

# John 11:18-37

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[0:00] All right, amen, and good morning. If I've yet to see you and say so to you, please take your copy of God's Word and join me in John chapter 11. Our text for today is John chapter 11, verses 18 through 37.

Last week, as we began John 11, we saw something about the love of Jesus that is profoundly comforting, although at first it can be difficult to understand.

Jesus loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus, and because he loved them, he waited. He received word that Lazarus was sick.

He knew exactly what was happening in Bethany. He possessed both the authority and the power to prevent Lazarus from dying, and yet, rather than immediately traveling to Bethany or just speaking a word where he was, Jesus remained where he was for two more days.

And the point John forces us to confront is that the delay of Jesus was not a contradiction of his love. Somehow, mysteriously but unmistakably, the delay was an expression of his love.

[1:14] Jesus loved them, so the text tells us. He waited. Because the love of Christ is aimed at something greater than our immediate comfort.

Christ loves us too much merely to arrange our circumstances according to our preferences. He intends instead to reveal his glory, strengthen our faith, loosen our grip on this dying world, and teach us to trust him when we cannot understand what he is doing.

By the time Jesus arrives near Bethany, Lazarus has been in the tomb four days. From the perspective of Mary and Martha, Jesus appears to have arrived too late.

Lazarus' sickness has run its course. The funeral has already taken place. The stone rolled over the entrance. The mourners have gathered. Lazarus is most assuredly dead.

And yet, as we said at the conclusion of the sermon last week, Jesus is never late. He may not operate according to our timetable.

[2:31] He may not intervene at the moment we would have chosen. He may allow circumstances to deteriorate until every human possibility has disappeared. But he is never late.

Because the Son of God does not merely react to circumstances. He governs them. Rules over all things. And now, beginning in verse 18, John takes us from the delay of Jesus to the arrival of Jesus.

And what follows is one of the most beautiful passages in all of Scripture. Because in the space of only 20 verses, we see both the incomparable majesty and the astonishing tenderness of our Savior.

And so we'll look together at verses 18 through 37. I will begin reading in verse 1, however, set the context, and in case you weren't with us last week.

Before I do any of that, let me lead us in a prayer for our benefit. Father God, thank you for your word this morning. We are always in some state of frailty.

[3:45] There are times when we feel it more than others. I can humbly say before you that I'm feeling my frailty today.

The frailty of my preparation. Certainly the frailty of my delivery. And all of us, if we're honest, are frail in our hearing and understanding.

We're easily distracted. Lots on our minds. Exhaustion often sets in on Sunday morning. So we ask that you'd help us to be attentive this day.

Take up your word together that we would rightly see Christ in it. We would behold him as we should. That our affections would be turned and set on him. We would see ourselves in the text. And see our need of this great Savior. The Lord Jesus Christ. It's in his name that we pray. Amen. John 11, beginning in verse 1.

[4:44] Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother, Lazarus, was ill.

The sister sent to him, saying, Lord, he whom you love is ill. But when Jesus heard it, he said, This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. But after this, he said to the disciples, Let us go to Judea again.

The disciples said to him, Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again? 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.

But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles because the light is not in him. After saying these things, he said to them, Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.

[5:54] The disciples said to him, Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover. Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, Lazarus has died.

And for your sake, I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him. So Thomas called the twin, said to his fellow disciples, Let us also go that we may die with him.

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 and met 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 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.

[7:04] Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and 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 are 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.

And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but 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 fell at his feet, 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 in his 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?

[8:23] But some of them said, Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying? All right. I have three points for us this morning to consider this text.

The first, Jesus' arrival. We'll look at a considerable bit of the text at this point. Notice that he goes to Bethany, this town that Lazarus is from, and it's near Jerusalem, about two miles off.

And the nearness to Jerusalem highlights the danger that concerned the disciples earlier in the chapter. Previously, Jesus has worked in Judea, in Jerusalem.

He's healed a blind man, and they are seeking his death. The presumption of the disciples is that they're going with him to his death as he arrives in this place to teach them something of the resurrection.

