

John 11:17-46

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[0 : 00] So what kind of God is Jesus Christ? Is he worth putting your trust in? Is he worth believing in?

You might remember when we started this series on John, John's Gospel, John gives the aim for writing his Gospel right at the end, doesn't he? His aim in writing the Gospel is that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, God's chosen King, and that by believing in him, we would have life in his name.

And as we come back into John's Gospel, as we continue through it, we come to this passage really where the question is, is Jesus Christ, is this God worth believing in?

Is he worth trusting in? Is he worth going to with the things that we fear the most? Is he worth trusting in, in the face of death?

What sort of God do you need to give you hope? With that subject that we never really want to talk about, isn't it? Jesus arrives in the town of two friends, Mary and Martha, at the funeral of their brother, Lazarus.

[1 : 12] Now I don't want to be morbid just for the sake of it, but this passage, as we read through it, it forces us, doesn't it, to think about how death has touched us all when we've stood at a gravesite, and of course when we think about our own deaths.

Society tries to hide it away, doesn't it? Or to try and sweeten it. We don't talk about it, or we make light of it, we kind of use euphemisms like, oh, he or she, they've gone into the next room, they've passed on.

Or maybe we kind of think about death in another way, we think, oh, it's just reincarnation, isn't it? You die, but then you reappear as something else. Or that in death, everything about you, your body and your soul, just decomposes into a bunch of molecules, so death really isn't anything to worry about, you don't feel a thing.

We live, and then we die, and that's it. But the Bible speaks about death in a different way. The Bible speaks about death like a shadow.

Calls it the shadow of death. And it's an experience that we instinctively fear. It is an evil thing that we instinctively want to avoid, isn't it?

[2 : 32] We try and ignore the darkness of death. We instinctively anticipate, with fear, the gloom of that shadow, don't we?

Just think of the effort that goes into avoiding it. For as long as possible, for as long as we live, we want to avoid death.

We try and buy ourselves time and health. And so the question we've got to ask ourselves, and what John forces us to ask, is can we trust Jesus to get us through it?

Who can we trust with are our deaths? Can we find real hope in him? And it turns out that Jesus has got a lot to say on the subject in this passage, among other things.

And Jesus comes to us here, and he says to us, you can trust me with your death. You must trust me.

[3 : 33] There is no one else, or anything else, that you can trust with death. And there are three ways, I think, here, that Jesus shows us a God that we can hope in, in the face of death.

First of all, Jesus shows us the kind of God who is indignant towards death. Jesus is indignant towards death.

So the sisters of the dead man, Lazarus, are there with the whole community, aren't they? And emotions are high. Jesus approaches the graveside, the corpse of his friend, Lazarus.

And we're told, in verse 35, if you look there, that Jesus wept. It's the shortest verse in the whole Bible. Just two words.

You see, with death, God is reduced to tears. He feels the pain of death.

[4 : 37] Jesus weeps about death. But actually, his reaction is far stronger than just tears. If you look back at verse 33, if you look there, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit, and greatly troubled.

Deeply moved in spirit, and greatly troubled. Now this is not just a kind of sentimental response. The word used, in the original Greek, can be used for the snorting of a wild animal.

Or the snorting of a war horse. And so whilst he can grieve at death, as we do, Jesus as well is absolutely furious with death.

He is outraged at death. He is indignant against it. He sees the effects of death on this world, and on his friends around him, the effects it has on families.

He sees the weeping, and he is indignant towards death. Just think for a moment about how different Jesus' reaction is, to the reaction of many that we hear in the world.

[5 : 57] Just think about the atheist reaction. The reaction that says there is no God. Or the humanist reaction. So Richard Dawkins, famous atheist, he said, In a universe of electrons and selfish genes, blind physical forces, and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky.

And you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference.

You see, at the graveside, atheism, if you push its logic, it just puts its arm around you at the graveside, and it says, oh well, some get lucky, some don't.

But do you see how Jesus is different? Jesus sees death, and he is furious with it. As God, becoming a man, he is outraged at this intruder.

Death is not just being unlucky, no, it is wrong. He is indignant with it. Growing up, I had a friend who lived on a farm, Simon was his name, and we used to go and visit this farm, and it was a lovely place to go and play, there were apple orchards outside, and lovely kind of things that you can muck around with in the fields of machinery you could play on.

