

AM John 11:1-44

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Preacher: Rev Duncan Peters

[0 : 00] Chapter 11, verses 1-44, on page 1081 of the Church Bible. And William's going to come and read that to us.

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.

For 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 up to Judea again.

[1 : 25] The disciples said to him, Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and you are going there again? Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day?

If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.

After saying these things, he said to them, Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.

The disciples said to him, Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover. Now Jesus had spoken of his son, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep.

Then Jesus told them plainly, Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe.

[2 : 34] 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 four days. Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother.

So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him. But Mary remained seated in the house. Martha said to Jesus, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you. Jesus said to her, Your brother will rise again.

Martha said to him, I know that he will rise again, in the resurrection of the last day, on the last day. Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life.

[3 : 52] 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.

[4 : 57] Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.

And he said, Where have you laid him? And 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 also have kept this man from dying? Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave and a stone there against him. Jesus said, Take away the stone.

[6 : 01] 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 believe, you would see the glory of God?

So they took away the stone, and Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, Father, I thank you that you have heard me.

I knew that you always hear me. But I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.

When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, Lazarus, come out. The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, Unbind him and let him go. Amen. I'd like us this morning to turn back to the passage that we read, to John chapter 11, on page 1081 of the Church Bible.

[7 : 20] In his gospel account, John narrates seven signs that Jesus performed during his ministry.

And these signs reveal his glory and power and authority over nature, over sickness, and over death. And today we're looking at the seventh sign, that of raising Lazarus from the dead.

Now death is a grim experience. For Lazarus, there was a severe illness, possibly pain and suffering, and then his death itself.

For Martha and Mary, there was bereavement, grief, and the painful loss of losing their brother. And I think we can all, to some extent, enter into their experience. We may have experienced the death of a loved one. And know the pain of separation, the pain of just being bereft of that person.

[8 : 38] Or it may be the certain prospect of our own death. We grow old, we slow down and decay. You might, if you are blessed, be able to gain a few more years of good health by eating the right stuff and looking after your body and mind.

But death will still get you in the end. Death always wins. Death always wins. Death always wins. Death always wins. And then there's death itself.

Your life snuffed out. Woody Allen expresses it well. He said, I don't want to achieve immortality through my work. I want to achieve immortality through not dying.

I don't want to live on in the hearts of my countrymen. I want to live on in my apartment. And then there's what happens beyond death.

Maybe, I don't know if anyone here believes that nothing happens after death. But even if that's the case, then your life just goes into oblivion.

[9 : 47] Your life was meaningless. In a hundred years' time, probably no one will even remember that you ever lived. But of course, there's another issue. And that is that maybe you fear this.

You fear what happens beyond death. Will I have to give an account for my life? Will my life be weighed and judged? And of course, the Holy Bible has much to say about that.

But in human experience, death always ultimately wins. It gets us all in the end.

Always, that is, until Jesus Christ arrives on the scene. And in this passage, we see that Jesus Christ has an authority and a power that overcomes and conquers even death.

So I want to look at this passage as a kind of a drama in four movements. First of all, Jesus delays.

[10 : 52] Second, Jesus claims. Third, Jesus weeps. And fourth, Jesus acts. Firstly then, Jesus delays.

In the film version of the Fellowship of the Ring, the first in the Lord of the Rings trilogy, there's a scene where Gandalf, the wizard, arrives for Bilbo Baggins' birthday party.

And Frodo, Bilbo's nephew, says accusingly, you're late. And Gandalf replies, a wizard is never late, Frodo Baggins.

Nor is he early. He arrives precisely when he means to. Now to Martha and Mary and those who were mourning with them, Jesus was late.

He was too late. Mary and Martha had sent word to Jesus that Lazarus was ill, in verse 3. And no doubt they had hoped that he would come, that he would respond immediately.

[12 : 04] But we're told that Jesus stayed another two days where he was, in verse 6. Now at the end of chapter 10, we read that Jesus was, well it was where John the Baptist was baptizing in the

early days of his ministry.

And that's a place called, well it's written as Bethany, but it seems most likely that it's a place called Batanea, which was about 95 miles away to the northeast of Jerusalem.

And in those days, 95 miles was about four days journey on foot. So it would take four days for a messenger to get from Bethany, where Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived, which was just very near Jerusalem, to Batanea.

And then Jesus waits for two days. And then it would take another four days or so for Jesus to travel back to Bethany near Jerusalem. So that's ten days in total.

Now if Jesus had come immediately, it seems likely that he wouldn't have made it in time. But perhaps he could have pronounced healing as soon as he got the message.

[13:21] In other miracles, Jesus does that at the end of chapter 4. Jesus doesn't even go to the person who's sick. He just says, go, he will be well. And the person was made well. So distance was not an obstacle to the Lord Jesus.

