

New Life: John 11
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The question of the hour is this: "Is He worthy?" According to John's Gospel, the resounding answer to that is "yes." Jesus Christ is worthy of all our praise. He is worthy of our belief. He is worthy of our faith. He is worthy of our life. He is worthy of our wholehearted devotion. We can declare that in song as a group. We can declare that as a church and clap and say "amen." But it really is important that we are able to say that personally. From an individual heart, from an individual life - that we would be able to declare that He is worthy of our faith. He is worthy of our life. He is worthy of our wholehearted devotion. He is worthy of more than sometimes obedience. He is worthy of more than "when I feel like it" love. He is worthy of more than just moody praise. He is worthy 24/7, 365 days of the year. He is worthy for all of eternity for us to love Him, worship Him, and believe in Him.

The way the story of John unfolds is a clue to us of what John is trying to prove to us. We're taking the Gospel of John now through this fall, basically a chapter a week to look and see what John has been building. He told us ahead of time that he is building the proof. He's offering an apologetic. He is saying to us, "I was an eyewitness. I saw Him. I touched Him. I heard Him. I walked with Him. And now I want you to believe in Him." And so John tells us that there are so many miracles that He did, so many signs that He performed, so many wonders that happened through His life. You can't even put them all down, but here's a few. He gives us seven signs and wonders - seven miracles in the Gospel of John. He attaches with them the claims that Jesus made related to each one of those. Then he asks, "Do you believe that He is the Christ? That He is the Son of God? Because if you believe, here's what comes with that - life. Eternal life, abundant life."

So in many ways, the Gospel of John is a divisive book. Do you recognize that today? Do you recognize that what I am doing this morning in standing before you is actually presenting to you a message that creates division? This divisive message does this page after page after page in the Gospel of John - it divides people into believers and unbelievers. You see with each miracle, you see with each claim, you see with each sign and wonder statements around it that say, "And many believed." Then you see others who rejected and who reported Him to the religious officials. There is division, and it was John's intent to present this case and say, "Here it is. Do you believe? Because if you do, there's life."

John asks this question from the beginning - "Is He worthy?" It's like a guy who's in the weight room who starts off with a little weight on the bar. And with every chapter in John, it seems to add more weights to the bar. He is proving the strength of Jesus, the truth of Jesus, the claims of Jesus, and is expanding this illustration of the power of Jesus and the authority of Jesus. You see Him in these chapters changing water to wine. Then you see Jesus taking an official's son who was sick in a distant city and when He speaks, that son becomes well. Next you see Jesus healing a lame man who had been not able to walk for more than 30 years. He was laying by a pool of water, and the hope was that somehow somebody would move him into the water. The belief was that when the

water was stirred, if you could get in the water first, you would be healed. Jesus speaks to him and says, "Get up and walk," and he walks. The next sign you see in the story of John is Jesus out teaching on the hillside, and more than 5,000 people are gathered around at meal time. Jesus says, "Feed them," but the disciples tell Him that they don't have anything. Andrew finds a little boy who has five loaves of bread and two fish, and they bring it to Jesus. Jesus has them sit down in groups, and He breaks the bread and the fish and gives thanks to the Father and feeds the 5,000+ people. And then just to top it off, He collects 12 baskets full of bread crumbs when it's over.

You see the next miracle when He sends the disciples on to the other side of the Sea of Galilee and Jesus needs to get to where they are. The crowds are around Him, so he takes a shortcut and in the night, He walks on water. He goes to them by walking on the water. Then we see Jesus coming in contact with a man who had been born blind. Jesus doesn't just improve his sight. Jesus takes a man who had been blind from birth and He heals him and gives him his sight! Then this week, we come to John chapter 11 with the seventh and final miracle, sign, and wonder that Jesus performs. It is like He takes the largest weight in the room and adds it to the bar, and He presses it with ease. He raises to life a four-day dead Lazarus.

