

The Death of Lazarus
Pastor Ty Blackburn
John 11:1-16
September 8, 2013

Please turn with me in your Bibles to John 11. I was wrestling with what to preach on this morning. In anticipation of the day, I considered a number of different passages and topics, and finally realized that the 30th anniversary celebration is about where God has brought us from, celebrating that, and also where we are today. And where we are today is, Sunday-by-Sunday we work through the Gospel of John, so I thought we'd go back to the next passage in the Gospel of John. We've been in it now for about three years, and we're in John 11:1 today, 11:1-16, we're going to cover a lot of territory for us in these 16 verses this morning.

It is the story of the death of Lazarus and its impact on his two sisters, Mary and Martha. It occurred to me only yesterday that the first Sunday I preached in this church, in view of the call of the possibility of becoming the pastor was on May 9, 1993. It was Mother's Day, and I preached on Luke 10:38-42, the subject of Mary and Martha. Which they are not a whole lot in the Bible, but there they are in Luke 10, and here they are in John 11, so the Lord kind of encouraged me with that, how He is at work.

So we are going to read John 11:1-16. We're going to look at this story and we're going to consider really why Jesus did what He did, why He said what He said, and what that speaks to us today about our deepest needs.

*John 11:1-16 ~ Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 It was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. 3 So the sisters sent word to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." 4 But when Jesus heard this, He said, "This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it." 5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 So when He heard that he was sick, He then stayed two days longer in the place where He was. 7 Then after this He *said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." 8 The disciples *said to Him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone You, and are You going there again?" 9 Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of*

*this world. 10 But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.” 11 This He said, and after that He *said to them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep.” 12 The disciples then said to Him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.” 13 Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of literal sleep. 14 So Jesus then said to them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, 15 and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him.” 16 Therefore Thomas, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, so that we may die with Him.”*

Let’s pray.

Father, as we come to Your word, we are always mindful of our complete poverty spiritually. We need Your grace, we need Your Spirit to illuminate this word that Your Spirit has inspired, that You would illuminate it in our minds and our hearts. That You would teach us, and show us the glory of Your Son, Jesus. We pray in His name, Amen.

Now in this passage, I want us to organize our thoughts around four points this morning. To help our memory, they are all going to begin with the letter R. We are going to talk about an intimate *relationship*, an urgent *request*, an astonishing *response*, and then a glorious *reason*.

1) An Intimate Relationship:

So an intimate relationship, the first thing, as we look at this narrative, this story that God has inspired to be put in His word. This account of a real event that happened of course, but is told in a unique and specific way, the Spirit of God uttering every single word of Scripture. We see some things about the story that really stand out to us. The first thing is that you see the intimate relationship between Jesus, and Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus. That there is a special relationship between Jesus and this family. We know that He was with them in Luke 10:38-42, in the house. That is when Martha was busy with so many things, remember preparing the food? The disciples are there, she’s just had a bunch of people come into her house. She is busy preparing the meal, and her sister Mary is sitting listening to Jesus teach, not helping. Remember Martha comes to Jesus basically saying, “Lord, do You see this? Do You see what I’m dealing with? My sister is always preoccupied with other things instead of doing what needs to be done. So straighten her out,” and she thinks He is going to do that because

everybody needs a good meal, right? But Jesus says, “No, Martha, you are worried about so many things. Mary has chosen the good part which cannot be taken away from her.” That is, she had an opportunity to sit at the feet of Jesus, or to cook a meal. What do you do? You sit at the feet of Jesus.

So it is that family, and apparently He had made a habit of, maybe when He was in Jerusalem, of staying there. Bethany is two miles outside of Jerusalem, and so this close relationship has developed, and you see it in the text emphasized by the fact that Jesus is described as loving Lazarus and his sisters four different times.

Verse 3.

John 11:3 ~ So the sisters sent word to Him, saying, “Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.”

Verse 5.

John 11:5 ~ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

Verse 11.

John 11:11 ~ This He said, and after that He *said to them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep;...

The word translated ‘friend’ is actually the same word in Verse 3 for ‘love’. It is the word ‘*philos*’. “Our beloved Lazarus,” is basically what it says. “Our friend Lazarus, our beloved friend has fallen asleep.” And also in Verse 36, later in the story when Jesus weeps at the tomb when He gets there. He weeps, He is moved deeply in His heart because of His affection for this family. The folks see Him, tears streaming down our Lord’s face, and they say, “Behold how He loved him.”

