

Jesus Raises Lazarus

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Date: 12 July 2020

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[0 : 00] So we're going to read together from John chapter 11. So if you have your Bibles, we'll be in John chapter 11 and we're going to read the first 44 verses before thinking about it briefly.

Let's hear God's word. Now a man named Lazarus was ill. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay ill, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. So the sisters sent word to Jesus, Lord, the one you love is ill. When he heard this, Jesus said, this illness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's son may be glorified through it. Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

So when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed where he was two more days. And then he said to his disciples, let us go back to Judea. But Rabbi, they said a short while ago, the Jews there tried to stone you and yet you are going back. Jesus answered, are there not 12 hours of daylight?

Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble for they see by this world's light. It is when a person walks at night that they stumble for they have no light. After he had said this, he went on to tell them, our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to wake him up. His disciples replied, Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better. Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. So then he told them plainly, Lazarus is dead. And for your sake, I am glad I was not there so that you may believe, but let us go to him. Then Thomas, also known as Didymus, said to the rest of the disciples. Let us also go, that we may die with him. On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. Lord, Martha said to Jesus, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask. Jesus said to her, your brother will rise again.

Martha answered, I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live even though they die. And whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this? Yes, Lord, she replied. I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world. After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. The teacher is here, she said, and is asking for you. When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there. When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell to his feet and said,

[3 : 23] Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. Where have you laid him? He asked. Come and see, Lord, they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, see how he loved him.

But some of them said, could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying? Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance.

Take away the stone, he said. But Lord, said Martha, the sister of the dead man, by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days. Then Jesus said, did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God? So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here that they may believe that you sent me. When he had said this, Jesus

called in a loud voice, Lazarus, come out. The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen and a cloth round his face. Jesus said to them, take off the grave clothes and let him go.

So it's a long passage, but it's a wonderful passage as we think about the raising of Lazarus, which is, in John's Gospel, his final signpost as to the identity and the mission of Jesus. And it stands as a climax. Here is Jesus described and identified, revealed as the divine yet human saviour who has come to defeat the power of death and the devil. It is a sign that reveals the glory of God. It reveals the power and love of Jesus and it points us towards the cross and the resurrection.

All the way along, we've been reminding ourselves of John's conclusion to why he chose to have these signs in his gospel. In John chapter 20 verse 31, these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. In other words, these are written so that we might believe so that like Mary and Martha, when trouble or suffering or death comes, Jesus would be the friend we would know and call on. Jesus would be the Son of God and Saviour that we would depend on. That we would see Jesus as the good news, the good person, the good God that we all need. So to think about this story, it begins with an announcement. First, 17 verses, there is this announcement that comes from Martha and Mary, comes to Jesus,

[6 : 37] Lazarus, who you love, is ill. And that's followed up by some announcements from Jesus. Jesus says to his disciples, this will not end in death. Notice he doesn't say Lazarus will not die, he says death is not going to be the end of the story for Lazarus. But rather, this event will reveal the glory of God and will reveal the glory of Jesus, his Son, as he performs this sign. Jesus then announces in time that he will go. And he says he will go to wake Lazarus from the sleep of death. And he's going to do that, we're told in verse 15, that the disciples may believe. So again, it's always moving us towards that response of believing. Now just as we get going, a couple of things to notice about Jesus here.

One, he enjoyed friendships and he shared love with individual people, here with a family.

So the message comes from the sisters, Lord, the one you love, Lazarus, is ill. And then we're told in verse 5, Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Now nobody had a schedule like Jesus. Now our schedule's all been flipped upside down, but you imagine yourself at your busiest and your life is nothing like as busy as Jesus. We read frequently that he was so overwhelmed by people wanting to hear him teach and to heal. Then he didn't even have time to eat. He didn't have a moment's peace. He would go to a quiet place with his disciples and crowds would come and he wouldn't have any space, a pattern of preaching and teaching and doing miracles and travelling from place to place and at the same time facing so much opposition and rejection.

But that didn't harden him. Some welcomed Jesus and he enjoyed friendship. He has this wonderful balance that he's a public figure preaching and teaching the kingdom of God, but he also has these personal loving friendships. Those who welcomed him enjoyed friendship with him.

[9 : 04] And that's amazing to just sort of step back and think. This Jesus who John has described as the creator and sustainer of all things, as the Lord of all, as the saviour of the world, is also a friend.

