

“The Preview” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Lent 5 – March 26, 2023

- I. **John 11:25-27** – ²⁵Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?” ²⁷She said to Him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”
- II. **The world needs Jesus and the Gospel message.**
 - a. Donald Miller, who wrote a few books and is one of the people who helped start Imago Dei Church in downtown Portland, wrote about giving a lecture to students at a Christian college.
 - b. He started out by telling them... “I’m going to present you the Gospel, but I’m going to leave out one very important element.”
 - i. So He dives into all the trouble and sin that are going on in our society today.
 - ii. Things like, “homosexuality, abortion, drug use, song lyrics on the radio, newspaper headlines, and so on.”
 - iii. He went on to say that the wages of sin is death, talked about teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and all the supporting statistics.
 - iv. He then went into how the way sin separates us from God...
 - v. He talked about the importance of morality... telling all these stories, and explaining how righteous living was better.
 - vi. He talked about the greatness of heaven... about repentance how our lives could be more God-honoring and God-centered.
 - c. So he finishes all this stuff and he writes – “I rested my case and asked the class if they could tell me what it was I had left out of this gospel presentation. Not a single hand raised ... I presented a gospel to Christian Bible college students and left out ... Jesus. Nobody noticed.”
 - d. Unfortunately it’s not only the culture around us that believes we go to heaven because we are a good person who is moral, or that we understand some theological ideas, or are very “spiritual”... but it’s many people in the Church too!
 - i. The problem with these views is that Jesus becomes completely unnecessary... He’s like an afterthought, or a special way by which we become morally pure, or a subject that we know about, or like a founding father of our so-called spirituality.¹
 - e. Again – even people in the Church have a tendency to leave Jesus out of the conversation – or at least keep Him at the forefront...
 - i. How many funerals or memorials have you attended where Jesus failed to make an appearance?

1. Sadly I know many of you have gone to other churches, or sometimes it's a celebration of life in an outdoor location – but the people talking leave out what should be the focus... Jesus and His saving grace.
 - ii. Yesterday we had a memorial service for Jessica Brown – and it was such a blessing to hear people come up to me and say thank you for sharing the faith and hope Jessica had in Christ – and it gave them comfort in this time of loss.
 - iii. When we leave Jesus out, we fail to give others the only true comfort and hope they will get.
- III. **Mary and Martha go straight to the source of hope and comfort today.**
- a. We had to cut down a little on the story because I would still be reading right now if I had to do the whole thing – but it starts with Jesus getting word that Lazarus, His friend whom He loved, was sick.
 - i. Jesus doesn't head right over, but instead hangs out for a while... essentially waiting for Lazarus to die first so He can raise him from the dead.
 - ii. As Jesus finally arrives in Bethany, it's too late, Lazarus is dead and buried in the tomb for four days (you don't get much more dead than that – not like he just passed away minutes before or something).
 - b. It's interesting but Martha, who complained that Mary was sitting around listening to Jesus instead of helping in a previous story, is now the one who goes to Jesus first.
 - i. Mary also goes to Jesus, telling the exact same thing as her sister, "If You had only gotten here on time, my brother would not have died."
 - ii. Now the first encounter, with Martha, is an exercise of stating her faith – as she says that Jesus can do whatever is needed – and then He encourages her to say what she believes – that Jesus is the Christ.
 - iii. The second encounter, with Mary, is an exercise in showing a miracle to encourage faith and trust... so He heads to the tomb.
 - c. But first, one of the most touching moments in Scripture happens as Jesus is overwhelmed with compassion for the people experiencing this loss – "Jesus wept." (vs 35)
 - i. We sometimes think that Jesus sees death or illness – all our troubles – and He doesn't react much... but this story should tell you that the trials of the world even impact our Savior.
 - ii. I find so much comfort in knowing that Jesus, who was fully aware that Lazarus was coming back to these people alive and well, was crying because they were all so heart broken.
 1. How do you think He reacts when you deal with a major loss?

- 2. He is not only a source of healing, but also a source of compassion.
- 3. Jesus cares. Jesus cares about you. Jesus cares about your suffering and trials.
- d. In this story, Jesus then goes a step further – by providing a miracle that is so big that it started the ball rolling for the religious leaders to seek to put Him to death – and poor Lazarus too (not like he hadn't already died!)
 - i. Jesus calls a dead man from the tomb – and showed the glory of God's power – even over death itself.
- e. Yet, this was only a preview of the even greater event of Jesus walking from the tomb in glory.
 - i. This is our preview too – because we will also rise from the dead in glory one day as we believe in Jesus our Lord.
- f. It's all about Jesus – not being a good person to get to heaven... not knowing all the Christian lingo and terms... not being a “spiritual” person.
 - i. “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26)
 - ii. Only Jesus can deliver to us the most important thing – His death and resurrection for the forgiveness of our sins.

IV. **A world without Jesus is hopeless indeed.**

- a. I know many people don't see it... can't see why Jesus is the most important thing.
- b. However, for those of us who do believe, we are able to walk through the trials and tragedies of life with tears of sadness, and hopeful expectation.
 - i. As it begins and ends with Jesus for us – the people around us can see that we go through these struggles with a quiet confidence that is incredibly appealing.
 - ii. As it begins and ends with Jesus for us – the people around see our connection in the Body of Christ – and the support we get from having other believers holding us up when we can't seem to find the energy.
 - iii. As it begins and ends with Jesus for us – the people around us will hear about Him as we tell the story of salvation and the gift of God to destroy even death itself.
- c. Each of us here today have been given a preview of what's to come – and the entire thing hinges on our Savior, Jesus.
- d. Rejoice in the redemption and the victory – they are yours... and just waiting to be shared with the world around us... a world that will also get a preview of what awaits all who believe in Him – forgiveness, life and salvation. Amen.

¹ Source: Donald Miller, *Searching for God Knows What* (Thomas Nelson, 2004), p. 158.