

AM John 11:1-16 & 38-57 Jesus' Agenda

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[0 : 00] We'll read the opening verses and then later on we'll read other verses in this chapter. John chapter 11 and we'll read first of all verses 1 to 16.

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.

[1 : 13] 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. But 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 has spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest and 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, said to his fellow disciples, let us also go, that we may die with him. Just to there for the moment.

[2 : 21] Now we are going to sing a part from this chapter, John chapter 11, and it is the closing part of this chapter at verse 38. John chapter 11, at verse 38, and we will read to the end of the chapter.

Now 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.

[3 : 34] 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.

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 priests and the Pharisees gathered the council, and said, What are we to do? For 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 both our place and our nation.

But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you, that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.

He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God, who are scattered abroad.

[4 : 48] So from that day on, they made plans to put him to death. Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there to the region, near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim, and there he stayed with the disciples.

Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem, before the Passover, to purify themselves.

They were looking for Jesus, and saying to one another, as they stood in the temple, What do you think? That he will not come to the feast at all? Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders, that if anyone knew where he was, he should let them know, so that they might arrest him. We'll just read to there. May God bless to us these readings in his word. Now we want to look at this passage that we read, in John's Gospel chapter 11, and really we're going to deal with the first 16 verses this morning.

And one of the central features is verse 3 here, which says, So the sister sent to him, saying, Lord, he whom you love is ill.

[6 : 07] Now I don't think there's any doubt, that these verses that we read, serve as an introduction to what follows. Here John is setting the scene, giving the geographical situation, the family situation, the situation amongst his disciples, in which this great event of the raising of Lazarus took place.

So it's an introduction to what follows. And we're going to look at it in this way, that there are various parties involved in this incident, as described in these first 16 verses.

And what we're going to look at is what motivated them. We're going to look at their agendas, what they wanted to do. So first of all, there is Mary and Martha, and they have got their particular agenda, which is expressed in the verse we read.

And then there's Jesus, and he's got his agenda as well. And then the disciples are also involved in this, and they've got their own particular agenda also.

So we're going to look at these agendas as a way of opening up the passage, and then we'll see how they're introductory, for what is going to follow, and then we'll ask about how that relates to ourselves today.

[7 : 32] What about our agenda? What are the items high on our agenda? What are the big ideas that make us what we are? That's the sort of question that this can help us to answer.

Right, we'll start with Mary and Martha's agenda. And here we've got this picture of this family. It consists of Mary and Martha and Lazarus.

Now generally, we think that that's all there were in the family, and it may well be that that's all there are in the family. But actually, I don't think we know enough to say with any certainty.

I would just like to suggest that for all we know, Lazarus was a widower with six noisy children running around the home. But we're not told that. We're not told anything about them, except that there were these three living together in their home.

And every impression is given here of a happy family. We've got this in the way that they speak of things.

[8 : 43] Lazarus is ill, and so the sisters send word to Jesus, because they're anxious over him. So they're anxious over somebody who is presumably very seriously ill.

And there's a concern, a family concern over the matter. Lazarus has got a meaning. It means God is my helper. And that isn't a symbolic name, but it may well be a clue to the way that we should understand what motivates this family.

God was their helper. Bethany probably means something like the house of happiness. So if you take these names, you've got a very interesting picture of a man whose help was the Lord, and who lived in the house of happiness.

And maybe that is one way of looking at the situation, because that's the way it seemed to be. Their help was in the Lord, and that was the basis of their happiness.

Lazarus. And you can see Jesus' attachment to the family as well. They say, the one whom you love is ill. Well, they don't name Lazarus, but it's obvious that that's who is being referred to.

[10 : 01] And you see that Jesus is an honorary member of the family circle, we might say. He's part of the family, in regard to their feelings for each other. Lazarus, the one whom you love.

