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August 10th: Hosea 8 & John 11:1-44

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The eagle over the house of the Lord. The raising of Lazarus.

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Transcript

Hosea chapter 8. Set the trumpet to your lips. One like a vulture is over the house of the Lord, because they have transgressed my covenant and rebelled against my law. To me they cry, My God, we, Israel, know you.

Israel has spurned the good. The enemy shall pursue him. They made kings, but not through me.

They set up princes, but I knew it not. With their silver and gold they made idols for their own destruction. I have spurned your calf, O Samaria.

My anger burns against them. How long will they be incapable of innocence? For it is from Israel. A craftsman made it.

It is not God. The calf of Samaria shall be broken to pieces. For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind.

The standing grain has no heads. It shall yield no flower. If it were to yield, strangers would devour it.

Israel is swallowed up. Already they are among the nations as a useless vessel. For they have gone up to Assyria.

A wild donkey wandering alone. Ephraim has hired lovers. Though they hire allies among the nations, I will soon gather them up, and the king and princes shall soon writhe because of the tribute.

Because Ephraim has multiplied altars for sinning, they have become to him altars for sinning. Were I to write for him my laws by the ten thousands, they would be regarded as a strange thing. As for my sacrificial offerings, they sacrifice meat and eat it, but the Lord does not accept them.

Now he will remember their iniquity and punish their sins. They shall return to Egypt. For Israel has forgotten his Maker and built palaces, and Judah has multiplied fortified cities.

So I will set a fire upon his cities, and it shall devour his strongholds. Hosea chapter 8 is a chapter in which Israel is trying in all sorts of futile ways to secure itself in uncertain times. The chapter opens with the blowing of an alarm.

The house of the Lord, here referring to the people of Israel, not specifically the temple, are under immediate threat. A great and powerful eagle, not a vulture as in some translations, is hovering over it. We should think here of an image similar to that of Ezekiel chapter 17, with the eagles of Babylon and Egypt coming to take from the land.

This mighty and irresistible force is nearly upon them, and yet they seem to be insensible to their danger, needing to be roused to action. The real threat, of course, is the Lord himself, who is bringing disaster upon them, because they have transgressed his covenant and rebelled against his law. However, they presumptuously assume that they know the Lord.

They fancy that they are worshipping the Lord when they are worshipping their idols. Yet as they have spurned the good, they will be pursued by the enemy. The enemy here is presumably the Assyrians.

Given the most likely time of this prophecy, in the late 730s BC, around 732 or 731, the years leading up to this time had been filled with coups and overthrown kings. The ruling house of Israel changed on a number of occasions and it lurched from one sort of foreign policy to another. The kings of Israel weren't appointed by the Lord, they had rejected the Davidic king in the south, and just about all of their kings were a rebel against his

predecessor.

Beyond this string of traitors turned kings, Israel sought security in the worship of idols. With silver and gold, they fashioned idols for their high places, which they worshipped while abandoning the Lord to their own destruction. In 1 Kings chapter 12, after the split in the kingdom, Jeroboam I, the son of Nebat, had set up golden calves at Bethel and Dan.

Proclaiming these to be the gods that had brought Israel out of Egypt, he instructed the people to worship them, hoping that the people would not go south to worship at the temple in Jerusalem, worried that the pull of that cultic centre might compromise the loyalty of his subjects. When worshipping this calf, many of the people would have fancied that they were worshipping the Lord. Yet the Lord had utterly rejected the calf of Samaria.

It would be destroyed, broken into pieces, while Jeroboam I and his successors on the throne of Israel had proclaimed it to be the god of Israel. It was merely the work of a craftsman, and no god at all. They had turned to the Baals and other false gods for fertility.

However, the result was that the land was becoming barren. They sowed the wind, casting forth from hands empty of seed, and they reaped the whirlwind, destruction and devastation. Even what would grow would be fruitless, standing grain having no heads, and yielding no flower.

Besides, even if it were to yield any fruit, what it yielded would be eaten by strangers. Israel was already a non-entity among the nations. For all of Israel's efforts to secure itself through foreign policy, through idolatry or through the latest coup, it has all proved futile, and the nation is gradually dissolving.

Like a wild and ornery beast, Israel has turned to the Assyrians for aid. They have paid large sums in tribute, hoping to gain some relief for themselves, not realising that their true enemy and opponent is the Lord himself. Until they come to terms with him, they will find no respite from a human source.

Going up to Assyria like a wild donkey wandering alone probably refers to the foreign policy of Israel. Following Hoshea's assassination of his predecessor Pekah, Israel would soon find itself handed over to the most burdensome of tribute. On account of its rebellion, Ephraim's entire cultic system was rotten and inoperative.

They had multiplied altars for sinning, establishing many high places and cultic sites in the land contrary to the word of the Lord, all designed, at least in theory, to deal with sin. And yet these sites for dealing with sin had become further occasions for sin. They had become utterly alienated from the word of the Lord.

