

John Chapter 11

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Date: 16 December 2018

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[0 : 00] Good morning, good to see you. It's a beautiful day, isn't it, for December? Absolutely lovely. But it's good that we can be in here and we can be coming to worship the Lord our God.

And particularly if you haven't got into this, if you don't realise it's Christmas yet, then I don't know what planet you've been on, but it's very, very fast approaching. And of course for us that means only one thing, the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The angel that came to Joseph and told him of this child said of Mary, she will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.

Jesus means the Lord saves, rescue. It's a rescue mission Jesus came to bring to humanity and the message of the angel there to Joseph and the message of the angels to the shepherds was the same thing.

Glory to the newborn king. So our first carol, our first hymn is 206. Hark the herald angels sing. Glory to the newborn king. Peace on earth and mercy mark.

[1 : 09] 206. Let's stand and sing. Let's pray together.

Let's come to God in prayer. We thank you again, oh Lord our God, that you are the one who has sent us good news.

You are the one who has sent those angels to proclaim that the son of God is born, that the living one, the one who gives life has come into this world.

We thank you again for this Christmas time, this time that we particularly focus our thoughts and remember the gift of Jesus Christ, the son of God. We thank you again, oh Lord, that his coming into this world is a rescue mission.

Thank you that his coming was to save those who were in grave danger, those whose lives were near to being lost.

[2 : 13] We thank you that he came at great sacrifice to himself and cost to himself to rescue us and to save us. Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you did not count us undeserving of your love.

Thank you that you did not, as it were, give up on us, but we thank you that in your loving kindness you came, that we might know you and trust you.

We pray, Lord, that you would help us in this time this morning. Help us, oh Lord, to bring to you our praise and our worship and our thanksgiving. Help us again afresh to realize the wonder and the joy and the power of Christmas.

Help us, oh Lord, to have our minds and our hearts moved as we recognize that this mission, this rescue was indeed the greatest event in the history of the world.

That this is not just a myth or a legend or a story or Father Christmas. This is something which is wonderfully true and has an impact and an effect upon our lives today.

[3 : 19] We praise you and thank you that Jesus is God with us. And we pray, oh Lord, that this morning you would be with us. By your Holy Spirit, draw near to us.

Help us, oh Lord, we pray, to know you're speaking with us and meeting with us. Lord, may this time be not just a passing hour to fill up a Sunday morning, not just something that we have to do out of duty, not something, oh Lord, which is merely a formality, but Lord, we long for you to be with us in such a way that we may know that the living God has met with us.

So Lord, help us then. We come to you, oh Lord, in need, for we recognize, oh Lord, that through this week we have sinned against you. Through this week, Lord, our lives have not been in keeping with your will and purpose, your good and pleasing will and purpose.

We know that, Lord, everything that you command us to do is for our blessing, our good, our joy, our benefit. We know, oh Lord, that to turn away from you is to bring into our world and into our lives and the lives of others sorrow and misery and grief and hardship and pain and death.

And so, Lord, we thank you that there is forgiveness with you. Forgive us, Lord, not because we ask it, not because we deserve it, but because Jesus has paid for it with his lifeblood upon the cross.

[4 : 40] Forgive us, oh Lord, and fill us with your Holy Spirit now we ask. For we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's read now from our Bibles.

And we're going to read from John and chapter 11. Gospel of John and chapter 11. If you've got one of the red church Bibles, that's page 1077.

Page 1077. John and chapter 11. And we're going to read quite a large section through to verse 45. One to 45.

Well-known event in the life of our Lord Jesus. And as we shall see, something which speaks to us strongly of Christmas. May not seem immediately obvious, but I hope it will at the end.

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

[5 : 47] So the sisters sent word to Jesus, Lord, the one you love is ill. When he heard this, Jesus said, this illness will not end in death.

No, it is for God's glory, so that God's Son may be glorified through it. Now, Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

So when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed where he was two more days. And then he said to his disciples, let us go back to Judea.

But Rabbi, they said, a short while ago, the Jews were trying to stone you, and yet you're going back? Jesus answered, are there not twelve hours of daylight?

Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light.

[6 : 44] After he'd said this, he went on to tell them, our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I'm going there to wake him up. His disciples replied, Lord, if he sleeps, he'll get better.

