

Will you love Jesus crazily?

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[0 : 00] This morning, it's a little bit in your face. Will you love Jesus crazily?! What I mean is seeing who he is and what he does, Jesus Christ, maybe knowing more and more what a massive personal impact he's had on you and on people you love.

Will you love Jesus extravagantly, almost crazily? Could you, will you in your life give yourself to Jesus Christ in total, unreserved, lavish devotion?

Or will you hold Jesus at the edges of your life? Or even in your day-to-day life, will you do away with him completely? We just heard read John 11, verse 45 onwards, which from one angle with it open in front of us, it is kind of the after effects of the big event.

The ripples that spread out after a big stone is dropped into a lake. Earlier in John 11, if you were here last week, Jesus had been told that Lazarus, the one whom he loves, is ill.

And Jesus waited on purpose till Lazarus died and then he left his safe rural hideaway and he went to Bethany, close to Jerusalem. His disciples said to him, hey, if you go there, that's where people try to stone you to death.

[1 : 25] You are walking into danger towards death. But Jesus went in John 11. I am the resurrection and the life, he declares. Right at the centre of John's Gospel, chapter 11, 25 and 26.

And whoever believes in me will live, even though they die. And if you remember, deeply moved in spirit and troubled, weeping, angry almost, with the sin and sickness and death in this fallen world that wreaks so much havoc and generates so much sorrow amongst us.

Jesus Christ acted in power publicly and undeniably, raising Lazarus from the dead. This four-day decomposing dead man raised him to life.

John 11 is a sign for us to say that Jesus is who he says he is. He is the dead, raising, life-giving saviour that we in our sinful, dying world so desperately need.

And so, verse 45, look, therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary and had seen what Jesus did believed in him. And so should you. And so should I.

[2 : 44] Believe in him. But John 11, 45 is not the end of the story. Events move on, the ripples spread and gather pace as religious leaders and the general public and sisters and disciples all work out how on earth they're going to live.

And what they're going to do with this son of God sent into the world who raises the dead. And all the time as we follow along the story towards his death and resurrection, you and I are being prodded.

We're being prodded by John. By God. What about you? Do you see who he is?

Do you see what he does? Will you believe in him? In fact, more than that, in our passage this morning, not just believe in him, but will you love him?

Crazily. Just as we walk through these verses, I want to get us to notice two things. Here's the first thing at the end of chapter 11.

[3 : 55] This life-giving saviour will die. He will die, this Lord Jesus. Come into the text with me and look, verse 45 onwards.

Many of the Jews who'd come to visit Mary and had seen what Jesus did believed in him, but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. And then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin.

In and around Jerusalem 2,000 years ago, the Romans were in charge, their empire stretching far and wide, and under Roman rule was the Sanhedrin, a group of 70 or so priests and others who controlled Jewish internal affairs.

They're in charge of the Jewish people. They hold the power. They say what goes. What are we accomplishing, they asked. Here is this man, Jesus, performing many signs. If we let him go on like

this, everyone will believe in him.

If you've got that verse in front of you, you think, well, that would be good, wouldn't it? Everyone believing in Jesus and receiving eternal life. But they say, no, that wouldn't be good.

[5 : 05] Because then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation. These religious leaders are happy with their lives without Jesus. They found their place in society.

They are happy to have their worship centre in Jerusalem, where they can make sacrifices to God. They are happy with their power and their position and how they've slotted into a multicultural world. But if everyone started believing in Jesus, well, that would rock the boat. And maybe their comfortable place in society and even their nation would be taken away. And so therefore, what could they do?

Verse 49, then one of them named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up. You know nothing at all. You do not realise it's better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.

So here is the plan. We should just do away with Jesus. We should make him die. Like Alexei Navalny in Russia last month.

[6 : 16] Like prominent Christian leaders in some countries around the world. Make him disappear. Get rid of him. Better that than our whole nation fall apart and perish and we lose power.

And so in verse 53, from that day on, they plotted to take his life. And you should think to yourself how twisted that is.

Don't you think? I am the resurrection and the life, says Jesus. He raises the dead. And they say we can't have that. He must die.

And die he will. If you're very new to Christianity, the plot to kill Jesus may actually seem very perplexing.

Maybe more than that. The end point. But the end point. His murder on a cross in nakedness and shame as something that Christians talk about and glory in. Is strange.

[7 : 21] Because he claims to be the son of God. He is all powerful. And yet, couldn't we say that, like Alexei Navalny may be, events get the better of him.

If you know the story here. This Lord Jesus Christ maybe makes some wrong steps. Annoys a few too many powerful people. And they plot. Then arrest him and beat him and kill him.

Such a tragic end to a good life. Surely that wasn't quite the plan. Except the truth is, as many of us know, it was a plan.

In verses 51 and 52, where I'd love us to drill down this morning. John, the gospel writer, steps up and out of the story to teach us.

To teach us that the death of Jesus Christ is not only no mere accident. But is wonderful and glorious and central to everything in God's world.

