

John 11

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[0 : 0 0] Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and you are going there again? Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world.

But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him. After saying these things, he said to them, Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him. The disciples said to him, Lord, if he's fallen asleep, he will recover.

Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest and sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, Lazarus has died. And for your sake, I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe.

But let us go to him. So Thomas, called the twin, said to his fellow disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him. 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.

[1 : 0 9] But Mary remained seated in the house. Martha said to Jesus, Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't 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.

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.

[2 : 1 2] 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 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?

Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, Take away the stone. Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.

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, and Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, Father, I thank you that you have heard me.

[3 : 16] 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, come out!

The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, Unbind him and let him go.

Many of the Jews, therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him. 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 high priest that year, said to him, You know nothing at all.

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 one, the children of God who are scattered abroad.

[4 : 33] So from that day on, they made plans to put him to death. John 11. All flesh is grass, and all its beauty, like the flower of the field.

The grass withers, the flower fades and falls. Surely, the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades and falls.

Even so, death comes upon us with steady and unfailing step, and will gather us all up.

We know it infallibly comes, but at times, it seems to come upon some a pace, with fleeter foot in speedier rendezvous, and the flower falls before it is faded.

It withers and dies while yet in bloom, with still so much in the bud. It's at times like these when our hearts are especially anguished, and from the turmoil of our tortured hearts comes the voiced feeling, how tragic.

[6 : 30] This is not the way it should be. There is a sense that the fabric of so many strands that makes life good, the heart glad, mouths full of laughter, have been savagely torn into and left frayed beyond repair.

Death, the terrible tearing, the jarring, the jarring full stop in the punctuation of life that comes, it would sometimes seem, mid-sentence.

It leaves us numb, stupefied, hollowed out. Is this not something of what we feel when we grow in our visceral verdict?

What a tragedy. There seems a senselessness to it. There seems to be no point. Well, I want to bring some words of Jesus into this sorrow and hollowness we feel, into the confusion, into the pain.

I want to take this account of Jesus among the mourners that Rick has just read. here at the death of Lazarus, as a window into his heart and mind when he stands before death.

[8 : 08] And as an invitation, even a summons, not perhaps so much to see death entirely differently than we feel it to be, it remains a great terror and a tearing.

but to have this feeling mingled with something more, mingled with something of the way Jesus looked upon it.

Friends, death, especially for those to whom it falls the closest, can make us feel raw. and for such a one, words intended to console can easily chafe.

The very effort to bind up can bruise in such a sober and sacred season. I can feel my heart to be one of simply sharing and shedding tears with you.

But Jesus tells us that he will not break the bruised reed. even the most tender and sorrowing among us is safe with him.

[9 : 24] So it's well and right that we go to him and seek to see and hear him amidst our sorrow. Let's pray.

Come among us, Jesus. speak into the heaviness of our hearts and by your tender living spirit meet us as you alone can do.

Our good and gentle shepherd, the God of all comfort, the one alone who is mighty to save.

Amen. Well, I want, as I have said, to open for us some windows into Jesus' thoughts and heart as he stands before death.

The first is found in his opening words. The news has come of Lazarus' illness with the implicit plea to come and heal him lest he die.

[10 : 37] There in verse 3. Lord, he whom you love is ill. And to this, Jesus responds, verse 4, this illness does not lead to death.

Now, on the surface, this might, he might seem to be saying, oh, don't worry. He won't die. But are we to presume that Jesus here gives a forecast that would prove mistaken?

I mean, after all, Lazarus' sickness would indeed lead to death. No. No, Jesus clearly realizes this. And when pressed for clarification, states plainly in verse 14, Lazarus is dead.

He's saying something else. He's not speaking of the immediate outcome of the illness. He's going deeper and reflecting upon the purpose.

What is the point of Lazarus' illness? What is it for? We might render the words this sickness is not with a view to death.

[12 : 04] So, Jesus raises his sights higher, further. He sees beyond Lazarus' dying to an ultimate issue.

Death is not the final thing to come out of this fatal illness. So, when Jesus saw beyond death, further than that immediate outcome, what did he see?

