

AM John 11:17-37

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[0 : 0 0] 11 and we're going to read from verse 17 to verse 37. John chapter 11 at verse 17. Now the background to this incident is that Jesus is well acquainted with a family consisting of two sisters of the brother Mary and Martha and the brother Lazarus. And he's away from this area and he receives word that Lazarus is ill. But he doesn't go immediately to help but he waits for some time and he only goes back when Lazarus is dead and buried. And what we have in this story is the way that he deals with the two sisters Mary and Martha in their bereavement and also in their disappointment that Jesus didn't come to help when Lazarus was still alive. And that is just leading on to the conclusion of the story which we're not going to read but we'll come to it maybe another time when he raises Lazarus from the dead. But we're focusing on this story of Mary and Martha and Jesus' dealings with them.

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 Martha 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 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.

[2 : 4 5] 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.

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?

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?

Just there may God bless to us this reading in his word. Chapter 4 reading from verse 14 and that is on page 1205 1205 in the church bible.

[4 : 0 7] Hebrews chapter 4 reading from verse 14 and it's entitled Jesus the great high priest. Now the background to this is that in Old Testament times there was a form of worship based upon sacrifice of animals.

There were priests that did this constantly and the high priest was the chief one who had special sacrifices at a certain time of the year and in this way blood was offered as atonement and that illustrated the big idea that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins.

Then in the New Testament all that way of worship is fulfilled in Jesus. He's the great high priest. He gave his own blood on the cross so that we might find atonement so that we might find peace with God.

So he fulfills all the rituals and ceremonies of the Old Testament times and that's the sort of thing that this is speaking about. If we don't understand that we may find this difficult to appreciate and even if we do understand it we might feel it a wee bit difficult to take in everything that is said here.

But that's what we have to think about. Jesus the great high priest. Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens. Jesus the son of God let us hold fast our confession.

[5 : 31] for we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sin.

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.

He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward since he himself is beset with weakness. Because of this he is bound to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people.

And no one takes this honour for himself but only when called by God. Just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest but was appointed by whom he said to him you are my son today I have begotten you.

As he says also in another place you are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. In the days of his flesh Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to him who was able to save him from death and he was heard because of his reverence.

[7 : 06] Although he was a son he learned obedience through what he suffered and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

Just reading to there may God bless to us this reading too. Now I want us to look at John's Gospel chapter 11 and we'll consider the story here of Jesus dealing with Mary and we can read verse 33 John chapter 11 and verse 33 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.

Now I've already sketched out the situation here. There are two practical two pastoral problems that Jesus is facing here.

There's the problem of bereavement. Here's somebody that has been bereaved and she's deeply distressed over it. How does he deal with a person that is suffering such bereavement?

But more than that she's got this perplexity in her mind we might say. She had sent a word to Jesus that Lazarus was ill and the clear implication was please come and heal him.

[8 : 50] But he hadn't come. He hadn't heard her request or attended to it as she had anticipated and seemed I suspect quite reasonable that he should do.

So how do you understand that? Because whenever Mary and Martha previously see Jesus they say Lord if you had been here our brother wouldn't have died.

So how does he deal with this perplexity that arises when prayers are not answered as expected? It's that double situation that he's dealing with here.

And it's a situation that isn't strange to us. People are always at certain times of life more than others have the pain of bereavement and we all know something of that some more than others as I say the sharpness of the pain of bereavement how does Jesus help us to deal with that?

And then we obviously have times when our prayers aren't answered even in the New Testament we've got an outstanding case of that with the man that was the chief instrument in spreading the gospel widely to the Gentile people Paul the apostle he had a thorn in the flesh some I think some physical disability that was thought to be a messenger of Satan to buffet him to torment him and it was obviously an impediment for him doing the work of the gospel and Paul says I prayed three times that it'd be taken away and it wasn't taken away and he had to find out what God was teaching him through his prayers not being answered and we no doubt have the same situation we have been praying and it hasn't worked out as we had hoped for or expected or even thought reasonable and God hasn't answered our prayers what are we to make of that?