And that's the sort of situation we've got here. So what is their agenda in this situation? And it's quite obvious that their agenda is simply this. If we can tell Jesus, he'll sort things out. If we can let Jesus know this news, then he'll come, and everything will be fine. And that is the way that they approach the matter. They send this message to Jesus. They just give the news. They don't ask anything from him. They just assume that he's going to come and help them, because they've got such confidence in him. The Lord is their helper. So that's their agenda. And it's a pretty good agenda. Something goes wrong, you call the Lord, and they help.

[11 : 06] And of course, that's a good introduction to what actually happened. In due course, Jesus went. We didn't read the story of Jesus, of all that happened. But Jesus went.

He talks with Martha. He talks with Mary. He shows his sympathy towards them. He raises Lazarus from the dead. So he did respond eventually to their call. But this is just the introduction to that. And you can see that this is a useful way to think about our agenda in life. Here is the agenda that the Christian should have. When things go wrong, you send a message to Jesus, and you leave it with him, believing that all will be well.

If there's illness in the family, you send a message to Jesus by prayer, and you leave it to him, and believe that he will work out everything in a kind and gracious fashion.

You have distress in the family circle. You have difficulties at work. You have personal difficulties. Whatever it be, put this item on your agenda, and say, in the midst of difficulties, I'll send a message to Jesus, and I'll leave it to him to sort things out, because my trust is in the Lord, my help is in the Lord.

[12 : 24] So here's something that is an example to us, indeed a challenge to us. This is indeed the sort of way that we deal with difficulties and problems in life. I suspect that ultimately we do, but we may be a wee bit slow in doing it.

It's only when things reach an extreme that we do it. But here it seems to me that they did this pretty well, pretty promptly, and that's the way we should do things.

If you're trusting in the Lord, commit the difficulties in life to him. Send a message to him, and say, this is my problem, and leave it in his hands to sort things out.

Martha's and Mary's agenda can be ours, should be ours. However, that's not the whole story, by any means, because we've got Jesus' agenda.

And there are two parts to the description of this agenda, as I'm calling it. The first part comes from the way in which he deals with this message that he receives, and the second part comes from the conversation that he had with his disciples.

[13 : 30] So, what is Jesus' agenda? We can see it in the way that he approaches this matter. In verse 4, 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 here, you see, there are three parts to his agenda, to his approach to this matter.

First of all, he says, this illness does not lead to death, which seems a bit strange, because we know that it did lead to death. Lazarus did die.

And of course, what we have to understand by that is that Jesus was saying, this isn't going to be the ultimate state of affairs. This isn't going to put the whole matter ends in, the death of Lazarus, full stop.

That's not what the story is going to consist of. That's not what this is going to lead to. So he's not saying, in the light of what comes after this, he's not saying Lazarus isn't going to die.

[14 : 35] He is saying that death isn't going to be the final outcome of this event. And then he tells it more positively, what is the outcome of this event? The outcome of this event is that it's for the glory of God.

And of course, that is something that we can easily take in. This was surely, this indeed is what we were taught, those of us that were brought up in the Shorter Catechism, and some of you who weren't brought up in it have surely heard of it.

What is man's chief end? Man's chief end is to glorify God. This is the chief aim of a Christian's life, of any person's life. Their chief goal is to glorify God.

So if you were brought up to look at things in that way, then it's not too strange to think that Jesus himself followed that line. Here he is in this world. What's he doing in this world?

He's glorifying God. What is happening through this incident? It's for the glory of God. And then he clarifies that, just that wee bit more specifically. And he says also, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.

[15 : 41] So it's not just that this incident would bring glory to God, but more specifically, that it would bring glory to him. And that's the way that he looks at this event.

Now, what is top of his agenda? The glory of God. The glory of himself, indeed, is top of the agenda. If we ask how this worked out, that's what I think is an important thing.

And I'm not going to open it up fully, because hopefully, I'll develop this story later on in another occasion when we're here. But, if we're here, but I can see this.

You immediately think, oh, God was glorified in the resurrection of Lazarus. Jesus was glorified in as much as Lazarus was raised from the dead.

And of course, we're not doubting that at all. We're not doubting it by any means. What a spectacular display of the glory of God. That this person that had been dead and buried for four days should be raised to life again.

