

John Chapter 11 v 1 - 44

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[0 : 00] Gospel in chapter 11, John chapter 11. It's quite a long reading, but we will read down to verse 44.

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.

So the sisters sent word to Jesus, Lord, the one you love is sick. When he heard this, Jesus said, this sickness will not end in death.

No, it is for God's glory, so that God's Son may be glorified through it. Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.

Then he said to his disciples, let us go back to Judea. But Rabbi, they said, a short while ago, the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you were going back there. Jesus answered, are there not twelve hours of daylight?

[1 : 24] A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. It's when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light. After he had said this, he went on to tell them, our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to wake him up.

His disciples replied, Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better. Jesus has been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. So then he told them plainly, Lazarus is dead.

And for your sake, I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him. Then Thomas, called Didymus, said to the rest of the disciples, let us also go, that we may die with him. On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. Lord, Martha said to Jesus, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

[2 : 35] But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask. Jesus said to her, your brother will rise again. Martha answered, I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life.

He who believes in me will live even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this? Yes, Lord, she told him, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.

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. When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.

[3 : 49] Where have you laid him, he asked. Come and see, Lord, they replied. Jesus wept. 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, 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 odour, for he has been there for four days. Then Jesus replied, 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've heard me. 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.

And when he had said 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.

[4 : 59] Jesus said to them, take off the grave clothes and let him go. Well, let's briefly pray, shall we?

Father, we do pray for those books, those booklets that have gone out on the cross. We pray that they will be read.

We pray that there will be those who will find the saviour through reading this literature. Thank you for the vision of the church here in getting those books and distributing that.

And Lord, now we pray that you'd be with us as we look at this wonderful chapter. We pray that you'd encourage us. We pray that on this first day of the week, this Sunday, when we meet together to celebrate the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, we pray, Lord, that you'd just remind us of the hope that we've got.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, you can call this sermon, if you like, The Tale of Two Bethanias. If you go to the end of chapter 10, you'll find that Jesus is basically in hiding.

[6 : 29] Verse 39 of chapter 10. And again, they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp. And then Jesus went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days.

So Jesus has taken refuge from attempts on his life. And if you read the Gospel of John, you'll find that each visit to Jerusalem gets more and more dangerous for Jesus.

Starts in chapter 5, when he raises that paralyzed man in the pool of Bethesda. They try to stone him. It goes on into chapter 7, where they actually send out soldiers to arrest him.

And they come back empty-handed, saying, no one ever spoke like this man. And it goes on and on and on with attempts to stone Jesus. Failed attempts to stone him. So Jerusalem is becoming an increasingly dangerous place for Jesus.

So at this point, Jesus goes to the other side of the River Jordan, to the place where John the Baptist first began to exercise his ministry. And if you look at chapter 1, verse 28, you don't have to turn it up unless you really want to, but just take my word for it.

[7 : 45] Chapter 1, verse 28 tells us that the place where John began his ministry on the other side of the Jordan was a place called Bethany. And there in Bethany, probably because of John the Baptist's ministry, people believe.

Verse 41. Many people came to him. They said, though John never performed a miraculous sign, all that John said about this man was true.

And in that place, many believed in Jesus. So there is Jesus on the other side of the River Jordan, in the place where John used to baptize, a place called Bethany.

And people are believing in him. While he's there, he gets a message from another Bethany, a village two miles outside of Jerusalem.

And the message is that his friend, Lazarus, is sick. And this chapter tells us that after a delay, Jesus eventually leaves Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, the place of safety and the place of faith, where people were believing in him.

[8 : 59] And he heads for Bethany near Jerusalem, the place of danger and the place of unbelief, where people were far from believing in him. Where people were wanting to stone him and put him to death.

But he heads from one Bethany to the other. And so we've got this wonderful story, the raising of Lazarus. And I want to make four points from this story tonight.

Four things that I think John wants to impress upon us from this story. And the first thing is Jesus' affection for this family.

Jesus' affection for this family. Three times in this chapter, we read that Jesus loved members of this family.

Look at verse 3. The sisters sent word to Jesus. Lord, the one you love is sick. Verse 5.

[9 : 59] Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Look at verse 36. The Jews said, see how he loved him.

When they saw him weeping, they said, see how he loved him. So the love of Jesus for this family, the affection of Jesus for this family is mentioned three times in this chapter.

And it's in this chapter that Jesus actually refers to Lazarus as his friend. Look at verse 11. After he had said this, he went on to tell them, Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep.

