

The dead man encounters Jesus * John 11
November 13, 2022 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

When I began here at Langford, it never occurred to me that I would conduct so many funerals. Three very special people died in the first year and then five the next and then two then next and then five the next and now I've helped families to lay their loved ones to rest twenty times. Twenty five times. That means I've spent a lot of time in the valley of the shadow of death.

And I'll tell you, there is no better passage for that time than the passage that we're going to look at today. John chapter 11, Jesus and Lazarus.

John chapter 11 is the perfect passage because it aches with the pain that all of us feel in the face of death. We've all been at the graveside, we all know the pain of loss. John chapter 11 acknowledges that and meets us there in the pain. But John chapter 11 also holds out hope to us that the grave is not the end of the story. John chapter 11 gives us the hope we need to face death, whether our own or that of a loved one, with Christ-like confidence.

Join me in John chapter 11 and I'll show you why I say that. John chapter 11.

Now as John chapter 11 opens, we meet a man named Lazarus and Lazarus was sick. Do you remember the sisters Mary and Martha? Turns out they have a brother – Lazarus – and they all lived together in the town of Bethany not far from Jerusalem. Lazarus, like his sisters, was a good friend to Jesus, and so when he got sick, the sisters sent to Jesus saying "Lord, the one you love is sick."

Now verse 4, 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."

Just like with the blind man, Jesus knows that what's about to happen will reveal the glory of who He is to all those who are willing to see it.

5 Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

6 Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.

Now that's kind of weird. If Jesus loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus, why did He not drop everything and head straight for their home instead of waiting where He was for two more days? We'll find out in a minute. When the time was right, He said:

And 7 Then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

8 "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?"

That's true – the last time He was in Judea, Jesus was very nearly stoned to death (John 10:31) but Jesus is not going to let the threat of stoning stop Him from accomplishing what God has sent Him to do.
Verse 9 -

9 Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light.

10 It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light."

Jesus has got a job to do and He's going to do that job, no matter who opposes Him.

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."

Now, the disciples, thinking on strictly human terms say: 12 His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." 'You don't need to be his alarm clock to wake him up.' 'Surely the sleep will heal him!'

13 Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

14 So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, 15 and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

Now the news of Lazarus' death is a bombshell all on its own, but Jesus goes on to imply that he is dead because they had lingered. If they had rushed to Bethany, maybe their friend would not have died but – Jesus says – I'm we didn't, because if we had, you'd have been deprived of the opportunity to see the greatest miracle that Jesus accomplished before His own resurrection. Jesus has power over life and death so He's not concerned about Lazarus; He's more concerned His disciples see who He is and deepen their faith in Him.ⁱ So He says 'let us go to him.'

16 Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

Weird thing to say unless you realize that if Jesus goes back to Judea, then His life is in danger, and if His life is in danger then His disciples' lives are in danger, and so Thomas seems to say 'well, let's go, even if it means we end up dead like Lazarus.'

So off they went to Bethany, which is about a two days' walk.ⁱⁱ

17 On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

18 Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem

19 and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.

(Evidently Mary and Martha's family was influential enough that people from the big city would come out to grieve with them over Lazarus's death. They had walked essentially the distance from here to the Tim Hortons up the road to come out to be with Mary and Martha in their grief).

20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

21 "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

22 But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

Put yourself in Martha's shoes right now. Consider the storm of emotions that she is feeling inside. She's watched her brother waste away in a matter of days, knowing full well that they have a good friend who can heal the lame and give sight to the blind. If Jesus comes, surely He will heal her brother. And yet He doesn't and so now her brother is gone.

And I think that what she says here reflects that disappointment. 'If You had been here Jesus, he would not have died!' She takes this sorrow, this frustration, this disappointment that she feels and lays it

honestly at Jesus' feet. And notice, Jesus doesn't scold her for it. He knows that this is how we pray when we are hurting inside.

But notice too, that Martha is not grieving hopelessly here; yes, she is hurting and yes she is honestly laying out her pain before the Lord but she is doing it from a place of faith. 'Even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask.' She is convinced that Jesus can still bring something good out of this sad situation.

In response to that, 23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

24 Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Clearly Martha has been paying attention in synagogue. She knows that the OT points to a resurrection at the end of the age (Daniel 12; Psalm 17:15, 49:15; Isaiah 25:8, 26:19; Ezekiel 37:1-10 all point in that direction) and so she is convinced that she will see her brother again on the last day.

But Jesus isn't going to make her wait that long.

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies;

26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

This is one reason why I love this passage. Jesus lays it out so clearly and so succinctly. "I am the resurrection and the life." 'I am the power of Life over death, the triumph of life over the grave. If anyone lives believes in me, they will never truly die because in Me, death is nothing but a doorway into eternal life. And all those who have already died believing in Me, they themselves we be raised to life.'

