

## John Ch 12:9-19

“An Effective Witness”

We enter the scene less than a week away from the Passover, less than a week away from the cross of Jesus Christ and The last couple of weeks we've considered the qualities of the committed, and have contemplated the characteristics of the counterfeit as seen in this supper that was made in honor of the Lord in the house of Simon the former leper in the little community of Bethany just outside the city of Jerusalem about 2-miles. I suppose you might say that Bethany was a suburb of the big city of Jerusalem. But because Jesus is to die during the feast of the Passover (for reasons of which we discussed 2 Sundays ago) that means that literally millions, 2-3 million Jews are beginning to pack the streets of Jerusalem and it's surrounding communities, because the Passover was one of 3 feasts that it was required of at least all the males in the families of Israel to journey to Jerusalem to take part in.

As one may assume, the talk of the town centers around Jesus, “What will He do?” “Will He be here at the feast?” The locals wondering if He'll even show due to the open hostility against Him by the religious leaders and their public plot to kill Him. and So there's no doubt this heightened sense of *expectation* and *anticipation* as to what's coming down the tracks, what's going to happen in the next few days. But there's another buzz blowing throughout the town, another curiosity pulsing through the people. The word is out and spreading like wildfire regarding the raising of Lazarus from the dead, the last major miracle we have recorded for us that Jesus ever performed. and So though there were all kinds of people coming around to perhaps just get a glimpse of Jesus, (this controversial character, and powerfully profound preacher) there were also those who wanted to see with their own eyes this man whom He'd raised from the dead. and This kinda catches the context of where we pick it up today, and we read in vs 9.

### Vs 9-11

Now there are a few things that we want to observe here, the 1<sup>st</sup> of which we see there in vs 9 and that is that there were no small # of people who were being drawn in curiosity not only over Jesus (as we just mentioned) but also to check out the reality of the work of Christ in the life of Lazarus. We mentioned the witness of Lazarus in vs 2, but here it just really leaps out of the vs for us. They wanted to see this man who once was dead, whom Jesus Christ gave new life to, and testify and ratify the reality of it. They wanted to see if it was true, if Jesus really could give life to the otherwise dead, and what kind of life it was that sustained him, you know, was he the same as he used to be? and I suspect not, I imagine he had an altogether new slant on life, how he seen things, the way he prioritized things, those things that were of value to him as opposed to that which was immaterial. Everything about his life was brand new, old things had passed away, and now all things were made new for Lazarus, and people wanted to check it out, and see what it meant to have new life breathed into you, and what it was that different about him now that Christ had given him new life.

I'm sure you see the premise, and can sense the practical application here for you and for me. Sure people are curious about Jesus, but they're also curious about you as one whom He's given new life. They want to see what kind of life He's given you, what makes you different than them, how do you see things, and what are your priorities now that Christ has called you out of death and given you life. They want to know, is the work of Christ in your life a viable reality, something which will sustain you and keep you "ticking" so to speak, or is it a passing phase that really won't leave you any better off than it found you in the end?

People want to know, because Lazarus serves as a perfect picture of what happened in your life and in mine when Jesus Christ called out to you, and called out to me and gave us life when we were dead in our sin and in our trespasses. The bible says, "*And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins,*" Eph 2:1 and The bible is clear that once we're in Christ, and all things are made new, old things having passed away, our old habits, our old ways of life, our old slants and perspectives or priorities, that now I'll have a new take on life. I have different priorities; I'm cultivating godly habits as where before my habits were ungodly. I see things through the lens of the scriptures and the convictions of the Holy Spirit as opposed to my own conceptions based upon the drives of my flesh, I'm just different now than I was when I was dead in sin, and I suspect you are too.

Those are the things people are *looking at* in you, *evaluating* in your life, they're curious about the work Jesus has done in your life, they want to see if you're the real deal, if what they've heard is true, or if it's all a bunch of hype and misinformation. They were checking out his witness, and we do well to be sensitive to the fact that people are checking out our witness as well, oh they may not flock out in droves, but you can be sure that they're watching the way you lead your life at work. and They're checking out the way you handle yourself at school, they're interested in the life that Christ has given to you, and want to see it lived out with their own eyes.

