

10/17/2021 - John 11:1-27 - "Jesus in the Midst of Sorrow"

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[0 : 00] We're going to jump into John, and we are going through an expositional preaching series in the Gospel of John, and I have got to mention that when we're doing expositional messages, the Scripture drives the series. Today, we're going to be talking about death, and for many preachers, I know some church growth experts are probably crawling in their skin.

They're probably saying, that's not how you get over 200 people in your church. You don't talk about death. You talk about other things that maybe apply. Talk about feeling good.

This is not my agenda. This is Scripture's agenda for us today, and so I have for us a message out of John 11. We're going to be looking at the verses that Jeffrey read, and the sermon title today is called, Jesus in the midst of sorrow. Jesus in the midst of sorrow, and that's going to be from verse 1 through 27 today, and we got to ask ourselves to kind of slow down today, to acknowledge that there's going to be a day where I'm not breathing anymore. None of us are going to make it out of this life alive, and what do we make of death? What do we make of this time?

We can often have coping mechanisms of minimizing it as if, you know, it's not this really intense, grieving period of life. We could minimize the rawness that death has on our emotions.

We can ignore that, minimize it when sorrow sets in. We could ignore it completely, at least not forever. No one wants to talk about death. Surely you're probably like, oh man, this topic today, Brent, come on.

[2 : 29] Nobody wants to talk about it. I know that's the last thing that my wife wants to talk about on a six o'clock Saturday night, figuring out our, you know, our will, our living will. She doesn't want to talk about it.

I don't always want to talk about it, but the Bible makes us talk about it. We could be paralyzed by death, as if we're living in constant fear of the unknown and be paralyzed by the reality of death. Or we could just take it for granted, as if you're invincible. Drive 150 miles an hour down the freeway, run into dangerous situations in the military without using your brain, and just taking death for granted as if you're invincible. What can we make of death? There's one thing that we can make of death, and we'll see in the text today, we can hope in it.

What do we make of death? We can definitely make something of death, being a moment where we can utterly feel so hopeless and downtrodden.

When somebody dies, you realize it's all over. There's no second chances here. The heart has stopped.

[4 : 00] The mind has ceased to function. There's no hope for the situation to change. And isn't it interesting, church, that death has the power of awakening our distracted lives? The stock markets in New York don't matter at those times of death. Your to-do list, the calendar items, even the birthday party that you have planned next week, it doesn't matter. It awakens our distracted minds. Being a pastor in various situations, I've seen that reality of those raw emotions upon family members. I've sat at beds of people moments before passing away, witnessed my own grandfather pass and his heart stop.

And I've seen the fear that's in even family members' eyes who are unbelievers of that fear of the unknown. Experience that peace of those who do know Jesus Christ.

And being one of your pastors at this church, I'm called to prepare everyone for death. Yes, I'm supposed to instruct you in a way of walking in a manner worthy of the Lord, but it's all leading to death.

Preparing you for death. So within only 11 chapters remaining in the Gospel of John, we are in Jesus' final days leading up to his crucifixion.

And chapter 11 is filled with 57 verses of a drama. And I have read it, and I can't get the illustration out of my mind, and hopefully this resonates with you.

[6:01] But what I see occurring, especially in the verses today, and I hope I explained this right, God help me, is to, is like a dance between two objects going through this narrative.

We see a dance amid this tense. It's like a dance that's going on among a storm. Like there's lightning, there's thunder, and then you have the dance between death and love.

And the dance between death and life just occurring, and you just feel this eerie sense of tension on the horizon. And this is Jesus' final visit to Jerusalem at the Passover, and serves as a climatic sign of his gospel, the raising of Lazarus.

This is what chapter 11 entails. And Lazarus is actually a typological foreshadow of Jesus Christ. He's a type of Jesus Christ.

It anticipates Jesus Christ's death and resurrection displaying God's glory. And it's important to note that as we're looking at this sign, that we're not missing the significance of a sign.

[7:17] We can call it a miracle for which it was, the raising of Lazarus, but more appropriately, we look at this as a sign, because a sign, just like any street sign, it tells you something.