Around these miracles, events, signs and wonders, Jesus makes claims with each of them. He declares something about who He is. Jesus takes the physical miracle and He applies it to a spiritual message. This teaching is going on. He did not feed the 5,000 just to solve their physical hunger problem. He fed the 5,000 to say to them, "I am the bread of life, and if you eat of me you won't be filled for a day. You'll be filled for eternity." He takes the man who was born blind and He gives Him sight and declares, "I am the light of the world." When this man received his sight physically and light came into his body, Jesus said, "It is bigger than that. I'm the light of the world."

When Jesus raises Lazarus back to life, He makes the spiritual application to this physical miracle by declaring, "I am the resurrection and life. I am who brings people to life. I am the One who brings people from death to life." That's why when John says if you believe that He is the Christ, the Son of God, you will have life. He is giving this great truth and this great testimony that to believe in Him is to have Him living in you. When He is living in you, you pass from spiritual death to spiritual life. You are alive.

John's Gospel records the desire of Jesus. Don't miss this. The desire of Jesus is for you to know who He is. He wants you to know Him. The Father in heaven wants you to know Him. The Father in heaven wants a relationship with you. He has come making these "I am" statements. Now we come to chapter 11, and Jesus confronts the heaviest weight in the room. And that is death. Paul described it as our last enemy. The resurrection and life confronts the news that someone He loved has died. Is He worthy? I think that it's a question we have to ask on this day. In the face of death, is Jesus worthy? They didn't know that in chapter 11.

I want to show you something. Look at verse 36 of Chapter 11. It shows where they were limited in what they understood about Jesus. John 11:36 says, "So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept

this man from dying?" What were they saying? They were saying, "We know that He can give sight to the blind. We know that He can make the lame walk. We know that He can feed the 5,000. We know that He can walk on water. We know that He can change water to wine." But they didn't know He could raise the dead to life. They thought the grave was too big for Him. They thought that death was too strong for Him. They were fine with believing in miracles up to a point of, "He could have kept this man from dying. He could've done a miracle." But Jesus says, "I've got one more for you. He can die and I can raise Him back to life."

John has written this so that we would see and hear these things in order for us to walk away saying, "I believe!" So is He worthy in the face of death? This week in Southern California, hundreds of college students gathered in a local bar in Orchard Hills. Much like a bar that would be in downtown Athens, hundreds of college students went to country night. They put on their boots and their flannel shirts and went to line dance the night away. Before the evening was over, 12 people would be dead. These are my kids, your kids. These are law enforcement people like you serve. By morning, the fires of Southern California would have begun to threaten that city. I'm told today that in Paradise, California near Pepperdine University that at least 23 people have died already from the fires of that forest.

Let's make it more personal. Is He worthy in the face of death? In our church - in what we identify as Watkinsville First Baptist Church - in the past 12 months, at least 30 families in our church have dealt with the immediate death of a loved one. 30 of us have lost either a wife or husband, son or daughter, mom or dad, or brother or sister. What an amazing thing by the grace of God that I can stand before you today and open my Bible to John chapter 11 and declare with confidence that Jesus is stronger than death. He is stronger than death.

I want you to see from the story of raising Lazarus back to life that the resurrection and life, Jesus Christ, when confronted with the death of someone He loved, was worthy. There are three ways this shows up. First of all, He saw the opportunity to teach the truth of who He is. In the death of a loved one, the resurrection and life saw the opportunity to teach the truth of who He is. Let's look at verse one.

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. That's an intriguing statement to me because this story of Mary wiping the feet of Jesus with oil in her hair had not been recorded in John up to this point. So as he writes looking back on the life of Jesus, he includes this to clarify which Mary and Martha he is referring to. He was writing with the perception that the people in that area knew the story of Mary who had worshipped Jesus in that way. So he clarifies who he is talking about and says in verse 2:

It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill."

Later they will observe again how much He loved Lazarus and later, Mary and Martha will be identified as people that Jesus loved. That has intrigued me this week. I've been thinking about why this story would include the emotions and the love that Jesus had for them. The only thing I can see is that God is wanting us to see how Jesus loves the people He loves. He wants us to see how He deals with death in the life of those He loves. So today, as people loved by God and today as a child of God, I want you to see how God confronts death. What Jesus does here is that He saw the opportunity to teach the truth of who He is. First of all, news came to Him. News came to Him that Lazarus was ill, but Jesus knew more. Verse four:

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."