[7 : 33] But there was one spot, as little boys, that we weren't allowed to play in. It was the kennel house. Because in there was Rex, the Alsatian.

I never saw Rex, but I often heard him. And he was never let out when children were around. He was a fierce brute of a dog.

And he was designed, and raised, and trained for one thing, and for one thing only. To guard the stock, and the machinery on the farm at night. He was chained up, in the kennels during the day.

You see, what you need, isn't it, and what you want to trust in, when there is the threat of an intruder, is a big, fierce dog. Not someone who just says, oh well, these things happen, shrugs their shoulders, and sort of goes back to sleep.

You need a big dog, who is angry with intruders. And Jesus shows us a God, who gives us hope, because he is indignant, towards our greatest enemy.

[8 : 42] He doesn't just shrug his shoulders, at the graveside, does he? Well, we all go there in the end, don't we? Death is a natural part of life. Some people get unlucky.

No. How dare you? He says to death. He is deeply moved, and greatly troubled. He snorts, like a wild animal. He is indignant, towards death.

He hates death. And that is the sort of person, we need, isn't it, as we face death. Someone who sees death, for what it is, and gives death, the reaction that it deserves.

And so Jesus says, that is one reason you can trust me, with your death. He is indignant, towards it. Secondly, Jesus shows us, the kind of God, who is defiant, towards death.

He is defiant, towards death. We can be angry, can't we? With death. But that, that might not change, anything actually. But Jesus, he is angry, but he goes further, than that.

[9 : 47] Notice, he prays a prayer, at the graveside. Just look at verse 43. When he said these things, he cried out, with a loud voice, Lazarus, come out.

Lazarus. I don't know, if you've been to a funeral, where the name, of the deceased person, has been called out. Can happen, can't it? It's an awkward moment.

But it does happen, people get really emotional, at a funeral, and they shout out, all sorts of things, in their grief. Funerals tend to be places, where people lose, their inhibitions, isn't it?

And so, is Jesus here, just, in his grief, just shouting out, in a reaction, Lazarus, I wish you were alive. Come out, Lazarus.

But then, we get one of the most, shocking verses, in the Bible, don't we? Verse 44, the man who had died, came out. The big claim here, is that, as Jesus shouts, it is not just, a hopeless cry, at a funeral, grief stricken, it is not, a hopeless call, but it is, a powerful command, to the dead man.

[11 : 04] It's not, an easy thing, to believe, is it? It's not easy, to believe, dead men, don't just get up, and walk, do they? You cannot, speak to a corpse, and get a response. But when Jesus shouts, it's not just, a hopeless cry, it's a powerful command.

The New Testament, speaks about, Christians, who have died, and it, describes them, with a strange phrase. It calls them, those who have, fallen asleep.

Those who've, fallen asleep. And it does that, because Jesus' voice, is so powerful, that in death, when he calls people, from death, it's as if they've, just been napping.

They've just been snoozing. And it's a command, isn't it? Come out, Lazarus. Rise and shine.

Wakey, wakey. It's been said that, had Jesus not used, the name Lazarus, then everyone in the graves, in the graveyard, would have come back to life.

And if it's true, this man, Jesus, shows us a God, who you can trust, with your death. He is indignant, he's angry, at death, and he has the power, to do something about it.

[12 : 20] To be fair, we can all get angry, with death, can't we? But all we can do, is cry out in grief. But he cries out, with a powerful command.

He's indignant, he's defiant. And thirdly and lastly, Jesus shows us, the kind of God, who is dominant, over death.

He is dominant, over death. Has Mary, just witnessed, a magic trick. Is this some kind of, Paul Daniels, David Blaine trick?

Well, we know that it isn't, because we read about, another Mary, at another gravesite, later in John's Gospel. And it's another, very similar story, in chapter 20.

You can read, again, about another grave, the grave of Jesus Christ, three days after he's executed. And it's a really, really similar scene, isn't it? There is a Mary, outside a tomb, weeping.

[13 : 24] And in chapter 20, verse 11, she is there, in John's Gospel. And then, with just one word, she realises, the dominance, of Jesus Christ, over death.

death. In one word, she turns round, he turns round, and says, Mary. The resurrected Jesus, calls to her.