But I am going there to wake him up. So three times we're told that Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters. And once we're told that Lazarus was even described by Jesus as his friend.

Now, as far as I know, and don't quote me on this, and you may want to go back and check it up sometime just to see whether I'm right or not.

[11 : 06] And to be honest, I don't know whether I'm right. But as far as I know, I can't think of any examples in the Bible of anyone calling God their friend, my friend, or calling Jesus my friend.

Some of our hymns might do that, but I'm not sure that it happens in the Bible. But something far more wonderful than that happens in the Bible.

In the Bible, you find God calling human beings his friend. Abraham, the friend of God.

And here Jesus calls Lazarus our friend. That includes himself. He's my friend. I mean, that's pretty wonderful, don't you? I mean, if over coffee, after this service, you're chatting to me, and I keep referring to Prince Charles, my friend, my friend Prince Charles, you'd probably think, oh, he's just name-dropping again.

You wouldn't take it very seriously, would you? You would? Well, thank you very much. Thank you. I wouldn't. And you're throwing me now.

[12 : 21] What I was going to say was, is that if you were listening on to a lecture by Prince Charles on architecture or something, and he referred to his friend, Brian Maiden, you would be well impressed, wouldn't you?

Well, that's what I'm trying to say here. Which would you prefer? I mean, for me, for me, would be sheer impertinent, would it not for the fact that Jesus refers to me and to all his followers as his friend?

And I think that's wonderful to think that Jesus regards you, us, me, as his friend.

We are the friends of Jesus. He says it again a few chapters later when he says, greater love has no man than this, that a man should lay down his life for his friend.

You are a friend of Jesus Christ. Just think about that. Meditate on that before you go to bed tonight. I'm a friend of Jesus Christ.

[13 : 39] You'd think Jesus would be a bit more careful, wouldn't you, in picking his friend. But you and I are friends of Jesus Christ.

So, what I'm saying here under this first heading about the affection of Jesus for this family is that there is no question about Jesus' love and his affection for this family at Bethany.

It's emphasized over and over again. And yet, Lazarus became sick. And yet, Lazarus died.

And he died prematurely. He died before he should have done. And yet, his sisters were bereaved. Desperately. Sad. Sad. At their loss. Bad things. Happen. To Jesus' friend.

[14 : 52] Bad things happen to people who Jesus loved. Being a friend of Jesus. Being loved by Jesus does not exempt us from the trials and from the disappointments and the tragedies of this life.

Sometimes I think some Christians think that it does or it ought to. But it doesn't. This chapter makes that absolutely clear. It doesn't exempt us from the difficulties and disappointments of this life.

So that's the first point I want to make. The affection of Jesus for this family. And then the second thing that I think John wants to impress upon us from this chapter is Jesus' delay.

The delay of Jesus. Jesus. That seems to me to be emphasized by John. Jesus doesn't get to the tomb in this chapter until verse 38.

It's quite a lot of verses isn't it? To get from one Bethany to the other. It takes him 38 verses to get to the tomb. Sorry 37 verses.

[16 : 03] He arrives in verse 38. So it takes him 37 verses to get there. His action at the tomb is described in just seven verses.

And the actual resurrection or resuscitation, let's say, of Lazarus is described in just two verses. So what's the emphasis in this chapter?

The emphasis in this chapter is on the delay of Jesus. That's very clear in verses 5 and 6. Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

Yet, when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days. Jesus loved Lazarus and Mary and Martha.

Don't make any mistake about that. Yet, when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was for two more days. Two inexplicable days.

[17:05] And during those days, during that delay, Lazarus' condition worsened and he died. And when Jesus finally arrived at Bethany, he had been dead for four days.

Buried for four days. Because they buried people straight away in that society. And no doubt, Martha and Mary had expected him to come immediately.

I'm sure they expected him to come immediately. That's why they sent that message to Bethany on the other side of the River Jordan. Lazarus, your friend, the one you love, is sick.

They expected him to come immediately, quickly. But he didn't. And this delay is a puzzle to the sisters. Look at verse 21.

Verse 21. Martha goes out to meet Jesus. Lord, Martha said to Jesus, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

[18:15] If you had been here, my brother would not have died. Where were you? Why didn't you come? And look at verse 32. 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.

Do you get the impression that they may have been saying something like this to each other during this delay? Why isn't he here? Why hasn't Jesus come? Why has he let our brother die?