[8 : 28] Just drill down here for a few minutes with me into these verses. First, in verses 51 and 52, his death is planned. It is planned by God.

Caiaphas, the high priest, reckons in verse 50, look, it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole people perish. Let's get rid of him, he says.

And yet, look, verse 51, he did not say this on his own. But as high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die.

In the Bible, prophets, those who prophesy, they are God's mouthpieces. When a prophet speaks, he's not speaking on his own, but God speaking through him, communicating God's plans and God's purposes.

And when Caiaphas says it's better than one man die, he is not speaking on his own. God is speaking through him.

[9 : 35] This is what will happen. You see, Jesus' death is no tragic, unexpected end. It is God's set plan, God's wonderful set purpose.

Why? Why plan to send your dearly loved son into the world to die? Why? Second here, in these so precious verses, his death is for many.

Look at this with me. Caiaphas reckons, verse 50, it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish. Verse 51, as high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation.

And not only for that nation, but also for the scattered children of God. It's repeated, for, for, for. What does it mean to die for someone?

This little word for can mean a few things. Forgive a few football examples if you're not football inclined. If you play football for England, you are representing your country.

[10:55] There's loads of us English people, but if you play for England, you are playing for us. You're playing on our behalf. Because Jurgen Klopp is retiring as Liverpool football manager at the end of the season, and the team really love him because he's a great manager, they want to win trophies for him, for his benefit.

We're playing for you, they say. When the team are out on the pitch and you're on the substitute's bench, you're on the sideline, at some point the manager might bring you on.

He brings Mohamed Salah off, and you go on for Mohamed Salah as his substitute in his game, in his place. That's football.

It's just a game, it's nothing more than that. God's plan is for Jesus to die for not just the Jewish nation, but the scattered children of God, says here.

He's sent into the world to die for a multinational group of people like us. To die on our behalf, for our benefit, in our place.

[12:09] You and I, as creatures who have turned away from the living God in rebellion, we deserve to die in our sins, Jesus says.

God's judgment of death, and perishing forever with God's righteous anger remaining on us, is what our sins deserve. You and I should die forever, and we should perish under God.

And yet the Lord Jesus Christ comes to die for the people. He will die on the cross on our behalf, representing us.

One man, one of us, our King, bravely putting himself forward for us. He will die on the cross for our benefit, for our good, so that you and I, rather than perish, will receive eternal life.

And that is because he will die in our place, as our substitute. This is God's plan, because he loves the world of which we're a part.

[13:25] His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, will go to the cross for us. He offers himself as a sacrifice to God, on our behalf, for our benefit, in our place.

He goes to die gladly, bearing our sins on his shoulders. As he dies on the cross, he takes our place. He dies the death that we should die.

He endures God's anger at our sins. He pays the price that we should pay. He perishes under God's judgment of death, so that you and I might not perish, but have eternal life.

The death of Jesus Christ, it's planned by God from all eternity past, and it's for many. And thirdly here, Jesus dies not just for Jews, but for people scattered all over the world.

Do you see that? And he does it, end of verse 52, to make them one. This is the purpose of his dying.

[14:36] So that today, as Jewish people, and Pakistanis, and Romanians, and South Africans, and Argentinians, and Brits, receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, and become children of God, Jesus brings them all together, and makes them one.

It's what he died to do. I've got a Portuguese friend on Facebook from when I was about 17 or 18. She's got a super-sized family.

And I saw a picture of them at the start of January, with all the cousins brought together in one photo. Over 50 of them, Portuguese, all together on the beach, all grinning widely, family brought together.

It says here, the Lord Jesus Christ dies to bring together one big multinational family, one flock, children of God, Lazarus, and you, and me, and millions and millions of others through history, and around the world, united together in love, under our Heavenly Father.

And when you belong to this family, when you're part of this one flock, what marks us out is that we will never die in our sins, and we will never perish under the judgment of God.

[16:01] But we will rise from the dead and live forever with our God, just as Christian's Father will. Why? Because one man has died for us on the cross.

What do you make of that this morning? And that is the old, straightforward gospel. It's the heart of everything.

You may have heard it a thousand times, or for the first time. You couldn't write it. You couldn't imagine it, really, could you? that God the Father might plan this for us.

That God the Son would gladly obey his Father and come into the world and do this for us. Die on your behalf. Die for your benefit.

Die in your place. That you and I can be part of the family of God now and into eternity. All of that. All that blessing. Because of Jesus Christ.

[17:09] The life-giving Saviour whom a group of weak men plot to kill. He who dies for us. We'll come back to the unfolding narrative.

And Caiaphas, the high priest, he spoke better than he knew. And the rest of the Sanhedrin back then 2,000 years ago, blind to God's wonderful plan and desperate to hold on to their position.

Verse 53, from that day on, they plotted to take Jesus' life. And so Jesus no longer moved about publicly, but instead withdrew to a region near the wilderness where he stayed because the God-appointed hour of his death had not quite yet come.