So they had an intimate relationship and this is even heightened by the fact that, when you look at the way that John tells the story, he makes kind of a proleptic reference to Mary’s anointing of Jesus. That is he puts the cart before the horse. He is going to tell us about this in Chapter 12. We are going to hear the story of Mary anointing Jesus in Chapter 12, but John can’t help but go ahead and tell us in Verse 2.

John 11:2 ~ It was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair,...

Now why does he do that? I think one reason is he knows that his audience knows about Mary wiping the Lord's feet with her hair, and anointing Him with oil. Do you remember what Jesus said in Matthew 26, when this event is told in Matthew's Gospel? "There will be no place where My Gospel is preached that what this woman has done will not be spoken of." So here we have it fulfilled. John writing the last Gospel probably around 85 A.D. As much as 25 or 30 years after Luke's Gospel. As much as 40 or 45 years after Matthew and Mark wrote their Gospels. So the Gospels are out there, that story is out there, and he knows everybody knows about Mary. I think in a way, he engages his audience. "Oh, this is that Mary. This is that woman who loved her Savior so much that she wiped His feet with her hair. She was the one who understood what was happening, more than His disciples did." She was anointing Him for burial. It is this Mary. How He loved her, and her sister, and her brother, and how she loved Him. That is the relationship that is described here. An intimate relationship.

2) An Urgent Request:

Secondly, an urgent request, the second point. An urgent request. Verse 3, Mary and Martha, in their predicament, send a messenger. Perhaps it is a servant, perhaps it is a dear friend, they send someone with a message to Jesus. They say basically, "Go find Jesus and tell Him this: 'Behold, he whom You love is sick.'" There is an emergency. In fact, the sickness is emphasized by the fact the word '*sick*' occurs five times in the first six verses, emphasizing that Lazarus is ill. The intimacy of the friendship actually results in, they don't even make the request formally. Look at that, they don't say, "Please come." This says something about their relationship too. "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." All they have to do is say he is sick. That is the same as asking, "Come." It is like if you find out that somebody in your family, or some dear friend of yours is near death, or in a serious predicament, a car accident, or an illness that you haven't heard about, what do you do? You get to them as soon as you can. So they expect Jesus to come because this urgent request doesn't need to be spoken. "You just tell Him that the one He loves is sick, and we know He is going to come."

The need is great, the situation is dire, and it calls for immediate action. Time is of the essence. They see their brother wasting away and they know the One who can save Him. They send to Him, and they know that Jesus has this special relationship with Lazarus. "Certainly, He will come." So you have this intimate relationship, and you have an urgent request.

3) An Astonishing Response:

Then you have, thirdly, an astonishing response, and the text, the way God has caused John to write this, He is calling forth astonishment. He wants us to be surprised by what Jesus does, and what He does is surprising. Look what He says in Verse 6. We are going to look at what Jesus did and what He says because what He did and what He said are both astonishing.

John 11:6 ~ So when He heard that he was sick, He then stayed two days longer in the place where He was.

He did not move. There was no immediate action. I think they assumed when they sent the messenger that not only would he deliver the message, but Jesus would hasten back with the messenger. “He’ll drop what He is doing and come.” Jesus doesn’t drop what He is doing, and in fact, we might think, “If John was trying to explain this, he would say, ‘Well, Jesus was so busy, there were so many people that needed to be healed, He stayed on where He was ministering.’” John tells us nothing about what Jesus is doing. Now I believe everything He is doing, every moment of His life, was glorifying His Father. He was healing people, He was teaching, there is no question He was not doing important things, but John doesn’t tell us about that because he wants us to feel the force of this urgent request from these folks that had this intimate relationship with Him, and then see, and be astonished by Jesus pausing. In a decided and deliberate way, He waits two days.

The language in the original is even more emphatic than I think it comes out in the English. Really Verse 6 could be translated like this because it basically, when it says, “So when He heard...” In Verse 7, “Then after this...” “He said to His disciples...” In reality, that could be translated, it has two different words there that they translate with one English word, ‘*after this*’. “Then after this...” Really it is like this: “Then afterward, after this,” is the force in the Greek. “Then afterward, after this...” The idea is, after those two days. He is wanting you to see the separation of time. “After He heard.” “Then afterward...” Then He finally says, “Let’s go to Judea.”

So what Jesus did was astonishing, but what Jesus said is also astonishing when you think about it from Mary and Martha’s perspective. What Jesus said, He says in Verse 4:

John 11:4 ~ ...“This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it.”

