

mp3/196/JOHN 11 PETER ROBINSON (7th)(WHOLE SERVICE).MP3

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Preacher: Peter Robinson

[0 : 00] If you'd like to turn in your Bible to John 11, to the event that was recorded and is recorded for us by John, then that will be helpful as we consider this reality and how it affects us.

I'm sure at some time in your life you've played Monopoly. It's one of those games that everybody has had an opportunity to play once or twice or even many times as well.

I wonder if when you play Monopoly there's a bit of an argument that goes on about which piece you're going to be, which are those little die-cast metal characters.

Perhaps you think, well, I want one that's going to reflect myself. I want the top hat because that reflects that I'm sort of a sophisticated man about town maybe, or debonair.

Or you want the train or the ship because that's sort of moving forward. That's on the go. Or the little dog, of course, because that's so sweet. All the girls want to be the little dog because it's a little terrier, isn't it?

[1 : 04] That's ever so sweet. Whenever we used to play Monopoly at home, when I was younger, there was always a competition beforehand over to who would have the racing car because everybody wanted the racing car.

Well, I did anyway, and I think my brother probably did as well, and we'd have a bit of a tussle about that. But nobody wanted to be the boot, did they? Oh, the iron. I think they've changed them now, the new sets.

But nobody wanted to be the boot or the iron. That was sort of, you know, that really was undesirable. Because these things reflected something of who we thought of ourselves.

Now, in this story, in the events surrounding the raising Lazarus from the dead, we have many different types of people, and perhaps we can appreciate or associate ourselves with some of them. As we come to this story, there are the disciples who are really in the background for once in this story, but they're sort of on the fringes. Perhaps we feel that when we come to church.

[2 : 02] We're a little bit on the fringes. We don't really know exactly what's going on. And as I hinted before, they seem a little bit confused about what's happening. It may be that you associate with Martha.

Martha clearly is somebody who has great theological understanding. She speaks about the resurrection of the dead in the last days and these sort of things. But her faith itself is struggling. She has the doctrine. She knows. But at the same time, there's some struggling with faith. If only you'd been here. There's things that we're going through that we don't really understand.

Maybe you feel a little bit more like Mary. She's grieving, isn't she? Really grieving. We're told that she, even Jesus sees her weeping. And because she's grieving, she seems a little aloof to Jesus. Unlike Martha, she doesn't rush out to Jesus. She feels distant from Jesus, maybe. Do you feel that way this morning? Because of the griefs, the sorrows, the trials, the difficulties, Jesus seems a little way away.

[3 : 01] He's distant. Well, perhaps you're like the crowd. We're told that there's this crowd of people who came from the city of Jerusalem to comfort. And they're people really who are undecided.

They don't really, they haven't decided who Jesus is. You know, look how he loves him. But couldn't he have opened, he who opened the eyes to the blind, made this man alive? We don't really, we haven't decided.

We've heard about Jesus. We've thought about Jesus. We haven't come down yet on one side of the fence or the other. The reality is, of course, we have. Because the Bible makes it very clear that

either you are for Christ or against Christ.

There is no fence to sit on. Okay? If you aren't for Christ, then you're against him. You need to choose very strongly, carefully. Who is he? And how am I going to respond to him?

But, of course, there is one person here who particularly illustrates every single one of us. And that is Lazarus.

[4 : 03] That is Lazarus. See, Lazarus' physical experience that we have here closely mirrors the spiritual experience of every person who's ever lived in one way or another.

We are either like Lazarus before Jesus' encounter with him or we are like Lazarus after Jesus' encounter with him. We fall into those two camps.

The whole of humanity and every single person here falls into those two places. Either we are like Lazarus spiritually, as he was physically, before Jesus raised us from the dead.

Or we are like Lazarus after Jesus has spoken to him and raised him from the dead. Now, we've been going through some of the miracles of Jesus over the summer.

