

John 11:1-27

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[0 : 00] Friends, while you're standing, let me pray for us. Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this evening. In Christ's name. Amen.

Amen. Friends, be seated. Be seated. Hello, everyone. Hello. It's good to see you. If you're new with us, my name is Aaron, and I'm one of the ministers on staff here. I want to start. I want to start by giving you a hot tip on reading the Bible. You ready? Hot tip on reading the Bible. Here it is.

To work out what's important, this is especially applicable to the Gospels. To work out what's important, look for the surprises in the passage. Like, what are the shocking elements? What are the unexpected sort of twists in the story? Often, that's where the gold is.

Now, the problem is, if you've been around church land for a while, the stories become quite familiar, right? And the surprises aren't surprising any longer. So let's try and come to the story of Lazarus and John 11 with fresh ears, because there are a number of really shocking elements to it. First shocking element. Jesus lets one of his good friends die. Like, on purpose, lets him die. I mean, that's wild, isn't it?

He let his family go through the trauma of all that. Isn't that interesting? Second, Jesus cries. God incarnate weeps. Now, if you're reading the story for the very first time, I imagine that's not on your bingo card. That God cries. Third shock, third shock. The actual resurrection of Lazarus, it doesn't get a lot of screen time in the story.

[1 : 47] It's just a couple of verses right at the end. And it's a long story. It's a long story. There's a lot of detail. The actual raising of Lazarus gets two verses right at the end, and it makes you wonder if perhaps that's not the main point.

So, here are the shocks again. Jesus lets a good friend die. Secondly, Jesus' emotions. And thirdly, the resurrection actually doesn't get a lot of real estate in this story.

So, what I'm going to do now is I want to go through these one by one, because I think there's gold there. There's gold there. So, let's go through them. First, Jesus lets a friend die. So, we discover in verse 1 that Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, he's sick, is really, really sick.

And verse 5 tells us that Jesus is really tight with this family. So, we get the shock in verse 6, though. So, when he heard Lazarus is ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

I mean, if he really loved this family, like the passage says, and if he had the power to heal them, which we know he does, why didn't he go to Bethany, which was the place where he was? Why didn't he go there immediately? I mean, Jesus healed people he didn't even know.

[2 : 54] I mean, he healed the slave of a centurion. The centurion, who were like the occupying force, he healed that dude's slave. Never even had to go where the slave was, and he healed him.

Why is Lazarus getting ripped off here? And it says in verse 14, Jesus actually waits until he's certain Lazarus is dead before heading over there.

So, why the delay? Well, the answer is in verse 15 there. Jesus says, and for your sake, I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. So, Jesus delays, not because he's callous or powerless or indifferent.

I mean, he loved these people. He said he did it for their sake. He knew if he'd waited, he knew if he waited, he could give them an even greater gift than to raise Lazarus.

He could give them faith. Let's think about this a little bit more, okay? If Jesus had raced over and healed Lazarus, which would have been a nice thing to do, what would he have demonstrated? He would have demonstrated that he is the Lord over sickness, which is good.

[4:01] But this calling Lazarus out of the grave, this tells us that he's the Lord over death, which is a whole other thing. So, the decision to delay, I mean, it was very costly for the family, but it allowed Jesus to show people he's better than we think he is.

He's actually greater than we can imagine he is. Now, let's apply this to our lives for a moment here. What do you think about Mary and Martha? Because I think their situation applies to us.

Maybe there are things in your life where you want Jesus to do something, but he hasn't. There's been, like, inaction.

And maybe you're like Mary and Martha and you've sent word out, you've sent word to Jesus in prayer, and you've asked your friends to pray, and, like, nothing's happening. For example, maybe you really want to get married, and you're saying, Lord, why aren't you fixing my singleness?

Or why aren't you fixing my career issues? Or why aren't you fixing my relationship dramas? What's the lesson here in this story? Here's one of the lessons.

[5:15] It's this. If Jesus delays, there's a purpose in that. If he delays, there's a purpose in that. J.C. Ryle is good on this. Here's an old Anglican bishop from the mid-1800s. He says this.

