

# The Love of Jesus

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[ 0 : 00 ] This is someone here's absolutely favourite passage, so if I butcher it, I am very, very sorry. So the stakes are high. Why don't I pray before we start?

Dear Lord, thank you for the Lord Jesus. Thank you that when he speaks, the dead live. Thank you that all of us here have heard your voice. Please, Lord, would you help us to respond rightly to it? Amen.

Amen. The question I want us to think about this afternoon is, does Jesus love me? Now, I know what you're thinking. Flippin' X, Simon. Where is the conservative evangelical preacher that we were promised?

Why is he talking about mushy feelings? Does he not know? And I apologise to our church family who wouldn't identify as coming from these hallowed isles. The Brits don't do feelings. Give me the exegesis and move on.

Well, don't worry. I have an incredibly sensitive cringe filter, so I understand the trepidation.

However, I think this question is possibly one of, if not the most fundamental questions for us as believers or non-believers.

[ 1 : 08 ] On a broad scale, I hope that makes sense. Our faith is not intellectual. It is a relationship, a relationship based on sacrifice, blood, forgiveness, redemption, family, adoption.

I could go on. But fundamentally, our faith is a relationship with the Lord Jesus. But I think this question becomes much closer to home when we pause and look at our fallen world and our place in it.

Jesus, bodily at least, is not here. He has left his people, apart from the Spirit, to fend for themselves.

In a world rife with illness, heartache, persecution and suffering, made all the more potent with a global pandemic and death statistics flashed across our screens daily, the question of does Jesus love me, does Jesus love me even though he is not here, really matters.

Jesus, you are not here. The world is so broken and painful. Does Jesus love me? And this question of Jesus' absence is one that John has been addressing right back since chapter 9, or even our earlier passage in chapter 5, and he will continue to do so right up until chapter 17.

[ 2 : 32 ] In fact, in chapter 9, we see Jesus heal a blind man on the Sabbath, who is then left on his own, as he steadily experiences more and more persecution and rejection, even from his own family.

The blind man's experience, one of meeting Jesus, Jesus leaving, leading to persecution, but also eternal life, is arguably the paradigmatic or perfect example of being a disciple of Jesus in John. And by chapter 17, Jesus has told his disciples that he is going away, and in his absence, they will be hated, persecuted, yet will witness to the ends of the earth.

And given that Jesus is leaving, and his followers will suffer when he does, the question of does Jesus love me, does he love me even though he is not here, will have been right at the forefront of the initial readers' minds.

Does Jesus love me? There are two irrefutable facts that we need to get clear on from the first 16 verses. Up until this point in the Gospel of John, Jesus' love has been entirely reserved for God the Father.

[ 3 : 46 ] In fact, he has never said that he loves anyone apart from God the Father until this point. Now, John wants to make abundantly clear that Jesus loved Lazarus and his family.

Have a look with me at 11 verse 3. So the sisters sent to him, saying, Lord, he whom you love is ill. Or 11 verse 5. Now Jesus loved Martha and her sisters, sister and Lazarus.

Or verse 11. After saying these things, he said to them, Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep. Or even 35 to 36. Jesus wept.

So the Jews said, See how he loved him. Irrefutable fact number one. Jesus loved Lazarus, Mary and Martha. Yet irrefutable fact number two.

Jesus was not there. Have a look at verse 5 and 6. Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was ill, and I wonder how you would think that verse is supposed to end.

[ 4 : 54 ] He stayed there two days longer in the place that he was. It's so jarring, isn't it? You would expect Jesus, the great healer, to arise immediately and sprint to Bethany to save Lazarus.

To save the one he loves. And Lazarus' sisters, before we think there might have been some mistake, expected the same thing. Have a look with me at 20 to 21. 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. Or verse 32.

The same accusation. Now when Mary, the other sister of Lazarus, 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.

Irrefutable fact number two. Jesus was not there. And you can hear the desperate and accusing tone. Jesus, we thought you loved us, yet you were not here.

[ 6 : 01 ] Does Jesus love Lazarus, Mary and Martha? Does Jesus love me? And this brings me on to my first point.

