

# Our Lord's Care For Us

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[ 0 : 00 ] The great hope that we have as Christians does not lie in the idea of a better life here, but in the fact that death itself has been conquered by our Lord.

That death has been conquered to such an extent that not only do we go our souls to heaven, but one day there will be a great resurrection of the dead and we will live in a new creation, in physical bodies with our Lord and with our God.

We see something of that conquest of death in the passage which we have read this evening. This passage where Jesus goes to the tomb of Lazarus and raises him.

And there are many great things that we could say about this passage this evening. But in John's Gospel, in John chapter 20, we are told that Jesus did so many great things that if they were all written down, there would not be enough books of the earth, in the earth, to record them all.

But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name.

[ 1 : 41 ] And therefore this evening, out of all the things we could say about Lazarus or his family, I want to concentrate on Jesus, on the fact that he is the Christ, the Son of God, and what it reveals to us about him.

Because that's the whole purpose of John's Gospel. Indeed, in the very chapter before this, in John chapter 10, Jesus announces to his followers that he is the good shepherd, that he will care for God's people.

And then as we go from that chapter into chapter 11 here, we see this great act of care and love that Jesus shows towards his people in the raising of Lazarus.

And therefore this evening, I want to take this in three parts to see the love and care which Christ has for his people. First of all, that it is a providential love that he has.

Secondly, that it is a personal love. And thirdly, it is a passionate love that he has.

[ 2 : 53 ] Providential, personal, and passionate. First of all then, providential love of Jesus. Jesus does something in this passage which maybe we find a little bit strange.

He receives a message from friends of his, from Mary and Martha, about their ill brother Lazarus. And they were followers of Jesus. Often when we speak of the disciples of Jesus, we think most naturally of the 12 apostles that Jesus gave a specific task to.

And rightly so, it's right that we think of them. But around Jesus was a wider group of people who followed him, gave him shelter, ate with him, drank with him, heard his teachings, even if they were not chosen by Jesus to be his 12 apostles.

And these people, Lazarus, Mary, Martha, fit into that category of a larger group of followers around Jesus. And there are people who know Jesus well enough to be able to send a message and ask for his help.

[ 4 : 09 ] And they do. Lord, he whom you love is ill. Now, if you were to receive a message that somebody that you are friends with, somebody that you care about is ill, is on their deathbed even, how would you respond?

My guess is that for most of us, we would want to see them as quickly as possible, wouldn't we? That we would want to get to the hospital or to their homes.

But that isn't what Jesus does in this passage. He stays where he is for several more days.

In fact, he doesn't go directly to Lazarus. Now, why not? Well, it isn't because of his lack of love for Lazarus.

It's not as if he doesn't care because we're told that in the very message which he received, he whom you love is ill. It's because Jesus has something greater here that he wants to use this for.

[ 5 : 23 ] He says that this will occur so that the Son of God may be glorified. In fact, he says even more than that, that he says to his disciples, I am glad that I was not there for your sake in verse 15.

Or again, we're told in verse 5, 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.

He stays where he is out of love for these people. Because he loves them, he doesn't go directly to them. Jesus has something greater for them.

There is something which is more important for them than even being saved from the grief and anguish of seeing their brother die.

They need to see something about Christ, about who he is, something about his glory. And Jesus is not uncaring, but he wants them to see something greater than what they have asked for.

[ 7 : 05 ] He gets their request and he does not give them what they have asked for. He is instead going to give them what they need most.

Now, getting what you need rather than what you ask for is a fine ideal that we can understand when it comes to children.

You know, if you've ever been involved in a Sunday school, you've got children of your own, and you know that not everything that a child asks for can be given to them straight away. You need sometimes to say, no, you're not going to get that.

You're going to get what you need instead of what you've asked for. But it's more difficult for us when it's applied to ourselves, isn't it?

Sometimes when we have been praying to God, and we're saying, God, I need this. God, I want you to answer my prayer. And the Lord responds by saying, I am not going to answer your prayer in the way that you have asked because I know better and you need something greater.

[ 8 : 16 ] in Romans chapter 8, it says that God makes all things work for the benefit, for the good of those who love him.

And that is a verse which can be thrown around very loosely, and it can do harm even sometimes when it's given to people in the wrong way. But it is a great truth.

It is a great truth. And we don't always understand why the Lord does what he does.

We don't always understand why the Lord will say no to one request and yes to another, or why he will take us through certain parts of our lives, like he is here with Mary and Martha.

But one thing we cannot say is that it's because his lack of love towards us that he does not care for us.

