

## John 11 Resurrection and Life

John's Gospel teaches us to have hope.

It teaches that God loves the world he created, so much He gave His Son. And that Jesus, Himself God the Son, came in the flesh and lived among us, gave His life on the cross as the offering for human sin, and rose from death so that whosoever believes in Him as Son of God and Saviour will not perish in bleak despair, but enjoy eternal life!

Jesus came to bring us life, a life that overcomes death.

When a Christian passes away, their soul immediately 'departs to be with Christ which is far better.' We speak of someone going to heaven because that's where Christ reigns in glory. But that's not all. With dignity we lovingly lay their body, as though sleeping, in a garden of rest, for we believe when Christ returns in the future they will share His resurrection.

We base this belief and practice on what we read in Scripture, not least Jesus' bold claim in John 11 that He is, ie He embodies both resurrection and life. Our bodies 'will live even though they die', and our souls 'will never die'. Jesus has us covered, body and soul, for now and forever.

He will demonstrate His divine authority to make such a claim by Himself returning defiant from the grave three days after crucifixion and burial. But more. On this and several other occasions in the Gospels, to reassure us that resurrection and eternal life are for His followers, not just Him, He gives a foretaste, He brings people back to life after they've died. Jairus' daughter, the son of the widow in Nain and here His friend Lazarus of Bethany.

Let's look at some of the details in this account and ask God to give us understanding. Observe with me here Jesus doing four things. He waits. He feels. He promises. And He acts.

First of all Jesus waits. He gets news that His friend is terminally ill and fading fast yet He stays where He is until Lazarus passes away. Imagine how confusing and distressing this is for all involved. Let me put it bluntly. He lets His friend die. He lets the sisters break their hearts in bereavement.

In ch10 He told us He is the Good Shepherd, that His followers would lack nothing, that even in the valley of the shadow of death we would know His presence and comfort. Why doesn't He hurry with all speed to Bethany to heal Lazarus and comfort this family that has shown Him kindness and hospitality?

In ch4 He healed a royal official's son with a word from a distance so he doesn't even have to travel. Why doesn't he say the word this time? Why does our Shepherd sometimes say no? Why does He let His sheep suffer?

It is a fact that in this present fallen world we will experience pain and loss and sorrow. Our prayers for healing can seem unanswered or refused. We must learn to wait and keep trusting, even if we're not getting the answers we want immediately, even if in the short term we are suffering hardship.

The Lord is the holy Judge of all mankind. It is in His hands whether someone lives or dies, thrives or fails. We must learn reverence, humility and patience, whatever our circumstances. We must practise trust and obedience seeking first the Kingdom of God and His glory and all that pleases Him, believing that everything else that is necessary will be provided by our gracious Father in heaven.

Mary, Martha and Lazarus couldn't see it at first but Jesus had a plan, and agonising as it must have been, He waited, knowing that something greater and more glorious lay ahead.

If it still sounds a bit cold, the next thing we witness here is Jesus feeling. John says He was deeply moved and troubled, that He actually wept with the sisters in the graveyard. This is indeed a divine mystery! If Jesus is God we're not surprised that He can perform miracles, we expect as much. If He knows he can and will bring Lazarus back to life why is He grieving? For God to stand among us at the graveside and cry, there's something much more amazing about this!

He is the Lord, He decides life and death for millions every day. And yet there is nothing cold or arbitrary about our Maker. On the outskirts of Bethany He weeps in frustration for His broken creation and the sin that causes such sorrow. He sheds tears with His creatures in our loss. He is the Lord, Sovereign over all that happens, yet He cares deeply for each individual and family. When at times we wonder what's going on, why we're being made to wait, let's take encouragement from this profound truth, Jesus wept. The Good Shepherd cares.

He waits. He feels. Next note what He promises. The disciples have been witnessing many remarkable things, the hungry fed, the storm quelled, the lame walking, the blind receiving their sight but better is to come. Not even death can defeat God the Son. He has come to bring life 'abundant' and everlasting. So death and wakes and funerals, separation and mourning, these are not the end for His followers. This is not how it will always be. Those who pass away in faith are comforted and at rest with their Lord, and when He comes again to judge the world we will hear His voice and rise like Him, victorious over death!

The time for weeping is past. Jesus now acts. Striding forward to the mouth of the tomb he orders it be opened and commands Lazarus to come out. He speaks to the dead and such is His authority the dead receive new life! He is the resurrection and the life, here is the clearest demonstration we could ask for! We will not be kept waiting for ever! Sin and evil will not win the day, victory belongs to our Lord and Master. Grace and salvation and liberation will rule. The dead will rise, families and friends be reunited, God will be glorified and His people rejoice.

As Lazarus emerges alive, Jesus instructs them, 'Take off the grave clothes and let him go.' Christians are liberated from the dread of the grave by the hope given us in Jesus our risen Lord. Let's not be bound any longer in our thinking by the dark negativity and cynicism associated with death but go on from here trusting in Him Who is the resurrection and life, knowing that in Him we shall be eternally free to celebrate life with great joy!