

February 22nd, 2009
“The Last Year of the Life of Christ, Part 35”

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John 11:27

27 She said to [Jesus], “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who come into the world.”

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

This week, my son, who is redesigning our website, asked me to develop a mission statement for our church that he could put on the website. I gave him this statement:

Our mission is to spread the Gospel, the Good News about Jesus Christ, to the Lansing, Michigan community. It is to present an informed, insightful, intelligent and convincing argument to those that are not saved that Jesus Christ was a person of history rather than imagination, and that the Biblical accounts of His death on the Cross as a sacrifice for our sins and His resurrection from the dead on the third day following His crucifixion are history rather than myth.

Our mission as a church is to provide an effective argument for the historical reality of the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ to our community. It is my job to preach and publish presentations that affirm the evidence that Jesus Christ was a real person, and that the Biblical accounts of Jesus’ activities are as historically accurate as are the accounts of the lives of Abraham Lincoln and George Washington, whose birthdays we celebrated last Monday.

My credibility when documenting the history of Jesus Christ is the reason that I never entertained my son with the popular fables of Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, the tooth fairy, or any of the other childhood myths that children are usually told. I knew I was going to tell my son of the reality of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and I did not want him to have memories of my telling him myths as truth to cloud his picture of the Christ. When I was a child, my parents told me the traditional myths, but, at the same time, they insisted that I tell the truth, and did not hesitate to punish me if they caught me in a lie. When I reached the age to question the truth of Christianity, I did so, because the idea of the Resurrection sounded like the myths that my parents entertained us with when I was younger.

Although I began going to church when I was five or six years old, became a church organist at fourteen, and spent a great deal of my childhood in churches, I did not actually

become a Christian until I was twenty-seven years of age, when a young man from the church which I was attending visited me at home to persuade me to increase my participation in the church. I told him that I participated in church because I believed that the church was a socially positive organization, but that I did not actually believe in the myth of Jesus Christ any more than any of the other myths adults tell children.

“Jesus Christ is not a myth”, my visitor told me. “The Biblical accounts are literally true.”

“I beg to differ with you”, was my reply, “because the things that the Bible says about Jesus Christ can’t possibly be true.”

“Well, the Bible is true”, said my visitor, “and I can prove it to you.”

“Oh, really”, was my incredulous reply, “I love proof. Prove it to me.”

My visitor asked me to meet him at Michigan State University library, and there we began a study of the recorded history of the life of Christ, the lives of Jesus’ Apostles and the first century church. During my research, I discovered that the body of history concerning the life of Jesus Christ is such that there is literally no person in the history of the world of whom there has been more historical information recorded and about whom there is more evidence available. As I sifted through the mountain of documents that describe the history of Jesus Christ and the early Church, I found that one of the most interesting facts in Christendom is that all of the Apostles who were the original members of the Christian Church, with the exception of the Apostle John, were executed as a response to their testimony of their faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. History records that the Apostles were given a clear choice by the Jewish, Roman and other authorities of the day that would allow them to live unmolested if they would only agree to stop preaching about the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and, to a man, the Apostles consciously and intentionally chose execution rather than to deny their faith in Jesus Christ. This fact made it clear to me that Jesus Christ was actually an historical person rather than a myth, for if He were not a real person, and if He had not done the things that these men testify that He did, why would all these men choose execution in order to affirm their testimony?

Understand that these men did not die as the result of warfare, nor were they being killed as they defended their families. These men chose execution. In many cases, their families were executed along with them. And being executed is not the same dying in battle.

John Foxe, the author of Foxe’s Book of the Martyrs, estimates that as many as 1,800,000 people became martyrs for the cause of Christ between 34 AD, when Jesus died on the Cross, and 313 AD, when the Emperor Constantine ended the tenth persecution under the Emperor Galerius.

Foxe writes:

It is both wonderful and horrible to peruse the descriptions of the sufferings of those godly martyrs as they are described by ancient historians. Their torments were as various as the ingenuity of man, excited by the devil, could devise, and their numbers were truly incredible. “Some,” says Robanus, “were slain with the sword, some burnt with fire, some scourged with whips, some stabbed with forks of iron, some fastened to the cross or gibbet, some drowned in the sea, some had their skins plucked off, some their tongues cut out, some were stoned to death, some frozen with cold, some starved with hunger, some with their hands cut off, or otherwise dismembered, were left naked to the open shame of the world.” Augustine, speaking of these

martyrs, says that, though their punishments were various, yet the constancy in all was the same. And notwithstanding the sharpness of so many torments, and cruelty of the tormentors, such was the number of these faithful saints, that as Hierome, in his epistle to Cromatius and Heliodorus, observes, "There is no day in the whole year, unto which the number of five thousand martyrs cannot be ascribed, except only the first day of January."