If the Lord were to multiply his laws a thousand times over, intense repetition would still be insufficient to overcome the foreignness of the word of the Lord to this rebellious people. They offer and eat peace offerings, and yet the Lord does not accept them. They fancy that they have communion with him, but what they have is not fellowship at all.

What they fancy will lead to their sins being forgotten actually brings their sins to mind. The ultimate curse of the covenant would soon come upon them. Their sins would be brought to mind.

They would be judged, removed from the land, and returned to Egypt from where they had been first taken. Israel and Judah also sought their security in building walled cities, fortifications and strongholds. The Lord however would overthrow them all, setting a fire upon their cities and devouring their strongholds, leaving them as defenseless prey for the nations, stripped of their glory and of their strength.

A question to consider. At the beginning of this chapter Israel insists that they know the Lord, yet we discover that they are offering peace offerings that are not accepted by the Lord. They are worshipping the Lord with idols in ways that brings them under his judgment.

They are building altars for dealing with sin, and actually compounding their sin. While they fancy that they are worshipping the Lord, what they are doing is worse than vain. They are making their situation worse.

How could they have undertaken the worship of the Lord in a manner in which they would be assured that they would be heard and accepted by the Lord? John chapter 11 verses 1 to 44. Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill.

So the sisters sent to him, saying, Lord, he whom you love is ill. But when Jesus heard it, he said, This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then after this he said to the disciples, Let us go to Judea again.

The disciples said to him, Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again? Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him. After saying these things, he said to them, Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.

The disciples said to him, Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover. Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe.

But let us go to him. So Thomas called the twin and said to his fellow disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him. Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.

Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off. And many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house.

Martha said to Jesus, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you. Jesus said to her, Your brother will rise again.

Martha said to him, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day. Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.

And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this? She said to him, Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world. When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, The teacher is here and is calling for you.

And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who were with her in the house consoling her saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. And he said, Where have you laid him? They said to him, Lord, come and see.

Jesus wept. So the Jews said, See how he loved him. But some of them said, Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying? Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb.

It was a cave and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, Take away the stone. Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, Lord, by this time there will be an odour, for he has been dead four days.

Jesus said to her, Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God? So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 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. When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, Lazarus, come out. 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. The raising of Lazarus in John chapter 11 is a pivotal event within the gospel. It completes the cycle of seven signs that compose the book of signs, which is the first half of John's gospel.

It is also an event that sets in motion many of the things that will occur in the second half of the book, the book of glory, concerned with Christ's death and resurrection. It might even be regarded as the fulcrum upon which the book turns. It is also important to consider some of the themes that are in play within it.

As we've seen in other episodes within the first half of the book of John, figures within the book can serve as archetypes or paradigms for understanding larger groups of people. The man born blind in chapter 9, for instance, is a paradigmatic disciple. Lazarus, a man who is loved by Christ and raised by his voice, might be another example of a paradigmatic figure.

In its introduction of Lazarus, the chapter does not immediately tell us that he was the brother of Mary and Martha. Rather, it is said that he comes from their village of Bethany. The hearer of the gospel is presumed to know who Mary and Martha are already.

This might be an instance of John assuming knowledge of one of the synoptic gospels of his readers. In verse 2, we are told about the action of Mary that will occur in the chapter that follows. In reading the beginning of this chapter, we should probably also pay attention to the order of days.

There is a first day that Jesus is told about the sickness of Lazarus. Then there's a two day waiting period. And then there's four days that he has been in the tomb.

This might suggest a seven day pattern corresponding with the one that we see in chapters 1 and 2 of the gospel. In verse 4, Jesus declares that the illness will not lead to death. We might assume that this means that Lazarus will not die.

However, Lazarus goes on to die, which suggests that Jesus' words have failed. As we'll later see, the sickness does not ultimately lead to death. It leads through death, however.

The illness is rather there to be a means by which Jesus is glorified. The raising of Lazarus will set a ball rolling that ultimately leads to Christ's crucifixion and to his own resurrection. It is also the most climactic sign, the event in which Jesus reveals his identity as the resurrection and the life.

As Jesus is glorified through the raising of Lazarus, and as the raising of Lazarus sets things in motion for the culmination of Jesus' own mission and life, the stories of Jesus and Lazarus become entangled together in important ways. When Jesus finally determines to go to Judea on the third day, his disciples are hesitant. They know that the Jews have been seeking to take Jesus' life, and Thomas the Twin, presumably speaking for the other disciples, expresses his sense of foreboding.

Jesus speaks in a cryptic way about Lazarus having fallen asleep and his going to awake him. In verse 9, he talks about the importance of walking in the day, when a person might see the light of this world. Jesus had formerly spoken of himself as the light of the world in chapter 9. Lazarus has fallen asleep, a state associated with the night, but now the light of the world is going to visit his situation and bring with him the dawn of Lazarus' resurrection.