Now you and I know the result of what is going to happen in this passage, but we have to step back for a moment and think about it from the perspective of people who don't know what is going to happen—the first-time readers, or Mary and Martha. They send a messenger to Jesus expecting that he is going to bring Jesus back because of the relationship. “We are sure Jesus will come.” I mean, the guy is going to be tired, He's been going two days probably at least to find Jesus, and he is going to be slow. Jesus might get ahead of him coming back, but what they get, maybe four days later after they send him, the messenger comes back alone. He gives them this message, and it is possible that Lazarus was already dead when they get the message. It is possible that they got the message right before Lazarus died, but the messenger comes back. Jesus says what He says in Verse 4 to the messenger in the presence of His disciples. ***“This sickness is not to end in death,...***

So now put yourself in Mary and Martha's place. They are sitting there nursing their brother. I mean, Martha is probably doing most of the heavy lifting. You know, giving him the herbs and the other things that medicinally at that time in history were effective. Mary is probably sitting there praying with him, talking with him, encouraging him. Can you hear Mary saying, “Lazarus, hold on. We sent for the Master. We sent for Him. He loves you. He is coming. Hold on.” Martha the same thing, just waiting, looking out the window. “It is time, Jesus should be back now.” Then she sees the servant come, but no Jesus. Then the servant comes and says, and gives the message, and then maybe within hours Lazarus dies. ***“This sickness is not to end in death,...*** and yet then it ends, at least temporarily, but for them it ends in death. You see them beside his bed, kneeled to kiss their brother and feel the coldness of his brow because he is gone.

And four days pass before Jesus shows up. He could have done so much. Think about, even in John's Gospel, He didn't have to come. He could have done what He did in John 4:48-53, remember when the nobleman comes to Jesus from Capernaum? The nobleman meets Jesus and says, “Jesus, I need you to come. My child is sick, my son is sick,” and Jesus says, “Go your way, he is healed.” The nobleman goes back and he meets his servants on the way. His servants tell him about such and such a time, the fever broke, or whatever is wrong with him. He suddenly got well, and the nobleman, it says in John 4, knew that it was exactly the moment Jesus said, “Go your way, your son lives.” He could have spoken the word, but He did not. He could have gotten back there, He did not. John wants us to feel the weight of that. Why? This is astonishing. What is the Savior up to?

4) A Loving Reason:

And then we come, fourthly, to the most important point—a loving reason. Why did Jesus do what He did? Why did He say what He said? Verse 5 tells us because ...***Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.*** That's the reason He did it. He didn't send the word of healing. He didn't hurry back. It's because He loved them. In fact, it's clear in the text, Chapter 6 in its relationship to Verse 5, I wish that the NAS—I'm using the New American Standard—they update their translations every now and then, and they messed it up when they updated this. The King James gets it right, here, and it's the only translation of this particular verse that gets it right, because it leaves the word *therefore* in it. In 1995, before they updated the NAS, it had the word *therefore* there too, because the word *therefore* is there. It says really not "so when He heard". It says, "When therefore He heard that he was sick, he stayed two days longer." The *therefore* begs the question: What does the *therefore* relate to? It just said:

John 11:5 ~ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

So therefore, when He heard, He stayed.

John 11:6 ~ He heard that he was sick, He then stayed...

Do you see that? The reason He stayed was because He loved them. God is so good to us. He is so loving and so kind that often, maybe most of the time, He doesn't give us what we ask for, but He gives us something far better, and that's what He's doing here. In fact, He clarifies it. Because Jesus loved them, He remained where He was, and I mentioned the word love occurs four times in the passage—in Verse 3, Verse 5, and Verse 11 (Our friend), Verse 36 (See how He loved him.) Of the four references, Verse 5 is the only one that is agape. The other three are philo, or the love of a companion, a dear friend. It means love but it's a friendship love. When it says: ***Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus*** it uses the word agape, and that is Jesus loved them with God's love which is a completely selfless love, that is, there's no selfishness in agape. It's only interested in the well-being and the blessing of the object of the love. The one who loves is seeking to bless and benefit the other person. That's what's primary in their mind. So when it says Jesus loved them, He wanted to bring the greatest possible blessing, the greatest possible good to them. That's why He stayed, is because He knew that if He stayed, and He let Lazarus die, and He let him stay in

the tomb four days, they would, as He said in Verse 4, they would see the glory of God.