The offer of Jesus' love, eternal life. The offer of Jesus' love, eternal life. Here we have possibly, and we're going to be looking at verses 17 to 27, sorry, for this point.

And here we have possibly one of the strangest, yet most glorious conversations in the New Testament. Jesus has finally arrived, some four days after Lazarus has been dead in the tomb.

So arguably a week after he first heard. And Martha, Lazarus' sister, distraught, approaches Jesus and accuses him to his face.

Have a look with me again at verse 21. Martha said to Jesus, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. And one might expect Jesus to apologise or offer an explanation or at least appear contrite for his absence.

[ 7 : 10 ] Yet his response is breathtakingly rude. Have a look with me at verse 23. Jesus said to her, your brother will rise again.

It would be like, I suppose, I was trying to think of an illustration that kind of got across how awful on one level this is. And I really struggled. But I suppose it would be like as if you were an expert surgeon.

The only one possible. I'm sure there's probably some in this room. The only person who would be able to perform a particular type of surgery. But you decided not to show up. And then you arrived at the funeral of the deceased late.

And the grieving sister accosts you and asks you why you were not there. And you say, oh, don't worry. He was a Christian. He'll rise again. Yet Martha, in incredible humility, responds verse 24.

Martha said to him, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day. Yet Jesus doubles down. Look at verse 25 to 27. Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life.

[ 8 : 18 ] 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's coming into the world. It's a shocking conversation. Jesus, in response to Martha's grief and Lazarus's death, offers eternal life in him.

It seems like at best a non sequitur. And at worst, downright cruel to promise resurrection at the gravestone of a recently deceased loved one.

Yet we shall see that that is certainly not the case. We will return back to Martha at the end. So that's point one, the offer of Jesus's love, eternal life. And this brings me on to point two, the scale of Jesus's love, death itself.

The scale of Jesus's love, death itself. And we're looking at verses 28 to 37. Jesus, at this point in the narrative, is not yet at this stage reached the funeral or the grave of Lazarus.

[ 9 : 25 ] And as Jesus approaches, he is confronted once again by someone he loves. This time it's Mary. Verse 31. 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. The exact same accusation is levelled at Jesus.

If you had been there for the people you loved, Lazarus would not have died. And here we have some of the most beautiful and comforting verses in the whole of our Bibles.

Jesus looks upon Mary's grief. And verse 33. Have a look with me. When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who would come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.

He was greatly moved in spirit. Now, you know, I do know a little bit of Greek. I apologize for bringing this up. But that is a pathetic translation of the original. It is more like a mix of extreme outrage and heart stopping grief.

[ 10 : 47 ] And to kind of really show us that we see that grief burst out in verse 35. Jesus wept. Jesus confronted with the brokenness of this world and the perversity of death that was never intended for his creation.

Even though he knows in 10 minutes time he will raise Lazarus from the dead, he weeps with those weeping and mourns with those mourning.

The same accusation is levelled at him. At first with Martha, he responds in what seems like a strange, pragmatic detachment by reminding her that Lazarus will rise again.

But this time he falls to his knees, rends his clothes and mourns with those mourning. As an aside, what a glorious God and King we worship.

No religion, no religion would demean their gods to suffer with us. Here we see the darling of heaven in the dust, weeping for his broken people and world.

[ 11 : 52 ] He knows he is not detached and he empathises with us. However, these verses are often taught simply as a comfort to the believer, which they are.

But this is only half the story as to why Jesus weeps. Because as Jesus surveys the utter brokenness and vileness of death, and it is vile, as he sees his loved ones weeping and Lazarus, his friends and family mourning, he sees why there is only one solution.

His death on the cross. The cost entail for verse 25 to 26 to be true. Have a look with me again. 25 to 26. Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life.

Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. The cost for that to be true is so great and so vast that only Jesus's death on the cross would suffice to pay it.

Jesus is not just crying at the death of Lazarus. He is weeping at death itself. Have a look with me at verse 37. But some of them said, could not he, that is Jesus, who opened the eyes of the blind man, also have kept this man from dying?

[ 13 : 11 ] And the answer is yes. Yes, he could have kept Lazarus from dying. But Jesus offers eternal life to those he loves and he pays the cost of it with his own death because he has something far greater in view.