In just a couple of verses, Jesus is going to look to the disciples, and they are going to say, "Well if he's just asleep, he can get better. We all need to go to him." But Jesus says plainly, "Lazarus has died." But here He says, "This does not lead to death." What's going on? The Greek phrasing for "it does not lead to death" is the same phrasing that would be used to describe danger. He was saying that this illness was not dangerous. But when Jesus came face-to-face with death, He was so powerful, so strong, so mighty, and so authoritative that He did not consider death dangerous! Wow! For us it is the event in life that we dodge, that we don't want to talk about, that we don't want to confront! And Jesus is throwing this weight on the bar and saying, "It's not dangerous to me." News came to Him and as Jesus gets the news of Lazarus' death, He says that it is for God to be glorified. Let's continue with verse five:

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.

Has anyone ever read that verse just once? You read it and you try to go to the next verse and think, "No, I think I said something wrong there." So you backup and think, "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he went immediately to where Mary and Martha were." But that is not what it says! It says, "So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was."

One of the things that you see happening in the story is that when Lazarus was ill and had been dead for four days, Jesus seems to take His time arriving. He was teaching and speaking; there was no rush for Jesus. There was no panic for Jesus. He did not see the death or sickness as dangerous. There was no surprise for Jesus. And every one of us in this room have felt Jesus work in that way, haven't we? We have been in the situation where with the psalmist we have said, "How long, O Lord? When are you going to answer? When you going to get here? Do you see what I'm going through? Do you see what they're going through? We need you, Jesus *now*."

Jesus in this story is taking the opportunity to teach truth even by His delay - or what would seem like a delay - to us. News came to Him of Lazarus, and then secondly Martha came to Him in verse 17:

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." 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."

Do you know what just happened here? Martha just gave her testimony of salvation. John says in chapter 20, "I'm presenting these miracles and signs and wonders that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing you will have life." Here's what Martha says: "I believe! I believe that Jesus is the Christ! I believe that You are the Son of God!" Do you know what happens in the transaction of heaven there? She passes from old life to new life. She passes from death to life. She has believed! Right here! Martha comes to Him, and notice how Jesus responds to her.

She says to Him, "Lord, if You had been here. If You would not have delayed. You've waited too long. You missed the opportunity to do something here." But with Jesus, there was no rebuke. There was no scorn, there was no sarcasm, there was no indifference. I love that. When you think about relating to your Savior - the One who loves you - look how Jesus relates to her dealing with death. What does He do? He sees the opportunity to teach her who He is. He unloads truth on her.

When she said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died," in essence Jesus was replying, "If I had been here you would have never learned that I am stronger than death. You already know that I'm stronger than disease, but I want to take it one step further and show you that I'm stronger than death." Jesus in this moment is showing His deity. Jesus in this moment is teaching truth. Jesus is saying, "Yes, he's four days dead, but I want you to know that if you believe in Me, you will live forever." Jesus, just like He did in the other miracles, took the physical miracle and applied it to a spiritual message. He's also going to take this physical miracle of raising Lazarus back to life, and He applies it to the spiritual message. He's saying, "The real celebration is this - I can take you from spiritual death and give you spiritual life, and you will live forever!" He saw the opportunity to teach the truth of who He is.

Secondly, He felt the pain of what sin does. In verse 28, after talking with Martha when confessed her belief in Him, she went and called her sister Mary and spoke to her in private. Enjoy this passage! When we see a statement like that, imagine Martha coming back from just having confessed Christ. She walks in the house, and Mary's crying. So she walks in the room and whispers to her, "Mary, come with me." She says in verse 28, "The Teacher is here." I love the fact that after

Jesus has just taught her that He's the resurrection and life, the title she gives to Him is Teacher. Look closer at verse 28:

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."

Where have we heard that before? Mary said the very same thing that Martha did, "Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

So you might think to yourself, "Here comes another load of truth!" But no! Look at verse 33:

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.

This is the Greek word there that was also used to describe a horse that snorted. It is phrasing here to help us see that from Jesus there was this erupting, this grunt, this groan. It was an external display of agony. In verse 34, Jesus says to them, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see."

