

Jesus and Death, the Last Enemy

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Preacher: John Winter

[0 : 00] We're reading today from John chapter 11 verses 28 to 57 in our series on John's Gospel. Today is entitled Jesus and Death, the Last Enemy.

! I promise you'll be more hopeful than the title. Okay, John chapter 11 verse 28. Jesus has just declared that he is the resurrection and the life and he asked Martha whether she believed that and she said, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world. We pick up the reading of verse 28.

And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. The teacher is here, she said, and is asking for you. When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there. When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

[1 : 26] When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. Where have you laid him? He asked.

Come and see, Lord, they replied. Jesus wept. When the Jews said, see how he loved him. Sorry, then the Jews said, see how he loved him.

But some of them said, could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying? Jesus was once more deeply moved, came to the tomb.

It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. Take away the stone, he said. But Lord, said Martha, the sister of the dead man, by this time there is a bad order, for he has been there four days.

Then Jesus said, did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God? So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, Father, I thank you that you have heard me.

[2 : 29] I know that you always hear me. But I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me. When he had said this, this Jesus called in a loud voice, Lazarus, come out.

The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen and a cloth around his face. Then Jesus said to them, take off the grave clothes and let him go.

Therefore, many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary and had seen what Jesus did put their faith in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. What are we accomplishing, they asked. Here is this man performing many miraculous signs.

If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him. And then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation. Then one of them named Caiaphas, who was a high priest that year, spoke up.

[3 : 35] You know nothing at all. You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the whole people than that the whole nation perish. He did not say this on his own, but 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 to bring them together and make them one. So from that day on, they plotted to take his life.

Therefore, Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the Jews. Instead, he withdrew to a region near the desert to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with the disciples.

When it was about almost time for the Jewish Passover, many went up from the country to Jerusalem for their ceremonial cleansing before the Passover. They kept looking for Jesus.

And as they stood in the temple area, they asked one another, What do you think? Isn't he coming to the feast at all? But the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone found out where Jesus was, he should report it, so that they might arrest him.

[4 : 45] Amen. And the Lord will bless to us the reading of his holy word. Jesus and death, the last enemy.

Because of our faith in Jesus, death, though it may be feared by us, is not something that will ultimately conquer us.

In Psalm 23, verse 4, we read, So death's shadow will overshadow us all.

And your rod and your rod and your staff, they comfort me. So death's shadow will overshadow us all. But death will not have the final word over us all.

Shortly before he died, D.L. Moody, the famous American evangelist, as he was passing from death to eternal life, said, Earth recedes, heaven opens before me.

[6 : 07] If this is death, it is sweet. There is no valley here. And John Wesley, on his deathbed, declared, And best of all, God is with us.

Best of all, God is with us. The Puritan John Preston, on his deathbed, was asked by his friends if he feared passing away.

And he whispered, I shall change my place, but I shall not change my company. For the Scripture says, Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor demons, nor anything, shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And this is not then a grim stoicism. It's not kind of standing, as it were, grimly in the face of death, except in our fate. This is a joyful acknowledgement that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

We can truly say, as Paul does in 1 Corinthians 15 and 55, Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O grave, is your sting? And it was Charles Haddon Spurgeon who used to tell this story of the bee.

[7 : 29] He reminded us that when the bee stings, and it leaves its sting in you, the bee will die. But the pain will be real, it will hurt.

I suppose he didn't know much about anaphylactic shock and all of that. It kills the odd person, doesn't it? But generally speaking, it will not kill us.

Most of us will survive a bee sting. But it has a sting. And it hurts. So it's not that we enjoy the prospect of death.

Paul calls death the last enemy to be destroyed. It is our enemy. And sometimes we kind of romanticize it.

Sometimes we even use Scripture to justify that. So there's a wonderful verse in the Psalms that says, Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his sins.

[8 : 27] Psalm 116 and verse 15. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his sins. Not because death is precious, but because death acts as a gateway to eternal life.

Death acts as the entrance door into the very presence of God. That is why it's precious. It's precious to Him. It's like any reunion. You know, if your child has moved away and gone from you from some distance, and then they return home to your home, what do you say?