It tells you something of what's ahead and how to act right now in the moment. And it's a sign to serve for a specific purpose, for a specific time period.

And during this time, it was to identify Jesus Christ as a son of God, as John makes it clear in his gospel. And I want to enter into this narrative, and I want you to see this dancing drama panning out amid the tension between death and love and death and life.

And today, my points are going to be looking at three lessons that we can learn from death. The first lesson being that God's love is not redefined by loss.

The second lesson today will be death is in God's control. The third lesson is God promises life to believers.

[8:34] And with the main point saying that Jesus Christ alone is the only object of hope in the face of death and the only means by which death is given purpose.

It's given intentionality. And Jesus Christ is only able to give that. So may we use our time to truly know and believe, not just do this intellectual digestion process, but to respond in an appropriate way.

Because the characters that are being developed in this narrative are the ones who 1 John chapter 1 talks about, the ones who have seen and looked upon, the ones that have heard, the ones who have touched with their hands.

This is real life. And may we see and know intimately and personally this word of life. Can we pray as we enter our time and ask God for help as we begin to enter this narrative of Lazarus?

Let's pray. God, as we turn to your word, we turn to something supernatural. We turn to something that has authority.

[10:01] We turn to something that is inspired by your Holy Spirit. And through the Trinitarian belief of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we know that this is inspired by you.

So Father, come to us as we are now in this moment in life. Help us to see Jesus Christ amid death. Help me to speak the words that you desire to be spoken today.

And Father, may you be glorified in our time. Help us to know you intimately and personally today.

We praise in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. The first lesson about death is that we see, according to this passage in verse 1 through 6, God's love is not redefined by loss.

The verse, this whole chapter opens up, 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. So the sisters went to him saying, Lord, he whom you love is ill.

[11:22] And we see that the setting is starting to take place. Just like any story you have, the character development occur early on in the story, the scene setting, and then it goes into the body and we'll enter the first half of the body of this story today.

And this is turning our attention to a man in Bethany. And Bethany is located just east of Jerusalem, about two miles off, as we'll see as the text continues.

And entering into a narrative that's infamously known as the death and the resurrection of Lazarus. Isn't it interesting how John kind of redirects our attention off of that?

And he's showing us this care and love that is between this family and Jesus.

I want to emphasize this drama well. I want us to see the tension the tension between illness, which is death as we know it in the narrative, which they thought was illness, death, and love.

[12:40] This is a dance that is going on. This family was very important to Jesus and within a narrative is tangled emotions of that intimacy and sorrow. It's taking center stage.

I'm going to emphasize a couple things so you see exactly what I'm speaking about. It says in verse 1, now there was a certain man who was ill.

So you have this illness and we identify who that ill man is. And then we see in verse 2, it shows this Mary, it's distinguishing Mary as the one who anointed the Lord, a significant act of love towards someone else.

And then it reminds us whose brother was ill. And so the sisters sent to him saying, Lord, the one whom you love is ill. You see, illness and love.

Illness and love. And they call out for a distress, a little distress call. This family has experienced significant traumatic event right now.

[13:48] And they sent a messenger on an entire day's trip to reach out to Jesus because Jesus is their only hope, their last hope that they can think of, similar to the healing of the official son who traveled miles.

And so we see Jesus receiving the message when he heard this, heard it, he said in verse 4, 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, the entire family.

And so when Jesus heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. One thing's for certain that we see just within six verses is that Jesus knows more about our situation and our condition than we do specifically.

Jesus has the power of bringing purpose out of our situation and our sickness and our illness. And you want to know why?

[15:08] Because at the center, in between all of this sandwich of illness and illness is smack dab Jesus' love for those who are experiencing the trauma, the ones who are experiencing death and illness.

At the center is the reality that this illness is Jesus' love. Similar to the divine knowledge of the blind man who is born blind being used to display God's glory.

Jesus makes that similar claim right here and right now. And this stems back to, I think, the problem of our human condition of questioning. It's our insistent questioning, isn't it, of what's the intention behind this?

If only this medicine would have started working, if only these nurses would have communicated clearly to a doctor, my grandfather would have been alive.

If only this or if only that. What's the intention? What's the intention of this illness? What's the intention of your delay, Jesus?