What else do we notice about Lazarus' witness? It was effective; let me extract a few words out of vs 11 so you can see what I mean, look at vs 11. "On account of him many went away and believed in Jesus." Because of the radical reality of the work of Jesus Christ in this man's life *many* (not a few) but *many* went away, that is, left their former way of life, went away from those things that they were clinging to previously, (they repented) and believed in Jesus. This life that Lazarus had because of the work of Jesus in his life was so compelling, it was so appealing, it was so real that people just couldn't deny it, and as a matter of fact they wanted it for themselves.

Now think about that, let it soak in for a minute, not to condemn, but perhaps to convict, how many people have believed in Jesus Christ due to the reality of the work that He's done in your life, in my life? and I praise God if it's even 1, but *many* believed in Jesus due to the newness of life that Lazarus walked in. and Paul in writing to the Romans said, "*...that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*" Rom 6:4

Why, because that's what's going to compel people, and convince people that Jesus really does deliver from sin and death, and set us free from the bondage that otherwise enslaved us that we might experience new life and the forgiveness of sin. If you don't show them anything different than what they can get in the world, then why would they desire your Jesus anyway? Lazarus showed people new life, and on the account of that many went away, forsook the old life, and believed in Jesus, God help us to have an effective witness, and an accurate reflection of the new life He's given us in Christ.

But there's something else we see going on here as well, there's a division that's taking place, and that always happens in the presence of Jesus, there'll be those who receive Him, and those who reject Him. Even though they see the evidence, and it's tangible, undeniable, right there in front of their face, but rather than give up their lives (or I should say the lack thereof) they'd rather cling to the grave, and reject Jesus Christ than accept the evidence and receive the life He offers.

That's what's happening here in vs 10, it doesn't matter how profound, or impacting the work of Jesus Christ may be in some people's lives, there will always be those who are critical of Jesus and *anything*, or *anyone* He's done a work in, and rather than *receive* the evidence and *rejoice*, they want to *discard* the evidence in *disdain*.

Now you'd think something as powerfully profound as a man raised from the dead would be enough to compel even the hardest of hearts to believe in Jesus Christ But do you remember what Jesus said? Leave John's gospel and turn with me to Luke Ch 16 (Vs 19-31)

Vs28

Just so that you know this isn't a parable, Jesus never used proper names in parables, this is an actual account of a happening beyond the grave that Jesus is sharing with us. and The one thing that everyone in hell wants to do today (resolving to accept their own fate) is to tell their loved ones to repent and receive Jesus Christ lest they come to that same place of torment, hell is real. and It's not party time, it's a place of torment, and every person there would give anything for one chance to send out the message to repent of your sins and to receive Jesus Christ because you don't want to be there, regardless of how Hollywood and some of the music industry seeks to glamorize it, they don't have a clue, you don't want to be there.

Vs29-31

What's the point? If the word of God (Moses and the prophets) isn't enough to compel and convict and transform the human heart, nothing is, there's nothing more powerful and more profound than the Word of God when it comes to something's ability to persuade the human heart to believe. That's why Paul said, "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes...*" Rom 1:16 The message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified, the message propelled in the Word of God (the volume of which is written of Him, of Jesus Christ) therein lies the power to convert the human heart. and It's the way man is born again, by the incorruptible seed of the Word of God, not some miracle, or some neat trick.

If a profound miracle were all that was needed to bring saving faith into the human heart, then all of Israel would've been saved having been delivered from the bondage of Egypt. They saw the parting of the Red Sea, all the plagues, they seen fire come down from Heaven, water from the rock, manna fall like dew from the skies, they heard the very voice of God at Mt Sinai, but yet they didn't enter in, why? Because of unbelief, they didn't believe the word that God said to them when He promised to deliver the land of Canaan into their hands. Because they wouldn't believe God's word, nothing else was able to persuade them, now those who did believe (Joshua and Caleb) they entered in and received the land with the next generation, but everyone else died in the wilderness due to unbelief, there was no miracle that persuaded them, regardless of how powerful and how undeniable it was. You see; saving faith just doesn't come from the miraculous, what does the bible say? "*...faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*" Rom 10:17

These men weren't willing to receive the things that Jesus had to *say*, so then why would they believe the proof of His *signs*? As a matter of fact this particular sign only ticked them off all the more, why? Because a portion of the chief priests were Sadducees, "What difference does that make?" Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection, and you recall their profound philosophy that they sought to stump Jesus by. Turn quickly to Mark Ch 12 (Vs18-27)

Vs24

I love that vs, people come up with the craziest philosophies, and they'll even try and interweave a few scriptures here and there to prove their point, but they divorce the word from it's context and don't take into account the whole counsel, or the totality of the counsel of the word of God and so they err not truly knowing the scriptures. That's why Paul told Timothy, "*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*" 2 Tim 2:15 These guys erred in their position because they didn't truly know the Scriptures.