Welcome home. They might protest and say, I've got my home somewhere else. But wherever parents are, wherever mom and dad are, there is home as far as mom and dad are concerned.

When we die, when we go to be with God, He says, welcome home. He longs for us to be in His presence.

Precious in the sight of the Lord are the death of His saints. That's why Jesus said to Martha, what appeared to be cruel and cold at first, look, Martha, this isn't about whether I was here or not.

[9 : 41] If you'd been here, my brother would have lived. I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, even if he die, yet will he live.

And whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe that? That's really important to get. Because one day, I'm going to die.

And my family will mourn my loss. One day you will die and someone will mourn your loss. But the comfort is this. Dad is gone. But he's gone home.

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints. With what watchful care, Leupold says, does God watch His own?

He watches them through the valley of the shadow. He takes them home and welcomes them into His bosom. God comforts them, James Montgomery Boyce says, in their dying.

[10 : 44] And receives them into His very presence. And you know, Christian martyrs used to love that verse, precious at the sight of the Lord are the death of His saints.

Augustine tells us that when they were being martyred in the Colosseum, when they were being brutally killed by the Roman authorities and their acolytes, they were jeered as worthless. But they regained their composure by sight in the psalm. Precious in the sight of the Lord is my death. And it is precious.

Because Jesus died to redeem us, to conquer death for us, and to ensure that death would not have the final word over us. Because I live, you will live also.

When Martha was asked, when Jesus declared, I am the resurrection and life, and she was asked, do you believe this? She said, Lord, yes, I believe it. I know that my brother will rise again on the last day.

[11 : 50] She knew that God would resurrect His children. But Jesus says to her in saying, I am the resurrection life, you will never die.

It is not that you will endlessly soul sleep for thousands of years until the final resurrection. When you leave this world, you will live consciously in my presence.

You will be separate from your body, but you will be conscious in the very presence of Jesus. There is no soul sleep in the Bible. Immediately upon dying, we are conscious in the presence of Jesus. So we need to just appreciate that. People will notice you've died, but you'll not notice. It will be like falling asleep and waking up.

Oh, wow, where did that time go? I wasn't conscious of it at all. For I will be more alive in His presence than ever before. So in this passage that we have before us, we see compassion.

[12 : 59] In the shortest verse in the Bible, in verse 35, it says, Jesus wept. I love the fact that it's the shortest verse in the Bible. Because lots of people tell me, I've not got a good memory.

I can't memorize Scripture. Here we go. John 11, 35. Jesus wept. Just say that to yourself. John 11, 35.

Jesus wept. Congratulations. Some of you might have learned your first memory verse from the Bible. Jesus wept. Who can forget it? It shows the wonderful humanity of Jesus.

He came into this world. He enveloped flesh. He is the incarnate one. He shares our nature.

He shares our sorrows. He understands our pain. And when He looks upon those He loves and He sees them in their grief, He weeps with them and for them.

[14 : 00] But, you know, we must not interpret this memory verse that you've just learned, Jesus wept. We must not interpret that as if it's some kind of inconsolable hopelessness.

Jesus. That's so often what weeping is at funerals. It's like they've gone and there's no hope. But this is not what Jesus is doing. Jesus knew that in a moment He was going to raise Him from the dead.

He wasn't weeping for Lazarus. In fact, Lazarus, poor old Lazarus, could be forgiven for sin in the conversation afterwards. Jesus, I really appreciate that you raised me from the dead, but now I have to die again.

And there's a bit of artistic license here. But the fact that He said to the servants afterwards, Take off His gray clothes. I wonder if Lazarus put them in His bottom drawer. For later.

Well, I'll be using those again. And He might have even died a worse death, physically speaking, than the one before.

[15 : 06] If He was martyred. No, no. Jesus is not inconsolable. So why is He weeping? Well, you just have to trust me on this.

There's an unusual word that is used in the Greek here, and it's only really used here. And actually, it would be better translated, Jesus snorted. It is the snorting of a horse.

