
The Gospel of John

Part 8 - by: Ronald L. Dart

Jesus defies explanation. You can't just put Him in a category and then say, "You have Him figured out!" Nearly every conventional idea about Jesus is contradicted by another conventional idea about Jesus and they all come from the same basic source documents: The four Gospels of your New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Study Jesus

On the one hand, you have a gentle Jesus, meek and mild. On the other hand you have Jesus kicking the money changers out of the Temple, turning their tables over, whipping animals and driving them through the whole mess. He was angry because of what they had done in the Temple.

You have Jesus, who wouldn't break a bruised reed or raise his voice in the streets. On the other hand, you have a vengeful Christ returning to make war and to destroy His enemies in the Book of Revelation. John, in his gospel, is at some pains to recall and present those sayings of Jesus, that identify Him as God, the Son of God, even the God of Abraham and then he turns right around and presents a Jesus so human that He is overcome with grief and weeps along with Mary and Martha at the death of Lazarus.

It's fascinating when you really begin to study this man, because He is certainly one of the most remarkable figures, regardless of what you may think about His deity. He is one of the most remarkable figures in the history of man.

Lazarus, Come Forth

One day, for example, Jesus had delayed His return back to this area of Bethany because Lazarus was sick. Mary and Martha had sent word to Him. He delayed deliberately, He told His disciples, "I'm not going down there right now." He actually arrived four days after Lazarus had died and when He got there, Mary came to him and saw Him and fell down at His feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Now that is tough, that is a hard thing to take from people that you really love and care about, because Jesus did, He loved Lazarus and He loved his sisters Mary and Martha. He thought that these were His people as it were, and He was not there. He was not there on purpose and to be reproached for it.

It's in John chapter 11 verse 32. In verse 33 it goes on with the story and it says, "When Jesus saw her weeping and all the Jews were weeping which had come with her, He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, {34} And He said, "Where have you laid him?" And they said to him, "Lord, come and see." {35} Jesus wept. {36} Then the Jews said, "Behold how He loved him!"

I think they have it right. I think they have it exactly right. Some people say that Jesus wept because of the hardness of all their hearts. He looked at all the people around there and all of their weeping and how unbelieving they were and He wept about those people. I don't think so at all. I think He wept with Mary and Martha. He was grieved. He felt the human emotions that were ebbing and flowing and He loved Lazarus.

"Some of them said," {37} "Couldn't this man, who opened the eyes the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?" {38} And Jesus again, groaning in Himself comes to the grave. It was a cave and there was a stone lying against it. {39} Jesus said, "Take away the stone. Martha, the sister of Lazarus, said, "Lord, by this time he'll be stinking. He's been dead for four days.""

Now there's something here, that's easy to miss, in the whole story of all this, where it talks about how Jesus delayed His coming, and how He was ready to go but He said, "No, I'm not going to go yet," and He finally told His disciples, "Lazarus is sleeping," but what He meant was, that Lazarus had died, and He still came late on purpose, and by this time, the expectation is that the body had begun to decay.

So why did Jesus delay, if He was going to heal Lazarus anyhow, why not come down and prevent his death? Why let Mary and Martha grieve for four long days?

"Jesus said to her," {40} "Didn't I tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" {41} So they did as He instructed, they took away the stone from the place where the dead Lazarus was laid, and Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. {42} I know that you hear me always, but because of the people who stand here, I said it, so that they may believe that You have sent Me.""

It is interesting what Jesus is saying here, "I know You hear Me all the time. I know I could've walked up here and just pulled Lazarus out here, but I actually prayed, so that the people here would know that it was You who sent me.

"And when Jesus had said this, He cried with a loud voice, "LAZARUS, COME FORTH!" {44} And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave clothes, staggering out of the mouth of the cave. His face was covered with a napkin and Jesus said, "Loose him and let him go."

Why Did Jesus Wait So Long?

Now does an answer occur to you as to why Jesus waited so long? Down through history, and even in John's day, there was a belief that the spirit of a dead person hovered around the body for

three days, presumably ready to return if the person was not really dead and stories abound that people who were thought to be dead, but who turned out not to be dead at all.

There was so much belief in this, I heard that they put a bell above a burial site with a string down into the casket so just in case the person really wasn't dead, and they revived, he could ring the bell and they could dig them up. Sounds a little far-fetched, but not entirely.

A friend of mine who used to fly dead bodies from place to place for funeral homes in his plane had a scary night once. He was ferrying a cadaver from one town to another through East Texas thunderstorms on a dark and wild night. It may have been the turbulence, but he looked over his shoulder once during the storm and the body was sitting up. At least that's his story and he's sticking to it.