[11 : 00] So if we've had the pain of bereavement or have had this perplexity over prayers that aren't answered here's a story that should make us say well how does Jesus deal with people in that sort of situation and that's what we've got here and that's what we're going to look at this morning now just as a further introduction to this it's interesting to me that he doesn't deal with Mary the way that he dealt with Martha now last time I was here you may not remember but we dealt with the story of Martha and she has the same problems and Jesus deals with that by teaching her mind he says do you believe in the resurrection then he says I am the resurrection and the life implying that if you want resurrection life you're going to have it in me if you want to know what resurrection and life really mean you've got to come to me and you'll experience it through trusting in me he's teaching her teaching her mind and in that way she grasps more of who Jesus is but in this case he doesn't address her mind at all he addresses her heart we might say

Martha needed her mind instructed but Mary requires her feelings to be smoothed that's the level at which this is being dealt with not at an intellectual or a mental level but at an emotional level that's the way that Jesus deals with Mary everybody's different and Jesus deals with people in their own particular way ok so let's see what support he gave to Mary in her emotional difficulties and what we're going to look at are two simple things what he felt and what he did and we'll then ask how that helped Mary and how it might help us what he felt we've got this here quite plainly in the verse we read he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled we'll look at this in detail moved in spirit and deeply troubled but some people have a difficulty over even imagining that Jesus could feel like that they have difficulty imagining that Jesus had a valid emotional life and there's a very simple way of putting it which is a wee bit simplistic but nonetheless people do say this sort of thing

God can't have emotions Jesus is God therefore Jesus can't have emotions which is quite logical in its way and I just want to make two comments on that first of all it is generally recognized that our God doesn't have emotions that's the standard theology which I adhere to in a sort of a way anyway because ok he doesn't have emotions but he is described in ways that implies that he's got something pretty similar to emotions God loves God hates God rejoices God is distressed these things are said about God God said to Jesus you are my beloved son I'm well pleased with you how can you imagine that being said without some display of what we would call emotion so although

God doesn't have emotions he gets something mighty like it and we shouldn't discount that way of looking at God but that's not the answer to this problem in this case the answer to this problem in this case is ok Jesus is God but he's more than God as well as being God he also took upon himself humanity now that's a very very difficult idea but it's a way that we have to hold in mind if we're going to explain anything about Jesus in his earthly life he never ceased to be God but as well as being God he took upon himself humanity he did that when Mary conceived Mary the mother of Jesus conceived but the conception didn't come about by human means it was a creative work of God he spoke and it happened just as he spoke at the beginning and it happened in that way

Jesus began his human existence in this world and what we're dealing with is not simply God here but a God who took upon himself humanity and that means that he's capable of feeling emotions because it wasn't a human body that he took upon himself it was the whole of humanity that took upon himself not just our physical nature and so we're told for example that Jesus grew in wisdom sorry in stature and in wisdom and in favour with God and man and there you see is what we've got of Jesus an all round human being he grew in stature that's his physical development he grew in wisdom that's his mental development he grew in favour with God and man that is his spiritual and social development he's an all round person and that means he's capable of feeling emotions he's capable of demonstrating feelings and that's what we've got here and that's very important because if he didn't have feelings he wouldn't be a very nice person at all if he was just a robot that worked impersonally without any personal feeling about it we wouldn't want to look at him just a machine would say this person is a real person a real human person as well as being fully

[17 : 36] God and so he demonstrates mental ability and physical development and emotional life like all of us have some are well developed mentally others are well developed physically and others are well developed emotionally but everybody has got something of these in us and so has Jesus and that's good because otherwise how could he sympathize with us and that's what we're reading in Hebrews we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses so that's Jesus able to sympathize with us because he has emotions he feels he's got an emotional life as all human beings have to some extent or another ok so that's no problem to say well how could Jesus have emotions that's how he can have emotions but then the problem is this these two emotions that he's demonstrating here what are they and how do they fit into the picture well I'm going to take there's two of them mentioned here

I'm going to take the second one first he was deeply moved in his spirit which is very difficult to say what that means and he was greatly troubled which isn't so difficult to say what that means Jesus was greatly troubled now we don't know sorry we don't need to explain what being troubled means because who hasn't been troubled by something or other it's to cause great mental distress to cause acute emotional distress or turbulence that's what being troubled means and we all understand what that is if we go to the Bible for examples of it we've got this as an example here were the wise men that came to King Herod when Jesus was born in Bethlehem and they say they're looking for the king that has been born the king of the Jews now Herod is a very tyrannical king he's a very wicked man although he's now known as Herod the Great he was a man of real injustice a real tyrant and when he hears that the Bible says he was troubled he thinks here is a usurper here's somebody coming to take my throne he's disturbed emotionally and mentally about this and that's what it means to be troubled and all

