

John 11:1-44

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 April 2016

Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 0 0] Again, that's John chapter 11, 1 through 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 that 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?

[1 : 0 9] 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 and sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, Lazarus is dead, 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, 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 for 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.

[2 : 2 5] 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.

[3 : 34] 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. 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?

When Jesus deeply moved again, came to the tomb, it was a cave and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, take away this 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. Jesus said to her, did I not tell you that if you believe you would see the glory of God?

[4 : 40] 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 crowed out with a loud voice, Lazarus, come out. The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen straps, and his face wrapped with cloth.

And Jesus said to them, unbind him and let him go. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Well, what an extraordinary passage.

A written account that comes to us down through the centuries with the most astonishing claim that Jesus raised a dead man by the name of Lazarus simply by calling his name.

Seems almost fanciful. Fairytale-like. There are elements in the text that are real, though.

[6 : 16] That demonstrate to us that this narrative is centered in the world in which you and I live. And it has things which we are all too familiar with.

Namely, the reality of death. I was trying to think of a way to bundle the first 16 verses together. And I would put it under the header, death is at work in the world.

Now that is something we know. Death seems to be the one undeterred force at work in the world in which you and I live.

And in the text, it is almost self-evident from every conceivable angle. It's laden with the angst in the voice of the two sisters.

Verse 1, A certain man was ill. Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary, and her sister Martha. And immediately we get this word, almost panicky word, from them in verse 3.

[7 : 42] Lord, he whom you love is ill. Now you only send a word to Jesus about the illness of a loved one if it is a real problem.

In fact, later we'll see their only regret each time in the voice of the sisters, Lord, if you had been here, he wouldn't have died.

They were in angst over the undeterred force at work in the world, namely death. And it seems to me that they understood that when their brother was ill, he was ill unto death.

So from the angle and the vantage point of the sisters, they live in a real world. The narrator also seems to acknowledge that death is at work in the world.

Verse 2 is fascinating. It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped her feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. It's actually a comment on a scene which takes place later in chapter 12.

[8 : 59] It's this kind of proleptic indication that while Lazarus is ill and you're introduced to Mary, it's Mary who will later anoint Jesus for his own death.

And so from the angle of the narrator, death is at work in the world. The death of Lazarus is inevitable, known by his sisters. It is connected to the death of Jesus, known by the narrator.

And don't you love those disciples? Verse 16, boy, to have been there for that line. Psalmist, Thomas called the twin, said to his fellow disciples, let us also go that we may die with him.

This indication that Jesus was under severe attack. He'd almost been killed earlier, the chapter before, when he had been in Jerusalem, and had only escaped by some kind of miraculously sounding movement.

And now he wants to go back to a city only two miles from Jerusalem. And the disciples are certain of one thing. Death is at work in the world. And they were for you once.

[10 : 12] They will be after you again. And if we go with you now, there's only one inevitable outcome. That is the death of us all. So from every conceivable angle, death is at work in the world.

Now, that's just important for us to look at. By general terms, we could call ourselves a younger congregation.

Not as young as we once were. But younger nevertheless, our congregation, we celebrate many more weddings and births than we do deaths and funerals.

And so it's good for us to remember that death is at work in the world. You've got to look that squarely in the eye.

And you better look it in the eye when you're younger. Lest you have a romanticized view of life down the road.

[11 : 18] I'm 51. I'm old enough now to have stood at the grave of a two-day-old with a little white box.

Two-day-old. A five-year-old from our own congregation. Young career professionals.

Vibrant and filled with life one day and gone the next. Middle-aged family. Snuffed out through disease long before one would expect.

And even the aging. I've been there. The full spectrum. Death is at work in the world.

It is the undeterred force. And notice, it even comes to those whom Jesus loved. And if it came to this one, it will come for us all.

[12 : 26] Did you know that 150,000 people roughly die every day? Over 6,340 people every hour. 107 people every minute. You probably take out this room already around the world from the time I began the message until where we are at this moment.

Did you know that in Chicago there are, by my count, no fewer than 19 cemeteries? That in the big cities, you're buried multiple people deep?

Death is real. In fact, there's a whole literature that has grown up around trying to deal with it. I think of the existentialist literature of Jean-Paul Sartre, his play No Exit.

