

Lazarus

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, so we're going to look at the story of Lazarus tonight. It's a very well-known story, and hopefully get a wee bit of interaction as well. I'm not going to read the whole story because it's pretty long. I'm going to read from verse 17. So it's John chapter 11 from verse 17. Jesus has been told about Lazarus not being well, and then Lazarus dying, and he's waited four days to go to deal with this, and his disciples are wondering why, and we'll maybe pick up on one or two of the verses before verse 17 during the talk. But verse 17, Jesus says, Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Bethany was near Jerusalem about two miles off, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary remained seated in the house. Martha said to Jesus, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask for from God, God will give you. Jesus said to her, Your brother will rise again. Martha said to him, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.

Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection in the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this? She said to him, Yes, Lord, I believe that you're the Christ, the Son of God who is coming into the world. When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, the teacher is here and is calling for you. When she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him.

Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but he was still in the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who were with her in the house consoling her saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she felt it as saying to him, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved and spirit and greatly troubled. And he said, Where have you laid him? They said to him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. So the Jews said, See how he loved him.

But some of them said, Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind, the blind man also have kept this man from dying? Then Jesus deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, Take away the stone. Martha, the sister of the dead man said to him, Lord, by this time there will be an odor for he has been dead four days. Jesus said to her, Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God? So they took away the stone and Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, Father, I thank you that you've heard me. I knew that you would always hear me. But I said this on account of the people standing around that they may believe that you sent me. When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, Lazarus come out.

The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, Unbind him and let him go. Amen. That's a great passage. Very dramatic.

[3 : 54] And we've been looking at the counters of Jesus with people, mainly sharing kind of gospel truth about the way Jesus dealt with people, particularly those who weren't believers, a case, Nicodemus, Jairus, the sick woman and Legion. And we've kind of been, I hope, stopping to ask a few questions, either on the night or maybe a city group or something else. What is it that we learn from Jesus in our interactions with people? And as we try and introduce people to Jesus in our lives, what is it we can learn from the way Jesus interacts with people? And learning from Jesus, really, it's what it's all about for us, isn't it? It's absolutely what it's all about. It's the most important reality of our lives is learning from Jesus and learning what Jesus says. It really goes back to that whole thing from Jeremiah 17, our discipleship text, which says that He's the living water. And these times here and Sunday and when you open the Bible and when you pray before that, you're asking that you will soak up the living water of Jesus Christ and He will transform your life. And we learn from Him and we grow and we change and we develop so that when you come back in a fortnight, you're different from what you were tonight. And that that's the ongoing story of our lives. Sometimes it's not like that, is it? Sometimes we feel we are regressing. But we're looking either in anxiety, by heat or in drought, whatever's in our lives that we are still bearing fruit because we are rooted in Jesus. That's why we're focusing really on Jesus, not just for sharing Him with others, but also for our own lives. So I'm going to see if this works tonight, if I can click it. Is that the first one? There might be another one. Another one? No. Okay. Is that the first one? Right, if that's the first one, that's fine. Doesn't matter. Okay. Shout out to me, some of the themes that you see, you think about in this passage. Just one word, one word answers.

What are some of the themes that you think, if you were preaching the sermon or preaching on this passage tonight or talking on it, what would be some of the themes that would come out? Miracle. Grief. Compassion. Resurrection. What else? Frustration. Weeping. There's a lot of really big themes. I've written down death, anger, glory, faith, friendship, grief, authority and signs.

And all of that comes out and all of that is significant and important in this story. So I'm going to go through one or two things that I think are important in this story. And I hope you'll discuss them then a week from tonight. And the first is life is hard to understand. Okay. Life is hard to understand. If you look at verse 21, and the trouble with me here is this writing is quite small and it's a bit darker here, but hopefully I can see it. Martha said to him, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. And then in 32, Mary says, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. Both of them say the same thing. Life is hard to understand. We've got to remember that in the story that Mary and Martha found it hard to understand why Jesus took so long to come and to do why he delayed. And that's something that's a very big theme of our lives, isn't it? That we don't understand God's delay. We don't understand his delays to our prayers, to answering our prayers. We don't understand when we're suffering. Why God isn't acting?