Jesus delayed coming till the fourth day because in so doing, He established once and for all, His power over death. There is no argument here, that if Lazarus wasn't really dead, or that he fainted or passed out or was in a coma and that he came to, you couldn't argue that, because we have come to the place now, to where the body would have begun to decompose, way beyond anything the Jews would have believed was a revival, because He wanted them to understand that He had the power to raise the dead. It must have been a thing for them to see.

Some Believed In Jesus and Some Didn't

Let's continue in John 11 verse 45, "Then many of the Jews who came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on Him." You know I would think so! {46} "But some of them went their way to the Pharisees and told them the things that Jesus had done."

You know, it's hard to imagine the conflict that this produced in the minds of the people who were there, because some couldn't help but believe in Jesus. They couldn't help but to believe He had the power over death. They saw this man dead, they saw that he was buried, they saw him walk out of the tomb and they couldn't deal with it, but at the same time, they knew that their religious leadership, the religious establishment, the people that they looked to and trusted, that they did not believe in Jesus, that they did not believe He was come from God, and so naturally, some of them went to the Pharisees in confusion and wanted to know, "What is this? We thought you said that Jesus was not of God, and here He has raised this man from the dead. What are we supposed to do about this?"

"The chief priests and the Pharisees," {47} "got a council together and said, "What are we going to do? This man does many miracles. {48} If we let him alone, all men will believe on Him and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and our nation.""

The whole thing was political. It's really hard to understand, isn't it? Here's a man, who thousands of people had seen heal people at one time or another. They had seen Him heal the blind, they saw Him heal the lame. They had seen a man born blind, who could now see. You know, when you really understand all this, when you actually see it with your own eyes, and you are standing there and a dead man walks out of the tomb after he has been dead for four days, when you see all this staring you in the face, how can you then in the face of all this witness

conclude, this man is nothing but pure trouble for us. If we let Him alone, we are going to lose our authority entirely. It's incredible.

Power Corrupts

Lord Acton said, "Power corrupts! Absolute power corrupts absolutely!"

Well, so be it. It is clear enough that power corrupts, power blinds, because here were people who simply could not see, deal with or accept the implications that this man whom they were coming to hate, was actually sent by God.

John 11 verse 49, "One of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year said, "You don't know anything at all, {50} Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perishes not.""

Funny, isn't it, he actually prophesied on this occasion "that one man was going to die for the people," but I don't think he understood it the way we understand it at all.

Why would it be that the Romans would come and take away their place and nation isn't clear. I guess they expected the Messiah to come and if the Messiah came, He would lead a rebellion and the Romans would come rolling in on top of the rebellion and then it would all be over, and yet there's no indication anywhere, in what Jesus said or did, that implied that He would have led a rebellion against Rome. There was no evidence of it, but they were simply scared to death.

Continuing in verse 51, "The high priest Caiaphas did not speak this of himself," John said, "being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, {52} And not for that nation only, but that He should also gather together in one all the children of God that were scattered abroad."

This is a statement of staggering importance. It explains Jesus' other sheep reference, where He said, "Other sheep have I which are not of this fold. I have to go and get them and so there would be one-fold and one shepherd."

So, Caiaphas prophesied this. "Then," {53} "From that day forward, they took counsel together to put Jesus to death."

Behold, the power of politics!

They Wanted To Kill Jesus

Now when you look at what we are looking at here in John's Gospel, with the overt actual attempt of the religious leaders to kill Jesus, with people taking counsel together to put Him to death, you can begin to understand perhaps some of the concern that has been expressed in some quarters, by Mel Gibson's movie, 'The Passion,' because 'The Passion' is apparently going to tell the simple truth about what happened in the last hours of Jesus' life, and the fact that it was the Jewish establishment in Jerusalem that wanted Jesus dead. It's a fact of the Gospels and

something that has to be dealt with. It is not a reason to persecute the Jews today, or the ordinary man in the street, because Jesus' disciples were all Jewish to begin with. The believers were Jewish. So why persecute Jewish people? But of course, people do crazy things and God knows the Jews have suffered terribly at the hands of Christians, which is not justified by the fact, whatever you think about the fact, that Christ Himself suffered at the hands of a handful of Jews in the first century.

Verse 54 of John 11, "Jesus, therefore walked no more openly among the Jews, but went from there into a country, near to the wilderness, to a city called Ephraim, and He stayed there with His disciples. {55} The Jews' Passover was near at hand, and a lot of people went out of the country up to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves."

The Passover was a very important day in their year.

"And they looked for Jesus when they got there," {56} "and they spoke among themselves as they stood in the Temple."

It was the constant topic of conversation.

"What you think? Do you think He will come to this feast?" {57} "Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a commandment, that if any man knew where He was, he should show it, so they could take Him.""