And we've had opportunity. We've looked at them in various ways. And we've seen that they particularly are to point us to the fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

[4 : 58] That he is not merely a human teacher or even a human miracle worker or magician. But they all are proof of his deity that he truly is God. Come into this world and come that we might know him.

But also we've seen as well that each one of these miracles points to and teaches us a spiritual lesson about how Jesus is the one who meets our needs. How Jesus deals with us and changes us when we put our faith and trust in him.

So, when he fed the 5,000, we saw, of course, that Jesus is the one who meets the spiritual hunger of every heart and life. The people of our generation and every generation are hungry.

They are looking for something to satisfy. Well, Jesus is the only one who can do that. When he healed the blind man, which we thought about last week, we realized that the Bible teaches that we are blind to the things of God.

We go through life without any real understanding of where we came from, of what life is about. But Christ opens our eyes to see who we are, to see what God is like, to give us a really proper worldview.

[6 : 07] We saw Jesus healing the lame and the sick and so on. Again, showing and pointing to the fact that there is a sickness, a disease which affects every one of us called sin.

That Christ is the only healer of that illness. But then we come to this final miracle, as I've said before. This again, surely must, if nothing else, prove to us that here in the pages of history is one who is truly God.

Because he raises to life one who is dead. But also we see here something which is a very powerful illustration.

To visualize to us the greatest miracle of all. The greatest miracle that God ever performs in the life of any person is not to give them sight when they are blind, not even to raise them from physical death to physical life.

The greatest miracle that the Bible speaks about and the greatest miracle that ever happens in a person's life is for them to become a Christian. That's why we find that it's likened to being born again, Jesus in John chapter 3.

[7 : 21] Or being made a new creation, Paul in 2 Corinthians. Or having a new start. It's about something totally transforming.

And here the resurrection of Jesus from the dead resembles that spiritual resurrection that must take place in our lives to become a Christian. You don't become a Christian.

The Bible says by simply following a set of rules or guidelines or buying into a certain way of religion or doing special things or having special things done to you, whether that be baptism or anything else.

It must be a new resurrection. It must be new life. It must be something which is akin to being raised from death to life as Lazarus was here.

And that language is all the way through the Bible and all the way through the New Testament. We find that in Paul's letter to the Ephesian Christians, he reminds them that this is what God has done for them.

[8 : 27] Because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.

And John, later as he writes one of his letters, speaks about this. We know that we have passed from death to life. Jesus himself, earlier on in the Gospel of John in chapter 5, verse 24, says this. I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned. He has crossed over from death to life.

We can't get to more extreme positions, can we, than death and life. That is exactly what has happened to somebody who has become a Christian.

They were dead and now they are alive. And so I want us just briefly to look at the reality of the situation that we find Lazarus in and all people in.

[9 : 29] And we ourselves, if we are Christians this morning, we're in that place before Christ came to us. And we can see the difference that Jesus Christ makes to those who have heard his voice and put their faith in him.

The first thing we've already seen, but we need to expand on just a little bit more, is this. Clearly, Lazarus was really dead. It wasn't just that he'd sort of passed out.

And it wasn't that Jesus sort of opened the tomb and went in and sort of Holby City style and gave him CPR and resuscitated him. It wasn't that he raised him from a sort of a coma that he had been in.

No, it was clear. It's obvious. Lazarus is really, truly, physically dead. Somebody who's in a coma can't just be brought back to life at the will of a doctor.

And certainly not shouting at them. Isn't going to suddenly bring them out of a coma. Besides all this, Lazarus would never have been buried if it wasn't for the fact that he was really dead. And he'd been there four days.

[10 : 42] In Jesus' day, and not so much in our day today, death was everyday part of life, if I'm going to put it that way. We're quite clinical with death, aren't we?

Because we hand death over into the hands of doctors and nurses. But in those days, death was something that you witnessed firsthand. It wasn't unusual to see somebody who was dead.