Death itself. And we'll come on to that in my second two points. The scale of Jesus's love. Death itself. Come on to my third and penultimate point.

The proof of Jesus's love. Resurrection from the dead. And this is verse 38 to 44. Here we reach the climax of John's narrative. And I want us to really slow down and note together the deliberate grounding details that John employs in this part of his account.

This is not myth. None of us are here believing that that is myth. And John employs every sense except taste to make abundantly clear that this event happened in history.

And we're going to go through the senses so that I can illustrate that for us now. Jesus approaches the tomb and commands the stone to be rolled away. Verse 39.

[ 14 : 23 ] 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.

Note John's details here. Martha, the sister of the dead man. The sense of smell employed.

Lazarus in the heat of the Middle East would reek at this point.

And in a time when the dead made one spiritually unclean, as well as threatening disease, there were many reasons to be hesitant of approaching a corpse. Lazarus was really very much dead.

Jesus rebukes them, as we see in verse 40. 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.

Note again the senses. The stone is rolled away. Touch and feel is employed. This was a real tomb with a real stone, barring entry to a real corpse.

[15:27] Next speech is used. 41 to 43. 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, Lazarus, come out. The son, the word at the beginning and here once more to bring about his new creation and new life with better word speaks again, commanding the dead to rise.

And finally, listening. Verse 44. The man who had died came out, his hands and his feet bound with linen strips and his face wrapped with a cloth.

Jesus said to them, unbind him and let him go. Listening. Lazarus, the dead man, comes out. And no, John. I just I love John, as you can probably tell.

[16:31] Note, Jesus did not enter the tomb. He didn't even touch Lazarus as another miracles to heal him. In fact, Jesus probably did not even see Lazarus.

All Jesus needed was his word. Lazarus heard it and the dead lived. And the man came out and faith was turned to sight as the rotten corpse pulled off the mummifying linen and stepped into the light at the words of Jesus.

This event really happened. And it is the same pattern that all believers have followed to. You were dead in the tomb, a rotting corpse.

And then, as we saw in John 5, the word spoke and brought you from death to life. And now each one of you stands or I suppose sits as a testimony of the proof of Jesus's love.

A corpse brought to life at the words of Jesus. Point four, my final point, the gift of Jesus's love, belief that leads to eternal life.

[17:41] And that's 45 to 53. This passage is often fairly referred to as the resurrection of Lazarus. But this is actually only, I suppose, I think half true because there are at least two resurrections in this story.

And the second is far more impressive than the raising of Lazarus. I wonder if you noticed. For Martha was raised too. In verses 25 to 27, 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? Martha, just like Lazarus, heard the words of Jesus, believed and was granted eternal life.

And note when she believed. I think this is a detail that was only pointed out to me recently. Martha believed before Lazarus was raised. In many ways, she's in exactly the same position that we are. We have not yet seen Jesus face to face. We are resting on the promise that he will raise us. There may have been even more resurrections than the two that we just mentioned.

[19:02] Verse 45. Many of the Jews, therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him. Because Jesus was not there and manifested his glory, many believed and in him had eternal life.

Now, there is so much more we could say here about how God uses suffering and loss. But sadly, we don't have time to cover it. However, please do text into the question time or come and ask me or any member of staff or anybody else afterwards.

I would love to talk to you about it. But suffice to say, the pattern is established. Belief in the son's words leads to eternal life. Our passage concludes with another masterclass in irony by John in 46 to 53.

Allow me to read that for us. 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 the high priest that year, said to them, you know nothing at all.

[20:17] 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 the children of God who are scattered abroad.

Caiaphas, I hope we realise, speaks far more than he knows. He wants to kill Jesus in order to stop political retribution against Israel from the Roman occupation.

He doesn't realise the death of Jesus offers eternal salvation to the whole nation. Caiaphas wants to save Israel, but he does not realise that killing Jesus truly saves Israel by leading to eternal life. But John takes it one stage further than this. You see, for John, it is the resurrection of Lazarus that gets Jesus killed. I wonder if you notice that.