Why isn't he changing things more quickly? Why doesn't he do something? Because life is hard to understand. And one of the amazing things about recognizing Jesus is coming to recognize and to acknowledge this and to trust that he knows, because in this story, for example, we see the end of the story, and we have to respond with faith, because John's gospel is all about showing us Jesus and giving us signs about who he is and why he's worth trusting. Do you know what the signs are?

Yes. Could you think of what there's traditionally the regard that John's gospel is? Seven signs that point to who Jesus is. Seven things that he did that explain a little bit more about who he is.

[9 : 30] Can you think of what they might be? Can you think of any of them? The wedding of Canaan. The wedding of Canaan, correct. Any other ones in John's gospel?

It's the same one. That's one sign you can't get away with that murder, trying to sneak a wee extra sign there. What other signs might there be? Feeding the 5000. Correct. Brilliant. Let's see if I can.

Right. That was the one. Change the water into wine. And John sees it's the first of the signs. Explaining who Jesus was. Healing the royal official's son in Capernaum. Healing the paralytic.

Feeding the 5000. Walking on the water. Healing the man blind from birth. Raising a Lazarus. These are regarded as signs that speak about who Jesus was and give us confidence that we can trust him in the delays when we don't know why things are happening in our lives.

And who Jesus is is really backed up powerfully in this story because this story is a cameo of a bigger picture because there's a bigger battle to be won. For Mary and Martha it's the raising of Lazarus.

[11 : 06] But there's an even bigger battle that's coming and this is a picture of it. And it's a reminder to us that this cameo of resurrection is a reminder to us of a bigger death and a bigger resurrection that was about to happen in Jerusalem.

And it's a reminder that the suffering that we go through is redeemable because we have the, we know the story. We know the end of the story. And we know that death in Christ will be reversed as it was with Lazarus albeit temporarily, but in Christ forever. We know and we can know in Christ even with the delays that the grave becomes sleep for the believer. And the glory of God, which Jesus speaks about here, is the revelation of Jesus as the resurrection and the life, the crucified risen Savior who loves us and who gave himself for us. It'd be good to memorize verse 25, wouldn't it? It's a great verse. Jesus said to her, I'm sure you know it, I am the resurrection of life. Whoever believes in me even though I die yet we'll live.

It's just tremendous verses to remind us of the bigger picture that Jesus is highlighting here so that in the delays we can trust Him and we can lie in Him. And it even kind of points forward because if you jumped another chapter, you come to chapter 12 in verse 2 and it tells us that they gave a dinner for Jesus and Martha served and Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table.

And it's what Mary and Martha's house, they had a big celebratory meal in honor of Jesus. And that kind of finishes this whole cameo and reminds us that that's what we look forward to as well, a super celebratory feast in the presence of Jesus forever. So all that a glorious family feast represents in laughter and love and with Jesus' worship and life and satisfaction and reward.

So that reminder to us of the delays that life is hard to understand. And you all come here tonight, I'm sure you all come here tonight thinking life is hard to understand.

[13 : 32] And there's many things we would ask God. But we're reminded we don't know the end of the story and we don't know everything and we're not in control. But this picture is there to remind us as we trust and as we love and as we serve Him that Jesus is everything. And that that is what counts for us as we put our faith in Him. That's the first thing, a few points just to make. Second thing is loving well includes tears. Loving, I'm missing out hundreds of things by the way in this passage. I'm just picking at one or two things. But loving well includes tears. And you know that, don't you, from the shortest verse in the Bible, Jesus wept. Here is Jesus, God's Son, on His way to Jerusalem. Thomas has said, oh well, we may as well go with you and die there because they know everyone's out to get Jesus there, the Creator of the universe, making His way, having made Himself nothing, tempted in every way as we are without sin, heading towards God's wrath and hell itself, once for all, His time to weep for His friends. That's the kind of Savior He is. He weeps for

His friends' death. Why? Because verse 5, which we didn't read, tells us that He loved them. He loved them. People mattered to Him and He shared their grief. You know, I've heard a lot of people say, oh, why was Jesus crying? He was just about to raise Lazarus from the dead. Well, that's kind of a daft thing to say because He was weeping for His friends who were grieving. And that text is there by God's divine perfection to remind us that it matters, that He made friends, that He had friends, that He cared and that He cried. Even the fact of a resurrection minutes later didn't take away the tears and the sadness. It's a powerful witness. And we remember that in our lives that as believers to love is to share people's grief, to enter into it, to acknowledge that sadness is real, not in some kind of supercilious, pietistical way to brush it aside and say, well, it'll be all right, we'll all get resurrected. Jesus wept. Loving includes tears. Loving well includes tears.