Is it your friend? Are you enjoying and growing in that friendship with God today, with Jesus today? The sister's instinct is important for us to recognise. In their suffering and their crisis, they turn to Jesus. You know, we sang a few minutes ago, what a friend we have in Jesus. All our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry everything to God, Jesus, who is God, in prayer. Mary and Martha knew that.

Do we know that ourselves? Are we making use of that wonderful resource we have in prayer?

Suffering, I guess we've said this a few times during lockdown, suffering serves as a stress test on the foundations that we build on. If their life, if their family life had been based on comfort and health and a lack of suffering, then those foundations would crumble.

But what we see in Mary and Martha is their faith is fixed on Jesus. He is the rock that they have chosen to build on. That's one of the images that Jesus gives. The Bible gives of Jesus. He is the rock. He is the foundation. He is the cornerstone that we are to build our life on. And these friends of Jesus, they've done that. Jesus is their friend.

But we also see that Jesus would reveal the glory and the power of God in these events. So in verse 4, this illness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it. So Jesus comes to reveal the glory of God. And he'll do it again in this sign. And we're

also here reminded that Jesus shares glory and honour with his Father. Jesus is not simply fully human. He is also fully God and deserving all glory and honour. And then in verse 11, we're reminded of his power. Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to wake him up. He's our friend, but only I can wake him. And for Jesus, his power is so great that raising Lazarus from the dead will be like waking him up from an afternoon nap. And again, remember the purpose of the sign that you may believe in this Jesus. The goal is for the disciples here to grow and be strengthened in their faith. That as the glory of Jesus is revealed to them once more, that it would call out a personal response in them. So today, as we reflect on this, can you and I, will we, trust Jesus in our pain, in our suffering, and even with our own death? Bearing in mind that Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever. We are encouraged to recognise that Jesus still has that same love, that same compassion, that same power in heaven that he had on earth. So let this story help you to see

[12:31] Jesus so that you might trust him as friend and as saviour. Moving on from that announcement, we come to, I suppose, the centre of the story with the comfort that Jesus provides. But first of all, there's a tension. Verse 17, on his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. And so the question is, is Jesus too late? And we discover with Jesus, it's never too late. Such is his power and wisdom. He will show himself as the friend who loves and the son of God who has come to deliver. And again, we get this beautiful portrait of the divine yet human saviour who stands at the centre of our faith. He is unique in all the faiths. He is the only head of a religion that claims to be God who has entered in. He's the only one who shows the grace of God. And here he is also standing in the middle of human suffering and grief, not standing on the sidelines, not distant and remote. And he comes to these two sisters who share a common faith. Both of them, verse 21 and 32, come to Jesus and say, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. So they have faith in the identity of Jesus, in the presence of Jesus.

And what we see in Jesus is that he loves each of them and he knows each of them and he knows their particular needs in that moment. So we see him, to borrow from Tim Keller, operating a ministry of truth where he sort of pushes Martha with truth towards hope, eternal hope. But then with Mary exercising a ministry of tears, entering into the grief and the sorrow. And we need this kind of saviour.

This isn't somebody that anybody would make up. Fully human, fully divine. So let's take a look. First of all, the ministry of truth. As we meet Martha, we discover Martha as, like many of the Jews of her day, she had a general hope of end time resurrection. That at the end of history, the people of God would be raised to a new life, to enjoy a new world. And Jesus brings a different hope when he says, I am the resurrection and the life. And he says to Martha, your brother will rise again. Jesus will bring not a general hope, but a personal hope of not simply an end time resurrection, but an end time, in the middle of history resurrection, something that's utterly unique.

And how is Jesus able to do that? Here the focus is on who Jesus is. He is the one who brings resurrection life because he is the I am. That's a title of God. He is the resurrection and the life.

[15:54] He is the one who in and of himself can give eternal life, which is both a quantity, perfect life forever. And it's a quality of life that begins now. Eternal life is to know relationship with God, to call on him as father, to enjoy his love and his salvation today, as well as for all of eternity.

And so Jesus says that death will not be the end. Eternal life beyond death is the reality for those who believe.

Martha's response when Jesus says, do you believe this? Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the son of God who is to come into the world. Martha's right. I believe absolutely.

And she recognises for you to deliver on those promises, Jesus, you must be the Messiah. You must be the son of God. She understands the connection between the sign and the identity of Jesus performs the sign that he is in none other than the son of God and the promised saviour who was to come into the world. So there is this ministry of truth to Martha to bring her towards hope and eternal hope. But then towards Mary, it's different. There's this ministry of tears.