It is the resurrection of the dead man that leads to the death of Jesus. Caiaphas thinks Jesus must die for Lazarus's resurrection.

[ 21 : 32 ] And he's right, but not in the way he thinks. Jesus must die for the sake of Lazarus's resurrection. But because it is only Jesus's death for the world that Lazarus and everyone who would believe in him could be raised from the dead.

Jesus raising Lazarus got him killed. I know, I hope this completely changes how we view Jesus's absence in this story.

If Jesus had rushed to heal Lazarus and saved him from dying, Jesus would not have raised him from the dead. No one present would have had life giving belief and Jesus would not have been crucified and killed for the nation.

Jesus delayed so that he might make absolutely sure that he would die for Lazarus, die for you and die for the whole world.

The gift of Jesus's love, belief that leads to eternal life. Earlier, I mentioned that there are two irrefutable facts in this account.

[ 22 : 39 ] First, that Jesus loved Lazarus, Mary and Martha. Yet second, Jesus was not there. And it begged the question, how can Jesus love Lazarus, Mary and Martha, even though he wasn't there?

Well, to answer that, I want us to compare the response of Mary in two scenes. Both of them knelt at Jesus's feet. The first is 11 verse 32, which we've already read.

Have a look with me. 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.

This tone is purely accusatory. Grief, pain and anger. You said you loved us, yet you were not here.

The second scene takes place on the other page, across the page, right after the resurrection of Lazarus in 12 verses 3 to 8. Mary, again at Jesus's feet, therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair.

[ 23 : 52 ] The house was filled with the fragrance of her perfume. Verse 7. Jesus said, leave her alone so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.

Mary is at Jesus's feet once again. Yet this time it is in complete adulation as she prepares her Lord for his death and burial.

For now she understands what Jesus provides for those he loves. And it is not a second crack at this life, but it is belief that leads to eternal life through his death.

Does Jesus love Lazarus, Mary and Martha, even though he was not there? Yes, because in his absence he gave them something far better.

He delayed so that he might ensure his death, so that whoever believes in him can have eternal life. I began this talk with a question.

[ 24 : 55 ] Does Jesus love me? Does Jesus love me even though I am not? He is not here. As we hopefully come out of lockdown, this question will have become even sharper for many of us.

Many of us will have lost loved ones, had mental health impacted, life disrupted and jobs affected. For many of us, the temptation to feel as though Jesus doesn't love us will have been an overwhelming one.

Zoom Church has, and I'm speaking for myself as well, saps the joy out of worshipping Jesus together. And the prospect of another year of ministry, whether that's jam or our family or the workplace, telling our friends about Jesus or serving the church family on the Sunday might feel like the absolute last straw, especially because it feels like Jesus has left us to do it on our own.

But this is to miss what we have in the Lord Jesus. Because Jesus delayed, he made sure he would die for every single person who would place their belief in him, including you sitting in this room.

Every single one of you, if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus, is a living, breathing testimony to the overwhelming love of Christ. You were all rotting corpses buried in the tomb until the Son of God called you and light dawned as Jesus went to the cross in your place.

[ 26 : 30 ] Every Christian you meet and read of through the ages is someone Jesus made absolutely sure he was nailed to the cross for. Because in Jesus you will rise again.

The price of Jesus's death has been paid. Does Jesus love me? One implication for us to think about as we close. Christian love for us does not look like social action, charity, financial abundance, good health, a good university education, a happy retirement or even a suffering free life.

If you think Christian love, Jesus's love for you, looks like those things, you will be utterly frustrated and disenchanted. And it is so, so important, you know, that Jesus's love for you does not look like those things.

Because this is the truth, friends, that will see you until the end. The love of Jesus, the love of God, it looks like the Son of God nailed to a tree for you in death so that you might live.

Does Jesus love me? Well, look to his hands, look to his feet, his sides, the wounds are there. Does Jesus love me?

[ 27 : 56 ] Yes, he most certainly does. Why not I pray? Dear Lord, thank you for the Lord Jesus. Thank you that he made absolutely sure he went to the cross for us.

Father, all of us here are testaments to that love. And please, when life is hard and we question why you are not here, please would you encourage us by looking to your Son on the cross who died for us.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.