Now, I can't kind of make that noise, because I'm not Scottish or Irish. If I was Scottish or Irish or Jewish, I'd have a guttural sound in the back of my throat. But I don't have that. But you know what it's like when you're really crying, but you don't get a noise, and then you just get that welling up from within.

And, you know, often comes it grief. It's messy. Yes, Ken. Really messy. Jesus feels a deep, deep pain when He sees the grief and the sorrow of the sisters and their friends.

And it is sometimes translated in this way, a deep anger welled up within Him. Or a deep indignation welled up within Him.

[16:23] And in John 11, 38, according to the New Living Translation, they translated it this way, Jesus was still angry as He moved toward the tomb.

So this was a kind of weeping of indignation. It wasn't the weeping of Mary. Interestingly, it talks about Mary weeping. It uses a different Greek word there.

That refers to wailing. You've kind of been, if you've ever been to an African funeral, they wail. They make lots of noise. The Jewish people did as well.

Deep wailing. Lots of loud wailing. But this was not what Jesus was doing. You would have hardly heard a sound. Except the sound of disgust.

An enemy has done this. There was an anger that welled up in Jesus because as our Creator, the Word who became flesh, through whom all things exist and coexist, death was not meant to be part of the world that He created.

[17:30] Death is an invader that destroys and damages and hurts people that God loves. And death is something that He will deal with at Calvary when He defeats death and rises from the grave on Easter Sunday.

But death will still pain His people. And He feels that pain. You know, some people ask the question, why does God, why does a God of love allow pain and suffering?

Allow, yes. Approve of, no. Allow, yes, because it has a purpose in His purposes. Allow, because it is necessary in a world that is fallen and cursed.

It must be. But He will defeat it. He has defeated it. And He will right the wrong in the end. For in heaven, there will be no more tears, no more pain, no more death.

Thank God. And in the meantime, learn the compassion of Jesus. When you weep and you grieve and you say, God, this is not fair.

[18:42] This should not happen. This pain should not be real. You should not have stood by and allowed my brother, my father, my child to die. He weeps too. For that is not what He wants.

That is not best for you. But it must be so. And He says, you will rise again. They will rise again on the last day.

And it will be better for them. You must trust me in this. God allows nothing unless He has a greater purpose. All things work together for good.

But we in this fallen world are not excused pain and suffering. For it must be so. In saying Jesus wept, anybody from a Greek disposition with the knowledge of Greek, the Greek gods and goddesses would have been surprised.

They believed the gods were apathia or apathetic, indifferent to pain and suffering. Jesus is not. He is not apathetic.

[19:53] He is not indifferent. He suffers with you. Praise His name. That's compassion. So if you're here today and you feel angry with God, you feel let down by God, you feel hurt by God because suffering has been part of your lot, know that He loves you, know that He did not abandon you, know that He did not let you down, know that He carries your sorrows, He puts your tears in a bottle and He has something better, something wonderful for you and for those you entrusted to His care.

I have not yet buried or cremated any of my loved ones that I have not thanked God for and not thanked Him for that He thought it was right that they should leave.

the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. Learn to rest and learn to trust in your compassionate Savior.

And a word from C.H. Spurgeon. Spurgeon said, the love of Jesus does not separate us from the common necessities and infirmities of human life.

Men of God are still men. You still grieve. You still feel the pain. You still have to recover through grief. You still have to heal. And that's right and that's proper.

[21:35] Sometimes He says we are told that if we really believe that our friends would rise again and that they are safe and happy even now, we would not weep. Why not? Jesus did.

And there cannot be any error in following where Jesus leads. So if you're still feeling pain and sorrow and you're still grieving yet, many years on, it doesn't have to be months on or days on, many years on, if there is still a tear, there's nothing wrong with that.

For your Lord and Savior Jesus modeled deep and real grieving. So there's compassion. Secondly, there's resurrection.

Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. He doesn't leave the situation in sorrow. He approaches Lazarus' tomb with profound confidence in God's power. He's already declared himself to be the resurrection and the life. And so he reaffirms his authority over death in this way. He makes a command. Take away the stone. [22 : 44] And then there is obedience on Martha's part. Think of Martha. Lord, we can't do that. He's been dead four days. His body will stink. It'll be terrible. But she gives permission and the stone is removed as an act of faith.