Third thing I want to say is that sometimes we need to snort with rage. You've probably heard this because most people that preach on this like to bring out this dramatic point.

In verse 33, Jesus says, when Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in His Spirit and greatly troubled. And then again in verse 38, Jesus deeply moved again, came to the tomb. Now that word for deeply moved is the word for the snorting of a horse. Just that, it's an angry word. It's an amazing and a dramatic picture of Jesus here, the wrath of the Lamb in a sense. He's kind of snorting in anger at what He's saying, what's before Him. You know that picture of a horse just ready for battle, just you know the nose flaring and breath coming out of it and ready to fend. I'm not sure if horses are angry but the snorting bit is the horse and the anger bit is coming from within them and that moved, deeply moved in Spirit and troubled. The troubled is a kind of agitated word. He's kind of, he's not still, he's agitated and he's angry at what he's seeing in front of him. And yet also he's powerfully controlled here and he's supremely authoritative and he prays before God also about what's happening. He's not out of control, it's not a raging out of control at all.

I hope this is not a reverent picture but it's almost like he's psyching himself up for a bigger battle that he's facing as he heads towards Jerusalem against all the forces of darkness that are represented here in the death of Lazarus. But whatever it is he's picturing here, he's seeing the darkness and the destruction and the sadness and the brokenness of sin and of Satan's rule and of his rebellion and of a lost humanity that has gone with Satan. He's enraged by that distortion that evil has brought in his perfection and his justice and his love.

[18 : 43] Sometimes we need to snort with rage. How do you apply that? Well I think there's a lot of misdirected rage just now isn't there in society. Social media is full of it. We're seeing it with COP26. All the rage that people have and what there's environmental or political or religious, there's all kinds of rage. We know rage is very real in the world in which we live and that's sometimes not a bad thing but I think we have to, we're called to get angry ourselves with what God hates as well. Just as Jesus here is revealing his rage at darkness and evil, we're called to get angry with what God hates and that starts first by looking at the mirror. That's where it starts.

Getting angry with our own complacency, lovelessness, pride, selfishness, greed. It's too easy to keep the light of Jesus shining on everyone else, isn't it? Or sometimes his light shines in on us and should expose within us things that make us rage because we see the hurt we cause or the disinterest we have in Jesus or the lack of care and compassion for his gospel and the relentless pride that drives us to our knees for forgiveness. So sometimes that rage should be, I think we're sometimes we're just too placid with our sin and it's all too easy and we don't care and we just walk our own way. But also I think we're called to rage at some of the wider injustices we see in the world around us and that can be a connecting point with unbelievers, can't it? We shouldn't just be rubbishing what's happening with people's rebellion and people's anger at what's happening in society. It might be broken in some ways and shadowy, but we recognize greed and poverty and wastefulness and environmental damage and a poor stewardship and we can partner with people in that and we can make a point of partnering with them on that even though their motives might be very different from ours.

Obviously there comes a point where we testify to a deeper malaise that even Greta Thunberg can't fix, a deeper malaise that the youth of today can't fix, a deeper malaise that politics and education won't change and so it drives us to Christ. But it's also that anger is a reminder to us that the battle that Jesus faced and the battle that we faced is primarily spiritual. We have an enemy of our soul and we need to wake up to that. You need to wake up and I need to wake up to that. Much of the time we blame God for things that happen, but it's Satan who's the architect of darkness and rebellion and we need to realize as Christians that Satan is at his most dangerous now than he ever was because he's a defeated foe not yet destroyed and you know what it's like for someone who's on death row, nothing matters does it? It doesn't matter what they do, they will do their very worst because they know they're defeated anyway and that's what we are aware of. That's why this is not just about playing religion and just trotting along to church.