He gives two things He wanted for them and He wants for us when He holds back from us what we want. He wants us to see His glory, Verse 4: ***but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it.*** And He wants us to grow in faith, Verse 15, when He says to the disciples: ***“Lazarus is dead, and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe;***

Now, the disciples all except Judas already believed. They were already saved. When He says ***...so that you may believe...*** what He’s basically saying is, “So that you may have a deeper faith and a deeper trust in Me. I’m glad for your sakes that I wasn’t there so that you may grow to understand the magnificent nature of My love for you, My power toward you, and you can trust more fully in Me.” So He says, “First of all I want you to see My glory.” The word glory, here, means to have a right estimation of, to have a proper estimate of. It means our opinion of God. That’s related to the word glory. It’s from a verb which means to think or to appraise, and one of the concepts is that you and I, our greatest problem, the greatest problem of all men is we have way too low a view of God and way too low a view of Christ, and we constantly need to have even as believers, those of you who have been born again who have come to repentance in faith and trust in Jesus Christ, even though we’ve been saved, still our greatest need today is to know more of Jesus’ glory.

My greatest need today is not to have what I think I want. I mean, I want everything to go well. I want everybody to be healthy. I want everybody to be happy. I want all the red lights to be green as I just pass through them. You kind of get excited sometimes when you get like eight or nine in a row. “Ten! Come on! Aw, almost.” We want everything to go our way, but if everything goes your way and you never encounter difficulty, you may die and end up in hell, but if you know Christ and everything goes your way, then you go through life never knowing Him more.

But if God lets difficulty come into your life, if God doesn’t give you what you want, if He loves you so much that He gives you more than you want, then He lets things come into your life. He lets the storms come and you ask Him, “Lord, stop this storm,” and the storm clouds are gathering, and you’re seeing the effect of it, and you’re feeling the weight of it and the trepidation of it, some storm in your life. Maybe it’s an illness, a potential illness, or it’s test results that you’re not sure about. It’s a diagnosis that’s positive rather than negative. There’s something there. Someone you love is taken from you.

Whatever it is, the greatest need that we have at the moment is not relief from the circumstances. The greatest need that we have is to see Jesus Christ, to see His sufficiency, to see that He is the 'I am' of this John's Gospel. *I am the bread of life. I am the Light of the world. I am the way, the truth, and the life. I'm everything that you need.* And in this situation, I mean, think about the valley that they go into, these two women who lose their brother. They're unmarried and they live with their brother. They're basically left completely helpless. There's no hope of income for these two women. They're going to be dependent upon others to care for them. Not only that but they've lost their dear brother, their brother who loves them so much. They've been disappointed by Jesus. They expected Him to come. In fact, when you read on in the story, both Mary and Martha, do you know the first thing they say to Jesus when they see Him? In Verse 21 Martha meets Him, and she says:

John 11:21 ~ ...“Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.

He talks to her and He basically says, “You all have so much more. I am the resurrection and the life. You're going to see this.” She calls Mary. Mary goes out to meet Jesus. What's the first thing she says? It's exactly the same wording. “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.” They wanted Him to bless them temporally with their circumstances to give them what they desired, but Jesus wanted to give them something far greater. He wanted them to have a right view of who He is. How many people are lost today because they haven't gone into the valley to understand that the greatest problem in all of our lives is not the people around us? The greatest problem in all of our lives is our own wicked hearts. It is our sin. That is my greatest problem, and if you have not come to understand that, then you cannot truly trust Jesus as your Savior. You can't be saved if you don't know you're lost.

So God takes you into the valley so that you see that I am so filthy. My sins are so deep. My heart is so black. There's nothing I can do. No amount of religion, no amount of effort can change it, but hallelujah, Jesus Christ has come into the world and He took our sins and He bore the wrath, and the punishment, and the guilt, and the pollution of all the sins of everyone who would ever believe. As He hung there on Calvary, God poured out His righteous, holy anger, basically visiting the hell that you and I deserve upon Jesus. He experienced it on the cross. That's why He said, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” The sky was dark. He was

under the wrath of God. He bore our sins in His body. God finished the wrath, and Jesus said, "It is finished!" and gave up His ghost, gave up His Spirit.

