

John 11:1-44

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[0 : 00] Turn with me to John chapter 11. John chapter 11. And we're going to look at the first 44 verses.

The last time I was in this chapter and spent some work in here was for Stuart Cashman's funeral. And it's one of those chapters, isn't it? It's a very poignant chapter. And so let's turn to God, let's pray and ask for God's help.

Our Father in heaven, we come to a chapter which is so familiar and yet brings us such wonderful comfort. And we pray that your Holy Spirit would use your words to comfort those who mourn tonight.

And to strengthen our faith. That we might know the hope of the Lord Jesus Christ who is the resurrection and the life. In his name we pray. Amen.

Martha said to him, Yes indeed Lord, I have personally come to this faith that you are the Messiah, the Son of God.

[1 : 11] You are the one who is coming into the world. Typically Martha put her faith into words. Her sister Mary put her faith into wordless action.

She came and fell at Jesus' feet. Faith. Her brother was still in the tomb. In fact he was not only still in the tomb, his body was well on the way to dissolution.

He'd been in the tomb four days. He was not only dead, he was twice dead you could say. Dead beyond recall.

Yes Lord, I've come to this personal faith. That you are the Christ, the Son of God. Mary came and fell at his feet.

And I think that is what this chapter is all about. I think this is what that story, this story is all about.

[2 : 18] It is about trusting the Lord Jesus when the chips are down. It is about trusting the Lord Jesus in the face of death. He wasn't there when we needed him.

Do you still trust him? Yes Lord. I've come to this personal faith. Lazarus is still in the tomb. Jesus says, I am the resurrection. Do you believe it? Yes Lord. I've come to this personal faith. Nothing has happened. Mary is still consumed with tears. And she goes to the tomb from the house. And it is assumed that she's going to weep there.

The two sisters are just consumed with grief. Because of the death of their beloved brother. Yes Lord. I believe. That is my personal faith.

[3 : 19] The chips are down. They are well walked into the ground. I'm standing in the face of death. But I'm still trusting. The story comes in three parts.

The first part is Jesus delaying. It says, let me read it to you. Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister.

Mary and Lazarus. So therefore. So therefore. When he heard that Lazarus was ill. He stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

That is odd isn't it? That is really strange. Jesus having loved them. They're in dire need. Therefore he didn't come to them.

He loved them. Therefore he stayed where he was. He didn't go to them. And what we see here is that the delaying. And the apparent absence of the Lord.

[4 : 24] Is part of his love for us. Didn't they look back. After this chapter. After this incident. And say. Now that we've got Lazarus back again.

Now that we've seen with our own eyes. That Jesus really is the resurrection. And the life. Now that Jesus really raises from the dead. Now that we've been through all of that.

And out of the other side. It was worth waiting those days. Wasn't it? Jesus says to them. Doesn't he? He says. This sickness.

That's what he describes. The death of their brother. This sickness. Is not unto death. But for the glory of God. And because. Mary. And Martha.

And Lazarus. Were loved by Jesus. He wanted them. To see the glory of God. In this sickness. Therefore he stayed for two days. There's Jesus delaying.

[5 : 22] The second part of the story. Is Jesus arriving. He gets near to the village of Bethany. Where they live. But he doesn't go and visit in their house. Again.

That's really strange. Isn't it? He stays outside the village. Which in itself is a remarkable thing. You would have thought. He would go straight away to be with them. In their bereavement.

He waits. He waits. But no. He waits outside. And the word gets to them. Because there has to be that little moment of decision.

He wasn't there when we needed him. Do we still trust him? I don't know if it's the best way to put it or not. But they have got to decide.

They've got to decide. They've got to make the effort of coming. And committing their cause to Jesus. They've got to express their trust and confidence in him.

[6 : 20] And that's the middle part of the story. He comes. And he waits to see how they will react. Of course he knows how they will react. But humanly speaking.

He comes to see how they would react. And here comes. I'm busy. Bustling Martha. Hurrying along. And she says. Lord if you'd been here.

My brother would not have died. So typical of Martha. She's got a recipe. Hasn't she? She's got a solution. For the situation.

Even now. Oh God. I know that whatever you ask. The Lord will answer. So what are you going to do about it? Jesus says.

Your brother will rise again. She says. Of course I know that he'll rise again. I know that the last day is coming. And the dead are kept safe until that last day. And then I'll see him again.

[7 : 15] No says Jesus. That's not what I meant. I'm not talking about the last day. I am the resurrection. Do you believe that?

You see he waits. He waits until they come out. So there's this little test. There's this opportunity. To express personal faith. That's Martha. Mary comes rushing to Jesus too.

Eyes filled with tears. And she falls at Jesus' feet. It's over to you Lord. It's over to you Lord.

That's the middle part of the story. Jesus delaying. Jesus arriving. And then there's the last part of the story. Which is Jesus triumphing. Can you see how the story works itself out?