[16:22] What's the intention of the wine shortage in Cana? What's the intention of a man who was bound to a chair for 38 years? What's the intention of the food shortage?

Why? Why? Why? Why? What we often perceive as a mistake in our circumstance, might we be blinded to the underlying meaning of it all?

Please understand, your circumstances, as horrible and traumatic as they can be, do not define God's love for you.

God's love is at the center of this narrative in verse 5. Verse 4 reveals the intention. You're asking why? Verse 4 is the intention and God's love is at the center in verse 5 and then his response to it in verse 6.

we should never view God as incompetent or insensitive based upon our occurrence of illness or death or maybe his delay to act, to intervene upon it.

[17:46] God brings purpose and meaning into all of it and specifically God's love is not redefined by our loss.

We see a second thing unfold as we enter into verse 7. We see death is in God's control. It says in verse 7, look with me.

Then 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?

And 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. The attention turns off of Lazarus, turns the attention off of that family, and now the attention is on his disciples.

[18:56] How are his disciples responding in this narrative to the reality of death? They say, are you nuts, Jesus, essentially?

That would be my translation, the BLT translation, the Brent's living translation, and the sandwich, which is good, mind you.

He says, are you nuts? The disciples reply, return to Jerusalem? These guys probably still have rocks in their hands.

You've got to be crazy. Consider the situation. He mentions something significant in this passage. I hope for you to see that.

In verse 9, he enters into this reality that there's 12 hours in a day. Back in ancient times, they didn't have clocks. They didn't have noon horns.

[19:54] Is that an Ohio thing, by the way? Noon horns? Does that go on all over? No? Okay. I think the consensus is no. It's a weird Ohio thing. Just like cookie tables at weddings.

They didn't have noon horns playing in their day. They didn't have clocks. They didn't have cell phones. Surely not. Their way of telling time was much less precise.

It was all about the position of the sun. 12 hours was considered from sun up to sun down. The next 12 hours of the day was night time.

You had 24 hours in a hole. The proverbial saying has superficial meaning, but it also has deeper meaning.

He simply says that it's safe for workers to do their work in the daytime. You wouldn't want to be putting a roof on a house in the night.

[20:51] I know probably many of you handymen have probably done that and said you could do it fine. You shouldn't. It's dangerous. You can't see things that you can fall over and stumble upon.

You'll probably whack your thumb. You don't work in the nighttime. You simply work in the day. But notice the richness of his usage of this proverbial saying in the face of death the disciples and for our sake even all Christians cannot be more secure in our daily work of putting a roof on but how much more secure we are entering into a life threatening situation than when we are right where we're supposed to be in Jesus Christ in him in verse 10 doing his will and yeah nighttime is dangerous for workers with their hands but the daytime for Christians is often dangerous during the day and entering back into Jerusalem is definitely a dangerous situation but he says but if anyone walks in the night he stumbles because the light is not in him he's making something sure that there's a yoked positioning in proximity with

Jesus Christ where protection is given when you're doing his will so truly we can be assured that even in the face of death itself we are confident in our security and our safety in our savior Jesus Christ when we're found in him and furthermore even if our lives are taken from us in the face of danger following his will our bodies can be committed to the ground our souls be commended to heaven but God is still in control of that Jesus still has his hold upon you not only in this life but in the life to come as we saw last week and verse 11 continues with just this confusion and it's laughable I believe he says after saying these things in verse 11 so in the the the the disciples said Lord if he has fallen asleep he's going to recover he's going to wake up and verse 13 now Jesus had spoken of his death for anybody who's questioning in this narrative for us today but they thought that he meant taking a rest and sleep so in verse 14 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 so Thomas called the twin said to his fellow disciples let us also go that we may die with him it's interesting how he uses Lazarus has fallen asleep this is a way of referring to death in scripture and when I look at falling asleep that makes me think of that just as falling asleep and waking up are sort of temporary you don't sleep forever some of us teenagers maybe sleep forever and seem like they're never going to wake up but it's referring to a temporary condition and