[ 9 : 18 ] The very reason he is our Lord is because he is prepared to die for us. And therefore, even this evening, if we are in a situation coming into this communion weekend where we do not understand why the Lord has done certain things in our lives, we don't understand why he hasn't answered every prayer that we've asked him, or why he has taken us through periods of our lives which have hurt, I want to say to you this evening and reassure you, it does not mean that he has forgotten you, and it does not mean that he does not care for you.

His love towards us is providential. It uses the events of our lives for our own good.

And we might not understand why he has done what he has done until we get to glory itself. But he does love you. Secondly then, we move on to personal love that he has for us.

Because Jesus announces after his delay that he is going to go, therefore, and go and see Lazarus, and his disciples decide to go with him. We have this comment from Thomas.

They obviously don't know what he's getting up to because as far as they're concerned, Jesus is going to go into a dangerous situation, and Thomas just says, well, he's going to go there. We may as well die with him.

[ 10 : 52 ] Thomas is nothing if not straightforward in his speech. But they decide to go down then to the village. And we are told that when Jesus arrives, Martha comes out to meet him.

And Martha knows that Jesus is a great man. She knows that he is a miracle worker. She even says so. 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. She has some level of trust in Jesus, and that Jesus can be trusted, even if she doesn't understand everything.

And Jesus says to her, your brother will rise again. And Martha says to him, I know that you will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.

Martha is a God-fearing first-century Jew, and they knew that there would be a great day in the future when God would raise people on the day of judgment in the resurrection to come.

[12:06] And she is looking forward to that day, and looking forward to the fact that her brother Lazarus will rise on that day. But Jesus doesn't want her focus to be merely on a good event in the future.

He wants her focus to be on himself. So he says to her, I am the resurrection and the life.

I am. Throughout John's Gospel, Jesus has used this phrase again and again. I am. I am the good shepherd.

I am the vine. I am the bread of life. I am the resurrection and the life. And it is no accident that he has done so.

Jesus is deliberately referring back to something deep within the memory of God's people. All the way back in the Old Testament in the book of Exodus, when God freed his people from slavery in Egypt and brought them into the promised land, God met with Moses at the burning bush and Moses asked God at that point, what is your name?

[13:39] And the Lord responded, I am who I am. I am has sent you.

So when Jesus stands before Martha here and says, I am the resurrection and the life, he is declaring that he is that God of Exodus standing in the flesh in human form in front of her.

That he is God Almighty. That this is the one to whom we put our trust in.

God is personal. That he is the source of all blessings. Not in an abstract idea of God.

Not in having a concept. But in this person. God is personal in Jesus to us today.

[14:55] That if you have Jesus, you have the resurrection and the life. If you have Jesus, you have all the blessings of heaven itself.

Because he is the great I am. Jesus asks Mary, do you believe this?

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?

And she answers wonderfully in verse 27. Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God who is coming into the world. Yes, she says, I do believe that you are who you claim to be, Jesus.

I believe that and I trust that is true. My friends, if God has come to us personally, if he has come in the person of Jesus Christ, Christ, do you believe that this evening?

[16:22] That's what Jesus asks. Do you believe this? He doesn't say that to receive the gift of eternal life.

He doesn't say that if you want to never die, that you must have stopped sinning. He doesn't ask the question, are you good enough for this?

He doesn't even ask the question, can you find Malachi in your Bible this evening without using the contents page? He asks this question, do you believe?

And notice he isn't saying, do you believe, without questions, or without doubts. Of course he doesn't say that, because look at Martha herself, what's the first thing that she said to Jesus when he turned up to her?

Lord, verse 21, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. What is that statement? Isn't that a type of question to Jesus, or at least a query?

[17:47] If you had been here, my brother would not have died. It's kind of like saying to him, why weren't you here? Why didn't you come quicker? We sent for you. If you'd come when you'd asked, he wouldn't have died.

And yet he asks her, do you believe? In the middle of doubts and questions, do you believe? And God is only interested in your answer to that question.

It is, God comes to us personally, and it is our response to that question which he wants to know. Do you believe?

Not, how do you compare to the other people in your church? Sometimes we do that, don't we, really stupidly. Sometimes we'll think of our Christian life, and we'll go, well, I'm not as good as the Christian over there, the person in that row, because they're a real saint.

But I'm not as bad as the one over there. So, I'm somewhere in the middle. I'm doing okay. God's not interested in that. He's not interested in how you're doing in your personal league table, in your head, compared to the other members of Crow Road.

[19:03] He wants to know, do you believe? And if you do, if you do, then all the blessings of heaven are yours.

You have the life and the resurrection which Jesus offers to you this evening. do you trust in this person, Jesus Christ?

Do you believe? Not, let me just say one last, one other thing, it's not. Not, do you believe plus anything else?

when I lived in the Western Isles, we sometimes had people in our congregations, in our congregation even, who would say, I believe in Jesus and I trust in him, but I haven't had the right experience yet.