You knew the difference between somebody who was dead and alive. Even without all the sophisticated instruments of today, the facts are clear that Lazarus was fully, totally, physically dead.

Now, Jesus had raised other people to life. We know that he'd raised the daughter of Jairus, a young girl who'd been dead just a very short time. And we know that he raised to life the son of the widow from then.

He'd been dead just a matter of hours, possibly 24 hours, but probably less than that. But here, what makes this so different, what makes this so very powerful, is the illustration that Lazarus had been dead for time, for some time.

[11 : 48] He'd been in the tomb four days, as probably you're aware, in the Middle East even today. Unlike here, a funeral will take place the very next day, at the latest, possibly even the same day as the person dies.

Unlike us, where it's a week or ten days before we have the funeral. No, it's the next day. So Lazarus had been dead at least four days, probably five days. And there he was, beyond any earthly help, beyond the reach of any doctor, beyond the reach of any physician.

There was nothing that could be done for him, physically, humanly speaking. Now, when the Bible speaks about us, before we have met with Christ, in our natural condition, it speaks about us being dead in sin.

Here's Paul again, writing to the Christians at Ephesus. He says, as for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live. In other words, physically, we are alive, but spiritually, we were and are dead.

Stone cold dead. Really dead. People often have the idea, perhaps, within the human soul, there's a spark of life just waiting to be inflamed. Just waiting to be encouraged.

[13 : 06] No, there's not. We were as dead spiritually as Lazarus was dead physically. There was nothing within us that could be revived. There was nothing within us that could sort of be stirred up or helped.

Lacking in spiritual life, a spiritual corpse. Utterly helpless. Utterly powerless. Beyond the help of any human.

Beyond the help of any person. But not beyond the help of God. One of the sad things about religion that is taught is that it is us bringing ourselves to God.

Many religions, even some types of Christianity, teach this sort of idea that if you do these things, if you act in this way, if you fulfill these duties, if you carry out these rituals, then there's something within you that you can bring back to life.

But you can't. But you can't. There's no way. No person can bring themselves back to life. They're spiritually dead. That's the reason why so many people that we meet with don't believe in God or find it hard to believe in God.

[14 : 19] Why? Because they're spiritually dead. They're cut off from God. You know what it's like when you're on the telephone and you're speaking to somebody and suddenly the line goes dead. In other words, it's been cut off.

There's no connection. There's no connection between us and God spiritually. There's no imparting of life from God to us. There's no way that we can reach to God or get to God. We are dead. And until we accept, until we recognize that we are in this completely helpless situation, then we won't see the need of being revived, of being raised.

But, of course, there are certain effects that come along, aren't there, in one sense, with spiritual death. And certainly even Lazarus' case. We find that Lazarus, because of his physical death, was now trapped inside a rather large tomb.

We're told that a stone was laid across it. We know that these stones, because we know something, of course, of the grave of Jesus as well, were large. They couldn't just be sort of moved by one person. It took two or three or several people to move them.

So even if Lazarus was alive, which he wasn't, he couldn't get out. He was trapped. So, again, with us, sin has the power to trap us.

[15 : 42] When we are spiritually dead, we are utterly ensnared. Jesus himself spoke about this when he spoke to the people in John, in chapter 8, in verse 34. He says, whoever commits a sin is a slave to sin.

Whoever commits a sin is a slave to sin. Quite in contrast to the thinking of most people, sin is not liberating. It is enslaving. Sin is not doing what you want and that pleases you.

It's actually doing what your sinful, wicked nature wants to do. Rather than being an expression of freedom, it's an expression of being bound and being under the mastery of sin.

Sin cannot be broken by our own strength and power. Sin cannot be overcome.

We are trapped. Trapped. But also, without Christ and in our natural condition, we are blind.

[16 : 44] Here's Lazarus, we are told as he came out, we are told that over his face there was a cloth. It's very much like the way that Jesus, if you read about the way that Jesus was wrapped up in strips of linen, it was the practice of that day and a cloth over the face as well.