Jesus had 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'm glad I was not there, so that you may believe.

Let us go to him. Then Thomas, also known as 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.

Now 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. But I know that even now, God will give you whatever you ask.

[7 : 54] 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.

The one who believes in me will live, even though they die, and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this? Yes, Lord, she replied.

I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who has come into the world. 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 was not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had left 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'd been here, my brother would not have died. When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who'd come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.

[9 : 11] 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's a bad odor. He's been there for four days.

Then Jesus said, did I not tell you that if you believe you will 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 knew 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'd said this, Jesus called out in a loud voice, Lazarus, come out.

[10 : 14] The dead man came out. His hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen and a cloth around his face. 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, believed in him. If you have in your Bibles open to John 11, that will be a help as we look briefly at these events and how they relate to Christmas.

How they relate to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ into the world. I wonder if you've got a favourite advert, a favourite Christmas advert that's at the moment.

Every year, of course, the big shopping stores and supermarkets create their own Christmas advert, a special advert which leads up to Christmas.

And of course, we're inundated with them. John Lewis, particularly, has always, stands out as one which particularly tells a story of something that's happening at Christmas. But Sainsbury's and Tesco, August, Amazon, all the rest of them.

[11 : 29] And of course, in those adverts, each one is making a claim. They're saying that they have something special which they can add to your Christmas which no one else can give you.

They have something special in their store or in their produce that gives you a Christmas worth celebrating. Morrison's have a Christmas advert as well as all the others and at the end of their advert they say the phrase Christmas, Morrison's makes it.

What a thing to say. Morrison's makes it. Their catchphrase all through the year is Morrison's make it but Christmas, they're saying Christmas. Morrison's can give that special ingredient to your Christmas that makes Christmas Christmas.

I think for every one of us there's something special about Christmas. There's one thing particularly that we look for in our Christmas celebrations. One thing that particularly makes it special for us it could be the fact that we see our children or grandchildren that time of year when we may not see them very often other times.

It may be the singing of carols. It doesn't matter who you are just love singing carols. Maybe watching the Queen's speech on the Christmas day afternoon or opening presents together on the morning.

[12 : 47] There's just something that makes Christmas Christmas. Without that one thing Christmas just wouldn't be as it should be. Well is there one thing that makes Christmas Christmas?

Is there one thing that makes Christmas not only a wonderful time of the year but a wonderful time throughout the year? Because ultimately that's what Christmas means.

It means something has happened which impacts and affects us throughout the year not just once a year. What is it that makes the birth of the Son of God into this world so special so wonderful so joyful?

Well that's why we're here in John 11. it's the same thing that Jesus brought with him from heaven when he came that makes Christmas Christmas and it's the same thing that he took with him when he went to see Mary and Martha in Bethany.

It's the one thing that he brought into this world. His journey from heaven to earth was to bring to us something that makes Christmas Christmas and his journey to Bethany which was several days brings one thing.

[14 : 07] He doesn't bring necessarily teaching doesn't necessarily bring calming of the storm but there's one thing he brings doesn't he into that town of Bethany into that family he brings the gift of resurrection.

He brings the gift of resurrection he says to Martha I am the resurrection and the life the one who believes in me will live even though they die whoever lives by believing in me will never die do you believe this?

And then of course he goes immediately on to that tomb in which was laid the body of Lazarus and he speaks and the man who'd been dead at least four days is raised to life once more.

The very reason that the Son of God came into the world came from heaven to earth was to bring resurrection to men and women. This is what Jesus said himself in John chapter 6 for my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life and I will raise them up at the last day.

Jesus came to bring resurrection. Christmas is about resurrection. Well let's trace something of the journey of Jesus here to Bethany and see how that impacts our lives and see what it really means.

[15 : 41] How is this journey like the journey of Jesus from heaven to earth? Well first of all we see that Jesus' journey Jesus' coming was at exactly the right time.

Exactly the right time. Apostle Paul writes to the Galatian Christians and he says this when the set time had come God sent his son born of a woman.

Jesus coming into the world was exactly according to God's plan according to his clock according to his timetable according to his diary. the son of God came exactly when he was meant to come.