I must say that there is a heresy warning here in this passage this isn't indicating that there's a belief of soul sleep this is something that the Mormon people believe in scripture is clear that our souls don't sleep after death that there's a conscience a continuous state after death and so it's not

saying that for anybody who might come in contact with a Mormon who points to this but what's better understood is that this is clearly not a reference to Lazarus' condition as if he's sleeping and waking up it's indicating Jesus' power if Lazarus is actually dead and Jesus is saying he's sleeping it's indicating it's putting our attention on Jesus' power to make a difference in the situation because Lazarus was clearly dead he was separated from his grieving family who sent the message and he was in the custody still of

[25 : 38] Jesus Christ even after death who is our hope in life and death and we're going to talk about this more next in this next point but Lazarus is dead the messenger traveled a whole day Lazarus probably passed along that traveling time period Jesus delayed two days to get to Bethany and it's going to take another day's trip to actually get there to where Lazarus is placed and so that's going to be four days in total that Lazarus would be dead and as we inquire why verse 15 says that it's best this way he makes purpose again out of this passage to his disciples who are concerned about the threat of death he's saying it's best this way so that disciples would believe and I love how the ending of this passage talks about

Thomas that's logical Thomas Thomas the doubter as we see in the gospel of John later on he's the one that had to touch the wounds of Jesus to actually believe and this actually validates the concern of death if logical Thomas is a little bit up in arms about this and he says well let's let's go say goodbye to your pets we're leaving we're not returning because it's pretty hostile in Jerusalem let's die with him that validates brings credibility to the testimony just as it was to touching Jesus wounds so truly we see in the last lesson about death that Jesus brings purpose he brings purpose in death that his love is not redefined by death but here we see that death is truly in God's control beyond a shadow of a doubt so what then shall we fear church in the face of danger and so the setting is laid out verse seven gets into the body of this narrative and we see the third lesson regarding death and we see that hope being revealed that

God promises life to believers and verse 17 continues now when Jesus came he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days and upon the calculations within this verse thus far that makes sense 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 and so when Martha heard that Jesus was coming she went and met him but Mary remained seated in the house we sense a little bit of cyclical writing style of John he's a very cyclical writer he's repetitive he's parallel in thoughts he kind of repeats things and it's significance when you see repeated words and repeated phrases you should consider those as being important and there's constant mentions of days of times in this passage there's mentions of a tomb and how long they've been in the tomb and this is important because why

Jesus said Lazarus is dead this is driving in the point if there's any shadow of a doubt that Jesus just went there and maybe resuscitated him or something that that would alleviate any of those concerns or any of that heresy this is really dead this is stinky dead Lazarus in a tomb I mean consider what happens to your organs within one to three days I mean they start to decompose and we're not even going to get into the graphics of the bloating process about three to five days that takes place and we won't talk about what comes out of the openings of your body at that point but what is important is that this is four days that Lazarus has been in the tomb four days Lazarus is dead beyond a shadow of the doubt church and even in verse 39

Martha makes it clear and verifies that very fact make no mistake in the words of Ace Ventura do not go in there you know in the arms saying woo like do not go in there so the author doesn't let us forget even in this narrative Lazarus is dead but why the mention of the Jews it's like John is making sure that we don't forget in this passage the danger that is very close by Jesus in Bethany as he's arriving and notice that this serves as a dual purpose of the looming danger that's right around the corner but also the dedication of these Jews to the six days of mourning that followed according to the tradition of comforting those who die in the mourning process and so Martha left to meet Jesus and

[31 : 34] I just want us to imagine that moment Martha went to meet Jesus you know those times in the hospital maybe with your family members who are in in surgery could be hours long and you're in the waiting room and you're just it seems like time is taken forever you're just waiting for that door to open you get this sense of jolt when you hear that door crack but you find out that somebody is exiting the operating room you're waiting for that doctor to come I want you to encapsulate those moments as Martha is experiencing that similar time in her life right now as she's

going walking probably running to meet Jesus by herself this is all in the whirlwind of the grieving process the frustration the anger the denial the bitterness etc verse 21