Jesus. When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come along with her weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. And then in verse 35, we simply read, Jesus wept.

[17:29] Jesus feels the horrific power of death. Jesus feels the grief of love lost, of separation experienced.

Jesus feels the pain of brokenness in a fallen world. Jesus is a king, but he's not like a visiting dignitary, coolly assessing the scene of a tragedy. He doesn't stand on the sidelines and make

notes and offer a passing nod to those in grief. He's not that kind of king. No, in love he enters in. And do you know what's remarkable? Remember, Jesus has already told the disciples what he's going to do. So he knows he's going to raise Lazarus. And yet, faced with the sorrow and the grief and the anguish of death, compassion and tears overflow. The author Dane Ortland describes this as Jesus's perfect, unfiltered compassion.

It's different to ours. It's a different quality to ours. Sometimes we can find that we are self-absorbed, so that we fail to provide the help and relief that we ought to. Sometimes we become numb and cold to suffering, so it doesn't move us like it ought to. Sometimes we just run empty. We run out of capacity to love and to care, but never Jesus. And Jesus also has that perfect wisdom to know what we need at all times.

We know this in our own experience when we suffer, when we grieve. There are times where what we want is solid truth, hope from the Bible. And at other times, we want someone's tears. We want someone to sit with us, to put an arm around us.

[19 : 47] For you and I, sometimes we don't read the signs and we lack wisdom. We don't always comfort well. But Jesus never fails to be the perfect comforter. And he sent the Holy Spirit to be God with us and in us to comfort us in our suffering.

Let's think now about the victory of Jesus here at the graveside.

Verses 38 to 44. What do we feel when we stand at a graveside? Often, it's an experience of deep loss, overwhelmed by grief.

A sense of the permanence of that parting. Maybe as Christians, if we're mourning the loss of another Christian, we have the hope of heaven, of eternity, that sense of comfort that they're now with their Lord.

One last thing to notice about the emotions of Jesus. In verse 38, and we've already seen it in verse 33, it says, Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. Now, what's that getting at?

[21 : 19] It's getting at the fact that Jesus is actually outraged in his spirit. Jesus comes to the tomb with a sense of horror and anger as he stands there.

Now, what is it that causes him to be angry? Well, surely it's the sin and the sickness and the death that he is face to face with.

Features of life in a broken world, misery and ruin that comes because of sin. There is pain at the intrusion of death, the great and the last enemy.

Bebe Warfield has an essay called *The Emotional Life of Our Lord*. And speaking of this passage, he says that death is the object of Jesus' wrath.

And behind it, him who has the power of death. And he goes on to say, the raising of Lazarus becomes an open symbol, a signpost of Jesus' conquest of death and hell.

[22 : 30] Here is King Jesus going to war against death, that great enemy. And Jesus goes into battle with the power and authority to bring that reversal.

In raising Lazarus from the dead, he gives proof that he is the resurrection and the life. In verse 43, when Jesus calls out in a loud voice, Lazarus comes out.

Jesus calls out in a loud voice, bearing our sin, facing our judgment, experiencing our death as our substitute and our sacrifice before rising in victory.

Jesus has both the power and the love to bring the greatest reversal, to bring the greatest renewal. He and he alone can bring life where there is death.

He can bring spiritual life where there was spiritual death. He can bring eternal life beyond physical death. All of this pointed to him, to bring the greatest of life beyond the world. All of this pointed to him, this sign.

[24 : 39] And remember, Jesus in heaven is not less loving and he's not less powerful than he was on earth back then. So to hear his voice today and to respond with faith is to have Jesus as your friend.

To have the comforting presence of the Savior Jesus in your life when you need him. The friend who sticks closer than any brother.

And it's to have that promise that you will hear his voice again at the end of time when he comes again to judge the living and the dead and to make all things new. And to bring perfect restoration. He will welcome you into the new heavens and the new earth. When suffering and death will be nothing but a distant memory. So as we finish our time in John's seven signs.

Have you come to see the glory of Jesus for yourself? And as you see his glory, will you come to him and keep coming to him?

[25 : 49] Will you go to him in your pain and your suffering and your tears? Will you trust him in your suffering and facing death? Knowing that he alone can make everything sad come untrue.

Because he alone is the resurrection and the life.