The historical fact is that almost two million people chose death rather than to recant their testimony that they believed in Jesus Christ. The foundation of the Christian Church literally rests on the blood of the martyrs, which causes me to ponder the question: why would these people voluntarily give their own lives for a religious preference?

The intense loyalty that the cause of Christ engendered began, in part, because of the historical episode from which our text today is taken. **John 11:1-4 records:**

1 Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha.

2 It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.

3 Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick."

4 When Jesus heard that, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

Jesus told His disciples that Lazarus became ill for a purpose, that being, for the demonstration of Jesus' power and glory. The episode continues, in **John 11:5-7:**

5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

6 So, when [Jesus] heard that [Lazarus] was sick, [Jesus] stayed two more days in the place where He was.

7 Then after this He said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."

The last two times that Jesus went to Judea, as recorded in John chapters 8 and 10, His messages so offended the Jewish leadership that they tried to have Jesus stoned to death. The disciples were concerned about Jesus' welfare as the next verse, **John 11:8** shows:

8 The disciples said to [Jesus], "Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?"

Jesus explained, in **John 11:11-15:**

11 These things [Jesus] said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up."

12 Then His disciples said, "Lord, if he sleeps he will get well."

13 However, Jesus spoke of his death, but [the disciples] thought that [Jesus] was speaking about taking rest in sleep.

14 Then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead.

15 And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him."

The disciples are not really sure exactly what Jesus means about waking Lazarus up from the dead, but Jesus has already so impressed the disciples that they are ready to go, as Thomas indicates, in **John 11:16:**

16 Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that

we may die with Him.”

Thomas understands the danger that Jesus is courting by going back to Judea, but he and the disciples think that they are ready for whatever violence may ensue. But Jesus is not going to fight or to die, but to see about the dead Lazarus and his sisters. The episode continues, in **John 11:17-19**:

17 So when Jesus came, He found that [Lazarus] had already been in the tomb four days.

18 Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away.

19 And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.

This mention of “the Jews” in **John 11:19** is to spotlight the traditional mourning style of this culture, in which mourning is a time of public emotional expression. Professional mourners accompany the mourning family with loud wailing and crying to provide an emotionally expressive environment so that anyone that felt inhibited in expressing their grief could feel comfortable expressing their sorrow. But Jesus’ arrival was the perfect distraction for Martha, as Martha still held hope that Jesus could do something about Lazarus’ situation. **John 11:20-22** records:

20 Now Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house.

21 Now Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.

22 But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.”

Martha has faith that Jesus can do something about her situation. **Luke 17:6** instructs us: **6 So the Lord said, “If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.**

The most important thing that anyone in communication with Jesus Christ has to have is an absolute faith in Jesus’ ability and in His decision making. Jesus speaks to reassure Martha that her faith has a foundation, in **John 11:23-24**:

23 Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

24 Martha said to [Jesus], “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

But Jesus is not talking about the resurrection at the last day. Jesus is talking about the new reality that He is bringing to the world, the reality in which death is no longer a terminal issue. In **John 11:25-26**:

25 Jesus said to [Martha], “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.

26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

Jesus Christ, in his statement to Martha, gives the reason that the Apostles and the long list of martyrs in Church history chose to die in defense of the Gospel. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Those of us that believe in Him will never die.

If a person believes that they will receive eternal life because of their relationship with Jesus Christ, they do not perceive their physical death as a tragedy; death will either lead them to eternal life in Heaven, or the effects of death will be reversed when Jesus Christ uses the power

of God to restore them to life physically. Sacrificing oneself for Christ becomes the greatest testimonial of faith in Him.

In the first three centuries of the existence of the Church, Christians, in massive numbers, spread the Gospel in an extremely hostile environment, volunteering to die for the cause of Christ, and they did so because they were convinced that Jesus Christ had power over death. The foundation of Christianity is recorded in **John 11:25-26**:

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.

26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

John 3:16 says it thusly:

16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Martha's response to Jesus' declaration is recorded in our text for today, **John 11:27**:

27 She said to [Jesus], "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

This statement is the confession of every Christian on the planet. In order to be a Christian, it is necessary that one have an intellectual belief in the fact that Jesus Christ is God in human flesh. To clarify, Martha calls Jesus the Christ and the Son of God, but to the Jews, being the Son of God was synonymous with being God. Jesus to the Jewish leadership, in **John 10:30**:
30 I and My Father are one."