What was the point of Lazarus' death? What was it for? If the view of Lazarus' death for Jesus didn't end with death, what did his view open to?

the glory of God. Verse 4, this illness does not lead to death, it is for the glory of God.

So, when Jesus looked at death, he saw further with elfin eye. Death is not the last word as to what this is about.

[13 : 21] The point is not the period at the end of death. The point is the glory of God. Oh, friends, if we would see death as Jesus did, we must raise our sights.

Death is so dark and dense, it would seek to pull in our perspective like a black hole becoming its final resting place.

But let's lift our eyes with Jesus and see more, for it will be a sight to behold, the glory of God.

What do those words mean? The phrase crops up throughout the scriptures, and we even may use it ourselves on occasion. but for many its meaning remains vague.

Glory of God. Think of it as the sum total of the splendor of God, the dazzling array of his attributes, his unspeakable wisdom, beauty, goodness, love, love.

[14 : 44] Jesus is saying, Lazarus' death will be in some way a lens through which is displayed the glory of God, a prism through which the light of his beauty, wisdom, goodness, and love will be breathtakingly cast before our view.

but not simply in the sense of a dazzling 4th of July fireworks display where we're bedazzled and we sing the star spangled banner and then go home.

No. No, the display of his glory is the revelation of his person so ravishing that it draws us into the unspeakable raptures of his own self-delight within his own Trinitarian self.

The glory of God gathers us into the dance of the divine joy within the Godhead.

The glory of God displayed brings us to cry out in amazed wonder how good how wonderful how loving how gracious how wise is he and our hearts melt.

[16 : 21] And God can do even that gather us up into his own rapturous self-delight and melt our hearts through the death of a dearly loved one?

Yes, he can. That's what the death of Lazarus is about? Yes, it is. Well, if that's what he's doing and if that's what it's about, it certainly isn't obvious.

No. No, it seldom is. Indeed, it is hardly ever apparent how many things somehow glorify God, show his goodness and so show his goodness so much that our hearts are melted into loving attraction and bursting with joy.

Usually, with things so horrible and heartbreaking, we can't imagine, even remotely, any good coming out of them. Least of all, anything gloriously good, it just looks all wrong, at least from our perspective, from our capacity to imagine good.

We don't cry out in enraptured wonder, how beautiful. We rather cry out in anguished pain, what is God doing? We may strain to see, but we have no elfin eye to catch any glimpse of glory.

[18 : 09] glory. And not only do we miss out on any sight of glory, even a pinkish sky dawning with some prospect, no, we're pretty sure we see the opposite, and we're just plain confused and hurting.

Well, that was certainly true of those around Jesus when he spoke of glory, right after making his statement about Lazarus' sickness being for the glory of God, the first thing Jesus did seemed all wrong.

Mary and Martha had sent word that Lazarus was seriously ill. Well, what did they expect? After all, Jesus was really close to them and Lazarus, surely he would come right away.

But Jesus acts clean contrary to their hopes, inexplicably so. We read of his response and glance back over the sentence, wondering if we've somehow misread it.

Verse 5, now Jesus loved Mary and her sister and Lazarus. so when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

[19 : 43] What? What are you doing, Jesus? If you want to bring good out of this, come immediately and heal him before it's too late. it is difficult to hold Jesus' action together with the knowledge that he is compassionate, caring, and loving.

Even those who love him and trust him most, they're confused. Perhaps there's even a mild accusation in Martha's words that she speaks to him when he finally does arrive.

Verse 21, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. And Mary too, in her hurt and confusion, speaks the very same words through her tears.

Verse 32, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. if the point, if the fuller view of the death of a loved one is that it will somehow be to the glory of God, that somehow it will show God's wisdom, love, goodness, and beauty such that we will through it be drawn to adore him and delight in him more clearly.

Well, clearly, we're presently in the dark as to how that could possibly be. We stand among the graves and amidst tears and see few, if any, shafts of glory.

[21 : 40] Indeed, so ungood and unglorious do things appear that one can easily understand how cruel, bitter, seemingly tragic realities put what at times feels like an unbearable strain upon trusting Jesus on this.