And we note as he arrives there, in the previous verse, it's already been four days that Lazarus has been in the tomb. And many of the Jews, verse 19 tells us, had come to Martha and Mary to console them, to comfort them concerning their brother.

[9:43] Because of the nearness to Jerusalem, many of the Jews are able to come and to mourn with Martha and Mary. Two things are notable here. First, the family of Lazarus possesses some

level of prominence evidenced by this many visiting to mourn his death.

We don't know a lot about this family, but they must have had some degree of prominence and by later evidence that they had some financial means because Mary anoints Jesus' feet with expensive ointment, something she couldn't have afforded otherwise.

We will note later in the chapter that this miracle is the final inciting incident that would lead to Jesus' crucifixion. John chapter 11 and verse 53.

This news goes out. It's carried back to the Pharisees, John tells us, and verse 53 says, so from that day on, they made plans to put him to death.

Jesus knows exactly what he's doing. He's going to raise Lazarus from the dead to teach something of the resurrection and that this incident will forward, press on God's plan for his crucifixion.

[11:01] Secondly, I've noted before that John uses the phrase the Jews in various forms throughout his gospel and that he most regularly uses the phrase to refer to the Jewish leaders who are antagonistic toward Jesus.

But in this case, we have no reason to believe that is what he means. This is one of those instances where he likely doesn't mean that because some of these Jews go and report to the Pharisees who are particularly antagonistic toward him.

The text seems to communicate that these are well-meaning people who know this family and that they are grieved alongside them for their loss. So they're gathered there in Bethany some days later comforting Martha and Mary and grieving the loss of this man.

Lazarus. And then verse 20 tells us that Martha hears that Jesus is coming, that he's on the road and so she gets up. Mary stays behind but she gets up and she goes to meet him.

There's no need to read anything into this private meeting or the one that Jesus will attempt to have with Mary and there is speculation concerning this. But we ought to assume that Martha merely wants a moment alone with Jesus before having to return and serve as the hostess to the crowd at her house.

[12:30] If you've ever been to a funeral or participated in the loss of a near and dear one, you've either or you've watched somebody else have to host people even in the midst of your own grief.

So she steals away, I think, all that's happening here. She wants a moment with Jesus before he arrives with all of the other mourners. Now, before we get into the details of the rest of the text and this conversation that they have, I genuinely believe that we'll be well served by looking at its literary structure.

I received a text this week that said chiasms are important. Don't let people bully you into not pointing them out. We have read the text together.

I sure hope you have a copy of it sitting in front of you. If you don't, the bulletin you were handed has all of the text found in it and I would assume that two phrases, if you're paying attention at all, rightly, two phrases leapt off the page at you.

The first, these are the two I'm assuming, the first, Jesus says, I am the resurrection and the life in verse 25. That leapt off.

[13:51] I tried to read it with some measure of emphasis as I read the text to you. I am the resurrection and the life. The other, I'm assuming, is verse 35.

It states simply, Jesus wept. These are not unimportant phrases. So don't hear me say they're unimportant.

They are significant phrases in this text. But neither of them are the chiastic center of the text. We're going to talk about chiasms. If you are new here, chiasm is a literary structure found all throughout literature. It is found a lot in the Bible.

And I've been arguing in our study of John that John uses chiasms quite often to draw our attention to particular parts of text. It's a mnemonic device meant to help people remember stories.

[14:51] Early church, many of these stories would have just been spoken. So it's being used in that way. But even as we have the written text in front of us, it's meant to help us draw some emphasis, give us a lens by which we look at the rest of the text.

So the word chiasm comes from the Greek letter for X, chi. And what it says to us, and I always plot it out and sometimes I do for you in your bulletin, is that the first part of the text corresponds to the last part of the text and so on.

So it feeds into a center, a cross point, so to speak. So let me take a few moments and show you the chiastic structure of this text. I think it's really going to help us see what John's communicating

here.

So notice first, verse 18 and 19, which corresponds to verse 36 and 37. You could underline these things in your bulletin if you would like.