Jerusalem was troubled with him and you can imagine that when that king who's such a tyrant is angry the people tremble when they hear that he's been upset by something they say oh what's going to happen next and there's foreboding because they don't know what this tyrannical king is going to do he was troubled and all Jerusalem we can understand what it means to be troubled in that sort of situation and so other occasions there are where people in the New Testament are troubled but the thing that strikes me is that in two places at least this word is used about Jesus being troubled and they're both used in connection with his death we read this in the closing hours of Jesus life when he said this Jesus was troubled in spirit troubled same word in spirit I tell you the truth he says one of you is going to betray me so there he is with his disciples and he's disturbed because one of them is going to betray him to the authorities in a few moments he's going to be arrested he's going to be taken out he's going to die on the cross and he's troubled over that and in another occasion he says now is my soul troubled and what shall I say father save me from this hour but for this cause came I into this world so Jesus is troubled when he thinks about his death it was a unique death where he was taking the sins of his people upon himself and he was paying the penalty that was due to them for their sins and what it means is that the anger of God is going to come in him and the just punishment that was due to his people he was going to take upon himself and that father that God who was his father was close to him who upheld him and cared for him he was going to turn his back upon him because he was treating him as a sinner although he was not a sinner he was acting as a representative of others they were in him he was acting as a representative of others and therefore he felt the weight of that what a terrible thing to have to experience and when

Jesus thought about it he was troubled that's the sort of background we've got to this we know what troubled means we know what it means in the life of Jesus now well ok let's just carry on I was going to say something people therefore ask what made Jesus troubled and I do think we've got to have some caution in providing an answer to that although I will provide an answer to that but I do think we've got to have some caution in providing an answer to that because after all if you react emotionally to something why did you do it you might scratch your ear and wonder why did I do that because it's probably a variety of things that caused you to do that and it's not something you think about and say oh I'm going to be angry here or I'm going to be disappointed here it's something that just happens to you and you can't really tell very plainly at least I can't what makes you do what you do emotionally that's the nature of emotion in my opinion so we've got to have some caution in saying oh it was this that made Jesus troubled or it was that that made him troubled we've got one explanation here see how he loved them people say they see him troubled and they say he must have loved

Lazarus he's feeling the pain of bereavement he's feeling how sad it is that somebody he's spoken to somebody he's known somebody he's spent a lot of time with has been taken away and he's sad because Lazarus is there no more and that might be a good explanation my problem is that Jesus is going to raise him from the dead so why was he mourning over something that was only a passing stage or some people say which I think is highly unlikely he's sad he's troubled because he's calling Lazarus back from heaven to this world of trouble and distress and it's a painful business to think of Lazarus coming back into this world he's there in glory he's there in the perfection of holiness in the presence of God and he's being called back into this world and that was what troubled Jesus maybe or maybe not certainly the people that are there say if he had come he could have healed them and that implies to my mind they're saying if he really had loved them he would have come and healed them and so they're casting doubt upon this explanation but anyway there are these different explanations that are given and one that I think we have got to consider seriously is this that

[25 : 36] Jesus is disturbed here just at seeing death death is a horrible thing it's horrible to think of somebody whose voice we heard is no longer able to be speaking to us somebody who had a certain place in the family home and that place is vacant and that's horrible to think about and it's death itself that troubles Jesus and I think there's something to be said for that but I think really and this is just for you to think about I think we should really consider this as a possibility that Jesus sees this death and says it's my turn next he looks at Lazarus and he says that will soon be me my time is coming when I'm going to leave this world and I'm going to leave this world in a particularly horrific fashion and when he thinks about it he's troubled now I say that for two reasons firstly because we've already seen that other occasions where Jesus is troubled it's an account of his death maybe here too he's saying this is a picture of what

I'm going to go through I'm going to be dead buried at least for a time and he feels the pain of that death coming up at him and he's troubled by it it fits into the pattern of him being troubled as we've seen already another way of tying this in is this this is true to the whole storyline of the story which we haven't spelled out in detail but what happens when Lazarus is raised from the dead everybody's told about it the authorities in Jerusalem are told about it and they don't like it and they say everybody's going to go after him we've got to do something about it what are we going to do about it we're going to kill him and the story of Lazarus leads on to the story of Jesus being handed over to the authorities it was not quite the catalyst but it was something like the catalyst that led on to that it was one trigger that set off the process whereby

