

## The Fifth Sunday in Lent

**Text:** *John 11:17–27, 38–53 (ESV)*

<sup>17</sup>Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. <sup>18</sup>Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, <sup>19</sup>and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. <sup>20</sup>So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. <sup>21</sup>Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup>But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." <sup>23</sup>Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." <sup>24</sup>Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." <sup>25</sup>Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, <sup>26</sup>and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" <sup>27</sup>She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

<sup>38</sup>Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. <sup>39</sup>Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." <sup>40</sup>Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" <sup>41</sup>So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. <sup>42</sup>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." <sup>43</sup>When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." <sup>44</sup>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."

<sup>45</sup>Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, <sup>46</sup>but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. <sup>47</sup>So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the Council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. <sup>48</sup>If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." <sup>49</sup>But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. <sup>50</sup>Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." <sup>51</sup>He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, <sup>52</sup>and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. <sup>53</sup>So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.

### Theme: Why Did Jesus Die?

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is the most horrible event that has ever happened in the history of this world. It is something that we can never take for granted. He suffered tremendously on the cross. His pain was beyond anything that we can imagine. Today's text shows us why Jesus died, why He suffered so much on the cross.

#### I. It was not because of man's plan or actions.

It's wasn't because of the plans of the Sanhedrin. Jesus had just raised Lazarus from the dead. It was an undeniable miracle. Lazarus had been dead for four days. That miracle caused many people to believe in Jesus. John shows that one of the reasons why the crowd shouted Jesus' praises on Palm Sunday was because of this miracle. However, some of the people, who witnessed the miracle, ran to the pharisees who convened a meeting of the Sanhedrin. They were afraid that if Jesus continued doing such miracles everyone would believe in Him, so they plotted to take His life. Caiaphas said the prophetic words, "*You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.*" They plotted to take Jesus' life to save their nation from the Romans and to keep their place as the religious leaders, but they were unwilling accomplices in God's plan.

God used their wicked plans for His gracious purposes. There are many examples of that in the Bible. Joseph's brothers sold him as a slave in Egypt, but God used their wicked plans to save many lives including Joseph's own family. After Stephen was stoned a great persecution broke out against the congregation in Jerusalem. The people were scattered, but it only caused the Gospel to spread more rapidly. Wherever they went, they told the good news about Jesus. This case was no different from many others in history. People plot and plan evil against our Lord and His church, but they only fall into God's plan. God uses them unwillingly and unknowingly to bring His salvation into the world. Jesus didn't die because the Sanhedrin plotted His death. God allowed them to plot His death.

Jesus also didn't die because of any of the actions of people. It was not because Judas betrayed Jesus, that the Sanhedrin and Pilate condemned Him or that the soldiers beat Him and nailed Him to a cross that He died. It was also not because of our sins that Jesus died. Some of the translations of our passion hymns mistakenly express that point. The translation of one of them goes so far to say, "**I caused Thy grief and sighing.**" Yes, Jesus did suffer for our sins on the cross. If we would have never sinned, He would have never suffered in this way. But to say that we caused His suffering and death is giving a lot of credit to ourselves. Jesus made it clear that no one took His life from Him in John 10:18 where He said, "*No one takes My life from Me. I lay it down of my own accord.*" Neither the Sanhedrin by their plans nor we by our sins caused Jesus to die.

II. It was His great love for us, that caused Him to die for us.

Earlier in the chapter it says that Jesus wept, but why did He weep? Listen to verses 32-35 again, "*When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell at His feet and said, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.'* When Jesus saw her wailing, and the Jews who had come along with her also wailing, **He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.** *Where have you laid him?'*" He asked. *'Come and see, Lord,' they replied. Jesus wept.*" Those verses reveal the heart of our Savior more than any other in the Bible. He didn't weep because Lazarus had died. From the beginning He knew that He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead. It was the grief of that family that caused Him to weep. He walked with them to the grave as they were wailing and mourning. His heart went out to them. He acted to take away their grief.

Jesus knew what would come of us because of our sins. We would wail and mourn for all of eternity. He knew the punishment that awaited us. His heart went out to us. He would wail and groan and scream on the cross to take away our sins. He would bear our sins in our place.

It was His great love for us that killed Him. I thought of three great expressions of that love. In John 15:13 Jesus said, "*Greater love has no man than this, that He lay down His life for His friends.*" That is just how much Jesus loved us, so much that He willingly gave His life.

That love is expressed in this verse of an Advent hymn by Paul Gerhardt,

**Love caused Thy incarnation, Love brought Thee down to me;  
Thy thirst for my salvation Procured my liberty.  
O love beyond all telling, That led Thee to embrace,  
In love all love excelling, Our lost and fallen race!**

One of my favorite Christian singers in the 90's was Michael Card. In a song entitled "Why?" he expresses Jesus' love this way, **"Why did they nail His hands and feet? His love would have held Him there."**

There were a number of times when Jesus walked through crowds that tried to kill Him. There were times when He avoided arrest. He could have continued to avoid death. Even while He was on the cross, He could have come down, but He allowed Himself to be betrayed, crucified and killed. Our text tells us why. It was so that *"He would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one."* That is why they plotted to take Jesus' life, so that we would not go to hell, but that by His innocent death and His glorious resurrection, our sins would be taken away. God could gather us as His own people. We can live under His blessing now and in His glory forever in heaven. That is why Jesus died, so that we could become the people of God.

This Lenten season as you meditate on the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, see His love for you in those acts. He wept, groaned and moaned so that you wouldn't have to. He died, so that you would live. He could not bear to see you suffer, so He suffered for your sins in your place.

Why did Jesus die? You might simply want to stretch out your arms and say, "Because He loves you this much."

Amen.

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