The Jews reacted to this statement, in **John 10:31-33**:

31 Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him.

32 Jesus answered them, "Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?"

33 The Jews answered Him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God."

The Jews knew what Jesus was saying, and they thought it best to kill Him for it. But Jesus responded to their threats, in **John 10:36-38**:

36 Do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?

37 If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me;

38 but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him."

So, Jesus made it clear that He did not intend to convince us of His deity by just talking. That is the reason that Jesus did not head to Bethany when He first received the news about Lazarus. In order for Jesus to give both those that loved Him and those that hated Him a reason to believe in Him and be saved, Jesus made a public exhibition of the power of God that was so undeniable that we would all would have evidence that Jesus was the Son of God.

After Jesus gave Martha hope for Lazarus, Martha called the weeping Mary. **John 11:28-32** records:

28 And when she had said these things, she went her way and secretly called Mary her sister, saying, "The Teacher has come and is calling for you."

29 As soon as [Mary] heard that, she arose quickly and came to Him.

30 Now Jesus had not yet come into the town, but was in the place where Martha met Him.

31 Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforting her, when they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, saying, “She is going to the tomb to weep there.”

32 Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.”

Although Mary used the same words as Martha, her thinking was different from Martha's. Martha came to Jesus in faith that Jesus would use His power on her brother's behalf. Martha told Jesus “But I know whatever you ask of God, God will give it to you.”

Mary, on the other hand, is mourning her brother's death without the expectation that Jesus could do anything. Mary's words to Jesus are words of recrimination rather than expectation, meaning, “You should have been here to stop this from happening.” Mary's grief is being exacerbated by the feedback of the paid mourners who are crying with her, and her sense of despair and grief causes Jesus great sadness, as He wants all of us to have faith similar to that of Martha.

Jesus is frustrated when we lack faith in Him. **John 11:33-35** says:

33 Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled.

34 And [Jesus] said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to Him, “Lord, come and see.”

35 Jesus wept.

Jesus is not weeping over the death of Lazarus, because Jesus is not sad about Lazarus. Jesus could easily have stopped Lazarus from dying but did not do so, because Jesus had a greater miracle in mind for Lazarus. But Jesus is saddened by the lack of faith shown by Mary and the mourners despite His many demonstrations of power. Jesus' frustration is similar to that that He showed when He entered Jerusalem during his last journey, in **Luke 19:41-44**, which says:

41 Now as [Jesus] drew near, He saw the city [of Jerusalem] and wept over it,

42 saying, “If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.

43 For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side,

44 and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”

Jesus weeps when He brings us salvation, but we prefer to stay in our sin because we are wallowing in our self-centeredness and cannot see the help that He is bringing us. A particular woman married a man who was a drunkard and a philanderer. The man mistreated her horribly, and while she complained to her friends and family of how he was so cruel and wicked, she remained married to him. The man fathered several children by the woman, while he continued treating her cruelly. But, one day the man came in contact with a minister, who was able to point the man to Jesus and convince him of the error of his ways, at which time the man decided to stop drinking and begin treating his wife in the way that a wife should be treated.

Shortly afterward, the wife filed for divorce from her husband. In the mandatory marriage counseling that the judge ordered for the couple, it came out that the woman craved the attention

that she received from being the victim of an oppressive man; she was part of a family and social circle in which complaining about boyfriends and husbands was the major topic of conversation. She had come to think that her role in life was to suffer from the mistreatment of a husband so that she could receive sympathy from the group, and she was so focused on the sympathy that she received that she couldn't give up her victim status to make the adjustment to a healthy relationship. A healthy marital relationship requires wives to focus on the needs of their husbands and for husbands to focus on the needs of their wives, but this woman was so self-centered that the only thing upon which she could focus was the strokes that she received from her peers as the result of her victim status. She was so excessively self-centered that she wanted sympathy for suffering more than a good life with her husband.

Jesus loves us all, and wants all of us to take advantage of His gracious goodness, but many folks choose to complain and cry rather than to consider the possibility that the Lord has come to bring us joy. Christians actually sin by denying themselves the pleasures that God has in store for them just so that they can show that they are suffering sufficiently, but Jesus makes it clear to us that there is no virtue in self-inflicted suffering. In the "b" portion of **John 10:10**, Jesus says:

10 I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

To see folk ignoring the power of God in order to maintain their own self-centered focus on a pity party is frustrating to Jesus Christ, to the point of making Him weep.