Jesus was going to be put to death so it seems to be not unlikely that part of what moved Jesus here was that he was troubled because this made him think that his own death was imminent lots of ideas of why Jesus was troubled you can pick and choose because the Bible doesn't explicitly tell us we'll come back to it in a minute actually but nonetheless it doesn't matter the big thing is Jesus was troubled the big thing was that he displayed emotion the big thing was that he was sympathetic and that's the big thing here Jesus is capable of understanding us and sympathizing with us and going through the emotions that we go through that's the big thing that this teaches us okay that's Jesus was troubled but we've got all this also where it says he was deeply moved in his spirit and that's much more difficult to say what that actually means and I'm just not going to talk about possibilities but just go straight to what I think is best here most people

I think recognize there is some sort of indignation in this some sort of righteous anger in this and that's interesting to reflect on Jesus is disturbed inwardly he's deeply moved inwardly he's stirred up by something he's stirred up to indignation I suppose here's an example we're in another country I know we have beggars in our streets in our countries but in other countries it's much worse so we'll go abroad to do this ok you're visiting this country and there are beggars on the street every ten yards you go down the street there's another person begging and in front of you is a man and a beggar speaks to the man and asks for something and it's not just that the man passes by he gives him a kick and he says something rude to him and walks on and you see this and you burn with indignation what right is a man to treat a fellow man like that what right as a rich person to treat a poor person as if he was a dog and you burn with indignation if you don't there's something wrong with you so that's the sort of thing we've got here indignation over injustice indignation over suffering indignation over death that's what's in Jesus mind here and that's what he's displaying on this occasion and you can see that that is quite a far reaching idea what's he so angry about he's so angry at death death is a horrible thing death is a terrible intrusion into life and it stirs Jesus spirit and he's disturbed by it and he's indignant over it that's the way that he views death now some of you may have heard of Sir Chris Hoy a famous cyclist Scottish cyclist and he's been diagnosed with terminal cancer and his reaction to it seems to be a very mature reaction and in some ways perhaps a Christian reaction and what he said was this this is nature you know we were all born and we all die and this is just part of the process and there you see a man facing death realising that it's just part of the process but here is Jesus facing death and for him it's not part of the process it's something to be indignant about death as I say is an intrusion the world was made perfect people were perfect and death came in when sin came in and it's an intrusion into the perfect world that God made and to Jesus it's a horrible hateful thing that he dislikes so much that when he sees it's active then it stirs him to righteous indignation and that's what Jesus displays here troubled yes but indignant too in the face of death and that's what Jesus felt now what did he do well we're told in verse 35 that he wept he said where have you laid him they said to him Lord come and see Jesus wept that's what he did under the stress of this emotion Jesus wept now there was a good bit of weeping going on and there were people that had come

from Jerusalem and were weeping with the family and sometimes indeed people would hire mourners to come and wail over the dead and so the weeping was very much a matter of outward sounds and the more people wailed at a funeral or in time of bereavement the better it was even if they were professional mourners now I'm not saying that these people here are professional mourners but what I'm saying is there was a tendency to concentrate upon outward expression and loudness rather than anything else and this word for weep is different it's not the same word as is used about the other people's weeping they're weeping in the normal fashion the normal word used for grieving at a funeral or bereavement that's the word used but this word here isn't the same it comes from the word tear and I think it's better to say he burst into tears and that's the way we're looking at this what did

[34 : 16] Jesus do he burst into tears now here we've got to ask why did he burst into tears and of course he burst into tears because of the emotions that he were feeling he was so indignant he was so troubled over this that he burst into tears but I would like to point out that something I haven't done up till now that one of the main things that led Jesus to do this was the sight of other people weeping verse 35 33 says this when Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with her also weeping he was deeply moved and troubled Jesus burst into tears not at the grave of Lazarus as I used to think and many people still do think Jesus has not got there yet he's going to go there he wants to go there but he hasn't got to the tomb yet I always thought he got to the tomb and looked at it and burst into tears or he wept but that's not the way it is he's not there yet and the most immediate thing that caused him to burst into tears was the sight of the women weeping and that makes this an act of extreme sympathy what did they do when he saw them weeping he wept with them that's what