The hand that was nailed to the cross is too wise and loving to smite without needs be, or to keep us waiting for relief without a cause.

I'll say that again. The hand that was nailed to the cross is too wise and loving to smite without reason, or to keep us waiting for relief without cause. So, do you see here, when God says no, where there seems to be inaction, he's not being cruel or indifferent, God knows what he's doing.

And we may never know the reason God says no. But it doesn't mean there isn't a reason. If you want a really pithy way of saying this, when it comes to your life, Jesus is the adult in the room.

Jesus is the adult in the room. And you can trust he's making the best decisions. One more thing before moving on. As we talk about Lazarus dying, perhaps some of you are thinking about death yourself.

[6:26] Maybe your own death. And it doesn't feel nice. But let's again just remember the really big picture here. Jesus chose a friend, a good friend.

He allowed him to die. He waited until he died. Dead, in a tomb. He was wrapped up in linen strips. And then he called him back to life.

We couldn't get a better or clearer illustration that Jesus is the Lord over death. And you can trust him with your death and the death of your loved ones.

He will come for you. He will raise you into everlasting life. Okay, that was the first surprise of the passage. Jesus lets a good friend die. Okay, the second surprise of Christ's emotions.

I'm talking about the weeping in verse 35. But also God's anger in verse 33. So let's talk about the weeping first. So why is Jesus crying?

[7 : 23] Is that the term? It simply says Jesus wept. But why the tears? It can't be because he's thinking like, oh, I'll never see Lazarus again. He knows he's about to heal him. I mean, don't you think?

Don't you think, Jacob? Don't you think it would make more sense if he didn't cry? Wouldn't that make more sense if Jesus didn't cry? Wouldn't it make more sense if Jesus kind of walked to the tomb with a bit of a kind of a swagger?

Like a kind of like a presidential air about him? Everything's okay, people. I'm here now. You can stop crying.

Which, incidentally, is what I say when I arrive at the St. John's office every morning. It's okay, Jacob. Put your tears.

It's embarrassing now, Jacob. I mean, it would also make sense if Jesus approached the tomb with a kind of like a grin on his face, like a cheeky little smile, right? Like a parent holding a gift behind their back.

[8 : 27] Like, I've got a surprise for you, you know. But no, he weeps. Oh, this is shocking. Why does he weep? I mean, I think he's joining the family in their distress.

Because death is awful. Death is horrible. And facing the tomb is probably already thinking about what he's going to have to approach. He's going to be in this tomb one day.

He's probably thinking about that too. Just as an aside, you know, I think this tells us something about what a faithful response to tragedy looks like. You know, a faithful response to tragedy for a Christian is not, you know, trying to be strong and not feel anything.

That's not trusting Jesus. That's just kind of trusting in your own ability to manage your emotions. Like, I think tears and grief and ball in your eyes, that's a wholly appropriate and faithful response to tragedy.

I mean, think about it, you know. Like, I've done a few funerals. What do you bring to a Christian funeral, right? You bring tears. But you also bring truth. You know, not just truth.

[9 : 34] You don't just bring truth to a funeral. You know, we're not heartless dogmatics. And not just tears. It's not just all tears and mystery and stuff, you know. We bring the truth of the gospel. Okay, back to the story.

Jesus is confronted by the reality of death and he weeps because it's awful. But he doesn't just weep. He gets really angry. We see this in verse 33. He was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.

It's a fairly soft translation. So, you know, the Bible was originally written in Greek, the New Testament here. And that's a fairly soft translation. In the original language, the word is used to describe the noise that a horse makes when it's really angry.

One translation of this verse is, Quaking with rage, Jesus approached the tomb. I think that's brilliant.

So, he's not just sad that death has sort of intruded into the world. He's angry. He's furious. I think these two emotions are really helpful for us. Because the weeping, it tells us that Jesus feels the feels.

[10 : 39] He knows what's going on for us. But the rage reminds us that he's going to do something about it. He's fired up about it. Okay, that was point two. That was shock number two.