Notice that Jesus travels to Bethany near Jerusalem and the Jews, many Jews, come to Mary and Martha to console them in verse 18 and 19. And then you see this speaking of the Jews at the end, verse 36 and 37.

[16:04] So the Jews said, but some of them said, verse 37. The next step in on this, right, corresponding, is verses 20 through 24, corresponding with verses 28 through 35.

Bigger passages, right? Notice the main thing going on here is Martha coming to Jesus and then Mary, along with the other mourners, coming to Jesus.

Note the similarity in their words. Martha said to Jesus, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. Mary in the same way.

Verse 32, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. Some significantly different things happening with Martha and with Mary.

But these two things correspond to one another. Then the next step in, verse 25 and 26, corresponds to verse 27.

[17:14] Verse 25 says, Jesus said to her, and then verse 27, she said to him. And at the center of all of this structure, I will argue to you, is the question that Jesus asks.

Do you believe this? I'm going to show you how the two things fold on top of each other and lay as we go on. But notice at the center of this, do you believe this?

What is he referring to? His statement that he has made, I am the resurrection and 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? And then her response, yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.

So, if we pick that up as a lens, I hope it will help us think the way we should be interpreting Jesus' words and then his response to the grieving later on.

[18:31] Now, verse 21, Martha said to Jesus. Remember, she is eager to go meet with him, to have this private moment with him, and she begins with the word, Lord.

Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died, but even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.

Note the faith of Martha. She begins with Lord, and then adds to the request, the same request that Mary makes, she adds to that, but even now I know that you can raise Lazarus from the dead, is what is implied in this statement.

And so, Jesus says to her, in a measure of ambiguity, your brother will rise again. And she responds with some confusion, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.

Now, Martha, because of this declaration, is showing herself to be of the Pharisee camp.

Theologically, she believes in the resurrection.

[19:50] There was two major groups in this day, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and they had many other differences, but the primary theological debate that they had was whether or not there would be a resurrection.

In the last day, there would be a resurrection from the dead. The Pharisees were more conservative. They were the Bible people of the day. The Sadducees tended not to be.

And they would have taken up a text like Daniel 12, too, which says, and many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

And believe it. And believe that there will in fact be a resurrection on the last day. So Martha's saying to Jesus, as he says, your brother will rise again.

She's saying, I know, I know someday he will rise again. And in my imagination, she might have gone on to say, but does that give me hope now?

[20:51] Is that something I ought to hang on to now? I'm feeling the grief of his loss now, but Jesus gets right in front of her and says, I am the resurrection and the life.

Now, this is the fifth of Jesus' I am statements, right? Connecting himself to the Godhead. This chapter is not the first we have heard Jesus speak of resurrection.

In chapter five, he has stated that he, along with the father, raised the dead. Just of a little interesting note, there is also a chiasmic structure between chapter five and all the way to chapter 11.

And you can guess chapter five and chapter 11 do in fact correspond with each other. In chapter five, he has said, in verse 21, for as the father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the son gives life to whom he will.

In the verse 25 and following, truly, truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and is now here when the dead will hear the voice of the son of God and those who hear will live.

[22:01] For as the father has life in himself, so he has granted the son also to have life in himself. He has given him authority to execute judgment because he is the son of man.

Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

So Jesus has said already and not long ago that he has the authority over life and death and the resurrection. Here he is drawing Martha to see that a belief in resurrection is not some abstract thing to believe in, but that the very one who provides it is standing right

in front of her. That's what he's doing. He says, I am the resurrection and the life. I have the power to execute it. It is found in me.

Christians do not just believe in what has been promised by faith in Christ, but in Christ himself. Not just what is promised, but in Christ himself.

[23:18] here we say again and again in presentations of the gospel that we are to repent, that is, turn from our sin, recognize that it is an offense against the holy God. The word repent means literally to change your mind, to not see this as a path we ought to pursue, but to see it as a path that should be rejected, discarded, because it is offensive to God, and to turn by faith in Christ to his person and his work, to who he is himself, and to all that he has accomplished on our behalf.