It is hard to hold his care and compassion together with the outcomes of our experience. but to ease the tension by imagining that Jesus does not care, does not feel compassion for us in our sorrow, that can never be.

Such a supposition must melt away before who he truly is. when we see him as indeed he truly is.

And when we see him here before the grave of Lazarus, verse 35, Jesus wept.

Jesus is among the mourners. He shares in the same sorrows. He is stricken by the same grief.

[23 : 08] He is alike with us in heaving sighs and trembling tears. And here's an extraordinary thing.

Let's call it another window by which we may peer into his heart. We cannot doubt that Jesus knew that he would restore Lazarus to life.

Indeed, in only a few moments, restore him to life. And yet, even knowing that, it does not blunt his sorrow or restrain his tears.

there is a heart of sympathy. There is a heart tuned to the sorrow of humanity which trembles resonantly with every tear and sigh.

Jesus wept. And he has wept with you for every tear of yours that has fallen and every numb hollowing out that you have endured.

[24 : 31] Do not think he does not care. Jesus wept. See how he loved him, said those around about.

And so might it be said of you. See how he loves you. But before we move from this window there is something more to see in the heart of Jesus.

For there is another description of his emotion at the grave here. Verse 32. Our few Bibles render it. He was greatly moved in his spirit and deeply troubled.

I won't hide the fact that this phrase has generated a great variance in translation. The difficulty is that most think the story requires that the words communicate an emotion of grief strickenness.

And yet one of the terms is typically used of beasts neighing, snorting, roaring, but when used of humans invariably refers to anger and can really only indicate a shudder of vent of indignation and outrage.

[26 : 01] Ah! The problem with this otherwise clear meaning is answering the question, at what then was Jesus angry?

Several suggestions are offered. Maybe he was angry at Mary and Martha for trying to force him into a miracle. Maybe he was angry at the mourners because he detected some hypocrisy in their mourning.

Or maybe he was angry at the mourners because they invaded his privacy when he wanted to have a quiet moment with Mary and Martha. Some suggest he was angry at the unbelief of the mourners including Mary and Martha who grieved as though they had no hope.

But the intensity of the anger that's here indicated is surely disproportionate to such a supposed cause.

I mean none of them I think can be the answer. I believe the object of Jesus' outrage his vent of indignation at the grave was death itself.

[27 : 27] Surrounded by the sorrow of the mourners and particularly of Mary's grief Jesus contemplated the general misery of the whole human race and he burns with rage at death the oppressor.

In death he sees the skeleton face of the world and traces everywhere its grim and morbid rain.

Indeed the whole earth has become but the valley of a shadow of death. In the tears shed in his presence Jesus saw that ocean of time whose waters of deep woe are brackish with the salt of human tears.

tears of sympathy filled his eyes and beneath them there burned a rage. Oh friend he knows your woe.

All the hurt and havoc that death has wrought and the vials of suffering it has poured out he hates it with a deep indignation and the one behind death who wields this terrible weapon.

[29 : 07] Of course it is one thing to sympathize to sincerely have your heart go out to the sufferer to weep with those who weep even to burn with inextinguishable indignation before the grave.

but it's quite another thing to be able to do anything about it. To be able to rescue someone from the grave.

But is this not what we truly need in the face of death? Not merely a sympathizer but a savior. One who can reverse the dread finality of it.

Stop in its tracks its grim triumphant march. So look with me through one final window into the heart of Jesus where we see him again groaning in spirit.

Verse 38 It's the same flaming rage but the setting has changed. Before he was among the mourners now he is striding toward the tomb as a warrior to do battle.

[30 : 43] Before he was among the ravages of his kinsmen. Now he turns from the smoldering rubble of the city of humanity toward the enemy who has despoiled them.

This is the king going forth to do battle. It is the princely valor that must stir every heart. the true going forth to which all the great tales of myth and story gesture. He smites the grave with his voice.

Verse 43 He cried with a loud voice Lazarus come forth. hearing hearing that voice of kingly power the jaws of death open releasing its prey.