Didn't come too early and he didn't come too late. His coming into the world his becoming one with us was part of God's plan.

A plan that was formed by God the Father the Son and the Spirit even before the world was made. Not a last ditch plan not a plan B but plan A.

- [16 : 44] For Peter writes in his letter speaking of Jesus he was chosen before the creation of the world but was revealed in these last times for your sake. When Jesus came he was neither too early nor too late.

When he came into history it was exactly at the right time. But look at this look at this journey that Jesus made to Bethany. We're told that when the message came to him that Lazarus his friend was ill verse 5 Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus so when he heard that Lazarus was ill he stayed where he was two more days.

He delayed purposefully his journey to go to Bethany to bring resurrection alive to the one he loved. He determined not to go.

Now there are some people who should remain nameless who are renowned for being late. They can be late on Sunday morning in fact most social occasions no matter what they are they're sure to be the last ones to get there.

But to be fair all of us have been late at least once in our lives or worse forgotten to turn up altogether but God is never late. When Jesus set off for Bethany after two days he did so with a purpose.

- [18 : 23] Do you know ambulance crews are given a time by which they have to be at the scene of the emergency after the call has gone in. Do you know how long they've got?

Eight minutes. That's all. Eight minutes. Well this was an emergency wasn't it? Lazarus was ill and for Mary and Martha to send a message saying that Lazarus was ill it must mean he was pretty poorly.

He didn't just have a bad cough. He was seriously seriously ill. So it was an emergency it was an emergency they were saying Jesus come quickly because we're worried about Lazarus and we think that this illness is going to end in his death.

We need you here. And Jesus stops and he waits two more days. Why? Didn't he care about this family? Yes he does because we're told that he loved them on more than one occasion.

Was it because he was too busy with things to do? Well we're not told that he was. It wasn't as if there were crowds there wanting to be healed which would have kept him back. Was he just indifferent? No.

- [19 : 28] Jesus makes it very clear why he waited. He said this 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.

It was for the sake of his disciples there was a reason why Jesus didn't go immediately as soon as he was called. There was a reason why he delayed two days so that they may experience resurrection first hand.

They might see the power of the Son of God in this world with their own eyes and experience it for themselves. Do you think that God is slow in answering your prayers?

Doesn't it seem at times that he delays? We've prayed about something a very urgent situation something that requires his immediate attention but nothing happens.

God should have been there to prevent that pain in my life. God should have acted when that trial and test came to me.

- [20 : 43] God should have prevented my grief. Doesn't he care about me? We can feel can't we like Martha and Mary did.

Both of them when Jesus spoke with them they said if you had only been here Lord my brother wouldn't have died. There's a questioning there. There's almost a telling Jesus off isn't there in that.

Lord you should have been here. You should have answered our call. You should have answered our prayer. You should have prevented this. Don't we feel that? Don't we feel that way ourselves?

Can't we sympathize with them? But the truth of the matter is this and we learn it here and we learn it from Christ's coming at Christmas. We realize this.

God is perfect in his timing. We are impatient people. In fact we're becoming more and more impatient aren't we? We used to be quite patient when we used to post a letter and not expect somebody to write back within a week or two.

[21 : 48] Now we send off an email and if they don't respond within 10 minutes we think what's wrong with them? Have they died? We're so impatient aren't we? We're impatient with God.

Patient with one another. But God is not just patient he's perfect. His timing is always right. If he hasn't answered that prayer it's because he has a purpose.

If it seems that he's taking his time it's not the case at all. There is a purpose. A reason. God does everything for a reason.

See Jesus didn't come into the world as soon as Adam and Eve sinned in the garden did he? That was an emergency. That was when sin came. He could have nipped it in the bud surely. He didn't come when humanity was so wicked that God sent the flood and rescued only that family of Noah.

He didn't come when the Israelites were on the edge of the promised land and could have gone in but they disobeyed God and spent 40 years wandering around. Lost until all that generation had died.

[22 : 59] He sent Jesus at the right time when everything was ready, when his plan had come together, when he'd been working all of history and all of its events to that point so the Son of God could come in and accomplish the work and perfect and bring that salvation that humanity needed.

Paul writes of this God who saves us according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.