So, he was blind as well. It was dark in that tomb. He couldn't see. Well, he was dead, so he couldn't see. He was completely blinded. And we, too, are doubly blinded before we come to Christ. We're blinded by sin itself. Sin has that power to blind us to reality. Ephesians in chapter 4. Here's Paul again writing. He says this, speaking about those who do not know God.

They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. We are blinded naturally.

There's a veil over our eyes. There's a darkness. There's a lifelessness to our eyes. But more than that, the Bible says and teaches us that we also are blinded by the devil.

[17 : 57] The devil is real. He is not just this sort of funny sort of cartoon character with horns and a pitchfork. He is the essence and the personification of all that is evil.

The devil is very real. If you don't believe me, just go and read the news. Who else could be behind the atrocities and the evil actions of the men of Boko Haram and the men of IS.

Who else? But Satan himself is behind those things and at work acting so wickedly. Yes, Satan blinds us. Here's 2 Corinthians. The God of this age.

That's Satan because he is the one who has influence in this world. The God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ. So we are blind naturally. But we are blind as well by Satan's influence to deceive and to lie to us so that we cannot see the reality of God.

[19 : 00] Again, that's why often as Christians when we share and talk with people about Jesus, what seems to us to be the best news in the world, the most wonderful thing, they're just blank.

People just don't get it. Why don't they get it? Is it because we're stupid and we don't explain it properly enough? Well, perhaps that may be the case. But more than that, it's because there's a blindness that the devil has put upon them and that sin has over them.

That only God can break. There's one thing here as well that we see. Not only was Lazarus dead and then trapped and blinded, but also as his sister so kindly pointed out to Jesus, he stank.

Verse 39. Jesus says, Take away the stone. But Lord, said Martha, the sister of the dead man, by this time there is a bad odor. He's been there four days.

Martha wasn't being unkind about her brother, about his personal hygiene or his washing habits. She was just pointing out what was pretty obvious, particularly in that part of the world, but in any situation, that he had been dead for five days and his body would be decomposing.

[20 : 13] And therefore, it would be giving off a rather unpleasant odor. Decomposing flesh is one of the most terrible smells. But you see, that points to something which we really don't like.

We may feel it's really something which is quite, you shouldn't talk about. But it's this reality that our sin is a stench to God. It's not just that God doesn't like the things that we do.

It's not just that God looks at the evil and sinfulness of our hearts and the sinfulness of the world and says, Tut, tut, that's awfully naughty. You see, God is holy. And our sin to him is repugnant. It is offensive. It is vile. It is a stench. Isaiah hints at this in his prophecy in chapter 65 where God is speaking about people who thought that they were good people but really in their heart of hearts they were evil people.

People who were religious people who thought that they could somehow please God. God says this, that these people are like smoke in my nostrils, a fire that keeps burning all day.

[21 : 23] There's something repugnant about sin. There's something which makes God withdraw from us because of sin. Elsewhere, Isaiah speaks about the fact that God is too holy, too pure, that his eyes may look upon evil.

Now, if you are honest with yourself, when you look into your hearts and you see some of the jealousy and the envy and the bitterness, the resentment and the pride, the greed, that's there.

The way that you've spoken to people in the past and acted towards them, then you yourself, I hope, are repulsed by that. If the Holy Spirit of God lives in you, then you will be because you know that those things are not at all nice.

And so here's Lazarus, like us, dead in our sins, trapped in our sins, unable to get ourselves out of the mess that we are in, blinded to see even the great need that we're in.

And our sins are a stench to God that drive him away from us rather than draw him to us. But, but, but, that's just the first half, isn't it?

[22 : 31] That's just, that's what was happened before Jesus comes into the situation. Here's Jesus comes striding into the midst of a hopeless, dark, helpless situation.

And what does he do? He comes and he stands at the graveside and he speaks, Lazarus, come out. Verse 44. It's, I don't know what the special word is it, but it doesn't make sense.