Next is the shortest verse in all of Scripture, but maybe the most profound verse in revealing something about who Jesus is. Verse 35 says, "Jesus wept." So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

It is not a lack a faith for you to grieve when you're walking through the death of people you love. Maybe you've wrestled with that by thinking, "I should be better by now. I shouldn't hurt like this." Listen, sometimes our emotions and our theology just don't match up. We know what we believe, but we don't know how to show it. Jesus wept. Mary and Martha are weeping. Jesus feels the pain of what sin does. But first was compassion; He hurt with them. When Martha said, "Lord if you had been here," do you know what Jesus does? He is so in tune with life and eternity that in that moment, you see His deity and He speaks truth. And in this moment, when He encounters Mary weeping, Jesus is so in tune and sovereign with life and eternity that He shows His humanity and He sheds tears. When you think about how Jesus relates to you as the Good Shepherd, as the light of the world, as the resurrection and life, don't miss this. Not only do you find Jesus as the Son of God speaking truth to death, you also find Jesus the Son of man shedding tears in death. What a Savior! What a King! What a Lord!

He weeps with Mary and is compassionate with her, but there's a second emotion. The second emotion that Jesus demonstrates in confronting the death is rage. Yes, anger! We know that the story of Jesus' anger in the New Testament was when He turned over the tables because He said

they had made the temple a house of thieves when it was supposed to be a house of prayer. He was raging against them.

Here's the second time that you find Jesus feeling the pain of what sin does in anger and rage and agony and emotion that is deep in His soul. Look what happens in verse 38: "Then Jesus, deeply moved again--"

In what I read about this verse, this is what I find through commentators' words. There is something that happens when you read a phrase like "deeply moved" that glosses over some of the emotions that Jesus was showing here. Jesus knew that the wages of sin is death. Jesus knew that death stings and that it looks like the grave has victory. In what we're reading here, this is the last winter of Jesus being alive on earth. As soon as He raises Lazarus back to life, what happens is that with great intensity, everybody begins to line up as enemies. The last phrase of chapter 11 is this: "Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where he was, he should let them know, so that they might arrest him."

We are moving rapidly toward the cross. They saw that killing Jesus was the answer to shutting Him down. They did not know that Jesus was stronger than death. But as he approached the tomb of Lazarus, there were emotions of sorrow, but there was also something much bigger going on here. I want to lean on the words of the commentator R.V.G. Tasker. In his writing he says,

There would seem to be in this approach indignation and even anger in His sorrow. The presence of the grief-stricken sisters to whose faith bereavement is presenting its sharpest challenge brings vividly home to him. So we may suppose the iron grip in which mankind is held by what Paul calls the 'last enemy that shall be destroyed' to bring about his destruction was the chief purpose for which the son of God had entered the human arena. It is death that is the object of His wrath, and behind death, Him who has the power of death and whom He has come into the world to destroy. Tears of sympathy may fill His eyes, but His soul is held by rage, and He advances to the team as John Calvin says, 'As a champion who prepares for conflict.' The raising of Lazarus thus becomes not an isolated marvel, but a decisive instance and open symbol of Jesus's conquest of death and hell. Not in cold unconcern, but in flaming wrath against the foe, Jesus smites in our behalf. He has not only saved us from the evils which oppress us, He has felt for and with us in our oppression. And under the impulse of these feelings, He has wrought out our redemption.

Jesus is stronger than death. And in this moment, He did have compassion for Mary. But also in this moment, He was confronting the price of sin, the cost of sin, and the result of sin. Now listen, not every death has sin as its cause, but every death is a result of sin. We know that from the beginning that death entered the world when sin entered the world. Jesus entered the world to deal death its final blow. This physical miracle of raising Lazarus back to life was to be applied spiritually to show the people that what He was about to do when He went to the cross and died was come back to life, and every one of us could live forever. And that is just amazing. Imagine coming around the corner and seeing your four-year-old or your 10-year-old son or daughter being punched in the

face repeatedly. Then you will get some sense of what it was like for Jesus Christ to come into this world and see death punch people over and over and over again to the point where He could go to the cross and take on our sin for us so that you and I could live forever. Believe Him, and live forever.