## Vs25-27

So in one fatal swoop the Lord derails their position with it's 2-fold philosophical and theological support. But back to the text that we're in today, you see Lazarus was an embarrassment to these guys theology. He was proof positive of life after death, so what do you do? You repent of your position, or, you seek to discard the evidence, they opted for plan B, they wouldn't repent, because again they wouldn't receive Jesus' word, so why would they receive Lazarus' witness, because it testified of Jesus' word. The hardness of some people's hearts is amazing, but when you combine the effectiveness of Lazarus' witness in drawing people to Jesus, along with the embarrassment he was to them and their theology in just his very life, they decided it was best to get rid of him as well.

So rather than repent, they reject Jesus' words and Lazarus' witness, but this is what we'd expect, if people won't receive Christ, they won't receive you either, Jesus said that. But on the positive side if they will receive Jesus, they place credence into your witness as well, Jesus said, *"A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also"* John 15:20 and That's what's happening here, they're wanting to persecute Jesus so they're wanting to do away with Lazarus to. But those who received Lazarus' witness, are believing in Jesus.

Now here in vs 12 the scene shifts from the quiet supper type setting, to a noisy public parade with this procession that's become commonly known as the triumphal entry. It's the next day, approximately 4½ days or so from the cross, and that's significant, why? Because the book of Ex ch 12 instructed the families of Israel that from the 10<sup>th</sup>, to the 14<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan, there was to be that 4 day interim period of time whereby they'd selected the lamb for sacrifice and during those 4 days it was to live with them, they were to inspect it, become more familiar with it, ensure it was with out spot and with out blemish, a worthy sacrifice.

We have to read the other gospel accounts to get a more rounded perspective, but it would be during this 4 day period that Jesus would be "inspected" (if you will) by the Jews as they hurled questions at Him and sought to ensnare Him with various theological difficulties, and when it was all said and done, what was the verdict that issued forth from Pilate's mouth before them all? You can find it in both Luke 23 and here in John's gospel, *"I find no fault in Him at all."* John 18:38 He's a Lamb as with out spot, and with out blemish, no fault in Him at all.

## Vs 12-13

It's interesting that after Jesus officially ceased ministering in a public way just a short time before the cross, He did the most public thing He ever did, and that was to allow all this fanfare and hype over Him as He came into Jerusalem on that day. Why? Look at the next 2 vs

## Vs 14-15

Jesus was coming to them in accordance with the more sure word of prophecy, He was fulfilling the word of God to the nation of Israel by presenting Himself to them on this very day, in this very fashion, and yet they didn't get it. You know that song, "This is the day that the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it." We sing that as the body of Christ, but it was in reality a portion of prophecy there in Ps 118, the messianic Ps from which they're quoting there in vs 13 regarding not just any day, but a very specific day, the day that the Messiah would present Himself to the nation of Israel. But they didn't get it, they couldn't see it, you remember how we've spoken of the oppression of the Romans upon them at this time, and it was reminiscent to them of the oppression of the Syrians, when Antiochus Epiphanies had brought them into bondage. But you recall how we spoke of the man Judas Maccabeus and how he led the crusade that ultimately delivered them from that particular bondage.

Well there was a big spontaneous celebration following that that involved the waving of palm branches and all of these things. and So here they are, under the oppression of the Romans, here comes their deliverer right? Jesus, He's going to set them free from Rome, and so the palm branches are being waved, the 118<sup>th</sup> Ps is being shouted, and it's apparent that they were looking to a political Messiah by what they say. "Hosanna" which means, "Save *now*" set is free from Rome, blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord to deliver us from this political oppression. That's why more than a "Triumphal" entry it was more like a "Tearful" entry as Jesus wept over the city and cried out, "*If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace!*" Luke 19:42 But they didn't know, they couldn't see it, and so there was gladness in their hearts, but sadness in His, with the situation when Lazarus died, it was just the opposite. It's amazing how diametrically opposed to the position of God's heart we can truly be. We're just the opposite of where He'd have us be so many times, God help us to be in stride with His heart, and in tune with His Spirit, that we might understand what he'd have us to, and see a situation for how He sees it.