[16 : 45] That was mercy. That was grace. That was power. Authority. Authority over death. That's all a display of God's excellencies. That's all, therefore, for his glory.

So we can quite easily see that this story leads to the glory of God and to the glory of Jesus. But I would like to suggest that probably this is preparing the way for something further.

because this story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead is not the end of the story as John records it here. It's just an event that leads to something else.

Now that's why we read the conclusion to that story. What happened at the end of that story? It wasn't that Jesus and Lazarus was raised and that was the end.

Something happened thereafter. And that is why John tells this story. people from Jerusalem had seen that. This outstanding miracle.

[17 : 46] They'd gone back and they told the Jewish religious leaders what had happened. And they get worried about it. What's coming, what's the matter coming to? If Jesus can do such a great event as this, everybody's going to believe in him.

And that's going to bring problems on us. And so the best thing that they can do is to put Jesus to death. And that's what's said here towards the close of the chapter.

So from that day on they made plans to put him to death. And that's the outcome of this event. Not just that he raises Lazarus, but because Lazarus is raised, enmity is stirred up and opposition reaches its climax.

And that's the factor that leads them to decide to put Jesus to death. And that's also what happened later on in the next chapter. It tells that they didn't seek only to put Jesus to death, they also sought to put Lazarus to death.

Because he was the means by which so much belief had been stirred up in Jesus, towards Jesus. And so what this is looking forward to is not just the raising of Jesus, the raising of Lazarus from the dead by Jesus.

[19 : 01] What this story is looking forward to is the death of Jesus and his resurrection to glory. And that's what Jesus has got in mind here, it seems to me as well.

And in that way it's an introduction not just to the story of resurrection of Lazarus, but ultimately to the story of Jesus' death and resurrection which stems from that.

That's the storyline as John has got it here. And it's something that we haven't I suspect thought on very much but it seems to me quite plain that Jesus does this or that John tells this story in order to show why there was such opposition to Jesus that led to his death and his resurrection.

And that is him being glorified as well as God being glorified. So, what have we got here then that is of use to us? Well, you may say well, surely we should follow Jesus' example here.

He sought the glory of God in everything. We should have that as the top of our agenda as well.

And of course I can't say that that's wrong. I'm not saying that that's wrong at all because it's obviously something very biblical that we should do all things for his glory.

[20 : 18] But I don't think it's the point that John is trying to get over here. What he's trying to get over here is that Jesus has a remarkable mission to fulfill.

And that's what's in his mind here. It's a unique mission. And that's what's before him when he speaks about this being for God's glory and this being for his own glory. He's thinking of his going to the cross, of a giving self there, of his resurrection from the dead and of his being taken up into

glory and heaven.

That's what's in Jesus' mind. That's his agenda. Okay, that's the first way in which we've got this agenda spoken of. But then you see we've got some discussion with the disciples.

Jesus eventually says two days later let us go to Judea again. And the disciples have their view about that. Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you and are you going there again? And Jesus says to them 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.

[21 : 28] But if anyone walks in the night he stumbles because the light is not in him. Now, the disciples will say more about them later but they come out of this quite well at this stage at least as they do later as well.

they seem to have some concern for Jesus here. You want to go to Judea but that's the place where people were trying to stone you before.

You shouldn't go there. They would seem to be looking after his safety. And Jesus is telling a little parable as we might well call it to show that it has to be thus.

And he talks about twelve hours in the day and we've got to do our work when there's light. We've got to go about our business in these twelve hours of the day because when the night comes you can't work.

Now, this is quite an obvious illustration especially given the circumstances of the time. With our electric lights and all the facilities we have to give light, we can do things at night which people wouldn't have done formerly.

[22 : 36] And to them it was quite obvious. If you wanted to do work you did it in the light of day. When night came you couldn't work. And Jesus is saying there is a time allotted to me when I have the opportunity of doing what I have to do.

But the night is coming, the time is coming when working will not be possible. He's talking about doing things in the day, meaning that's what he's doing.