The great enemy lifts its foot from the neck of its victim and the prisoner goes free. And yet this was but a skirmish on the outskirts.

[32 : 04] The real battle lay ahead to where he had set his face like flint. Lazarus was merely resuscitated.

Death would still have him as its prey. The grave would yet have its fill. Jesus knew this.

This skirmish at the grave was just a foreshadow of the real battle. That battle which lay ahead upon a hill outside Jerusalem.

There would be the true contest with every fiend and demon hell's denizens gathered in strength to afflict their worst.

There in the heart of the enemy stronghold he would spill his soul for his brethren.

[33 : 11] There he would cry out not simply come forth but as his own blood flowed forth cry out it is finished as he himself the champion would lay down his life in ransom and himself sink down into death.

At the grave of Lazarus he contemplated this fearsome battle that would cost him his life. Sever the never broken communion with the father and he was troubled in spirit.

He shuddered at the cost he would pay for the real rescue of his people. The cost not as with Lazarus of a momentary reprieve from death only finally to sink down into it again at the last but to for his people burst its bonds forever not merely resuscitation but resurrection unto everlasting life across which death's dark shadow would never again fall that in the morning of the resurrection would sound from his voice a come forth that would issue in a life which would roll on through all the years of endless ages yes at the tomb of

Lazarus his eye was on the cross the groan that issued gutturally from his inner being was brother to the sweat like drops of blood in gethsemane indeed when word was first brought to Jesus of Lazarus illness his eye was upon the cross he knew Lazarus would die he knew he would raise him and he knew this great miracle would galvanize those who sought his destruction as was so verse 53 tells us from that day on they made plans to put Jesus to death thus Lazarus illness would propel Jesus to the cross and this was a great part of the meaning of how

Lazarus illness would glorify God did you notice how Jesus put it there in verse four that Lazarus death is in order that the son of God himself may be glorified through it what did that mean well there is no mystery in John's gospel as to the meaning of Jesus glorification his hour in which he would be lifted up and glorified it was the cross so Lazarus his deadly illness brought the glorification of Jesus on the cross in God's sovereign scheme that was what it was for but who could have known but Jesus to all but him it simply seemed a tragic death simply an aching sorrow of course it would be so too and more so for a death that would follow so soon upon its heels when

[37 : 26] Jesus would climb the hill and then the cross try to imagine how full of sorrow and confusion were his disciples as they stood at the cross and watched their master expire executed as an imposter and a malefactor what a pointless tragedy they must have thought it was can you not hear them saying in their dismay surely nothing good could come of this how could God possibly even remotely glorify himself in this they didn't see it they could not have seen it they could only sorrow Jesus knew this too he had told his disciples and their foreboding sense of impending doom in the final day before the cross what

I am now doing you do not now understand but afterward you will understand John 13 7 friends this side of glory we are as his disciples so often confused and sorrowful hollowed out unable to see or even catch a glimpse of glory times all we see through our tears are those strewn graves of precious ones and treasured things so let us cling to his words and take them into our hurting heavy hearts what I am doing you do not now understand but afterward you shall understand will you not trust him he weeps at your graveside will you not trust him he has girded his loins and run with burning indignation against our great and terrible enemy will you not trust him he has in his kingly valor gotten the victory for his people will we not trust him with our sorrows where else will we trust when it comes to death our great enemy so let us hear again his promise for it and he who makes it shall alone pierce the dark gloom with a strong hope a hope that shall not disappoint

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 let's pray Lord we say with those women at another tomb we would see Jesus Lord as we set and stay our sight upon the face of

Jesus would you by your gentle and strong spirit cause that face to become for us that place where the glory of God is revealed to us and so melt our hearts and when we finally come to cross that dread river may its experience be changed for us because of Christ as we go down into the chill waters may we feel that underneath are the everlasting arms and may we feel that firm strong tender hand from which hand no one shall snatch us conduct us through that river to the other side to open our eyes upon that same face we have long loved who will forever be the center of our love and life as the ages roll on without end amen