Both of those are very key to understand. So Jesus says, I am the resurrection and the life. There is no resurrection nor eternal life outside of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He does this similarly in other places, like in John chapter 6. He talks about food that doesn't perish. Verse 27, do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you, for on him God the Father has set his seal.

So Jesus will give us the sustenance that endures to eternal life. And then he says in verse 35, I am the bread of life.

It's me. I will give you myself. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

[24:54] That's what Jesus is doing for Martha, whom he loves. She's looking to this abstract future reality that, yeah, yeah, Jesus, I know Lazarus will be raised in that final day and he's saying, no, I'm standing right in front of you right now.

I am the resurrection and the life. I'd suggest to you that Martha has faith and Jesus is bolstering her faith with this statement.

He goes on to say, whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.

He plays with this language. Whoever believes in me, who has taken me up, we will go through an earthly death, but we will live spiritually forever.

And the one who lives spiritually even now will never die spiritually. And then he asks the question, do you believe this?

[26:02] Do you believe this? There should be no question to us why John might structure this text in this way.

You've heard me say, John chapter 20, verse 30 and 31, why did John write this gospel account? He says there, now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book.

But some are, are they not? Here in John chapter 11, we are about to see Jesus do this work, this sign raising Lazarus from the dead.

Verse 31, John 20 says, but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life.

in his name. Well, I want us to be the kind of people that when we read in John chapter 11, this statement of our Lord, do you believe this, that our minds are triggered?

[27:07] John chapter 20, right? That's why John wrote this. Look at what he's doing as he constructs this text under the power of the Spirit to ask the question of us today.

Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Do you believe this? And she responds, yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.

Now, notice with me second, so this is Jesus' arrival, notice secondly, Jesus' anger, verses 28 through 33.

Now, why would I draw your attention to this portion of text by titling it, Jesus' anger? I hope that was a little bit shocking to you. Because of the phrase, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.

Now, you may have in your Bible a footnote following the first part of that phrase that reads, or was indignant. So it could read, he was indignant and greatly troubled.

[28:30] So what are we meant to make of this? I use the word anger first because of its alliteration with my other points. Helpful sometimes, and I like to do it when I can.

But, more importantly, because I think it gets at what John is showing us here. This Greek root, this is a single word, is used only twice in this chapter and four other places in the Gospels.

In those places, it's translated, sternly warned, or in the case of Mark, chapter 14 and verse 5, the disciples, a record of Mary anointing Jesus with the ointment.

There are 14, 5, it says, for this ointment could have been sold for more than these hundred denarii and given to the poor, and they scolded her. That's the same verb root found there.

This is not a soft word. I think deeply moved is a fair translation, but it's deeply moved in a particular way.

[29:46] Deeply moved, indignant, angered in his spirit inside of him, and, John adds, greatly troubled.

Now, I think what translators are trying to do is they're trying to connect to this idea of Jesus weeping. How does all of this come together? He doesn't say things loudly.

There's not rebuke that's following here. They're trying to help us wrap our minds around what's happening, but I think it comes up short. I'm thankful for the footnote, at least in my Bible, that says was indignant.

Additionally, recall our literary structure, and how it's supposed to help us think of the rest of the text.

Do you remember, right? Do you believe this? And we have this correspondence between Martha, who comes, expresses a great measure of faith, Jesus, asks the question, and then Mary, who is delayed, Jesus has to request that she come to him, verse 28, right?

[31:10] Martha goes back, says to Mary, the teacher is here and is calling for you. She gets up quickly, she goes, the mourners follow, and when she arrives to him, she says the exact same thing that Martha said.

Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. And then John tells us in verse 33, there's no more talking at this point.

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.

I think what John is communicating to us, you see on the one side of the literary structure, belief, and on the other side, unbelief.

Not just grief, but grief without hope. So, what is it that Jesus is angry at?

[32:15] D.A. Carson writes this, quote, some think that Jesus is moved by their grief, and is consequently angry with the sin, sickness, and death in this fallen world that wreaks so much havoc and generates so much sorrow.