Jesus holds this out to Martha and says 'Do you believe this?'

27 "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." (to deliver us from death and give us life).

Now this is a fascinating insight. In a time when women's education was not a priority, Martha proves to be more insightful than all the men and all the disciples put together. This is the most profound statement of theological truth in all of God's Gospel. Jesus is the Messiah, sent by God, to make good on all that He had promised. You know, sometimes, Martha gets a bad rap – over in Luke, she's the 'busy lady who's too busy to sit at Jesus feet.' I think she's sat at Jesus' feet long enough now to realize exactly who He is. And she believes in Him.

28 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."

29 When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him.

30 Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.

31 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. (So now there's a crowd gathering – just keep that in mind).

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."

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

One of the most interesting things about this account is that it reflects the personalities of Mary and Martha that we read about elsewhere in the Bible. You get the sense that Martha is the left-brained sister; she's logical, rational, analytical and you see that I think in the way that she hosts Jesus over in Luke, in her talk with Jesus here. Mary, on the other hand, is the right brained one – the emotional one - she's at His feet and crying.

And yet for all their differences, they say the very same thing. 'Lord, if You have been here, my brother would not have died.'

And again, Jesus meets her where she's at. He doesn't scold her for a lack of faith. He meets her in her pain. He knew that Martha needed to process what has happened analytically. He also knew that Mary needed His shoulder to cry on. And as He stood with Mary, contemplating death, he was 'deeply moved in spirit and troubled.' He was affected by the sister's loss, by the loss of a close friend like Lazarus.

34 "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied.

And they brought Him to the place and there at the graveside,

35 Jesus wept.

That right there is the shortest verse in the whole Bible, but one of the most profound. Jesus is not unmoved by death. Jesus is not indifferent to loss. He knows the pain of it. He knows the sorrow that it brings. He knows what it's like to lose a loved one and when we mourn, He is right there with us, deeply moved in spirit and troubled. Unlike us though, He can do something about it.

36 Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

37 But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

They're thinking the same thing that the sisters had - 'if Jesus was so powerful, why didn't He use that power to keep Lazarus alive?'

38 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance.

39 "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." (Ever logical Martha).

40 Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"

41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me.

42 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."

Well, now we have our answer to the question the people were asking – ‘If Jesus was so powerful, why didn’t He use that power to keep Lazarus alive?’ Jesus didn’t use His power to keep Lazarus alive so that He could do an even greater miracle, bringing Lazarus back to life from death, and most importantly, giving them unassailable reason to trust in Him. If He can raise the dead, who wouldn’t follow Him?

Mary and Martha have both said – ‘Lord, if you had been here, our brother would not have died’ – but now Jesus says essentially – ‘If I had been here, then you would not have believed. If I had been here, I would have deprived you of the opportunity to see the power of God at work.’ And so He prays that the crowd gathered around would understand that what He was about to do was done by the power of God and was intended to move them to believe in Him.

He’s probably already talked to the Father about raising Lazarus, maybe even as early as verse 14, when He tells His disciples that Lazarus is dead. That’s why He says – ‘Thank you that You have *heard me*’ – that implies that He’s *already* prayed. Now though His prayer is that people will see and believe.

And so, 43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"

44 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."

Jesus raised the dead man to life.

45 Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him (John 11:1-45 NIV).

They saw what had happened. They understood. And they believed. That was Jesus’ point all along. He didn’t want to just SAY that He was the resurrection and the life; He wanted to prove it. And so Jesus resurrected Lazarus and gave him life again to prove that He Himself is the resurrection and the life.

Because Jesus is the resurrection and the life, He resurrected Lazarus and gave him life again.

And that’s what Jesus promises to us too when we believe in Him.

Like Martha, Jesus says to each of us ‘I am the resurrection and life. Anyone who believes in Me will live, even if he dies, and whoever lives and believe in me will never truly die. Do you believe this?’ Jesus is asking each of us.

Do you believe that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life, the power over death and the giver of eternal life? Do you believe that Jesus is the One sent by God to deliver us from sin and death and give us the eternal life?

When we believe in Jesus, He will resurrect us and give us life, just as He did for Lazarus. When we put our faith in Him, we too will one day hear His voice call out ‘Lazarus, come out!’ ‘Graham, come out!’ ‘_____’ come out!

When we put our faith in Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life, He will resurrect us and give us life.

What do we do with that knowledge? Well, three things:

1. Let it deepen your faith in the Resurrection and the Life, in Jesus. Again and again in this passage, Jesus tells us that what He does for Lazarus is meant to reveal His glory and to deepen our faith in Him. In a sense, the raising of Lazarus is an object lesson, one that anticipates Jesus' own death and resurrection and meant to deepen our faith in the One who holds the power of life and death in His hands. Let this story be fuel to fire your faith in Jesus.