That was the theme of their conversation, I'm quite sure. Look at verse 37. Some of them said, Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?

Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying? Why didn't he come? Where was he?

How many Christians there are who have shared the bewilderment and even the disappointment of these sisters, Martha and Mary? Lord, if you had been here, my brother, my sister, my wife, my husband, my son, my daughter, my father, my mother, my loved one, my friend, my friend, if you had been here, they wouldn't have died.

[19:46] Where were you? The delay of Jesus. And yet, even as John emphasizes the delay of Jesus, he also emphasizes his complete knowledge and awareness of what was happening at Bethany.

He's totally in control. He knows exactly what's happening. He's in control of the timing. He goes in his timing.

Not in that. His love for this bereaved family never wavered for one moment. Verse 14. He told them plainly, Lazarus is dead. And for your sake, I'm glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him. He goes at his timing. And we can be sure that this remains the case.

I want to just suggest this to you. I don't know what you think of this. But it's possible that some of John's readers were disappointed by the delay of Jesus.

[20:55] The delay in Jesus' return. It's usually thought that John is the last of the four Gospels to have been written. It's not as definite now as it used to be.

But still, most scholars think that John is later than the first three Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke. And by the time John was writing, there were no doubt many Christians who thought that Jesus should have come.

And we know from the letter to the Thessalonians that this was a real problem in the early church. Paul had to write to the Thessalonians and say, Look, those folk who have died, you need to worry about them.

They haven't missed the second coming. They haven't missed the second coming. They're going to be first in the queue when Jesus comes. The dead in Christ will rise first. And then we who are alive will be caught up with them to meet the Lord in the air.

And so shall we ever be with the Lord. It wasn't supposed to happen. Christians weren't supposed to die. And yet, they did.

[22:07] And Paul has to write to assure them that the delay in Jesus' return, the delay in Jesus' coming, doesn't mean that the dead have missed out in some way.

And I wonder whether, in spending so much time on the delay of Jesus in this chapter, I wonder whether John isn't telling his readers to be patient.

Jesus will come, but he'll come in his own time, not in hours. And during the delay, bad things happen to Jesus' friends.

Christians die. Christians lose loved ones. Christians get sick. Christians lose their job.

Sadly, the marriages of Christians sometimes break up. When that happens, we mustn't think that Jesus doesn't care or that he doesn't know.

[23 : 16] He does know. And he does care. And he'll come at his own time. So that's the second point. The delay of Jesus.

And the third thing that I think John emphasizes in this chapter are the feelings of Jesus. The feelings of Jesus. This is an amazing chapter in many ways.

You've got a tremendous combination of divine power in Jesus. After all, he does raise Lazarus from the dead. A tremendous combination of divine power and human feeling.

We've seen it three times. John says that Jesus loved Lazarus. Human feelings. And it's, of course, in this chapter that we get the shortest verse in the Bible. Verse 27.

Jesus wept. So any idea that Jesus' delay meant that he didn't care is just swept away by this one short sentence.

[24 : 19] Jesus wept at Lazarus' tomb. He cared so much that he wept. And you know how they weep in the Middle East. You've seen it on the news, on the television, haven't you?

They aren't like us. Middle Eastern people aren't like us. We're very buttoned up at funerals, aren't we? We're very stiff up a lift.

We don't like to show our emotions at all. It's the opposite in the Middle East. They don't just weep. They wail. They really let it out.

And the crowd noticed the tears of Jesus. It wasn't British weeping. It wasn't English weeping. He didn't sort of go into a corner and try to stop his lip quivering.

He wept. And the crowd noticed that he wept. And they said, look, look how he loved him. So, that little verse completely demolishes any idea that the delay of Jesus meant that he didn't care.

[25 : 30] Jesus did care and yet he delayed. So, the seeming inactivity of Jesus doesn't mean that he doesn't care.

But there's more to the feelings of Jesus in this chapter than just that. Because in verse 33 and verse 38, again we read that Jesus was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.

Verse 33. He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. And verse 38. Once more, deeply moved, Jesus came to the tomb.

Now, we usually take the word deeply moved and troubled simply to be another way of saying that he was upset, that he wept.

And that may be the case. But, normally, the word translated deeply moved and troubled does not refer to compassion.

[26 : 39] We were looking at compassion this morning. The word deeply moved here is a different word. And it doesn't normally refer to compassion. It normally refers to anger.

And indignation. One translation has outraged in spirit. Outraged in spirit.