It's about a spiritual battle with the enemy of our souls and the engine room needs to be the place where we're at. It doesn't matter what else we do, it doesn't matter if this church is filling a Sunday, it's irrelevant completely if we're prayerless or if it's insignificant, if it doesn't matter if other things come first. Prayer is everything because it's the only place that we find security and protection and refuge from the battle and we should get angry about not caring and not realizing and forgetting that we need his protection every day as we go out into the world as we live our lives we need his protection, it's everything, it's absolutely everything. So sometimes we need a snort with rage. You need to work out in your own life and I need to work out in my life what that looks like but I don't mind you snorting now and again. I think it's quite a good thing.

Okay and that really I've beaten myself to my last point. We need to be praying for faith to believe because that's everything. In verse 15 we didn't read this and it's actually quite an important verse as they all are. Verse 30 says, now Jesus had spoken of his death but they thought that he meant rest and sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly Lazarus has died and for your sake I am glad that I was not there so that you may believe but let us go to him. This happened so that they would believe and then obviously in verses 41 and 42 where we read it were Jesus' praise, Father I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me but I said this on account of the people standing around that they may believe that you sent me.

[24 : 09] That's what's behind this whole story is that Jesus wanted them to have faith. He wanted Mary and Martha, surely Lazarus and Faithy. He'd gone into the realm of the dead for four days. He must have had faith coming out of that and the people around and the mourners and everyone else the disciples. He wanted them to have faith and he prayed to the Father that they would have faith and see his glory and know who he was. And again that's why we pray and that's all evangelism is about.

You know we have techniques and this and that and friendship and everything else but ultimately if Jesus needs to pray to the Father for them to see who he is and that they might believe, if Jesus needs to do that surely we need to be doing that as well in the same way.

You run out of things to pray for then pray to the Father for more faith because that's what Jesus wants here, more faith to believe, more faith to say well I'm not going to play about with sin anymore, I'm not going to be a hypocrite, I'm not going to make Jesus second in my life, I'm not going to shrug at his love and just say yeah yeah it's fine he died in the cross, it's lovely, it's pleasant.

Pray for more faith to see the kind of things that he saw and snort and rage like he did and weep with our friends is the way he did and trust in his delays as well. We need faith to do all of that and we need to be crying out for faith and faith and faith. Young people here I say the best thing, you can ever do in your life as a Christian is learn to pray and keep on praying and make it the absolute foundation of everything you are as a Christian and if we talk about evangelism, I guess this passage isn't quite in the same way it's not about evangelism in terms of Jesus dealing with unbelievers but we have the very crux of evangelism here praying to the Father, you praying to the Father for the people you bring before him that maybe nobody else does with people in here on Sunday for the baptisms have never been in church before the mums and dads will all be appearing for them and praying that they hear the word, not just in church from themselves and from others and all of you from you and me from my life that all that we're doing that God will use it to reveal Jesus so that people might believe the focus of our friendships of our evangelism is that we will declare the glory of Jesus. What is that glory? It goes back to what he said,

I am the resurrection in the life. I am the, that's the glory of God. That's what that verse refers back to what he said at the beginning. I am the resurrection in the life. That's the glory of God is a crucified Jew 2000 years ago on the third day who was resurrected. That is what we need to be telling people about. The aim of evangelism isn't to get them into church, the aim of evangelism is to tell them about Jesus and we need faith to do that and we need prayer to do that and we need hearts to be changed and rage to be directed in the right way. Wouldn't it be brilliant if all that rage that we see in society would turn towards Satan and the injustice and the darkness and the blackness and the bleakness of who he is and look to Jesus Christ for forgiveness and salvation because as I'll go on to preach on Sunday there is a day of reckoning.

[28 : 02] So you're getting a heavy lot in the next couple of days because that's the next section in Second Thessalonians. There is a day of reckoning and that's supremely important anyway. Enough said.

Let's pray. Father God we ask and pray that we would hear you more clearly every day as we open these stories, stories we know from when we were we many of us, but that must remain living and must remain relevant and powerful and moving for us and we do long for this place, this building to be full of people praying on a Wednesday night and we long for it to be doubly full on the Lord's Day of people worshiping but we know that's impossible unless we are praying to the Father that they may believe and we pray that would be the case and we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.