Passover Time

We are now at John 12 verse 1, "Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, who had been raised from the dead, {2} And they made Him a supper and Martha served. Lazarus was one of those that sat at the table with Jesus."

Now this is something to consider, here is the man who was dead, four days dead, and Jesus raised him from the dead and now Lazarus is able to sit at the table and eat with Him.

"Then," {3} "Mary took a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair and the whole house was filled with the odor of the ointment."

This is a really touching thing. You know it's difficult to realize as you cast your mind back down through two millennia to try to understand what was going on, but Jesus had, apart from His love for mankind, He had some very close personal friends whom He loved and who loved him dearly. They loved Him because He was the son of God. They loved Him because He was the Messiah, but it seems evident to me that they also loved him personally.

Judas Was Jesus' Friend

"One of disciples when he saw what Mary had done, he said, {5} "Wait a minute, why are you doing this? Why wasn't this ointment sold and the money given to the poor" (John 12:4-5).

Guess who said it? It was Judas Iscariot. {6} "He said this, not because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief and had the bag and he carried around whatever money that they had."

You know, if you look back on this time, you think about Judas and you really wonder how in the world a man could have been close to Jesus, for as long as he was, and have stolen from Him. What did he need? They all were taken care of. They had a bag in which they bought whatever they needed. They had a place to sleep. They had food to eat. They had people who would take care of them. They had a work to do as they went up and down the hills and preached and talked to people, but it wasn't enough for Judas. He was a thief and the sad thing about all this is, Jesus knew who he was from the beginning and Jesus still cared about Judas.

The Psalm that deals with this, says "My own familiar friend, in whom I trusted has lifted up his heel against me" (Psalms 41:9). The Scripture in the New Testament with the old, seems to be saying, that Judas is a figure whom Jesus regarded as a familiar friend whom He trusted. Now don't misunderstand me, what it says is that Jesus placed His trust in him. He knew that Judas was a thief. He knew that Judas was going to betray Him right from the very beginning, and yet He still placed trust in him and called him a friend.

It really makes you think, doesn't it? How Jesus was able to love and care for, and call a friend, a man who He knew was going to stab Him in the back.

Well, {7} "Jesus said to Judas, "Let her alone, against the day of my burial has she kept this, {8} For the poor you always have with you. But I'm not going to be here forever." {9} Much of the people of Jews therefore, they knew He was in the house and they kept coming there. They didn't come for Jesus sake only, they wanted to see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead."

They Wanted To Kill Lazarus

The word spread all over the landscape about what Jesus had done with Lazarus and they wanted to see this man. They wanted to say, "Look, that's the man, he was dead. Look, he's alive!"

Verse 10 of John 12, "But the chief priests, consulted that they might put Lazarus to death, {11} because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away and believed on Jesus."

I should not laugh. It is just the absurdity. It is just the tragic absurdity of this poor man, who was dead, now is alive, and they want to go out and now kill Lazarus, so people can't go around and look at him and believe on Jesus. The desperation of these men has an almost comic quality about it, but in truth, there's really nothing funny about it all. It is a terrible tragedy for them.

Jesus' Entry Into Jerusalem

John 12 verse 12, "On the next day many people had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem and {13} They took branches of palm trees and they went out to meet Him and cried, "Hosanna, Blessed is the King of Israel that comes in the name of the Lord.""

Apparently, there was a huge gathering of crowds.

"And Jesus, when He found a young ass, He sat on it, as it is written, {15} Don't be afraid, daughter of Zion, your King comes sitting on an ass's colt.""

Now let's not misunderstand the importance of this is, their Messiah, their king was to come to them, not on a horse or a chariot as a conqueror, as a ruler, as one harsh and making war, but humble, sitting on an ass's colt, gentle with no threat.

Jesus' Disciples Did Not Get It At First

John 12 verse 16, "Jesus' disciples did not understand this at the first, but when He was glorified, they remembered the things that were written of Him, and that they had done these things to Him."

I think that's an interesting passage. John, writing rather late in the course of things, I think, actually looks back and says, "You know, we just didn't get it at the time. We did not understand it. It was only after the fact, that we began to really put this thing together."

Well, {17} "The people that were with Him, when He called Lazarus out of his grave and called him from the dead bear record, {18} And for this cause the people also met him that they would see Him that had done the miracle. {19} The Pharisees said among themselves, "Don't you see how we are accomplishing nothing? The whole world is gone after Him."

It must've been terrifying to these Jewish men because they saw their power, their influence, their authority vanishing like smoke in the wind.

Certain Greeks Came To Worship At Passover

About this time something unusual happened that Jesus took as very important.

Let's continue in John 12 verse 20, "There were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast. {21} The same came to Philip, who was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired of him, saying, "Sir, we want to see Jesus."