I haven't had the right conversion experience. And you say to them, well, but do you believe? And they say, yes, but I need to believe and have this experience.

[ 20 : 26 ] No. Do you believe? And if you do, then you, if you haven't taken communion before, should stop disobeying Jesus and speak to your elders this evening about coming to the communion table tomorrow morning.

finally, then, it is a passionate love that this Jesus has for us. Passionate love.

After Jesus has met with Martha, he asks to see Mary, and Mary comes out to him, and she comes out and she falls at his feet, and she asks, Lord, have you been here?

My brother would not have died. And we're told that then Jesus asks to see the grave. When he's brought to it, we're told told.

The shortest verse in the English Bible, Jesus wept. Jesus is not a stoic.

[ 21 : 55 ] He's not unmoved by the tragedy and the grief that he sees around him. It's a powerful example, isn't it?

A reminder of what it says later on in Scripture, in Hebrews chapter 4, that we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but has been tempted in every way, yet is without sin.

That Jesus cares for us. He sympathizes with us in our sorrows and in our pains.

He is not a dispassionate God who is uncaring, not simply a force. He in his humanity has been through the trials and sufferings of this world himself and our Lord knows what that feels like.

And he has therefore great love for us. And do you notice that that love for us is shown as to us individually as not all the same.

[ 23 : 15 ] When Mary came out, what were the words that she said to Jesus? Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

It's the same words as her sister Martha, isn't it? And yet, Jesus doesn't treat her the same way as Martha.

With Martha, he knew that when he met with her, he needed to teach her, to say something about himself and about what he was about to do.

And yet, with Mary, he moved straight to being taken to the tomb and to show her his own power. two sisters from the same family with the same words and yet, Jesus responds to each of them differently.

Our Lord is not a vending machine. He's not, you know, in a vending machine, you go up and you put in this code and if you put in the same code every single time, you get the same product out, don't you?

[ 24 : 21 ] But the Lord knows us individually. He knows our names. He knows us better than we know ourselves and he knows that even if two people in church prayed the same prayer with the same words, he knows each of us well enough to answer that prayer in the way that is applicable for that person.

And so, two sisters, get different responses from Jesus because he knows them both so well. But the love of Jesus here, it goes beyond grief and sympathy or even help.

It is, as I just said a moment ago, it is a passionate love for us and we see that as he comes to the tomb itself. Verse 33, we are told that he was deeply moved.

And again, in verse 38, when he came to the tomb, we are told that he was deeply moved.

The words behind deeply moved that in the ESV, you will see that it is called a footnote for indignant. It has the idea there of not simply love and of, sorry, not simply compassion and sympathy, but of outrage.

[ 25 : 55 ] That Jesus is outraged, indignant by what he sees in this. Jesus sees the impact that death has on his people and on the creation and is indignant at it.

Remember what we said a moment ago when Jesus was speaking to Martha. Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life.

He is the source of all life. In fact, if we were to turn all the way back to John chapter one, we would see there that Jesus is described in the opening verses as the word of God made flesh and the word of God which created the world.

And he made this world good. He made humanity in his own image. And he gave us life. And he made it without human death.

death. The only reason why there is death in this world is because of human sin. Because of our rebellion against God.

[ 27 : 13 ] It is not a natural part of his created order. It is a trespass on his territory. It is an invasive species.

It is not welcome. in God's creation even though it is here. It is an intruder. And therefore when he comes face to face with the darkness of death he is indignant with it.

And he has a passionate love for his people against the death which we suffer and which mars his creation so much and which hurts us so badly. And that passionate love that he has for his people will drive him not only to raise Lazarus here but to go to war against death and the cause of death human sin.

This passionate love which he shows for us in John chapter 11 at the tomb of Lazarus will be the same passionate love which will drive him to go to the cross on our behalf to pay for our sins.

Jesus knows that for Lazarus to come out of the grave he will eventually have to go into the grave on our behalf.

[ 28 : 41 ] That is the love of Christ. A love of Christ which is so great towards his people towards you towards you that he would prefer to be crucified than to lose you for eternity.

He would prefer the cross for himself than for you to be lost.

My friends, if that is not a passionate love, what is? That is the love which your Savior has shown to you.

now this evening, as we finish and as we think this evening and as we prepare tomorrow to take the bread and the wine, we will not have every question answered.

There may be areas of our faith where we don't understand what the Lord is doing. There may be questions that we have and doubts even about this or about that.

[ 30 : 22 ] But be reassured, my friends, whatever your questions might be, whatever events might have gone on in your lives, it is not because your Lord does not love you.

Because there is a cross in history which proves to you how passionately he does. let's pray. Thank you.