This is his agenda. I've got to do what I've got to do while there is time and opportunity because the night is coming when I won't have the opportunity of doing it.

He's saying in other words, the time is short. The time when I'm going to be taken from this world is close to me and I've got to do what I've got to do while I have time and opportunity before the night comes.

time is really in response to Mary and Martha. He's saying look, I've got my task to do. I've got my mission set before me and time is getting short so I can't immediately attend to what you're asking me to do because I've got a bigger plan, a bigger idea, a bigger agenda and that's what I've got to do because the time is short.

[24 : 03] To his disciples he may well be stressing that second bit, the time is coming but I won't have the opportunity of this any longer because my time in this world will be at an end and he's saying to them, you're worried about me dying, well that's just around the corner, it's coming any time, the night is approaching, he means my death is coming.

And that's what he's saying perhaps to the disciples to answer them. But you see the thing that we're getting at here, Jesus has an agenda, it was that he should go to the cross, that he should die, be raised again and be taken to glory.

And that's the big idea in his mind. And I'm not saying we should have that on our agenda, what we should do is recognise the greatness of Jesus' agenda, there's nothing like it, we can't imitate it, we can't follow when his footsteps in this respect.

He did it in a unique fashion, he gave himself for his people, he was raised from the dead, and we cannot follow his footsteps in that respect. so to say that Jesus had this agenda of bringing glory to God and gaining glory for himself, it's not saying that we should follow this as an example, but that we should subject our own agendas to his.

That's what he's saying to Mary and Martha, you've got your agenda, but I've got mine, and my agenda takes precedence over yours. Yes, I'll attend to what you want to do in due course, but I've got an agenda, and I've got to follow that agenda, and yours has got to give way to mine.

[25 : 50] And I think that's a significant way of looking at our agendas. is this the way that we look at things? There's this I want to do, there's this item on my agenda, it's quite important to me, okay, it may be quite valid, but at the same time we have to say, but your agenda for me is bigger and greater, and takes precedence, not what I will, but what you will.

So this is a warning therefore, you may have a good agenda, as Mary and Martha did, but our agendas always have to give way to his agenda. He'll work out his own purpose in his own way, in his own time, and our desires, our ambitions, our plans, have got to give way to his.

That's what this part teaches us. And this brings us to the last thing, which is the disciples' agenda. Now as I say, there's something quite positive in what the disciples see to Jesus, Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?

Well, we could say that there is something positive in that. Here's care over Jesus, here's some desire to look after him, and to see for his comfort and well-being, and to that extent, there is something good in this agenda that they have.

On the other hand, there is something not entirely so good, because Jesus had already told them a long time before that he was going to go to Jerusalem, and he would suffer, and he would die there, and he would be raised from the dead on the third day.

[27 : 37] He had told them all this, and they don't seem to appreciate that perhaps that time has come. The disciples don't say to him, oh, has your time come? The time that you spoke about suffering and death, they don't seem to take that into consideration.

However, there is something positive in it, as I say. And then, this comes, again, their agenda comes out in the words of Thomas.

So Thomas called the twins, said to his fellow disciples, let us also go that we may die with him.

That, to my mind, is a pretty good statement of a disciple's agenda.

Okay, he's intent upon going to Jerusalem. We see that this might well lead to his death, given the opposition he's already aroused. But we'll go nonetheless.

And if we have to die with him, we die with him. And that's a pretty good agenda, it seems to me, at this stage of their thinking. And that's what a disciple should say.

[28 : 44] I'll follow you wherever you go. If the path leads me into danger, I'll follow the path. If it leads me to discomfort or hardship, I'll follow that path.

It's equivalent to saying what they've said here. We'll go with them, even if we have to die with them. It's good. Now, of course, we know that it didn't happen that way.

But nonetheless, the expression of it was good here, it seems to me. Now, this raises it in my mind, this is just for you to think about. I'm not saying that, well, I'm just giving my idea here.