Now what is fascinating about this is, these were Greeks who believed in God, and who came up to worship at the Feast of Passover. They weren't Jews and Philip came and told Andrew and then they came and told Jesus.

"Jesus answered them, {23} saying, "The hour has come, that the Son of Man should be glorified."

This is what we must expect to take place, that if Jesus is going to be here, He is going to do His work. Surely it will be done among the Jews at first, but it is going to have to go elsewhere as well. We can't stop it.

Kernel of Wheat

Jesus says in verse 24 of John 12, "Verily, I say unto you, Except a kernel of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abides alone: but if it dies, it brings forth much fruit."

Now what a thing to say in response to this. He just told them, "Now the time has come when the Son of Man will be glorified."

The whole world is hearing us, then He turns and says to His disciples, "Except a kernel of wheat falls into the ground and die, it abides alone."

This is true, a little kernel of wheat. that's all it is, you can eat it and it's gone. But if you put in the ground and let it die, which it does, it brings forth much fruit."

Verse 25, "He who loves his life shall lose it. He that hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal."

We cannot hang on to this life at any costs. In fact, there are any number of costs that might be far too high to try to retain this life.

"If any man serves me, let them follow me and where I am, that's where my servant is going to be. If any man serves me, him will my Father honor. {27} Now is my soul troubled," Jesus continued to say, "And what am I going to say? Father, save me from this hour, for this cause I came to this hour."

Now this is a troubling thing. He is trying to explain this to His disciples, which they really didn't get yet, that He was going to have to die.

Jesus says, "Any man that loves his life is going to lose it." He says, "My soul is troubled. This is not easy for Me, What shall I say, Father, save me from this hour," there is hardly any point in saying that, because this is why I came to this hour.

Verse 28, ""Father, glorify your name." and then all of a sudden there came a voice out of the sky saying, "I have both glorified it and I will glorify it again." {29} The people that stood by, heard it, and said, "It thundered." Somebody else said, "No, no, an angel spoke to Him." {30} Jesus answered and said, "This voice came not because of Me. It came for your sake. I didn't need to hear it. I already knew it. {31} Now is the judgment of this world. Now shall the prince of this world be cast out {32} And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." {33} This He said, John tells us, signifying by what death He would die."

And you know, what Jesus said is so true, that Him being lifted up, between heaven and earth, Him hanging there on that Roman stake or cross, whatever it was, and pouring out His life's blood, enduring the pain and the suffering of that long night and the next morning on the cross itself. This is something that all men can see and deal with and understand. This man suffered and died for me and you.

Continuing in verse 34, "The people answered Him and said, "We've heard out of the law that Christ abides forever, and how do you say the Son of Man must be lifted up, who is this Son of Man?"

"We thought you were the Messiah, everything about this was Messiah this and Messiah that, but the Messiah is going to go forever, how come you're going to die?"

Light and Darkness

John 12 verse 33, "Jesus said to them, yet a little while is the light with you. You'd better walk while you have light, lest darkness come upon you, for he that walks in darkness doesn't know where he is going, {36} While you have light, believe in the light, so you can be children of the light." He spoke these things and left and hid himself from the crowd."

The time had come to get away from them, and what Jesus is saying here is very sobering. He says there is a period of time in which you can walk in the light, and you see where you're going. You'd better get it done while you can see, because the time is going to come, when you can't see.

"Though He had done many miracles before them, yet they couldn't believe on him. {38} That the saying of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke, "Lord, who has believed our report and to whom is the arm of the Lord been revealed? {39} Therefore, they could not believe, because Isaiah said again, {40} "He has blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart, that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them."

What a thing to say. They actually didn't have a chance, that these things said Isaiah when he saw his glory and spoke of Him.

"Nevertheless," {42} among the chief rulers, many believed on Him, but because of the Pharisees, they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue, {43} For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."

What a tragic indictment, that men for political reasons, would turn their back on the Son of God.

The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit RLDEA.com where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think about Mr. Dart's point that "Jesus defies explanation"?
2. Have you ever heard about the belief that in the past they believed that the spirit hung around for three days? Therefore, Jesus had to wait to make sure everyone had no doubt that Lazarus was dead.
3. How do you think the people reacted when Lazarus came forth?
4. Why do you think power corrupts humans so much?
5. How has 'power' heart God's people today?
6. What can we do to not fall into the temptation of power and pride?
7. Why do you think Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus? Was it because of his own character flaw or was it because he had a role to play?
8. Have you ever gone through something that at the time you didn't understand why but later after the fact, you finally figured out the reasoning?
9. Do you ever consider how hard and scary it must have been for Jesus to know what was about to happen to Him?
10. Have you ever been afraid to stand up for what you believed in because you didn't want to face the opinions of those around you?