And Jesus' defiance, towards death, is seen most wonderfully, isn't it? As he himself, goes to a physical death, on the cross, he rots in a tomb, for three days, and then he rises again.

He himself, dominates over death. He is the kind of God, who actually experiences, the thing that we are afraid of, and he wins.

Now, I've used this story before, but I think it illustrates the point. Just imagine, in a bizarre chain of events, that we had to kind of, stop this talk, immediately, immediately, because somehow, a wolf, from Hanwell Zoo, had escaped, and made its way down, Uxbridge Road, and it was hanging around, in Ealing Broadway.

[14 : 35] We've got to lock the door, and we've got to wait, for the RSPCA, or someone to come, and rescue us. But in a display of bravery, David Jones, gets up at the front, and he says, no, no, no, no, don't wait for the RSPCA, I'm going to get rid of the wolf.

I'm going to go out there, and I'm going to kill the wolf, myself. So it's David, versus the wolf. Sorry David. So he disappears off, he goes around the corner, and then we hear some shouting, and we hear some howling, and then there's a silence.

Who's won? We don't know, do we? The only way that we're going to know, who's won, is if either the wolf, or David, reappears around the corner.

And so when David, walks back around, and he knocks on the glass, we all know, won't we, that David has won, and that he has defeated the wolf.

And that is the wonder of the resurrection, of the Lord Jesus, isn't it? As someone has said, it isn't that, it isn't just that Jesus is alive, but that he's risen, that is wonderful.

[15 : 46] That he is back. He's back from the dead. He's back from killing the wolf. John Scott said, we live and then die, but Jesus Christ died, and then lives.

He's back. His resurrection says, you can trust me, with your death. Now, if you struggle with the validity, of the resurrection, just think about the testimony, of the apostles, who preached, the

message of the resurrection.

In the 1970s, dozens of high-ranking officials, from the Nixon administration, were shamed, by now what's known as, the Watergate scandal, isn't it?

And it's come to symbolise, the investigation that took place, on allegations of phone bugging, and government cover-ups. And it led to Nixon's resignation, didn't it, in 1974.

Now, Charles Colton, was special counsel, to the president, for public liaison, during that time. And afterwards, he said, I know that the resurrection, is a fact, and Watergate, proved it to me.

[17:04] How do you make that connection? He says, well, twelve men testified, that they'd seen Jesus, raised from the dead. Then they proclaimed that truth, for forty years, never once denying it.

Every one of them, was beaten, tortured, stoned, and put in prison. And they would not, have endured that, if it weren't true. Watergate, on the other hand, embroiled twelve, of the most powerful men, in the world, and they couldn't, keep a lie, for twelve weeks.

Sorry, three weeks. You're telling me, that twelve apostles, could keep a lie, that they knew was a lie, for forty years? Absolutely impossible, Colton says.

The resurrection, of Jesus Christ, is unprecedented, isn't it? And men, and women, will often die, for things, that they believe in. But to knowingly die, for something, that you know, to be a lie, is unheard of, isn't it?

Somebody asked me recently, what is it, that sets Christianity, apart from all other religions? Well, the answer is simple, it is the resurrection, among other things.

[18:17] That Jesus, is defiant, and, he is dominant, over our greatest enemy. And so, let me ask you, as we close, who can you trust, with your own death?

Christopher Hitchens, another atheist, he's died now, hasn't he? Before his death, he said, I don't trust, false consolations, of religion. I trust, in medical science, and the support, of friends and family, he said.

That's who he trusted, with his death. And friends and family, they are good things, aren't they? But they are not enough. When we face, our own death, and the death, of those that we love, there is only so much, that friends and family, and doctors can do, isn't there?

And there will come a moment, where what all of those, people and things can do, isn't enough. But Jesus comes to us here, and he says to us, you can trust me, completely, with your death.

We live, and then we die, but Jesus Christ, died, and then he lived. And he is indignant, he is furious, at death.

[19:35] He doesn't just sit back, and say, oh well, just stick the telly on, and forget about it. And he is defiant. He gives not just, a hopeless cry of grief, but a powerful command, to raise his people, from the dead.

And finally, he is dominant. Jesus is the big dog, isn't he? Who kills off the wolf. And so he says, you can, trust me in your death.

Let us pray.