And when Jesus does finally arrive, Lazarus has been dead four days, or it's the fourth day since his death. And both Martha and Mary say to him the same thing.

In verse 21 and then in verse 32, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. A bit later in verse 37, some of the mourners say, couldn't this man who opened the eyes of the blind man have done something to stop this man from dying?

They're speaking about what might have been. If only. For all of these people, Jesus is too late. But Gandalf's words could apply to Jesus. That Jesus is never late, nor is he early. He arrives precisely when he means to.

[14:35] But why did Jesus delay for two days before even moving from where he was? What did he mean by that? Well, in verse 5 and 6, we read that 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. So the reason he waited, the reason he stayed, was because of his love for Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

That was the motivation. And it may be that for you, you're waiting for something from God. And you pray, and you pray. And nothing seems to happen.

And then maybe it's too late. But if you belong to Jesus Christ, if you love the Lord, even a delay till it seems too late is motivated by his love for you.

It's motivated for your ultimate good. And it may be that it's only when we die and go to be with the Lord that we will see how that works out.

[15:53] Well, Jesus' delay is also motivated by seeking the good of his disciples. In verse 14, we read that Jesus told them plainly, Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe.

So Jesus not being where he was seemingly most needed will in the end result in the development and the increase of their faith in him.

It will result in their having a bigger view of Jesus. And Jesus' delay also has another related purpose in view, one that he prophesies as soon as he hears of Lazarus' illness.

In verse 4, we read that when Jesus heard it, that's heard of Lazarus' illness, 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, of course, it will lead through death, but death is not the end of this. The ultimate outcome of this, and through Lazarus' resurrection, is the glory of God, and the glory of God's Son, who is Jesus himself.

[17:24] And here we see just how closely bound together God and God's Son are. That when God is glorified, the Son of God is glorified.

That when the Son of God is glorified, God is glorified. They are so closely bound together. And in John's Gospel, the glory of God is his revelation, it's his self-disclosure.

It is God showing something of himself. And that is magnified, God's glory is magnified by Jesus' delay.

Second, I want to look at Jesus' claims. Most of the Jews at this time believed in the resurrection of the dead on the last day.

That God will bring this present age to an end, and that there will be a physical, bodily resurrection and judgment. And that was based on certain passages, texts, in the Old Testament.

[18 : 36] And Martha expresses this belief when Jesus says to her, your brother will rise again, in verse 23. Martha answered, I know that he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day.

Now this was central to her faith as a devout Jew. And Jesus affirms her belief in the resurrection of the dead. But then he develops that belief in an astonishing direction.

He makes this self-directed claim, in verse 25. Sorry, I've got the wrong page. In verse 25, Jesus said to Martha, 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.

Jesus says, I am the resurrection and the life. Judge Dredd said, I am the law. And General Charles de Gaulle said, I am France.

[19 : 54] And I think in making those claims, they were claiming that they represented and embodied the law in the case of Judge Dredd and France in the case of de Gaulle.

That the law's identity was tied up with Judge Dredd and that France's identity was tied up with Charles de Gaulle. But Jesus makes a far bigger claim, an enormous claim.

He is claiming here that he embodies resurrection and life. That resurrection and life are so closely and inseparably bound up with him.

To the extent that he can say, I am the resurrection and the life. I am essential to the resurrection of the dead. I am essential to eternal life.

Without me there is no resurrection. Without me there is no life. And then he continues, whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.

[21 : 03] Believers like all people will die. that is the one certainty. But if we believe in Jesus Christ, we shall live, live that is beyond death.

We will experience bodily resurrection life. And Jesus is the gateway to that eternal resurrection life. Jesus continues that everyone who lives, in verse 26, everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. This means that the resurrection life that comes through faith in Jesus Christ is everlasting life.

It is life that shall never end. And this huge claim of Jesus, this claim that I am the resurrection and the life, it's connected to two things that are taught in John.

One at the beginning and one at the end, although it's intimated all the way through. John opens with these words, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

[22 : 19] He was with God in the beginning. through Him all things were made. Without Him nothing was made that has been made.

In Him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. And a few verses later we read that this eternal Word became flesh, became human in and as the person of Jesus Christ.

Christ. But before that, becoming human, John, inspired by God, tells us that all things were made through the Word, and that in Him was life, and that that life was the light of all mankind.

So Jesus is the origin, the source of life, of human life, of all life. Later on in chapter five of John, Jesus himself says that just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom He is pleased to give it.

So Jesus Christ is the source of life, the source of creation in the first place. So John narrates his story, the story of Jesus Christ, his words and actions, and the whole narrative is moving towards its climax, which is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[23 : 58] Now, raising Lazarus would be an amazing miracle. It was a sign. But Lazarus would die again in the course of time.