But I love this phrase here in vs 15. "Fear not, Your King is Coming" I don't know the things that have made for a lack of peace, or assurance in your life in that particular situation, or the other specific circumstance, but fear not, your King is coming. Don't miss Him in the midst of it, the things that make for your peace are found in Him, and He's coming to you, you can be sure of it, He's brought you this far He's not about to abandon you now, fear not, your King is coming.

## Vs 16

What's this show us? That God never takes away from our free will, yet His perfect will is still ultimately accomplished. They were just in the midst of a spontaneous happening of their own accord, and yet in retrospect they realized they were fulfilling prophecy. This wasn't a scripted event by the disciples, they didn't even understand it, but after Jesus was glorified, the realization came to them. and I don't want to over spiritualize this but I think we can glean a principal here, often times realization of the scripture comes through Jesus' glorification in my life. What I mean by that is that we so often want the deep insights to the word of God, those

golden nuggets that perhaps no one else has seen, but we don't really want to submit ourselves to the simplest instructions *of* the word.

But as the Lord is glorified in our lives through simple obedience, then sometimes the deeper truths will be realized. Their realization of the scripture came through the Lord's glorification, and I think there's real aspect of that, that's true for us as well. "Husbands love your wives," there's one to start with. "Wives, submit to your husbands," not too difficult to understand, young people, "Honor your mother and father." "*...be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.*" Eph 4:32 You see these are things that are easy to *understand*, they seem at times difficult to *obey*, but therein lies a big key, as Jesus is glorified in our lives through obedience, then perhaps deeper truths will be realized. John says here, they were granted understanding as to what was going on here after Jesus was glorified.

Vs17-19

Man it's frustrating for the anti-Jesus crowd to see Jesus being popularized and glamorized isn't it? You remember for a couple of months right after 9/11 everywhere you went you seen the signs, "God bless America" and it was so frustrating to the atheists of the nation, but it just didn't seem to matter, people were just all kinds of religious.

I'd like to tell you that it's a different thing happening here, but vs 18 reinforces to us that this was a misguided event on the people's behalf. There was all this hype and fanfare because of this sign that He'd performed in raising Lazarus from the dead, these people were seeking a sign, not a Savior, they wanted to be delivered from Rome, not from their sin, and so consequently these same people who are now shouting, "Save now, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! The King of Israel!" Will be shouting, "Crucify Him, Crucify Him," "*We have no king but Caesar!*" John 19:15

Why, because they wanted Jesus on their terms, but Jesus wouldn't compromise the Father's plan to accommodate their agenda. and How often people want Jesus on their own terms today, and they're ready to cast Him aside as soon something doesn't go their way.. How sad, that's why Jesus said that we're to count the cost when we give our lives to Him, because He won't compromise His standards, and His plan to accommodate our agenda, we're here to serve His agenda, not the other way around.

Well, the Pharisees make this comment here to their own frustration, "Look, the world has gone after Him." People had mixed motives, that much we've seen, but Lazarus' witness was effective, seeing the work that Jesus did in his life aroused and peaked the people's interest, he just lived his life in the newness of life that Jesus had given him and people sought Jesus out due to that fact. "The world has gone after him!" and There's perhaps more truth to that than what they may've realized, and we'll see that next time.

If you're here and you don't know Jesus Christ, or you've never given your heart to Jesus Christ I pray that today, your heart is turning *towards* and going *after* Him. These people were seeking signs, not a Saviour, but a sign never saved anyone, Jesus Christ and Him crucified is what we need to see, what we need to receive for the forgiveness of our sin, and the healing of our heart. Jesus took your sin, and my sin upon Himself when He was pinned to that cross and He shed His blood to make the payment that you and I could never make. and If you'll just open your heart and your life up to Jesus today, He'll make all things new in your life as well, your sin will be forgiven and you'll be washed white like snow, it's up to you.