The mourners missed the point of Jesus' tears. **John 11:36-37** records:

36 Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!"

37 And some of them said, "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?"

Some of the mourners thought that Jesus was showing sympathy, but others thought that Jesus should have healed Lazarus before he died. They were correct in thinking that Jesus had the power to do so, but they did not understand that to do so was not part of Jesus' plan. Jesus plan was to increase the faith of all by showing His power to the world. So Jesus acts, in **John 11:38-44**:

38 Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.

39 Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days."

40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?"

41 Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me.

42 And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me."

43 Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!"

44 And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go."

Lazarus was dead and stinking, and Jesus raised Lazarus back to life with just a word. Jesus was not in Bethany when Lazarus died or when Lazarus was buried, the tomb was sealed

before Jesus came to town, and the stone seal had not been disturbed. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead with a simple prayer, and proved to His disciples that He, Jesus had the power of life and death.

After the resurrection of Lazarus, death was no longer the problem for the disciples that it had been previously, because they have just had an ocular demonstration that Jesus Christ can call men back to life from the dead.

One of the reasons that I believe that the Bible is history rather than myth is that the men who saw and participated in the miracles recorded in the New Testament, including that of the resurrection of Lazarus, were changed. And they were really changed when they spoke to Jesus Christ in the Upper Room after His personal resurrection from the dead. The Bible records, in **John 20:24-29**:

24 Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." 26 And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" 27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." 28 And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

It may be that the most compelling testimony of the Apostles is not the lives that they lived after Jesus rose, but the deaths that they died.

In 36 A.D., STEPHEN was stoned to death, becoming the first Christian martyr. – Recorded in Acts 7

In 44 A.D., JAMES, son of ZEBEDEE, was beheaded by HEROD ANTIPAS – Recorded Acts 12

In 52 A.D., THOMAS was killed in Cranganore, India by Brahmin priests who knocked him to the ground and stuck him through with a lance.

In 54 A.D., PHILIP, after having ministered in France, was pierced through the thighs and hung upside down on a cross until he died at Heliopolis in Phrygia at the age of 87.

In 60 A.D., MATTHEW was slain with a halberd in Egypt. A halberd is a weapon that consists typically of a battle-ax and pike mounted on a handle about six feet long

In 62 A.D., JAMES, brother of Jesus, cast from a pinnacle of the Temple, showered with stones and finally his skull smashed and his brains beaten out with a fuller's club. He was buried on the Mount of Olives. A fuller's club is a blacksmith's hammer.

In 64 A.D., MATTHIAS, the apostle who took JUDAS' place, was stoned and beheaded in Jerusalem

In 67 A.D., PETER after completing Second Peter, was crucified by NERO.

In 68 A.D. JOHN MARK was dragged to death through the streets of Alexandria, Egypt on Easter.

In 68 A.D. BARTHOLOMEW, after having ministered in India with THOMAS and THADDEUS and with PHILIP at Hierapolis, died after being beaten with clubs, flayed alive and crucified in Armenia.

In 68 A.D. PAUL was imprisoned in Rome and wrote "Second Timothy" shortly before he was beheaded by NERO.

In 69 A.D., ANDREW was crucified at Achaia on a cross in the form of an "X", hanging there for three days before he died on the last day of November.

In 69 A.D. LUKE, who had been ministering with ANDREW, was crucified at Patros, Greece by being hanged on an olive tree by idolatrous priests.

In 72 A.D., THADDEUS was killed with a halberd at Edessa.

In 72 A.D. SIMON ZELOTES was sawn asunder in Persia.

In 73 A.D., BARNABAS was killed by the Jews in Salamis on Cyprus.

In 97 A.D., TIMOTHY reprovved the pagans of Ephesus for their idolatry, causing them to fall upon him with clubs and beat him. He died two days later from the beating.

Finally, in 97 A.D. JOHN the Apostle died of natural causes at Ephesus on September 26th.

All of these men, except John, were executed in defense of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as were almost two million others. And they gave their lives because they believed the evidence that Jesus Christ Himself gave, as He was crucified on the Old Rugged Cross, buried in Joseph's new tomb, and then rose from the dead on that first Easter Sunday morning. Jesus Christ has made a clear path to heaven for us, and to reach it, we only need to believe in that which He has done. **Romans 10:9** records:

9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

I challenge you that if you do not believe, do the research, as I did, and you will be convinced by the history that Jesus Christ is Lord. The evidence is clear and abundant, but the choice to receive it is yours.

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