more deeply at three aspects of this passage this evening which warrant further consideration, as well as being something useful to meditate on as we prepare for another week.

8 "Teacher," the disciples answered, "just a short time ago the people there wanted to stone you; and are you planning to go back?" 9 Jesus said, "A day has twelve hours, doesn't it? So those who walk in broad daylight do not stumble, for they see the light of this world. 10 But if they walk during the night they stumble, because they have no light."

Eph 3: 20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

The disciples thought Jesus was mad to go back to Judea, but Jesus utters these words. What did He mean? The picture itself is straightforward. Have you ever tried to go for a walk after midnight now the council switch off the lights? It's deadly! You just can't see over the kerbs if it isn't moonlit. In the day it's no problem, daylight means you can see where you're going.

The disciples saw return to Judea as dangerous. Why would Jesus want to return. Even after Jesus said this, He then spoke of Lazarus being asleep and needing to be awoken. They were mystified because if you are sick, a few days in bed does a world of good! It needed spelling out and even then poor old pessimist Thomas still makes a sarky comment about them all dying as well! Some commentators are more generous to Thomas and suggest Thomas may be referring to a possible martyrdom of Jesus and a willingness to die with Jesus, but a gut reading and knowledge of John 20 suggests that Thomas had a negative streak in him which came out from time to time.

The disciples didn't see the full picture because spiritually they weren't walking in the daylight but in the night and they couldn't see the spiritual daylight as well as Jesus could. This has implications for us:

- realise our spiritual limitations and that it is easy for us to stumble when we are not aware of God's purposes for a situation.
- ask that God will reveal His will and His way to us, but also for grace to trust Him when we know we are in the dark.

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will live, even though they die; 26 and those who live and believe in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Eph 3: 20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

This is a favourite for funeral services! This was in the discourse with Martha. Jesus said

Lazarus would be raised. She thought it would be on the last day. Jesus meant right then. Then we have these words. Martha still thought that Jesus meant at the end of time, but Jesus is making a much wider point. He is the resurrection and the life. Death and life are in His hand. He has the power to raise the dead, not at some later time, but anywhere and any time.

Actually there is a difference between resurrection now and resurrection on the last day which we considered last Sunday morning. People who are raised now die again. Lazarus ended up brown bread eventually. The same for everyone in the Bible who was resurrected and everyone since. They were raised and God was glorified – then they died again. (Of course I know there is one exception – Jesus!) It is the same for all recipients of miracles. The healed get sick again, the resurrected die again. What Jesus did that day was for that day, and eventually for John's record: that Jesus brought glory to God because He raised Lazarus and many believed. And in reading this, the intention is that we should believe who Jesus is and in believing, we will receive life in His name.

But the I am saying goes further than this which is what the raising of Lazarus was pointing to. Let me read it again:

5 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will live, even though they die; 26 and those who live and believe in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

The raising of Lazarus demonstrated that Jesus has power over death – and life. From this point on John recalls the events of the last week of Jesus' life and ultimately Jesus' own death on the cross and His raising to life again. All the bits in the jigsaw of signs John gives us then fit together. The One who created the world, who created the human race; who demonstrated His power in these signs, ultimately showed Himself worthy and able to die to deal with our sins. The proof of it all was in His power over death. It was the next step on from Lazarus – because He was raised never to die again, being the forerunner of the time when His people will be raised too – which is what we considered last Sunday.

Because Jesus has power over death and life, He ensures that whether we are physically alive or dead, as His people, our lives continue in Him eternally. His ability to raise the dead, and to rise from death Himself, means that we can be sure that when He says *those who believe in me will live, even though they die; 26 and those who live and believe in me will never die* is a promise to us. Whether we are dead or alive as human beings, in Christ we will always live. So we can face both life and death in the confidence that we will live eternally.

It reminds me of some verses we considered earlier this year in *Colossians: 1 You have been raised to life with Christ, so set your hearts on the things that are in heaven, where Christ sits on his throne at the right side of God. 2 Keep your minds fixed on things there, not on things here on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 Your real life is Christ and when he appears, then you too will appear with him and share his glory!*

Eph 3: 20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

We need to take this on board. It doesn't matter what happens to us, we belong to Christ. We were spiritually dead, but we are now alive. We are physically alive but one day we will be dead (if Christ doesn't return). But whatever happens our lives are hidden with Christ in God. We live on but one day we will be resurrected and we will appear with Him. Let's live our spiritual lives without fear and seek to serve and please a Saviour who has made us alive in Him eternally, whatever the future for our bodies is.

33 Jesus saw her weeping, and he saw how the people with her were weeping also; his heart was touched, and he was deeply moved. 34 "Where have you buried him?" he asked them. "Come and see, Lord," they answered. 35 Jesus wept.

Why did Jesus weep at the grave of Lazarus when He knew that He was going to raise him to life? In fact the weeping was part of a demonstration of very strong emotions from Jesus. The Greek word for wept in verse 35 is different from the word used to describe the weeping of others in the chapter. It isn't snivelling into a Kleenex. It's loud, open lamentation. What moved Jesus so much when He knew Lazarus was to be raised?

I've seen a few theories for this over the years but I always try to look at what's in the passage and it's in these following verses:

39 "Take the stone away!" Jesus ordered. Martha, the dead man's sister, answered, "There will be a bad smell, Lord. He has been buried four days!" 40 Jesus said to her, "Didn't I tell you that you would see God's glory if you believed?" 41 They took the stone away. Jesus looked up and said, "I thank you, Father, that you listen to me. 42 I know that you always listen to me, but I say this for the sake of the people here, so that they will believe that you sent me."

Jesus had been completely open with His disciples and Martha. Lazarus was dead but He was going to raise Him. But here we are at the tomb and for Martha the penny hadn't dropped. Jesus was surrounded by people who believed but didn't believe. In fact there were some there who would witness the power of God at work – Jesus made sure they knew that in the way He prays in verse 42 – and would go away and plot His death.

The tragedy of this scene was that there was a whole sea of people who had witnessed three years of power, three years of teaching and prophecy, but who still hadn't grasped the most basic thing about Him. No wonder Jesus lamented. For many the raising of Lazarus would change things, but for others the reverse would happen.

We have a Saviour who laments when people in our world, hear the message, see answered prayer, see miracles, and yet continue to live in their unbelief, sin and rebellion. The hear of the Saviour weeps for them.

I believe that our Saviour weeps for us too as we hear the testimony of scripture, see what God is doing in the world today, see what is wrought in our lives by Him; yet like Martha we still fall short of realising what God wants to do through us. It's a tragedy.

If we get nothing else out of this passage, then remember this. We have a Saviour who weeps loudly for all those who don't follow Him. He also weeps loudly for those who do, but whose expectations fall well below what He wants for us. These things are written not to make us feel guilty, but to also realise how enthusiastically He responds when we come in repentance and expectancy of what He wants to do in our lives and in His church.

Eph 3: 20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.