Others think that the anger is directed at the unbelief itself. The men and women before him were grieving like pagans, like the rest of men who have no hope, 1 Thessalonians 4.13.

Profound grief at such bereavement is natural enough. grief that degenerates to despair that pours out its loss as if there was no resurrection is an implicit denial of that resurrection.

Those are the two options. And the D.A. Carson says, perhaps these two interpretations are not irreconcilable. And I think that this is right.

What Jesus feels here is a righteous anger at unbelief and all the problems it has caused, starting all the way back in the garden and still causes today.

[33 : 31] perhaps you felt this kind of righteous indignation at the trouble that is experienced in this world.

We see things be not as they ought to be, brought about by that original unbelief in the garden and perpetuated on by unbelief.

and we are grieved by it. Greatly troubled, moved within. You don't feel this at the tragedy of this world.

I think that you should. I know that I do. It's so often expressed in me when I hear the news come across my table, whether that's out there somewhere or within our own congregation.

I just go, come Lord Jesus. I need the hope of the resurrection in those times. I need to believe this.

[34 : 34] Jesus is the resurrection and the life. We have hope in this world. We do not grieve as those without hope, but those with hope.

I think this is what troubles him. these two things. Sin has caused so much and it was started with unbelief and then the unbelief carries on in the world.

Notice lastly, Jesus' affection. There's our final A. Jesus' affection. And he said, this is his response to this grievous grieving that's going on.

Where have you laid him? They said to him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. What's happening then here?

Jesus is angry. Why is it that he is weeping? I think he also grieves. Now, the Jews said, see how he loved him.

[35 : 43] And this is a misunderstanding because Jesus certainly loved Lazarus. Chapter 11, verse 5, tells us this very thing. When he's told to come, the one whom you love is sick.

But Jesus knew full well that he was about to see him again. The glorious thing that he was about to do. So I don't think that Jesus is weeping over the loss of Lazarus.

this often gets preached that way. I've heard it time and time again. I don't think that's what's going on here at all. Another misunderstanding. Some of them said, could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?

There's a faith being expressed here in the works but not in the person. On the one hand, it can be read as an honest question but note that Jesus' response in verse 38 he is deeply moved again.

Once again indignant, righteously angry. So I think verse 35 when we read that Jesus weeps we're meant to see him righteously angry at this hopeless grief and broken hearted.

[37 : 04] An affection for people who will not take hold of him as the Christ. A broken heartedness, a desire to see them.

He's right there in front of them. He's about to do this thing, this miraculous thing, and yet confused about who he is. I'm going to see next week some of them are going to go off and report in order to get him in trouble about this thing that he has done.

And so this all begs the question, do you believe Jesus is the resurrection and the life? Because if he is, everything changes.

If Jesus is the resurrection and the life, then the worst thing this world can do to you is not the ultimate thing. If God is for us, who can be against us?

If Jesus is the resurrection and the life, then death does not own the Christian. If Jesus is the resurrection and the life, then a cemetery is not a permanent residence for the bodies of believers.

[38 : 21] If Jesus is the resurrection and the life, then every Christian funeral takes place under the promise of a coming resurrection. We grieve with hope.

One day Christ will speak and the dead will rise. The same Jesus who will stand in front of Lazarus' tomb and cry, Lazarus, come out, will one day issue a summons heard by every grave.

The dead in Christ will rise. That is not wishful thinking, that is Christianity. So Christian, you may grieve.

You will. grieve. Your life may not have experienced grief yet, but you will grieve. Do not imagine that strong faith requires stoicism.

There will be days when you cry, days that demand tears. There will be empty rooms that hurt to enter. There will be anniversaries that reopen wounds.

[39 : 26] There will be moments when a smell, a song, a photograph, some ordinary object suddenly brings back the weight of someone's absence.

Grief is real. Jesus wept. But we do not grieve without hope. We hope in Christ, the resurrection, and the life.  
let's pray together.