[8 : 20] Delaying. Arriving. Triumphing. Where have you put him? Come and see. Take away the stone.

Jesus says. No, no, no. Says Martha. Martha knows about all these things. She's busy. Bustling. Practical Martha. Lord if you take away the stone.

There's going to be the father and mother of a stench. It will stink. He's been dead four days in the Middle East. He's been in the tomb four days. His body will start to have decomposed. Take away the stone.

Jesus says. You see. Jesus. wants them to know that this man is not only dead. But doubly dead. And therefore he makes them stand in the stench of death.

The stench of corruption. Jesus says. Father, I know at the time you heard me. Is that interesting? I know at the time you heard me.

[9 : 24] That tells us, doesn't it? That Jesus has been praying before he came to Mary and Martha. What was he doing for those two days? Committing the whole matter to his father.

I know that you heard me because you always hear me. But I said this so that these people may believe that you sent me. And then he says these words.

Lazarus, come forth. And Lazarus came forth. He who was dead came forth.

Somebody has said of me that he had to use the name Lazarus. Because if he hadn't used the name Lazarus. All the dead of the graves would have come out. Jesus triumphing.

The sisters implicitly said, didn't they? Where were you when we needed you? Where were you when we needed you? So let's try and answer that question in the rest of our time together.

[10 : 26] Where was Jesus when they were looking and longing for him to come? First of all, this passage shows us that Jesus was in charge.

He was in charge. He knew why the sickness had come. He knew how long it would last. And he knew what would happen next.

He says the reason why this sickness has come. This sickness is not unto death. It is for the glory of God. And that the Son of God may be glorified.

And he knew the reason. He knew the purpose behind it all. He knew how long it would last. He stayed two days where he was. And then he said to the disciples, Lazarus has died.

That isn't what he said, is it? What did he say? He said, Lazarus has fallen asleep. Because that is what death is to Jesus.

[11 : 33] To us, it's not falling asleep, is it? Because we cannot wake our beloved dead. But to Jesus, death is sleep.

It is dropping off in order to be brought back again. I love that. When I ring my mum and dad and I ring home. And my mum answers the phone.

And I say, how's dad? And she will say, he's just dropped off. I'll call him. And then I hear the words, Alan. And he groggily comes to the phone.

That's the picture. He's just dropped off. We see it elsewhere in the Gospel, isn't it? The picture of the little girl. She's 12 years old.

And she's died. And Jesus goes into that room. And he takes her by the hand. I love that. He took her by the hand. He took her dead hand in his hand.

[12 : 36] And he said she's only asleep. I very, very occasionally have to wake Phoebe up in the morning. Jesus took her by the hand.

I have to shake her. Lazarus, I am the resurrection and the life. He is dead. I am going to wake him out of sleep.

He's in charge of the whole thing. Why has he come? And how long will it last? And what will the end be? Why has it come?

It has come for the glory of God. How long will it last? He's waiting two days. And whatever time it took on his journey. And what will be the end? I will wake him out of his sleep.

Jesus is totally in charge. And he's speaking to us. He's speaking to you. When you are in that same situation.

[13 : 36] With that intense word of comfort tonight. It is all purposeful. Because the thing that bugs us. And the thing that bugs you.

When the chips are down. Is that you can't see why. You cannot see why. There is no sense in it. I can't see any purpose in it.

Neither can we. But he can. This sickness is not under death. It is for the glory of God.

So that the Son of God is glorified. We love Psalm 23. We've sung it a few times recently. The words are so familiar aren't they?

They slip off your tongue. And we don't ask often. What do they mean? And so the good shepherd in Psalm 23.

[14 : 31] He leads us doesn't he? In paths of righteousness. For his name's sake. Have you ever asked yourself. What is a path of righteousness? Righteousness. The word righteousness has the same meaning.

All the way through the Bible. Of course in different contexts. Different contexts. It's got different shades of meaning obviously. But it's got one basic meaning. All the way through the Bible.

The word righteousness means. What is right with God. Can you remember that? Righteousness means. What is right with God. He leads me.

In paths. Of righteousness. I don't see the sense of them. But they are right with God. Jesus is in charge. The second thing about Jesus.

In times of trouble. Is Jesus is available. He came to them. He came to them. Where they were. He came to listen to Martha's solution.

[15 : 35] And to gently comfort Mary. As she laid his feet. Different though they were. He came to be with them. But he came in such a way.

Do you remember. To recalcate. To excite their faith. Now that I've come. Are you going to trust me? Was there a build up of resentment?

In their minds. It sounds a little bit like that. Doesn't it? In Martha's words. If you had been here Lord. My brother would not have died. There's a note isn't there.

Of accusation. There's a little bit of resentment. It seems. Are you. Going to overcome. Your spirit of resentment. And replace it with a spirit of trust Martha. And come to me now that I'm here.