Thoughts that have arisen that I'm still trying to think out, and I just give them for your interest, and you can think about them yourselves. You know, Thomas is not mentioned in the other Gospels, except in the list of disciples.

But in John's Gospel, he's mentioned four times, from here on four times in the Gospel, in John's Gospel. And it seems to me that John has got some special interest in Thomas, that he singles him out for attention.

[29 : 52] And this is the first thing that Thomas says. Later on, when Jesus is teaching about his going away, he says, we don't know where you're going, so how can we know the way? So there he is, on behalf of the disciples, asking for more information about an important matter.

Later on, he's there fishing with some of the other disciples. And finally, there is the incident that we who know our Bibles call the occasion of doubting Thomas.

The other disciples had seen Jesus risen, Thomas hadn't. And he said, I won't believe until I see evidence for myself. And then Jesus comes and gives the evidence, and Thomas says, my Lord and my God.

Now, I'm not going to develop that story yet, but it seems to me that we've taken that rather negatively. Here is Thomas and what he's known for, he's known for his doubting.

But you know, what did he say? My Lord and my God. Did the other disciples say anything as far reaching as that? They had just realized that he was the Messiah, and that he had to die and rise again, and they had trouble taking that in.

[31 : 07] And here is Thomas, and he comes and says, my Lord, which is okay. And he says, my God. Here he is. He's got the perception to realize that this is no mere human Messiah.

This is God in human form. And it seems to me that that is a remarkable perception that Thomas is expressing at that stage.

So, perhaps this is John introducing this figure, introducing this figure, who's going to make this quite important statement here. Let's go with him, even if we have to die with him.

And he's the one who later on asks questions and comes out with this wonderful statement, my Lord and my God. So that I don't think we should see Thomas as doubting Thomas.

Thomas here is very advanced in his understanding and perception and expresses it. And Peter is generally the sort of person that did that sort of thing.

[32 : 11] But it seems to me that John is saying, no, no, Thomas had his outlook upon this as well. And here's the first instance of it. Keep your eyes open because later on in this gospel he's going to come to prominence again and again.

And that's the way that this is an introduction for what follows. But that you see is the thing that determined his agenda. It was an agenda that had to grow and develop so that he didn't just say let's go so that we may die with him.

It's an agenda that developed into him saying my Lord and my God. And that's the way we should understand this. So how does this affect our agenda?

Well, is this our agenda? Any disciple that truly follows should be able to say this sort of thing. Now most of us are not likely to be exposed to dying for the sake of our Saviour.

But some of us may be. And all of us should face the question. Would we be able to say with Thomas, we'll go with Jesus even if it costs us our lives.

[33 : 22] But that's what he's asking for us here. We must take up the cross and we must find follow him. We must be willing to suffer and even to die for the sake of our faith. And although it's easy for some of us to say that, we should nonetheless take it seriously.

In our situation here, we've got a great history of what we call the covenanting movement. Never mind what that means if you don't know it.

But it was a time, as we understand it, when God's people were oppressed for their faith. And they were asked questions which if they answered them wrongly, led to them losing their lives for it.

There was an old woman who wouldn't go to the parish church but wanted to go where the gospel was preached. And she was tied to a stake in the Salway. Local folks will know the story.

And the tide came up and drowned her because she wouldn't worship the way the civil authorities told her to worship but wanted to worship the way that her conscience told her to worship.

[34 : 31] Would we have done that? In our historical setting. That's the sort of question we might well ask ourselves. It's a question about the degree of commitment that we've got to our master.

So there you see is this story. Opening up the incident that is recorded here. Providing an introduction for it as I hope you've seen.

But also challenging us in this way. When we've got difficulties do we send a message to Jesus and leave it in his hands? When our agenda clashes with his agenda do we say not what I will but what you will?

And when we're up against difficulties do we say I'm going to follow my Lord whatever it might cost me. May God bless to us his own word. Now we're going to do with the Lord.

Let's do with the Lord. Let's do with the Lord. Let's do with the Lord. Let's do with the Lord. Let's do with the Lord.

[35 : 39] Let's