And do you know, four days is significant because within Jewish tradition, there was a belief that for three days, the spirit of the dead person hovered by the dead person.

But by the fourth person, by the fourth day, the spirit was gone and death was confirmed. So he was very dead in the Jewish mindset, incapable of rising again until Jesus raised him.

Did I not tell you, he said, that if you believe, you will see the glory of God? Well, you did, Lord. I don't know what that's going to look like.

Well, here, just watch. They took away the stone, an act of faith on Martha's part, and then he prayed. Father, he said, I thank you that you've heard me and I know that you always hear me.

[23 : 52] But because of the people who are standing by, because they're watching and they're listening, I'm going to do this publicly. I could have done it privately. I'm going to do it publicly because of the people who are standing by.

Then I know that whatever I ask, you're going to do. That they may believe that you sent me. And then he shouts, Lazarus, come out.

Simple as that. Now, why say Lazarus? Well, if he's in a graveyard, if he just said, come out, everybody would come out. Everybody would come out.

He has the power over death and hell. One day he will return from heaven on the clouds and then he will say, rise up, and everyone will rise up.

They will rise up either to newness of life or to eternal damnation, but they will rise up. The grave will give up dead at his command. So it must be specific.

[24 : 52] Lazarus, come out. And then Lazarus comes out. I like to think of him like this way, shuffling out like this in grave clothes, shuffling out into the light.

I don't know what he's thinking. Where have I been? What's happened to me? What's all this? And then Jesus says, take the clothes off.

Didn't melt away, by the way. Could have melted them away, couldn't he? Could have done the bit of extra with the miracle, except, as I say, he needed them again.

And actually, God doesn't always do a miracle for things that we can do ourselves. We can all remove grave clothes. We can't raise the dead. Only Jesus can do that.

And this is a reminder to us, a sign of what resurrection is going to be like. One day, thank God, in what will be a moment of time for us once we're dead.

[26 : 05] So it doesn't matter whether the distance of our dying is 10,000 years until the final resurrection or 10 minutes just before. Time means nothing to us once we're dead.

One day, he will speak and we will rise. And you will be very surprised to find out what I look like. you'll be amazed. Because sometimes we ask the question, I ask the question, how old will we be when we're resurrected to eternal life?

Will a baby be a baby and will I look like, you know, my Lord, you know, I'm reasonable at 63 but I looked better when I was about 25. So will I be like 25?

And will I be, you know, nice and slim and muscular and taller? Here's the good news, you'll be at your best.

For when we see him, we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is. And when you ask yourself, what was he like? Well, he shone like the sun. And when John saw him, his robe and his description, it was beautiful.

[27 : 18] And in heaven we will all be beautiful. All at our best. Won't it be good? No more aches and pains. No more dissatisfaction with how we look.

But thank God, a glorious body like his glorious body. So recognize from this passage that death is defeated.

It is a defeated enemy. He holds the key of death and of Hades and he promises that when he comes again he will raise us up and then the last enemy will be destroyed.

And we will live forever in a resurrected and glorious body. Thank God. And I love the fact that it will be a physical resurrected body. That Jesus was touched.

He ate. He conversed with his friends. Heaven's going to be great. We're going to kind of meet each other. We're going to be able to embrace each other. We're going to be able to eat good food though I think it will be vegetarian.

[28 : 21] So get your steaks in early. And the music will be brilliant all of the time. Whatever the Alexa is there it will always play my favorites.

but it won't. I look forward to that. No eye has conceived nor has entered into the hearts of men the things that God has prepared for those who love him.

We have to get used to loving the idea of heaven. We have to get used to the idea that this world is not our home and that one day we will go to be with him far far better.

Experience spiritual resurrection today. One reason Jesus did this miracle was to show that he had conquered death. Another reason he did this miracle is to remind you that he is the resurrection and the life and the one who believes in him will never die and you can experience this eternal life now today.