The dead man came out. Well, he wasn't dead then, was he? But the man who had been dead and now was alive came out. This incredible miracle has taken place. This person who has been dead for, can you imagine it?

Can you imagine it? What a transformation. What a change. He's alive. And this is the wonderful thing. Dear friends, when we come and Christ speaks to us and meets with us and imparts to us life, we come out.

And Lazarus was clearly so well that he could walk out. Now again, you know, think about this in a medical capacity. If this man had had a heart attack or a stroke or something which was seriously ill so that he had been, he had had to have CPR to revive him, he wouldn't just be able to walk out, would he?

[23 : 53] It'd take him days or weeks or months of recovery. But no, here he is. It's an instant transformation from death to life. He's fully well again.

In fact, later on, we read just later in that day, he's having a meal with Jesus and the others as well in chapter 12. So dear friends, when Christ comes and speaks and gives to us life, we have real, full life.

A miraculous life. A Christian is somebody who is a walking miracle. A walking testimony to a supernatural God.

And the life that Christ imparts to us is not simply to make us better people. It's not simply life that somehow makes us happier people.

But it's life that is eternal, everlasting and full. It satisfies those hungers. It satisfies those thirsts. It opens our eyes. It opens our ears.

[24 : 54] It does everything that we've ever longed for it to do and much more beside. Jesus himself said this in John 10, I have come that they, speaking of those who believe in him, that they may have life and have it to the fullness.

Whatever you're looking for in life, whatever you're seeking for in life, whatever the goal of your life is, let me say this to you in all sincerity, dear friends, you'll never, ever be satisfied with what you have until you have Christ Jesus and the new life that he gives.

Whether you want that new car, whether you want that new job, whether you want that new marriage, whether you want that new friendship, whether you want that new relationship, whatever it is, whether you want that money, it will never, ever give you the peace and the life that you are looking for and it certainly can do nothing for you when you face death as you must do and I must do and it will do nothing for you when you stand before a judge who is God himself.

It is only Christ who gives life and gives it fully. But that's what he's given us and also in giving us that, he's given us freedom as well. Here's Lazarus, we're told again, this is a picture of what happens to us.

Lazarus comes out of the tomb, his feet are wrapped with strips of linen and a cloth around his face, take off the grave clothes and let him go. One of the wonderful things is this, that becoming a Christian is entering into liberty.

[26 : 23] Galatians 5, Paul writing, it is for freedom that Christ has set us free. When you become a Christian, you don't submit yourself to a great ton of rules and laws that oppress and push you down and ruin the joy of life.

When you become a Christian, you're bursting out of the tomb. All the chains are being broken. All the things that manacled and held us down and trapped us are being released.

We are free to enjoy the things we were once dead to. We're free to enjoy God. We're free to enjoy his forgiveness. We're free to obey him and keep his commandments. We're free to come to him in prayer.

We're free to live those lives that we were created for. All because of Jesus. And so we see as well that we are given sight when once we were blind.

Lazarus came out the darkness of the tomb into the light. The face cloth that impaired his sight was taken away as well. Before we couldn't see, before we couldn't see just how wonderful God is, before we couldn't see just what a glorious, marvelous Savior Jesus is.

[27 : 31] But when he gives us life, he gives us sight. We were confused. We were stumbling about from one thing to another thing, looking for something which would give to us light for the path.

We didn't know where our lives were leading. But when we came to Christ, our eyes are opened. Here's a wonderful verse from one of the hymns we often sing. Heaven above is softer blue.

Earth around is sweeter green. Something lives in every hue Christless eyes have never seen. The whole worldview is changed.

Your whole sight is changed. The cataracts of sin are removed. And you can see, you can see the wonderful beauty of God and the wonderful beauty of life.

One last thing here, which is so important and so necessary as well. Once our lives stank to God, but now we are a sweet-smelling savour to him.