We all love making plans. Perhaps you've got plans for 2019. Perhaps you've got plans for Christmas. We all make plans but there's no guarantee they're going to happen. No guarantee they're going to be fulfilled.

We can be so careful and we can make all sorts of preparations but there's no guarantees. With God there's a guarantee that his plan, his purposes always come about.

And if God has planned as he surely did to send his Son into the world and brought him at exactly the right time, then let me assure you of this dear friends that the promise that God has made that Jesus will come again is circled in his diary.

[24 : 14] He knows and we must be prepared because when he comes again it will be with judgment and justice.

He will come as Lord and King, not as a babe, not to die. So we see here from this journey, again, something of Jesus is coming, that it was on time even though it seemed to be late in people's eyes or at the wrong time in people's eyes.

But then we also see when Jesus came into the world, just as when he came into the home of Mary and Martha, we see that Jesus came with real tears.

He came at the right time and he came with real tears. There it is in verse 35, Jesus wept. It's the shortest verse in the Bible, people still use it from time to time as a curse, a swear word, a word of astonishment.

But though it's the shortest verse in the Bible, it's probably got the most telling truths contained within it. When the Son of God came into the world and took on our human nature, he did not cease to be God in any way.

[25 : 30] And therefore, without stretching a point, here we see the tears of God. Here we recognize an incredible truth that God himself weeps.

We often hear people correcting someone, don't you? If somebody's been unsympathetic about something or shown no sympathy for someone, somebody say, show some humanity.

That's completely wrong. The truth is that when we show that we love somebody, when we show we care for others, when we weep for their suffering, we are showing our divinity.

We are showing and glimpsing the image of God in humanity. See, all of us are made in the image of God.

The Bible makes that very clear. We were created by God to know God. We bear some of his characteristics even still in our nature. One of them is mercy, compassion.

[26 : 38] But that divine image of God in us has been virtually destroyed by our sin, our wickedness, our evil, our selfishness, our pride, so that it's almost impossible to see the image of God in us anymore.

When Jesus wept at the graveside of Lazarus, he was revealing just how God feels about death. He wasn't weeping because he was sort of overcome with the emotion of the situation, emotional though it was.

We find him there weeping because he sees and remembers and recognizes the awful consequences of sin, which is death. It breaks his heart death to witness the consequences of our sinful behavior destroying us and robbing us of the life that God created us to know and enjoy.

Death is the very worst and final result of sin. Romans chapter 6 23, the wages of sin is death. When you live for sin, when you seek to follow sin, when you give your life over to sin, that is that which is contrary to God's will, then all that you're reaping is death.

Passing pleasure maybe, but the wages are death. But death is not the only thing that grieves the heart of God.

[28 : 09] Death is not the only thing that sin produces in our race. Every sorrow, every grief, every pain, every loss is due to sin.

Why? Because our sin and that of others tears and defaces the beauty of God's image that is in us.

So that all that is left is a grotesque monster of our own making, a Frankenstein like creature which rampages through life and history destroying and killing everything in its path.

Real tears over the consequences of sin from God. Jesus Christ came into this world because of his mercy for those who are dead and dying.

And so therefore we come to the point where we recognize why Jesus came, why Christmas matters, why the Son of God was born as one of us. Because coming into the world, Jesus brought with him resurrection, triumph.

[29 : 36] Resurrection rather, transformation. And we see the transformation, don't we, in the life of this man Lazarus. Without being macabre, he was a man whose body was decaying.

Four days in the tomb in the hot weather of Israel meant that a body would decay. That's why they would have buried him on the day of his death or at the very latest the next day.

And this decaying and decomposing body within the tomb would have been giving off an unpleasant odour. That's why when Jesus says take away the stone, the stone that sealed that tomb, Martha says don't do it, he's already going to be stinking.

there's no hope for Lazarus. As far as they were concerned, this is the end. If you'd been here, you could have healed him, but now he's dead, that's the end.

Now he's dead, there's no hope. He's never going to recover. It doesn't matter how long he sleeps, it doesn't matter how much rest you give him, he's never going to get up again.

[30 : 52] That's the end, death is final, we know that. But there was one person there, one person who could do something for him, one person who knew what needed to be done, one person who could bring resurrection to a dead corpse that was decomposing, it was Jesus.