It is called being born again being raised up to everlasting life so that you will not die but live for eternity.

[29 : 45] Jesus can help you shed your grave clothes today. Jesus can bring you newness of life today. It starts today if you will accept him.

But inevitably as it always is in John there is finally division. A kind of remarkable thing happens here. Some people watch Lazarus come out from the grave and they go to see the Pharisees and effectively drop Jesus under the bus.

You've got to do something. We've got to stop him. He's doing these miracles and it's undoubtedly happening and so they go off and think right let's have a meeting let's call the Sanhedrin we'll have this meeting so we can find how we can kill him.

Remarkable isn't it? Of course many people believed on him there. A man who raises from the dead must be who he claims to be he must be the Messiah he must really be the resurrection of life and they believe.

but then other people allow a little bit of doubt to come in and they say well wouldn't the man who loved Lazarus to weep at his tomb wouldn't he stop him from dying?

[31 : 06] And always find a reason not to believe you know any reason you like to deny the evidence in front of you that faces you that you're looking at.

And Jesus is again deeply moved. When he hears what they're saying he's deeply moved he kind of realizes again he groans within himself what do I have to do?

And the answer is he will do nothing more not from here. There will be no more miracle in John's gospel after this one. For if they will not believe if one should rise from the dead they will not believe at all.

and from now on he will go into his final week and John will concentrate on the final week. The final public miracle has now happened and there will be no more.

The crowd are divided and the religious establishment set their course. Jesus must die. One of the chief priests or the chief priests they gather in the Sanhedrin and then the chief priest himself gets up and says you know nothing.

[32 : 22] It is better that one man should die for the whole nation than that the whole nation should perish. Why does he say that? He's frightened that the Romans will take away our place and our people.

He's not interested in anything but himself. Our place. Our place of privilege. Our place of authority. authority. The fact that we're kingpins in this society.

They will take away our place. They will take away our people. The people we rule over. So an innocent person even if he is innocent and a messiah even if he is messiah must die for the nation.

And John says interestingly he didn't speak on his own there you know. He spoke a prophecy. He didn't know he was doing it. But because he was high priest that year he spoke a prophecy.

And that just reminds us that it is possible for people to exercise spiritual gifts without themselves having changed hearts by the way. It's still possible that God will speak through unbelieving high priests and even through prophetic donkeys if you know the story of Balaam.

[33 : 32] The fact that he prophesied did not mean his heart was right. It showed he was an instrument in the hands of God to bring about the purposes of God. And so off they went to make sure that this Jesus will die for the nation.

But not only for the nation he says. But for the scattered children of God to bring them home. I have the sheep not of the sheepfold Jesus said in chapter 10 I must bring them also.

so yes Jesus will die. And everything will determine for our eternal well-being upon how we respond to this Jesus.

We will either accept him or we will reject him. We will either be on his right hand as believers or we'll be on his left hand ready to hear away from me you cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his children.

Division is coming who we choose will determine where we stand in eternity. Jesus displayed undeniable power and truth and the religious elite and the world's elite rejected him for they preferred status and place and power and wealth above their eternal never dying souls.

[35 : 18] Choose you this day whom you will serve. we must ask ourselves a very real and personal question. Do I prefer my life, my wealth, my comforts, my status, my job over Jesus?

Will I choose those things at the risk of my never dying soul or will I put him first and follow him for the rest of my life and into eternity?

Are there areas in your life where you are compromising God's truth, where you are hiding your faith in order not to upset the status quo?

how did John know that there was an unofficial calling of the Sanhedrin that night? How did he know?

You ever thought about that? He wasn't there. How did he know? Because a certain two men, one called Joseph of Aramathia, the other called Nicodemus, told him later when he was writing.

[36 : 39] Maybe many years later because at this moment they were afraid to declare their loyalty to Jesus. Years later they owned it.

If you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. God knows sometimes we're cowardly but never, never, never put things, people, status and power, above Jesus.

Remember he holds the key of death and of hell and you will be a fool to try and keep and hold on to what you cannot keep and lose what you cannot lose which is your soul.

Let us pray.