Jesus did so how did this help Mary you know we've got to put it together a wee bit but the best I can do is this this is what moved her this is what instructed her this is what enabled her to get over her difficulties that Jesus hadn't come and that Jesus prayer had not been answered this is the thing that deals with her problems she knows that Jesus sympathises she knows that Jesus is concerned and I suggest that that is what made all the difference to her we know that it made a difference because in a story that comes next after well comes at the next chapter that's clearly connected with this Mary gives a supreme expression of devotion to Jesus in an extraordinary fashion so that by that time she's really devoted to him in the fullest possible way what caused it to happen

I suggest it's this experience of seeing Jesus weep seeing Jesus weep with her and those that were weeping and so Martha could say he came and he taught me and it made a difference to the way I thought about him Mary can say there he was when he saw me weeping he burst into tears himself and that's what makes a difference here's somebody that cared for her here's somebody that was concerned here's somebody that was sympathetic and it was that that sorted out her emotions and made her say this is somebody I can trust whether he hears my prayer or doesn't hear my prayer I know he's concerned whether he comes to me in my trouble or doesn't come to me in my trouble I know he's sympathetic because when I was there crying he burst into tears himself and that's what this did to Mary I think so what does it do to us well

I want to deal with this in a general way first of all this shows us that God deals with us still on a personal basis Jesus dealt with Martha in one way and he deals with Mary in another way and to me we've got to say this does not lead us to stereotype Christian experience he comes to one person in one way dealing with one set of needs he comes to another person another way dealing with another set of needs but we've got to be careful about that as well because does this mean to say there's more than one gospel you who are needy in physical terms come and you'll be provided with you who need companionship come to Jesus and you'll find one you who are seeking wisdom you come to Jesus and he'll teach you you who are distressed come to

Jesus and you'll be sympathetic is that are these the gospels we've got and the answer is no there's only one gospel and the one gospel has got to do with Jesus who gave himself for us the one who was wounded for us and bruised for us and freed us from the guilt of sin and provides us with forgiveness this is basic to the gospel that Jesus died for our sins according to the word of God according to the scriptures at the very center of things the basic kernel is Jesus died for sinners guilty sinners may come to him but once you've put that in its place you can therefore go on to say once you've found that forgiveness you who are seeking knowledge will find teaching in him you who are seeking sympathy can find sympathy in him you who are seeking companionship will find companionship in him once you've got that key experience in place the various aspects of the gospel will come to you according to your particular needs and your particular situation so he deals with everybody differently but he deals with them on the basis of the one gospel come to

[40 : 18] Jesus and you'll have rest from the terrible guilt that racks your brain come to him and you'll find peace and reconciliation because he gave himself on the cross for sinners come as a sinner and lay claim to that put your trust in him that's the centre of the gospel and once you find that you'll find all sorts of other riches as well according to your particular needs and your situation in life that's what this teaches God deals with us in the gospel but each one according to their different situation but more obviously this tells us how sympathetic Jesus is this is one that we can look to as somebody that understands and knows and appreciates because he was distressed and he was indignant and he burst into tears he knows what we're going through when we feel indignant and when we feel troubled and we burst into tears he knows us he understands us and it comes back to what we said previously that we are not going to one who is untouched by the feeling of our infirmities but who was at all points tempted as we are yet was without sin are you tempted

Jesus knew what it was like to be tempted you can go to him and he'll understand because he was tempted and he overcame do you know what it feels like to be sad over bereavement you can go to Jesus because Jesus was sad over Lazarus bereavement do you feel that he hasn't answered your prayers his sympathy will deal with that as well he's really concerned are you a refugee Jesus was a refugee who went down to Egypt and did stay there because the powers that be were hostile and were seeking his life are you in that position so was Jesus he understands he's sympathetic and that's an important aspect for us to look at Jesus and trust him he knows me he understands me he sympathizes therefore like Mary I can trust him trust him in all situations Jesus is sympathetic

Jesus Jesus hates death now I do think that sometimes we speak very lightly about believers dying and they're in heaven but their bodies are still under the power of death and Jesus hates that this assures us that death has been dealt with in the gospel how could a person come amongst us to deal with our problems and look at death and be indignant by it because it was such a horrible intrusion how could he do that and not deal with it of course he's dealt with death thoroughly and completely so that not only are we invited to Jesus to know forgiveness of our sins we're invited to rest upon him so that the great day will come when we will be raised to life again and death will be thoroughly and completely destroyed and that's what this should say to us so that as Mary went on to show her devotion to him saying really I can trust him I love him I'm devoted to him because I know he's sympathetic to me let us go away from here with that same idea

I can trust him always because he knows he understands and he sympathises may God bless to us his word that another OK so