You think of Camus. You think of John Updike, most famously. giving themselves to the subject of death, which by nature isn't despair.

[13 : 34] It's an attempt in literature to overcome that which they know to be true. I love this humorous line by Updike. He says, The world keeps ending, but new people, too dumb to know it, keep showing up as if the party's just started.

Yeah, you don't write that when you're 18, but all of us, there comes a day when you can write it. The world does keep ending.

Let's not deceive ourselves into thinking that that's not the case and that the fun has just started. The regret of Martha, if only you could have been there, the premeditated delay of Jesus is by far the most surprising moment in that first paragraph, isn't it?

Don't you love that? Verse 5 and following, Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, so when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he got on his horse and got there.

No. He stayed two days longer in the place where he was. What a enigmatic, decision.

[14 : 52] And then, therefore, later, his own voice, where he is, in a sense, indicating that this death would not lead to death, but it was for the glory of God.

So there is death at work in the world, but in the very text, this movement of the one named Jesus who seems to be acknowledging it, embracing it, yet determined to bring glory to God through it.

Well, the second section, verse 17 to 27. If the first section is, death is at work in the world, this moment in the narrative seems to be indicating to you and to me that life is at work in Jesus.

I mean, there's this long statement by Jesus in these verses. Jesus said to her, verse 23, your brother will rise again.

Martha said to him, I know he'll 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.

[16 : 13] 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're the Christ, the Son of God, who's coming into the world.

Let me go get my sister. Life is at work in Jesus. This is part of the story. This is nothing new for John.

Take a look back to chapter 1. Particularly in verses 3 and 4, the gospel writer indicates from the outset that life is at work in Jesus.

Verse 3, all things were made through him. That he's actually the creator of all that we call life. And without him was not anything made that was made.

In him was life. And the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

[17 : 13] So, in John's words, while death is at work in the world, there is one who has come from God, namely Jesus, the Nazarene, in whom life is at work.

Not only is he the creator of it, all that you and I call life, according to John, he's the source of life. That in him is life.

And so Jesus says, I am the resurrection and the life. I'm life. You want life? You want life? Jesus is the source.

What a striking claim. But there it is. In other words, the claim of the Christian message is this, that Jesus entered into the world to restore life.

The Bible at its very beginning indicates that death is king because sin has been enthroned. and where sin reigns, death is the result.

[18 : 24] So back to Genesis 2, 17, the command of God not to eat of the tree and their disobedience of the command, for in it you will surely die. And that death is twofold.

The physical death of Adam is recorded in Genesis 5, 1. And he died physically. But the spiritual death that separation from God is indicated in chapter 3 of Genesis where they are forced out of the presence of God.

So when we speak about death we need to think of it in two terms. You and I will physically die. That day is yet in the future. But there's an indication from the scriptures that we're already spiritually dead.

That is, we are separated from God. So both in body and in spirit death is at work. Death is at work already within us.

And yet Jesus claims to be the source of life even for those who are under the penalty of death. For he says even if you die in me you live forever.

[19 : 36] You'll never die. So think about that. If you're exploring Jesus Christ this Lent season moving toward Easter he claims to bring with him the waters of life that will run into your soul as blood runs through your body.

That he will give you the spirit his spirit that will enliven you spiritually now and will quicken you on the last day to live with him forever.

That's the claim of the Christian message. That's why Jesus becomes everything. If he is life he is everything. In this text there's an early hint that you can begin that life now.

What an amazing thing. Whoever believes in me verse 25 I mean look at the words. These are the words of Jesus. You're pulled back through the centuries and his voice the word of Christ to you today whoever believes in me though he die yet shall he live and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.

And the question comes of course do you believe this? The Sadducees didn't believe it. They were a group in the first century that didn't hold to a final day of resurrection.

[21 : 09] There was no bodily resurrection. There was no final resurrection. When you were planted in the ground that was it. And that is the predominant view of our day. It's the predominant view of our neighborhood.

It's the predominant view in life. That when you die you die you are effectually terminated. When the blood stops moving through the coursing through your body and that heart stops you stop.

But according to the scriptures that is not the case. That when he created you he breathed the breath of life into you and that your body and your spirit are one and both are intended for life with him together.

life is at work in Jesus.