[28 : 32] We aren't told what Lazarus smelt like when he came out of the tomb. We can, I think, predict that he wasn't too pongy and that he was received and welcomed.

But the wonderful thing for us is that when we become a Christian, then the stench of our sin is removed and we smell to our God of the sweet fragrance of his son.

Here's Paul as he writes. He says this, for we are to God the aroma of Christ. We smell of Jesus because when we come to faith in Jesus Christ, what happens is that we are clothed with him.

We are brought into union with him, with all the good things of Jesus are given to us. All of his righteousness, all of his obedience, all of his loveliness, all of his holiness is given to us so that God is pleased to draw near to us.

God is not driven away from us anymore, but he receives us as his children. He embraces us in his love. He takes us as those who are his delights. As we thought at the very beginning of our service, God takes pleasure in his people.

[29 : 36] Dear friends, as we continue to live in sin, there's one thing we can be sure of, that God is repulsed by us. Don't think that God is happy with the attempts at religion that you make.

Again, the Bible makes it very clear that all the righteous acts, all the good things we try to do to win God's favour are to him like stinking, filthy rags. But when we come to Christ and when Christ comes and raises us from the dead, then dear friends, we are changed.

God delights in us, takes pleasure in us. We're a sweet-smelling fragrance of his son to him. And he will never, ever be far from us.

Once we drove him away, now we could never drive him away. Once we could never draw near to him, now we can never get away from him. One thing we have to close with and think about just as we finish this morning, how did all this change happen?

How did this once dead man become alive? How did we who were dead in our sins and lost and blind and stinking, how did we become changed? What happened?

[30 : 47] What did Jesus do? He did simply this. Look at what happens. He lifts his voice and cries out, Lazarus, come out. Such is the power of Jesus Christ that he only has to speak and life is given.

Again, evidence that he is God. What happened at creation? God said, let there be light and there was light. God here says, let there be life and there is life. It's that same call of Jesus Christ that raises us from spiritual death to spiritual life and all the blessings associated with it.

It's simply him speaking to us with a voice that we hear that transforms and changes our situation.

And so the question is this, this morning, have you heard the voice of Jesus calling you? Have you heard him speaking to your heart and your life, even perhaps this morning through this and through other situations as well?

Is he not calling you? Is he not crying out to you? Leave your tomb of sin. Leave those grave clothes of self-will.

[32 : 04] Put behind you those attempts at trying to save yourself. Simply believe upon him. Will you do that?

Will you do that? Who wants to stay in a stinking cell, a grave, in darkness? Who wants to stay an object of God's wrath? Who wants to stay in a place where there is nothing but darkness and no light and no life?

Do you want to stay there? Surely not. And isn't Jesus himself who walked the earth those years, who walks the earth today, who lives because he has risen from the dead, he calls to you and he says to you, dearly beloved, he calls you by name as he called Lazarus, Lazarus, he calls you by name and says, come out to me.

Come out to me from your sin. Come out to me and I will give you life. Oh, please come. Don't put your fingers in your ears to the voice of Jesus.

Come out to him into the light. Let's sing together our final hymn. This morning, it's going to be projected on the screen.

[33 : 23] Reminds us of that glorious Easter Sunday when Jesus conquered sin and death. If you yourself believe that God has been speaking to you, Jesus has been calling you, please don't put it off.

Please respond with faith. If you want to talk to me or anybody here, then we'd be only too happy to talk with you and tell you and point you to Jesus because he is the one who is the life giver.

But let's stand and sing. See what a morning gloriously bright. with the holy hope in Jerusalem.

Thank you. Thank you. See what a morning gloriously bright with the holy hope in Jerusalem.

Oh, the great loving nature is Christ's proriamente to life and grace in Jerusalem.

[34 : 48] The Lord that He of Jesus still Christ ex-centered where you also for free joy Oh Oh Oh

Oh Oh

Oh Oh Oh Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.