Until verse 55. When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover. The yearly festival, the time to sacrifice a Passover lamb is looming.

And people start streaming up to Jerusalem and they look out for Jesus. Is he coming? But, verse 57, the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who found out where Jesus was should report it so that they might arrest him.

[18:29] And so to chapter 12. I have really only got one question I want to ask this morning and here it is. This life-giving saviour who will die, who dies for us, will you love him?

Crazily? Because just see what happens at the start of chapter 12 as Jesus' death looms. Read along with me.

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Do you remember Lazarus? Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honour and Martha served while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him.

Isn't that wonderful? Lazarus had died. He'd been four days in the tomb, decomposing. His sisters had wept with grief and yet now here he was, raised from the dead by Jesus.

And now they're all around the same table together. I don't know if you've ever had someone over to your house for a meal as a way of saying, thank you. Thanks for looking after our guinea pigs or something like that.

[19:50] Martha and Mary have their brother literally back from the dead and they get Jesus over for dinner. You think in a meal like that, how would you feel about Jesus?

How would you feel towards him with your now alive brother next to you? How might we respond to this Lord, to this saviour who dies, that he might give real resurrection life to us and to those whom we love?

In verse 3, Mary took about half a litre of pure nard, an expensive perfume, and she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

It is an act of extravagant, humble, beautiful devotion, isn't it? I had to look this up.

Nard is an oil-like perfume extracted from the nard plant a long way away in India. This is pure nard and half a litre of it. It's come from a long way, it is top quality and there's loads of it.

[20:56] And John says it's an expensive perfume, which is a bit of an understatement. If you go into John Lewis in town tomorrow, you can buy a 200 milliliter bottle of that Maison Francis Kirkjian Baccarat Rouge 540 Eau de Parfum for, do you know how much?

£485. Which is expensive perfume in my book, isn't it? You think if you bought a bottle of that, you would use it extremely sparingly.

If I bought that for Meg, I'd say, please only use it once a year or something like that. Half a litre of pure nard, on the other hand, is worth, Judas says in verse 5, a year's wages.

Not 485 quid. The UK average wage is £28,000. Just to give an idea of comparison. So Mary takes not £500 of Maison France, etc, Eau de Parfum, that's nothing.

She takes £28,000 worth of pure nard and she does not use it sparingly. She pours it out on Jesus' feet and bends before him in humility and wipes his feet with her hair.

[22:13] Looks to me like lavish, over the top, uninhibited, unreserved, devoted, gratitude. Jesus, I love you.

I love you. for who you are and what you've done. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume because Jesus is worth it.

He's worth it. This almost crazy, seemingly over-the-top devoted love. Like, what do you think of that?

Do you think it's a bit much? A bit over the top? One of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected. Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages, which sounds very holy and disciplined and right. By the way, he didn't say this because he cared about the poor because he was a thief. As keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

[23 : 14] Leave her alone, Jesus replied. It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial to anoint Jesus' body.

You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me. Quite whether Mary knows or not that she's anointing him for burial a week early, not sure it's super clear to me. But what is clear is that this kind of all-in, total, unreserved devotion to Jesus is entirely appropriate and completely appropriate.

There is an old hymn that we sing from time to time. We will sing it in a few minutes. When I survey the wondrous cross, and here's the last verse, responding to the life-giving death of Jesus were the whole realm of nature mine that were an offering far too small.

Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all. So this morning's question, will you love Jesus?

[24 : 30] Almost crazily. for sure don't turn away from him. For sure don't have him on the edges of your life. See who he is and believe in him and then as you understand what he does, will you take your life and your money and your time and your soul and everything and will you pour out your life for him?

Will you? right now this morning, this Sunday morning, fix your eyes on Jesus here. See who he is and what he does.

Survey in your mind's eye the wondrous cross as he dies for your benefit, on your behalf, in your place. See how glorious he is, this saviour of ours who dies for us.

Put your faith in Jesus. Come to him and believe in him. Look around this morning if you like at brothers and sisters here who have been brought from death to life because that is the reality for us.

Take the Lord's Supper in a moment in Jesus' honour and then sing at the top of your voice and then go out into your week I pray for myself and for us and love him.

[25 : 51] Will we love him extravagantly and almost even crazily? Let me lead us in a prayer.

Let's pray together. Let's pray together. as high priest that year Caiaphas prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God to bring them together and make them one.

We praise you this morning our God and Father for your stunning plan that you would send your dearly loved son into the world for people like us.

We praise you for the stunning obedience of your son willing to come and live and allow himself to be arrested and beaten and mocked then crucified knowing that he was laying his life down for the sheep.

Thank you for his willing wonderful sacrifice on our behalf for our benefit and in our place that we might live and that you might gather us together and make us one members of your family.

[27 : 34] Help us this morning as we sing and share the Lord's Supper and look around at one another. Deepen our grasp grasp of the glories of your love and make us those who respond in love and praise for our wonderful Saviour.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.