And Benjamin Warfield, in a wonderful essay on the emotional life of our Lord, says that this word signifies, quote, not uncontrollable grief, but inexpressible anger.

Not uncontrollable grief, but inexpressible anger. If that is the case, then what is Jesus angry about?

Some people suggest that he's angry at the unbelief of the crowd or the unbelief of the sisters. But I think that's unlikely. And I think the more likely explanation is the explanation given by people like Warfield, that it was death itself and the devil that was the, which were the objects of Jesus' anger at this point.

[28 : 07] The ruin that the devil and the death had inflicted upon mankind. One commentator, I can't remember who it was.

Jesus burns with rage against the oppressor of men. And John Calvin writes, Jesus advances to the tomb like a champion prepared for conflict.

So maybe it was a mixture of emotions. Maybe there was grief there. Although, bear in mind that Jesus was about to, he knew that Jesus was about to raise Lazarus from the dead.

But maybe there was what we were talking about this morning, compassion for the sisters, grief. But there's more than that going on here. There's indignation. There is rage at the evil of death and sin. And surely, all of us will have felt similar emotions when faced by death.

[29 : 05] The Bible describes death. Paul describes death. Even though elsewhere he says that he desires to depart and be with Christ. He describes death as the last enemy.

Death isn't something for Christians to be sentimental about. Death is something Christians hate. It is unnatural. It is horrible.

We hate it. There is no sense of justice with death. Some people live to be a hundred or more.

Others die in the prime of life or even before the prime of life.

Well before the prime of life. Death is a terrible thing. It is a scourge upon mankind. We do all we can to avoid it and to delay it.

But it gets us in the end. And it leaves our loved ones bereft and alone. And Dylan Thomas, the Welsh poet, wrote a poem about it.

[30 : 13] And it starts like this. I'm sure you've heard it before. Do not go gentle into that dark night. Rage, rage, rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Well you can rage as much as you like. But it will make no difference. All our sorrow, all our rage make no difference at all.

Not so the sorrow and the rage of Jesus. Which brings us to my final point.

And it's a shorter sermon. Because I'm trying to make up, I'm trying to make amends. For my previous sins. My wife told me that I preached for 44 minutes last Sunday night.

Which is just a bit too long. So I'm seeking to atone tonight. By preaching the slightly shorter sermon than usual. It should balance it last Sunday night out.

[31 : 12] Brings us to the final point. The power of Jesus. So we've got the affection, the love of Jesus for this family.

We've got the delay of Jesus. The seemingly inexplicable delay of Jesus. We've got the feelings of Jesus.

The feelings of Jesus. And finally, the power of Jesus. This is obviously another great emphasis of this chapter. But it's dealt with in just two verses.

In this long chapter. Jesus arrives at the tomb. He's surrounded by these powerless mourners. The situation is beyond hope. As the NIV delicately puts it.

By now there is a bad odour. The King James Version says. He stinks. Or he stinketh actually. It was a situation beyond hope.

[32 : 21] That's the point. But Jesus says. Take the stone away. And the stone is removed. And with a cry of command.

Jesus summons his friend Lazarus. To join him. And out comes Lazarus. Bound in his grave club. There's no mumbo jumbo. There's no lengthy incantations. One command from Jesus Christ. And death gives up.

What it had claimed. And this incident is meant to illustrate. Of course. The claim of Jesus. In verse 25. I am the resurrection and the life.

He who believes in me. Will live even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me. Will never die. Do you believe this? In chapter 5. Chapter 5.

[33 : 26] A time is coming. When all who are in their graves. Will hear his voice. And come out. Those who have done good. Will rise to live. And those who have done evil. Will rise to be condemned.

So this is simply a sign of this. A sign of what is to come. And that it is Jesus who will do it.

So. Human beings. As we've seen. Are powerless and helpless. When faced by death. But death is powerless and helpless.

When faced by Jesus Christ. When human beings face death. It doesn't matter how hard they try. Death wins every time. When death.

Faces Jesus Christ. Jesus wins every time. Death isn't as powerful as it looks. I do love verse 11.

[34 : 25] I preached on it. At two or three funerals. But the trouble with funerals. Is that you can't go on. Preaching the same sermon. At every funeral. So you have to. Change the sermons a little bit.

But two or three funerals. I preached on verse 11. Our friend Lazarus. Has fallen asleep. But I ain't going there to wake him up. And so.