Jesus' delay and absence from the scene is an important part of the story. In verse 15, we see it is one of the reasons why the sign will be more effective, leading people to believe. Later on, it will also be this detail that the two sisters highlight in their conversation with him.

When reading scripture, we can often see literary structures and parallels that can help us to understand deeper meanings. In John chapter 11, Jesus' two encounters, his encounter with Martha and his encounter with Mary, are paralleled with each other and contrasted also. Both of them present Jesus with a similar challenge.

Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. The similarity invites us to reflect both upon the likeness and also the differences between the two encounters. The difference that really stands out is what Martha says after that statement.

But even now, I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you. The later encounter with Mary does not include that element. Indeed, Mary's association with the Jews at this point suggests some element of unbelief on her part.

There is a sort of contrast between the faith that Martha exhibits and the limited faith that Mary exhibits. In the Gospel of Luke, we have a far more negative portrayal of Martha. She's the sister who is busy with the work of the house and fails to pay attention to the one who was visiting, Christ himself, whereas Mary was the one who sat at Jesus' feet.

Once again here, we see Mary associated with Jesus' feet. She throws herself at his feet

and later on in the chapter that follows, she anoints his feet. And so there's a particular attachment that Mary has to Christ, a very personal attachment.

Yet perhaps it's more easily wounded as a result of that. She feels maybe that her love for Jesus has been wounded or betrayed by his failure to come when he was called. Martha does not seem to be quite so wounded by Jesus' absence.

She's still able to exhibit a sense of faith and hope, even in this situation of tragedy. Even now, I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you. Perhaps taking the synoptic portrayals of these two sisters and the portrayal of them in the Gospel of John together, we can recognise rounded personalities that have differing strengths and weaknesses.

Considering that John's Gospel is written so that we might believe and that in believing we might have life, John might want us to reflect upon these two paradigmatic responses to a sense of Christ's absence in tragedy. Jesus' delay is not out of an absence of love. Indeed, in the Gospel, Jesus' relationship with Lazarus is defined by love.

And in this episode, Jesus enters into the emotions associated with the tragedy of human loss and the pain inflicted by the enemy of death. That Jesus does not always turn up when people first meet him is a spur to a dogged and persistent faith. Rather than doubting his character or his love, those who have faith are supposed to persevere in the darkness, confident in his character that he will act in their situation.

When Jesus declares to Martha that her brother she believes that he's referring only to some event in the distant future. Jesus elicits and encourages her resurrection faith, but he wants to take this faith even further. The statement of verse 25 is one of the strongest and most important in the Gospel.

This is another one of the I am statements, a statement of divine identity. However, Jesus is also here presenting himself as resurrection and life come in person. We should think back when reading this chapter to chapter 5 verses 24 to 29.

There Jesus stated, So he has granted the son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment because he is the son of man. In this chapter, Jesus gives a demonstration of the power of his word, the power that he possesses as one who has life in himself and the way in which his voice is that which will raise the dead.

Resurrection is not a generic theological truth. It's not just a truth about some event that will befall people in the future. It's a personal reality present in Jesus Christ.

He is resurrection personified. He is the one who has life within himself. He is the one whose word will raise the dead and give life to those in the tomb.

When Jesus comes into this situation, he comes bringing life and the fullness of life with him. Jesus encourages Martha's faith in the resurrection by looking to him as the resurrection and the life, confident in his love for her brother Lazarus. Hearing the unbelief of the Jews and the cruel statements that they make, doubting his supposed love for Lazarus, Jesus is filled with indignation and with sorrow.

Seeing the place where his friend has been put to rest, he weeps, removing all doubt in the witnesses of his love for the deceased Lazarus. Jesus had assured Martha that if she believed, she would see the glory of God. Yet she doubts, wondering about the odor if the tomb is opened up.

Jesus doesn't rebuke her for her weak faith. He encourages her to trust him and assures her that as she trusts him, she would see the glory of God. Throughout the gospel to this point, the connection between the work of Christ and the work of the Father has been highlighted.

Jesus does the works of the Father. He does them with the authorization of the Father. And here he publicly prays to the Father in order to demonstrate the authorization the Father has given to him.

He does not pray that the Father would raise Lazarus, but he thanks the Father that he has heard him and that he always hears him. Just as Jesus had said that the dead would hear the voice of the Son of God and those who heard would live, Jesus speaks the voice that gives life to Lazarus, summoning him to come out of the tomb. Christ gives an anticipation of the general resurrection here.

Once again, as with a number of the signs, Jesus' absence and then the power of his word are prominent themes within this story. It is the word of Christ that is the means of salvation and deliverance. Christ speaks into that situation and those people who hear his word receive life.

A question to consider. Jesus' first sign, the changing of the water into wine at the wedding of Cana, and this final sign involve a response to the request of a woman who loves him, first seemingly rebuffed or not answered, and then answered in response to a persistent faith. What are some of the lessons that we can learn about faith and its relationship with prayer in this chapter?