Jesus imparted into that decomposing dead body into its flesh, into his mind, into his soul, life, resurrection life, for he simply stands at the tomb entrance, he doesn't touch him, he doesn't take hold of him, he doesn't do anything to him, he simply speaks, Lazarus come out and that man who was dead comes out walking.

Every single one of us need resurrection transformation. transformation. Every single person in this world, you and I, we must have resurrection transformation.

We need to be raised from the dead. And for that reason Christmas is Christmas. That reason Christ came. See, turkey won't do it, and booze won't do it, and Santa can't do it, and friends and relatives can't do it, and presents can't do it.

There's no supermarket, no shop, no app on your phone, no online provider who has it in stock. Only the Son of God can give resurrection transformation to you, and that's what you need, dear friend.

[32 : 31] He came into the world with the power to give life to the dead, the power to transform those who have all their lives been decomposing because of the sin in their nature.

and the very reality and the proof that he had that resurrection power is not only that he raised Lazarus from the dead, but that he himself, after he had been in the tomb three days, was raised to life once more.

And he has come into this world, dear friends, with the greatest gift of all life for everyone who wants it. Do you want it?

Do you want resurrection transformation? Do you see how dead you are without Christ? Do you see how empty this world is without him?

Do you look around you and throw your hands in the air and say what on earth can be done? Until you recognize that you are part of the problem, you can never be part of the cure.

[33 : 43] Until you recognize that you yourself because of your own sin are under that same power of death, then you will never see your need of resurrection.

Until you can acknowledge that you are a sinner before God, and that without him you must die, not only physically, but spiritually and eternally, until you can recognize that there is something that must change, then you shall always stay where you are, in that tomb, decomposing.

You may seem to be alive, but like some sort of zombie, it's not life, not real. There's no life outside of Christ, the Son of God.

There's only decay and death in this life and the next. And we can't do anything for ourselves, like Lazarus in the tomb, it's no good you saying, well I'll try and be a better person, and I'll try and make my life worth living, and I'll try to do the right things, and I'll say no to the wrong things.

You can't do it, you're as dead as Lazarus in the grave when it comes to pleasing God and doing the right thing, and turning your life around. You need to be able to cry out something like the words of the Apostle Paul when he spoke and said, what a wretched man I am, who will rescue me from this body of death?

[35 : 13] But he had faith and was able to say, thanks be to God who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord. What did Jesus say?

Did he say you can be raised to life by CPR? Did he say you can be raised to life by a new scientific breakthrough, by new technology? He said, the one who believes in me will live.

It's faith. Putting your faith in the Christ of Christmas, putting your faith in the Son of God who came. When Jesus spoke to Martha, he said to I am the resurrection and the life.

The one who believes in me will live even though they die. Whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this? Well, do you? Well, don't you?

If you believe it, then act on it. Pray that prayer. Lord, save me from this body of death. Rescue me. Give me life as you gave to Lazarus.

[36 : 19] Turn the clock back. everything that's on offer at Christmas, that we're tempted to and drawn to and seek after.

Can we really turn our backs on this? Can we really say no to resurrection transformation that Jesus offers?

Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, you are the life giver and no one else.

All the things that are offered to us at Christmas and throughout the year which promise us some improvement to life or pleasure in life or enjoyment in life or longevity of life.

Lord, all these things are but baubles on the tree. They're just fancy lights. They have nothing that's lasting, that's transforming, that's changing, that's what we need.

[37 : 39] We thank you, Lord Jesus, that you came into this world to give life to the dead. You came into this world to bring resurrection to those who, because of our own sin, because of our own foolishness, have brought upon ourselves only death.

We pray again, O Lord, that this Christmas time that we would receive that wonderful gift, the gift that cost you so much when you suffered and died in our place, that gift, O Lord, which is to all, men and women, boys and girls, young and old, rich and poor, clever and stupid, good and bad.

Lord, let us not pass by this Christmas without believing and by faith receiving resurrection, transformation.

For we ask it, Lord Jesus, because we know it's what you want, and we know that what you want is always best. Amen. Where, O death, is your victory, where, O death, is your sting, the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law, but thanks be to God, he gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. Amen.