So, the first shock, Jesus let a good friend die. The second shock are the emotions of Jesus. The last shock. Lazarus doesn't get a lot of screen time here, does he?

See, it's really interesting. I think what's happening here is the passage doesn't let us make the raising of Lazarus the kind of climactic focus. We know that because it just gets two verses right at the end.

You can imagine, right? You can imagine. Jacob is there. He's watching this happen. He's dramatic. He's writing everything down. You'd make it a big drama of it.

Wouldn't you make a big drama of it? You'd be like, the stone rolled away. And the crowd gasped. And Lazarus haltingly staggers out of the tomb. And a child screams.

[11:44] I don't know. I'm making stuff up now. But you know what I mean? You'd really play it up. You'd make it half the passage. But it's not. Let me read it to you. Verse 43. When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, Lazarus, come out.

And the man who died came out. His hands, feet bound with linen strips, his face wrapped with a cloth, which we'll come to in a moment. Jesus said, unbind him and let him go.

That's it. It's not that it's not important. But clearly, I think the focus is somewhere else. But before I talk about that, a couple of details I just want to say quickly here. A couple of things I want to mention.

Why did Jesus say Lazarus' name? Why did he say, Lazarus, come out? Martin Lloyd-Jones, this old English preacher I like, he was asked this question.

And he said, if he hadn't said Lazarus by name, then all the dead and all the tombs would have come out. I love that. I think that is just a really great view of God's power.

[12:46] Okay, the other thing I want to mention here is the grave clothes. It does mention the grave clothes. Like the one detail, which I think is fascinating, I think.

It says the grave clothes were still on Lazarus. Why is that? It's a reminder to us that when Lazarus comes back, he's returning to the land of the dying. Death still has a grip on Lazarus.

That's the point. That's the picture. He will die. Lazarus dies again. Remember when Jesus rose from the grave.

Where were his grave clothes? If you remember the story, where were his grave clothes? Really nicely folded up in the tomb, weren't they? Jesus left death in the grave.

Jesus left death in that tomb to never die again. So this is not the same as Jesus rising again. The reason I say all this is it points us to the main point of the passage, this.

[13:48] Here's what I mean. I think the shock of the passage is the main point is not Lazarus' resurrection. The real focus is the astonishing words of Jesus in verse 25 when Jesus says, he is the resurrection and the life.

Now, at the start, at the start I said Jesus wanted to give them more than what they asked for. More than just, you know, the brothers come back.

He wanted to give them faith and hope and a lasting hope. And he wanted to give them a greater understanding of who he was. And here's where he does it. Verse 25. Jesus says, 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. This is the heart of our text. The story is not, look at the crazy stuff Jesus can do.

It's if we trust him, death can't take us forever. This is the promise of Jesus. As horrible and as painful and as tragic as death is, it does not get the final word in our life.

[14:48] That's what Jesus is saying. Then to demonstrate that he's telling the truth and that he can pull this off, he raises Lazarus from the dead with just three words.

This is the demonstration of verse 25. Because verse 25 is the main point. And what Jesus did for one man temporarily in a small town 2,000 years ago, what he does for him, he will do for everyone who trusts him.

Because he's the resurrection and the life. Okay, let me finish up here. There are three shocks in this passage. Three shocks. The first, the delay. The surprising delay.

Jesus let a good friend die. And God delays. And God says no. When you don't feel like you get an answer. We've got to remember, Jesus is the adult in the room.

Secondly, Jesus got emotional. It's wonderful. Jesus is not some detached deity. He cries with us. Speaking the truth without tears is remote and heartless.

[16:01] He doesn't do that. But we don't go the opposite direction as well. It's not tears without truth. It's not just kind of like, you know, I weep with you, but it's all a mystery. I've got nothing to say to you.

No. We don't go that right out there. So God delays. He weeps. And he gets angry about death. And he does something about it. He shows us his power over death so we can be people of great hope.

And the third shock is this. The resurrection of Lazarus isn't the coolest thing that happened that day. It's there to point us to the Lord of life and death who we can trust with everything in our lives.

Even the hardest and most difficult things. Amen. Amen.