I put the name of whoever's funeral it has been. In place of Lazarus. Our friend. Mrs. King. I think it was the last one. Our friend Mrs. King.

Has fallen asleep. That Jesus says. I'm going to wake her up. I'm going to wake her up. Jesus is a good friend to have isn't he?

Jesus isn't going to let death. Ruin a good friendship. A friendship that he died.

[35 : 27] To put in place. He's not going to let death ruin that good friendship. Nothing. Can separate his people from the love of God. Which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Nothing in all creation. Now this raising of Lazarus. Was not a resurrection. It was a resuscitation. There's a. Slightly. We're very sad and slightly amusing verse in chapter 12. Chapter 12 verse 10. The chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well.

They were making plans to kill Jesus. So they were making plans to kill Lazarus as well. So poor old Lazarus had to die again.

That's why he came out in his grave clothes. Because he would need them again. Sadly. This was not a resurrection. It was a resuscitation.

[36 : 29] The resurrection was still to come. It was a pointer. It was a sign to the resurrection. But this was not the defeat of death. It was a foreshadowing of the defeat of death.

The defeat of death was still to come. And it would follow the defeat of sin. At the cross. When our sin bearer. Bore our sins.

And bore God's judgment against sin. And absorbed that judgment. Entirely drank that cup for us. So that death. As well as sin.

Is now defeated. And three days later. Jesus would come out of the tomb. Alive. Never to die again. Revelation chapter 1 verse 18.

I am he that liveth and was dead. And behold. I am alive forevermore. And hold the keys of death. And the grave. That's why Jesus left his grave clothes behind.

[37 : 35] Lazarus brought his out. Jesus left his in the tomb. Because he wouldn't need him again. He. Has been raised never to die again.

And those who believe in Jesus. Will rise. Like Jesus. Not like Lazarus. But like Jesus. Philippians chapter 3 verse 20.

We're citizens of heaven. And we are eagerly awaiting a savior. From there. The Lord Jesus Christ. Who by the power that enables him. To bring everything under his control. Will transform our lowly bodies. So that they will be like. His. Glorious.

Body. This isn't something just to celebrate. At Easter time. Once a year. It's something to celebrate. Every Sunday. On the first day of the week. I just want to make.

[38 : 34] One final point. It's just a very very brief point. And that's this. Life. For Lazarus. Meant death.

For Jesus. Two Bethany. One Bethany. The place of faith. And safety. On the other side of the Jordan. Jesus could have stayed there. The other Bethany.

Two miles from Jerusalem. The place of unbelief. And danger. And death. And Jesus left. The place. Of faith. And belief. And.

Made that journey. To Jerusalem. And. Thomas must have suspected. That it was going to be. His last visit to Jerusalem. Let's go with him. So that we could. So that we can. We can die with him. He knew what was going to happen. Jesus made that journey. And sure enough. When you read on. Into. Chapter 12. Later on.

[39 : 32] Later on. In chapter 11. And into chapter 12. You find. That it was the. It was the. Raising of Lazarus. That led the Jewish authorities.

To finally. And to formally resolve. That Jesus would have to be put to death. Jesus would have to die. And this was indeed. I think.

His. His. His. Last visit. To Jerusalem. So life. For Lazarus. Came at the cost. Of death. For Jesus. So Lazarus. Is. A wonderful example. Of John. Chapter 15. Greater love. Has no man. Than this. That a man. Lay down. His life. For his.

Friend. Friend. That's exactly what Jesus did for Lazarus. He laid down his life. So that Lazarus. Could live. So there's a sense.

[40 : 27] In which if you're a Christian tonight. You are. A Lazarus. Jesus. Called you his friend. Jesus. Is not going to let.

Death. Or anything else. Destroy a good friendship. You therefore. Ultimately. Have nothing to fear. And like Lazarus. You. Will emerge.

From the grave. Into. Everlasting. Life. In the new creation. But it's all. At the cost. Of Jesus's death. For our sin.

Let's turn to another. Resurrection hymn. Thine be the glory. Risen. Conquering. Son. Number. Amen. Amen. Amen. And so Lord we pray.

That as we live. For you. In this world this week. We might be ready to give. A reason. To anyone. Who asks us.

[41 : 29] For the hope that we have. We pray that we might. Be people with an obvious hope. We're living in a world without hope. help us to be different help us to be people with a clear joyful hope and help us to be ready to give a reason for that hope to those who ask us and we pray that people will ask us part us with your blessing we pray in Jesus name Amen