The question of verse 27 is so personal isn't it? Do you believe this? Well if death is at work in the world, first 16 verses, and life is claimed to be at work in Jesus, both by John and Jesus, 17 to 27, it's interesting to see the next section 28 to 37, Jesus is provoked.

[22 : 41] He is agitated. And the question is, what is he provoked at? First of all, I want you to see that he's provoked. The translators of the text that I have in front of me are helpful in verse 33, when Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and greatly troubled.

And when I travel to the bottom for an indication on the word that is translated deeply moved, they give us the word indignant. It's a word that's used elsewhere of a horse that's just all sweaty and riled up and snorting angry.

So when it says he's deeply moved, it isn't necessarily this term of let me put my arm around you. It's I am angry at this. In fact, it's used twice. It's used again there in verse 38, then Jesus deeply moved again, agitated.

What is it that provokes him? Let me give you three options from the text. It could be death. I mean, here he comes, he's now with Mary.

They're near the tomb. Verse 32, Mary comes and says, Lord, if you'd been here, my brother would not have died. When Jesus saw her weeping, he also wept.

[24 : 13] He could be provoked at death, grieved by her loss, his loss. but he could also be provoked in the sense by the despair that she's emanating.

Jesus, if you had been here, this wouldn't have happened. In other words, I just wanted a little more time, and you could have given us more time. This despair, which Jesus could translate as, you don't think I have any power to do something now.

So his agitation could be with not only death, but the despair of people who are unsure that he can do anything about it. Or, he could be agitated by the mourners who are with her.

Look what they say in verse 37. Some of them said, Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying? Couldn't he have done anything? In other words, he could be provoked at death, he could be provoked by the doubt and despair that he can do anything about it.

He could be provoked by disbelief. People don't think he can do anything about it. After all, who can do anything about death? death? And so, he is agitated in whatever way and for whatever reason, to the point where he, at the last movement in that narrative, makes his way to the tomb.

[25 : 45] He came to the tomb, it was a cave, and a stone lay against it. So reads verse 38. in that last section, he proves by the raising of Lazarus from the dead, that he was sent by God to give life.

Look at the request. Jesus said, verse 39, take away the stone. 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's been dead for days.

That is a true response. I'm not in the University of Chicago School of Medicine. As you know, I was trying to remain eligible, not looking for medical degrees, as some of you now have.

But what I've read tells me a little bit about what happens upon death. Within the first three minutes of our death, our muscles, there's this immediate movement of relaxing, followed by this, between three hours and 36 hours after death, a stiffening, a hardening of things, which is why often when people pass away, they close their eyelids first thing because they are one of the first things subject to the hardening after the relaxing, and it's very difficult to close one's eyes afterwards, to be at peace, at rest.

rest. What happens immediately after we die is our blood, of course, will stop moving and begin settling and cooling and pooling and the whole body will begin to cool.

[28 : 01] At about the two to three day mark, the stiffening gives way to a second movement of tissue relaxing.

There will be a discoloration on the lower right abdomen and the words here of Martha about odor will begin to take place.

The onslaught, the irreparable onslaught will be underway due to the sulfur containing gases which are in our intestinal tract, the bacteria which is helpful to us in life but disastrous to us at least physically in those days after death, it will all take place.

And so they had wrapped Lazarus, they had covered his face, they had bound his feet, they had laid him in the tomb four days ago.

All of this movement is in place. Jesus says to her, did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?

[29 : 24] Is it possible? Is Jesus able to re-knit the human body? To bring life?

Evidently, she gave permission, so they took away the stone and Jesus lifted up his eyes and now he goes upward thanking God that he's going to do something, that what he's going to do now, which is the reason for his waiting two days, I love Lazarus so much that I'm going to use his death that people would know that you sent me, that I can do this for the world.

And so there it is, the stone is open, the people are waiting, and Jesus cries out in a loud voice, Lazarus, come out! I can't imagine what it would have been like to stand there at that moment.

Some people say it's a good thing he used the name Lazarus or everybody would have tried to come out. And then the light which can penetrate the darkness through his word and through the hole.

And something happened. According to John, every aspect of decay was reversed in a moment.

[31 : 02] the heart began to squeeze. The blood began to warm and flow.

The muscles demonstrated reflex. The organs absolute and immediate transformation.

The skin eventually but quickly regaining color. The brain functioning.