And deal with your situation. That's often the really hard bit isn't it? When everything in us. Wants to go into the corner. And chew the fat.

[16:34] And tell ourselves. How awful life is. And grumble to ourselves. In our hearts. The answer is to get out of the corner. And come to the Lord Jesus. And the third thing about Jesus.

In our times of trouble. Is this miracle. Jesus was moved. I suppose isn't it. If I passed. Pencils and papers around tonight.

And I asked you. What is the great miracle of John 11. We would write. Wouldn't we. The great miracle of John 11. Is that Lazarus was raised from the dead. But I don't think it is. Really. Jesus is the son of God.

He's the son of God. It is no bother. Is it. For Jesus to raise. The dead. If you did. That would be an incredible miracle. But for Jesus.

He is the son of God. It stands to reason. Isn't it. That if Jesus is the word made flesh. He is the Lord of all life. And all power.

[17:36] No. The real miracle. Is the shortest verse in the Bible. Isn't it. John 11. And verse. 36. Jesus.

35. Jesus. Wept. Jesus. Wept. When I was growing up. Every Sunday morning. In Swansea. All the children of the church.

You had to go up to the front. For the children's talk. And there you had to recite a verse. Alright. And. Some. Children. Put it on their hand. If my father was away preaching. I would always recite. John 11. 35. Jesus. Wept. It's the shortest verse in the Bible. Well. It's an astonishing verse isn't it. I can't really fully understand it.

And neither can you. Jesus knew that he was going to raise Lazarus from the dead. He knew that. He would raise him from the dead in two minutes more. And everybody's tears would be turned to laughter and joy.

[18:39] But before he does that for them. He identifies with their sorrows. Isn't that marvelous? He identifies with your sorrows.

He is one with them in their grief. He is greatly disturbed in his spirit. And deeply moved. Jesus wept. Jesus is in charge.

Jesus is available. Jesus weeps. And then of course Jesus triumphs. He brought the whole thing to a triumphant conclusion. He brought Lazarus out of the tomb.

I spoke to my brother this week. He'd been taking a funeral. And he'd begun the funeral. By reading the story of the raising of the widow's son. In the town of Nain. Where Jesus stopped the funeral. And raised the son back to life. And gave him to his mother. It's a shocking way to begin a funeral. But then later on he read about the dying thief.

[19:50] Do you remember the dying thief? And what does Jesus say to the dying thief? Jesus says today you will be with me in paradise. Jesus is not going to come and raise the people whom you love who are dead.

Jesus is not going to do that. He doesn't disturb funerals anymore. But Jesus does an even better thing. He does a far greater thing. A far better thing. If only you will realise it.

Today. Today you will be with me in paradise. Not back to this tired old life. Not back to this veil of tears.

But on. And on to the glory. That is Jesus triumphed for us. So trust him. And that is.

The Jesus. Who is at the centre of their faith. Martha said. Yes. Indeed Lord. I have personally come to this faith. That you are the Messiah. The son of God.

[20:53] The one who is coming into the world. Martha's personal faith. You are the Messiah. That is. You are sufficient for every need. Because you are the one who has been anointed by God.

Which is what Messiah means. You have been given by God. Every potentiality. And every power. Every gift. And every grace. Every supply. And every richness. You are the Messiah.

You are God's king. You have it all. You have it all. For me. And I trust you. And you are the son of God. You are the one who has all power. To do in heaven and earth.

Anything you want. And anything you please. I can't. But you can. And you are the one that is here. And you are the one who is coming into the world.

And you are here. And you are with us. Yes Lord I believe. I believe. I believe that you are the all sufficient Messiah. The all powerful. And the all present Jesus.

[21 : 55] And then there is Mary. And she just came. And she fell at his feet. And said Lord over to you. Mary and Martha.

Martha believing that I believe you are the Messiah. The son of God. Mary handing herself over to the Lord Jesus. And I think those two things.

Are really the two essential sides of faith. What is faith? What is faith?

The shorter catechism tells us isn't it? It is a resting. And a relying. On the Lord Jesus. And so Martha. She comes.

And she tells us. What she believes. In the moment of trouble. And so in the moment of trouble.

How do you respond by faith? You respond by saying. What you believe.

[22 : 53] I believe the creed. I believe. You said it this morning. Isn't it? I believe in God. The father almighty.

I believe in Jesus Christ. His only son. Our Lord. That on the third day. He was raised from the dead. I believe that. God's truth. Is our strength. I believe that you are the Messiah.

So instead of rehearsing to ourselves this week. Our troubles. Rehearse to yourself. The truth. That Jesus is the Messiah. Messiah. And a very present Messiah.

And then you go to the other side of faith. The faith. That trusts. The faith. That entrusts. Ourselves to him.

All my needs. Into your hands. May God grant us. Such faith. Let us pray.