Martha gets to Jesus and Martha says to him Lord if you had been here my brother would have not died but even now I know that whatever you ask from God God will give you I want you to note something significant church that even amidst amidst the grieving process I want you to note this even amidst the intense emotions that death has in our lives Martha still trusted in the truth of who Jesus is there was nothing that could take that faith off track and the same is true for us today and Jesus says to her your brother will rise again and Martha says to him I know that he's going to rise again in the resurrection on the last day and she's kind of focusing on this far off proximity of hope that in the last day it's known that the resurrection of our bodies will be called in the last day but Jesus is saying that yeah that's true and all but he's going to rise again there is hope not just in the distant future within the proximity of your life there is hope here and now amid your grief and the fact that she was reliant upon Jesus' special relationship with God is that he had power to bring purpose in all of that purpose Jesus

Jesus Jesus enters into the grieving process here and just as Martha clinged to the hope of God's future promise the last resurrection at the last day it is now being redirected to cling to the hope of God's promise right now in her life Jesus says to her in his I am statement 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 Jesus is the only hope that we have in grief he brings purpose to death and illness that his love is at the center of it in our first lesson he is in control of it he brings purpose in the midst of danger and here we see that he is our only hope in grief there are no drugs that can numb that pain there is no alcohol that can ease that pain there is no entertainment that can distract that pain but

Jesus Christ has the power to enter in and cure that pain Jesus says do you believe this do you believe Martha that your judgment is a little bit flawed you are focused on the past if only I were here earlier you are clinging on to a little hope in the present that my ways are not your ways that my thoughts are not your thoughts that my dear friend Lazarus purpose now is to be a means of the faith of my disciples and coincidentally the Jews that are surrounding this scene later in the passage do you believe that I am the resurrection that I am the life that I'm the resurrection of the future I'm the resurrection I'm the life now it's not far it's near do do you believe that you will live even though you die do you believe that everyone who lives and believes will never die do you believe and

[37 : 44] Martha says yes Lord I believe that you are the Christ the son of God who is coming into the world in Jesus fifth I am statement it is clear that the life of a believer does not end in death but continues eternally just as endless fellowship with Jesus Christ in the present and in the future this is true for Lazarus as we'll see this is true for Martha and this is true for everyone who calls upon the name of Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and not only that don't take my word for it take the sign for it he proved this to be true church might Jesus be moving you from this distant reality and this distant abstract hope in death that yeah

I know things are going to get better at death but he's moving you from that to something here and now a precise intimate close hope in death this process begins with the drawing of the Holy Spirit in our lives capsulating our hearts as this word goes out you know beyond a shadow of a doubt that something is changing within you and you are going from that distant hope that I hope I'm going to heaven too I know I'm going into the father's arms in heaven our hope in life and death according to the gospel is that those who die in Jesus will rise with Jesus Colossians 3 makes that ever so true this process begins with the Holy Spirit and is consummated and is brought in by the power of Jesus Christ do you believe I want to close with a couple thoughts and let me take a cough break this means of hope is still available today

John 11 helps us to learn a few lessons concerning death that as we saw in the first lesson that God's love is not redefined by loss that only God knows the intention knows the purpose behind our loss and our tragedies but death has no authority also to compromise the reality of God's love we see the second lesson that death is in God's control and our perception of death is limited we can't comprehend the complexity of an infinite God we are finite we are limited and we do his will no matter the threat of danger that lays ahead as long as we are doing his will and also the third lesson about death is that God promises life to those who know him at death while there may be a plethora of ways that we can die they actually made a TV show about it there's multiple ways that we can die

but there's only one way that

God intended for us to die and that's faith in Jesus Christ and if you're not a believer in this room and you're not sure of that even on the live stream today if you know that something has happened according to God's word today within your heart and he's turning you from death to life right now he is the resurrection of your life right now to bring you from death to life believe in the person and work of Jesus Christ that's something to hang your hat on that's something to hope in and if you're a Christian don't lose sight of this hope death is real death is ugly and even Christians myself we don't want to sit around and figure out our living wills just don't want to face that reality but we can't lose sight of the hope that we have in death in

Christ we are under the authority of Jesus Christ we are no longer under the authority of death death has no victory death has no sting Jesus Christ alone is the only object of our hope in the face of death and the only means by which death is given purpose let's pray