The veil was torn from top to bottom in the temple because now access is there. Not only that, but He gives us a perfect righteousness, and if you don't know your need to be saved, you won't ever come to trust Him. But then as a Christian, every day the Lord wants you to know He's the Prince of Peace, and He allows the waters of your life to be stirred up. How would you ever know that He's the Prince of Peace if He didn't do that? And somehow in the middle of a storm that is still swirling, the circumstances don't change so often, but Jesus speaks into your heart and says, "Peace be still." And though everything outside is going crazy, in your heart there's calm because you're resting in Jesus Christ and you know He is your friend and He is your Savior.

Everything about Jesus that we need to know, there's so much, and our views are so inadequate. We need to wake up every day saying, "Lord, what I need more than anything else is I need to feast on the Bread of life. I need to know that You're everything that I need, that You're everything that I could ever hope for," and listen, we know what happens in this story. Do you think Mary and Martha after this all happens, if they could go back, would say, "Lord, why didn't You come earlier?" Would they have changed it? That's preposterous, isn't it? I mean, this is what led Mary to pour that costly perfume on Jesus. Can you see her heart swelling up with, "You've blessed us with this amazing thing. You let us walk through the darkest valley, so that in that darkness we could see Your glorious light like nobody else that I know," that they know had seen.

To that point this is the greatest mountaintop experience, but it came through the deepest valley, and that's the way of God throughout the whole Bible. Moses and the people of Israel came to know the Lord because they had to be delivered from Egypt. He put them in Egypt as slaves, and then they had to be delivered through the Red Sea, because He let the Egyptians come out after them and put them up against the Red Sea. If God doesn't take you through the valley, you will never know more of Him and more of His glory. Now, I know we don't need to be masochistic and say, "Lord, hurt me today," but you know we need to say, "Thy will be done, and no matter what You bring, I know You love me, I know You know better than I know, and I know You're going to bless me because of what Jesus Christ has done."

There's a verse in Romans 8, Verse 32, where the apostle Paul is talking. This is something we should have in our minds. No matter what happens, if tomorrow a tragedy strikes my life, may God bring this first to mind. If it strikes your life, if in

the next year we find ourselves in deep, dark valleys, may this verse be in your mind. The apostle Paul says:

Romans 8:32 ~ If God did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not together with Him freely give us all things?

What that verse means is this, that if you're in Jesus Christ, if you've repented and placed your faith in Him, God is only going to give you good things. It's not like the people on TV say, the crazy, TV prosperity preachers. They're completely missing the point. It doesn't mean He's going to give you a nice car, and a happy life, and healing from every disease. No, that's not it at all. He wants to give you something far better than that. It means that whatever comes into your life that looks like a blow, and even evil's at work, sin's at work, Satan's at work, but whatever Satan means for evil, God means for good, and you can rejoice when it comes, knowing, "Lord, You have brought this into my life and it therefore is a good thing, and that is why I will, as Your word says, 'in everything give thanks' not for the evil that's happened, but for the fact that You have ordained it for some greater good," and that's where we see the glory of our Savior, and He becomes more and more real to us.

Corrie ten Boom, I love the story of her life. She and her sister and her father lived in Holland. They were both single ladies caring for their father, and Hitler had taken over Holland, the Netherlands, and he was beginning to round up the Jews. They had a hiding place, and they would hide the Jews in the hiding place in their house. The book of her life is by that name, *The Hiding Place*, and the movie as well, and Corrie ten Boom and her sister and her father kept people up there, and then they would get them out of Holland. They were Christians. They did this because they loved Jesus. They were arrested. Corrie's father and sister both died in the concentration camp and she spent the rest of the war behind the walls of those horrible, evil places, and there she shined like a bright light on a very, very dark night, and after the war, her testimony was this: *No matter how deep the pit you find yourself in, Jesus is deeper still.* And wouldn't you rather know that than miss that? God is good to us. May He be glorified in our lives as we trust Him more.

Let's pray...

Our Father, we do come to You today praising Your holy Name, that You have blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Jesus Christ. You have lavished Your grace upon us. We are the apple of Your eye in Him. Though

we were so unworthy, yet through His blood, through His death, and through His resurrection, You have made us Your precious children.

Father, we pray for those in this room that have not truly repented and believed, that today You would open the eyes of their heart, grant them repentance, and grant them faith. May they cry out to Jesus even today to truly save them. Father, we pray that You would help us who do know You, who are walking with You, to have a deepening hunger every day of our lives that can only be satisfied by the Bread of Life. May our hearts long to drink from that fountain every day, and may You radiate Your glory off of our contented and ever-increasing joyful faces as we know and say, "Hallelujah, what a Savior." We pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen

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