Lazarus was raised to this same kind of mortal life. life. But Jesus Christ rose to a new kind of life. It is no less material and physical, but it is an immortal life, one not subject to decay and death.

And He opens up the path to this life for all who believe in Him. And Jesus' death is also crucial in this, because death is the wages of sin, the Bible tells us that.

But Jesus Christ, as John the Baptist announced when He arrived, Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And that phrase Lamb of God, that title Lamb of God, suggesting sacrifice. Jesus Himself in John 6 51 said, I am the living bread that came down from heaven.

[25 : 07] Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

So the life of the world, the life of those who believe in Him, comes through His giving up His flesh, laying down His life. Again, we see that in John 10.

Jesus there says, I have come that they, His disciples, including us if we are believers, I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. I lay down my life only to take it up again.

No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. So we receive life through Jesus Christ because He laid down His life for us.

[26 : 11] Because He took the wages of sin in our place. And Jesus Christ's words give us hope even in the face of death. This raising of Lazarus acts as a trailer of the resurrection of all believers to everlasting life.

Now death is a curse. It brings our hopes, our achievement, our personal development, our relationships, our life to an end. But in and through Jesus Christ there is the sure hope of resurrection to everlasting life that He promises to all who believe in Him.

To life that is full, that is abundant and that is eternal. Amen. Amen. So third, we see Jesus weeps. Martha goes to call Mary. And Mary comes to meet Jesus. And in verse 33 we read that 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.

The word translated deeply moved usually means angry. It is a very powerful emotion.

[27 : 43] Don Carson in his commentary translates this phrase that Jesus was outraged in spirit and troubled. Why is that?

Why is Jesus filled with anger? I believe that he is filled with anger and sorrow over what sin and death have done to humans.

You see God created and intended humans for life, not for death. And death is the curse that came upon humanity due to its rebellion against God our maker.

Death is unnatural. It runs counter to God's intention. It is a curse. It is a blight. And Jesus, the one pure, sinless human, is enraged by what sin has done to humans.

The theologian B.B. Warfield puts it well. He says, the spectacle of the distress of Mary and her companions enraged Jesus because it brought poignantly home to his consciousness the evil of death.

[28 : 56] It's unnaturalness. It's violent tyranny. In Mary's grief, he sees and feels the misery of the whole human race and burns with rage against the oppressor of men.

It is death that is the object of his wrath and behind death, him who has the power of death and whom he had come into the world to destroy.

Jesus also, we read in verse 33, is deeply troubled. And then in verse 35, we read that Jesus wept. And we have profound insights here into the emotional life of Jesus Christ.

In verse 36, also, we read that the Jews, or that could be translated the Judeans, said, see how much he loved him. And Jesus' love for Mary, Martha, and Lazarus features prominently in the narrative.

They were his close friends. He hated to see Lazarus gone and his sisters so distraught with grief. And Jesus' deep turmoil and weeping demonstrates real sympathy, real empathy with them.

[30 : 15] And remember that Jesus Christ is the word, the one who reveals God to us, who makes God known. The anger and tears and sympathy of Jesus reveal the sorrowful anger and tears and sympathy of God for a broken, sinful, sick and dying world.

A God who weeps with you in your grief and sadness. Well, fourth, Jesus acts. earlier in his ministry Jesus had performed two resurrection miracles.

He'd raised the son of the widow of Nain, a young man, the only son of a mother, a widowed mother, who had died. And it seems to have been the same day because burials happened pretty much the day of death.

And this young man was on his way, was being carried out of the town to the graveyard to be buried. Jesus also raised the daughter of Jairus.

She'd been dead perhaps for an hour or two. And we read of that in Matthew, Mark and Luke. And these were both remarkable signs, miracles. But the raising of Lazarus is even greater.

[31 : 43] This is now the fourth day since Lazarus' death. That's why when Jesus says, take away the stone, Martha objects, Lord, by now there will be a bad smell or odour, for he has been dead four days.

Now we have evidence that from the third century, there was a Jewish rabbinic belief that the soul hovers over the body for three days, intending to re-enter it.

But as soon as it sees the body's appearance change, in other words, its decomposition starting, the soul departs. Now, to be clear, there's no basis for that belief in the Bible.

But it was a common Jewish belief in the third century, and it may well date earlier, back to the time of Jesus. Lazarus has been dead for four days, and in Jewish eyes, that means he is well and truly dead.

Well, in verse 40, Jesus says to Martha, did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?

[32 : 59] And they took away the stone, and Jesus looked upward 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, so that they may believe that you sent me.

So, Jesus prays to God, the Father in heaven, and Jesus' work here is done in such close and intimate cooperation with his Father in heaven.

Jesus is dependent on the Father and sent by him, and he wants people to know and to believe that. And yet, when the moment comes, Jesus does not pray that God would raise the dead person, as Elijah and Elisha, the prophets, did in similar situations many centuries earlier.