The body responding. The ear hearing. The motor skills moving.

The rolling to the edge of a slab. The landing on the feet. The movement to the door.

[32 : 10] And his presence in the light. And Jesus says, unbind him.

Let him go. Out he comes. Out he comes. the reaction of course was mixed.

As I'm sure it's mixed here this morning. Verse 45, many of the Jews therefore who had come with Mary and had seen what he did believed in him.

But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. So the chief priest and the Pharisees gathered to counsel. What are we going to do?

This man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this everyone will believe in him and the Romans will come and take away our place and our nation and they move toward his own arrest and crucifixion.

[33 : 27] What will you do with Jesus? Well, not what will you do with me, what will you do with the testimony of John? What will you do with the experiential word we heard today?

of those who in a moment of the prime of life have a moment of clarity and realize that while they are living they are actually dead and that when they come to Christ they first began to live.

The reaction is mixed. It's interesting some called it a sign. It's a very important word for the structure of John's gospel.

He's actually written, we don't have time for it this morning, but all 21 chapters kind of hang on that word, a sign, something that is sign significant, something that is significant.

It's the sixth of such signs. He began the first sign turning water into wine, then the raising of an ill child. It was followed later by someone who had been paralyzed and now walked, the feeding of the 5,000, the healing of the blind man, and now an indication that he can work such significant works that he actually can bring people back from the dead.

[34 : 55] And that sixth sign, Lazarus, is an anticipation of the final sign in John, which is his own death and resurrection. So that the resurrection of Jesus becomes for John, the indicator that he is who he said he was, and that God sent him into the world to bring life.

But this very body that I'm standing before you in, this very body will be resurrected on the last day. Jesus would be the source of life.

Jesus would be the complete fulfillment of all the Old Testament promises that God was going to reverse this tragic flow in humanity where we lived out of the presence of God, each one to our own way.

He would have reversed all of that. That through belief you can have life, that you can have it today, that it could begin today. Think of that.

That's a good day, isn't it? Daylight savings, you walked in here not thinking too much about your eternal state, just glad you got up an hour early, but under the penalty of sin and having lived in rebellion to God, but then by the time you walk out that door, actually a child of God forever more, that's a good day.

[36 : 19] You might not even take a nap on a day like that. Who wouldn't want that? Another indication, of course, is that it means that when you and I stand at the grave of our loved ones and one day find ourselves under the ground itself, we are standing on resurrection ground.

I've often thought of this in the cemetery, that just as he said Lazarus come out, the scriptures indicate that there will be a trumpet at the last sound and that the earth will open, that actual dirt is going to give way and there will be an ultimate final resurrection from the dead and there will be a moment where my own skeletal structure will be re-knit with my flesh in such a way that while glorified, yet recognizable to one another, that when he saves you, he's not merely saving your soul.

It's just, oh, you're in the ground, but you're not here, but thank God we have a spirit that will be with Jesus forever. No, the Christian gospel is that the body and the spirit will be reunited and walk the streets of gold, which becomes for Paul the impetus for holy living.

Why live a godly life now? Because he wants my body and my soul. My body is wed to his body.

I live for him. So, so many things come Easter. Do you believe?

[38 : 00] I don't know. I believe. In fact, I've been thinking about Easter, you know, we've got a few weeks out. If you believe that Jesus is the Christ and gives life, then I'm beginning to think there's got to be some tangible, personal, way to communicate that to somebody over the next four weeks.

As you leave today, I encourage you to pick up. This is my own effort. I encourage each one of us who believe in the resurrection to find a way of your own creativity to indicate to others something of the truth of that narrative.

Just pick this up. it's a little booklet. I'm praying that someone comes to Christ who's sitting here today or that you read this and hand it to somebody else and they come to Christ. It's just a little, my own effort on Mary Magdalene who was someone who was beyond belief and her life was changed and she believed.

Take it. Read it. Believe it. Hand it. Give it. Speak it. Find a way over the next month to use your own voice to speak of the gospel's great claims.

For on that final day, the words Lazarus, come out, will be an echo of a call for you.

[39 : 57] Our Heavenly Father, these Christian truths, we pray you would impress upon our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit that we who are so busy trying to live and yet enslaved to death would in Christ be set free and unbound that we might love you as you first intended we would.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.