2. Let Lazarus' encounter with Jesus give you courage in the face of death. I know that we don't like to talk about our own mortality, but the reality is that it's a reality that we will all face. When you believe in Jesus, He will resurrect you and give you life; let that give you hope as that day approaches. Just imagine what it will be like to rise again into a glorified body, forever free from sickness, sorrow and death.

Gary Burge said something very insightful in his commentary on John – "...Imagine for a moment Lazarus's thoughts as he laid on his 'second' deathbed some years after the death and resurrection of Jesus [Lazarus was resurrected in John 11 but he would have died again]. Normal feelings of worry and fear were there in the corners of his soul, no doubt. But he had confidence..."ⁱⁱⁱ knowing that Jesus had overpowered death at his tomb before and at His own tomb, and He would do it again. Let this passage and Jesus' identity as the Resurrection and the Life give you hope and courage in the face of death.

3. Let it give you hope in the death of a loved one. As you mourn a loved one, remember Jesus weeps with you. He knows what it like; He knows the pain of loss. He knows and can handle sweeping statements like 'Lord, why has this happened?' 'Lord, if You had done something, they would still be alive.' He knows that this is how we pray when we're hurting, even if our hearts are full of faith. Go to Him, with faith, for grace and mercy in times of need.

And know that if your loved one has put their faith in Jesus, you will see them again; they will be raised to life to live eternally with God. Again, let that give you hope and comfort.

When we believe in Jesus, He will resurrect us and give us life, just as He did for Lazarus.

Do you believe this?

Let's pray.

Carson

More important, by waiting to leave until Lazarus had died, and therefore ensuring that he could not arrive until the fourth day after the death, Jesus is accomplishing two things: he is powerfully demonstrating himself to be the resurrection and the life (v. 25), and he is powerfully establishing the faith not only of his disciples (v. 15) and of some Jews who were onlookers (v. 45), but also of the Bethany family itself (cf. notes on vv. 22ff.). As the narrative is cast, the delay is for the good of all concerned, including Lazarus, Mary and Martha.

Rather, they are words of grief and of faith: she is confident that if Jesus had been present while her brother lay ill, Jesus would have healed him (11:21-22).

When Jesus asks Martha Do you believe this?, he is not asking if she believes that he is about to raise her brother from the dead, but if her faith can go beyond quiet confidence that her brother will be resurrected at the last day to personal trust in Jesus as the resurrection and the life, the only person who can grant eternal life and promise the transformation of resurrection. If she answers positively, the raising of Lazarus becomes a paradigm, an acted parable of the life-giving power of Jesus. (v25).

Life Lessons Stanley

11:14, 15 — “Lazarus is dead, and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe.”

Jesus was glad that He was not present with them at Lazarus’s death because it provided Him the perfect opportunity to mature their faith and teach them about His resurrection power. God is far more concerned with growing our trust in Him and deepening our relationship with Him than with making us comfortable. Adversity can be a bridge to a deeper relationship with the Lord, if we will trust that He can work every detail of our lives—even the bad ones—together for good (Rom. 8:18, 28; 2 Cor. 4:16–18).

Life Lessons

11:37 — “Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind man, have kept this man also from dying?”

Yes, Jesus could have kept Lazarus from dying, but in His wisdom, He chose to do something far better. He did not spare His friends’ great grief because it benefited them more in the end to witness His power over death (Rom. 8:18).

When I began here at Langford, it never occurred to me that I would do as many funerals as I have. In the first year alone, we lost three very special people here in Sharon and Drew and Jean.

As hard as it was though and as painful as the losses were to you, there’s a sense in which I’m grateful for that experience. Because right off the bat, I drove home for me the point that we’re not playing

around here when it comes to church. These are life and death issues that are at stake. I know that it's no fun to think about losing a loved one, even less to think about your own mortality but these are the issues that are at stake.

When I began my ministry here at Langford, it never occurred to me that I would do so many funerals. I think I'm up around twenty five now and I'll tell you, that experience has shaped how I think about death and funerals.

ⁱ "But for Christ it was more important to conquer death than to cure disease. He showed his love for his friend not by healing him but by calling him back from the grave. Instead of a remedy for his illness, he offered him the glory of rising from the dead." Peter Chrysologus, Sermon 63:1-2, quoted in *John* (ACCS) 11:3.

"All physicians wear themselves out for their patient lest he die. But Lazarus's physician was waiting for his death in order to show his victory over death." Ephrem the Syrian, Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron 17.3, quoted in *John* (ACCS) 11:14.

ⁱⁱ Ben Witherington, *John's Wisdom*, 202.

ⁱⁱⁱ Gary Burge, *John* (NIVAC), 329