Jesus does not pray, rather he commands Lazarus come out. And the dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of cloth, and a cloth wrapped round his face.

It's worth repeating that if Jesus had not specified Lazarus come out, that all the dead would have come out, such is his authority.

[34 : 25] And indeed, one day in the future, Jesus Christ says of himself that a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice, that's Jesus' voice, and come out.

Those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned. Immediately before this, Jesus had said to Martha, did I not tell you that if you believe, you would see the glory of God.

And Jesus Christ, in raising Lazarus from the dead, displays the glory of God and the glory of God's Son. He demonstrates that he himself is the resurrection and the life.

Just finally then, I want to look at what our response should be. And it's summed up in one word, the word believe. The word believe appears seven times in this passage.

And to believe means to trust, to place your trust in Jesus. Charles Blondin was a tightrope walker who crossed the Niagara Gorge on the US-Canada border on a rope that was 340 meters or 1,100 feet long, 3.25 inches or 8.3 centimeters thick and hovered, well, was suspended 160 feet or 49 meters above the water.

[36 : 10] And Blondin walked it for the first time on June the 30th, 1859. 1909. And then several other times with theatrical variations.

He did it blindfold, he did it in a sack, he did it on stilts, and he did it pushing a wheelbarrow. And before he set out with the wheelbarrow, he asked the crowd if they thought he could walk safely over the tightrope with the barrel with somebody in it.

And the crowd all answered yes, they believed he could do that. And then he asked for volunteers. Would anyone like to come in the wheelbarrow and be wheeled over?

And strangely, very few people volunteered to do that. But it illustrates genuine faith. It is entrusting your life, your destiny, your eternity to Jesus Christ.

It is getting into his wheelbarrow. Jesus said to Martha, I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live even though they die.

[37 : 25] And whoever lives and believes in me will never die. And then the question that Jesus asks Martha comes to each one of us. Do you believe this?

Amen. May God bless his word to us. In Matthew, Mark and Luke, there are accounts of the last supper, the evening before Jesus suffered and was crucified.

We read of him using the Passover meal to institute the communion or the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper. John's gospel doesn't have that narrative, but we do have something similar in John chapter 6 and I'll just read a few verses.

This is John 6 verse 48. Jesus says, I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat of it and not die.

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.

[38 : 45] The Jews then disputed among themselves saying, how can this man give us his flesh to eat? So Jesus said to them, truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.

Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink.

Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.

Now, Jesus, there speaks of life, of eternal life, and just as our day-to-day lives rely on food and drink in order for us to stay alive.

[40 : 06] So, eternal life, life in the age to come, and indeed life that is, I suppose, spiritual life, life being alive towards God, comes through Jesus Christ.

He gives that food to us, and that food is his own body. Now, what we are having here is symbols, it's signs, it's not, there's nothing magical in the bread or the wine, but it symbolizes Jesus' body that was really, truly broken on the cross for us, and his blood that was shed for us.

And, in that act of dying, Jesus Christ's body broke and his blood shed, in his death, we gain life.

And that is what we are remembering this morning as we take the communion.

We are remembering that our life comes through his death, and we remember that death, and we remember it with thanksgiving, with gratitude.

So, I meant to do this in the hymn, but if you like to take communion, please do come to the front two or three rows. If you can't do that, that's okay.

[41 : 22] An elder will bring you the bread and wine if you are a communicant. perhaps I should also say at this point that, I'm not sure if there's any visitors, but the communion is for all those who love the Lord Jesus, whatever church you are from.

If you love the Lord Jesus, if you are a believer in him, then the communion is for you. So, I'm going to read the warrants for this.

This is in 1 Corinthians chapter 11. And in verse 23, Paul writes, I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body which is for you, do this in remembrance of me.

in the same way also he took the cup after the supper saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood, do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Let's pray together. Lord Jesus we praise you and we have been reminded of something of what you are, that you are the resurrection and the life, and that you are the bread of life, and that you are the one who gives life.

[43 : 06] You gave life in the first place, that through you the world was created, and you restore life to us sinners, who had forfeited that life by our sins, as part of a human race that has forfeited that life by sin, the wages of which is death.

And so we thank you that we are here today as those who receive that gift of life from you, and we know that that gift comes to us at great cost, the cost of your body, broken for us, your blood shed for us on that cross at Golgotha, and the horrendous suffering that that entailed.

And so we pray that as we eat and drink today, that we would do so with deep gratitude in our hearts to you, and that we may remember you, that we may worship you for this.

Amen. Amen. The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body which is for you.

Do this in remembrance of me. Amen. Meow.

[45 : 15] Meow. Meow. Meow.

Meow. Meow. Meow.

