

John 11: 1-45 Jesus is the resurrection and the life 22nd March 2026

Pray:

Gram Seed was a bloke in the UK, who had fallen to rock bottom. He was violent and addicted to drugs and alcohol. One day he passed out and ended up in hospital in a coma. After a few days, the Doctors spoke to his mum about turning off the machines as they were all that were keeping him alive. She asked for a bit of time to think about it.

During Gram's time on the street, a couple of Christians had been talking to him about Jesus, Gram had chased them away. But they kept been praying for him, they kept looking out for him. And they were in the hospital the day the Dr's talked about turning off his life support and someone pointed them out to Gram's mum. They asked if they could go and pray for him. She agreed but didn't think it was going to make any difference; he was as good as dead.

The Christians prayed and Gram woke up from his coma! His addictions to drugs and alcohol were gone. They invited him to come on an Alpha course, and Gram gave his life to the Lord. Gram experienced new life in Jesus. He is now married and goes into prisons to run Alpha courses.

We could ask why didn't Gram come to faith earlier when he was being visited by the Christians, why did he have to almost die? Well, just perhaps, like the death of Lazarus that we have heard about today, Gram's resurrection from virtual physical death was so that Gram and others would believe, and that God would be glorified. It was a witness to the power of God and bringing about new life for Gram, his life is now a blessing to others. He now points people to Jesus.

It's a wonderful testimony isn't. It's a true one; those who did the Alpha course last year would have seen Gram speaking on one of the videos.

Jesus is the resurrection and the life. He offers new life for today and eternal life forever. For those who believe.

Do you believe?

The story of Lazarus is the final 'sign' in John's gospel, pointing to who Jesus was and a wonderful prelude to what is to follow, his own death and resurrection.

We have heard this message of new life for those who believe repeated in the passages we have looked at the past few weeks...

Jesus speaking about new birth to Nicodemus, offering new and living water to the Samaritan woman at the well as she came to *believe* that he was the Messiah; giving new

life as well as physical sight to the blind man as he came to *believe* and worship him, while others remained blinded.

Again, today we read that many came to believe, but in the next section of John's gospel we read how the Pharisees plotted to kill Jesus, they wanted to stop people from believing in him. They did not want to believe in Jesus as it would interfere with their ways, their ruling, their power, their status.

Let's take a closer look at this wonderful passage of the death and raising to life of Lazarus and the message that Jesus offers in this scripture.

Firstly, we are told that *a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.* This family were friends of Jesus, he had been in their home before, Mary had sat at his feet to hear him teach, while Martha complained that she wasn't helping with the dinner! Jesus was obviously fond of this family as the sisters sent word to Jesus, "*Lord, the one you love is sick.*"

It seems Jesus knew how sick Lazarus was, I think he knew that he would die, even while announcing that the sickness will not end in death! Whatever was to come was for God's glory. Jesus chooses not to rush to them immediately. He stayed where he was for 2 more days.

When he decides it is time to go to his friends in Bethany, the disciples are concerned as Bethany is near Jerusalem where they knew the Jews were trying to get rid of Jesus. They want to protect Jesus and probably themselves!

Jesus knows that his journey to the cross is getting closer. He continues to set his face to Jerusalem, he continues to listen to his Father, to be obedient and not shy away from his Father's will.

Jesus talks in riddles again, which the disciples do not understand. He says their friend had fallen asleep, but he is going to wake him up. Jesus was using 'sleep' as a metaphor for death. The disciples say that if he is asleep then he will get better!

He then plainly tells them that Lazarus is dead, and that he is glad he wasn't there earlier! The way Jesus speaks sometimes, it's not surprising that the disciples were often confused. I'm sure they were thinking, like the sisters, that if he had been there surely Jesus could have prevented his death...why is he glad?!

Jesus is glad because soon more will believe as they witness God's glory.

The disciple Thomas then shows great loyalty, in announcing to the disciples that they should go with Jesus...and wait for it, that *'we may die with him'!*

Thomas is often called ‘doubting Thomas’. Here we see he is a man of great courage and loyalty, even though his thoughts are quite negative, convinced that Jesus is walking to his death. And in fact, he was quite right! Sadly later, the disciples did not show such loyalty, deserting him in the garden, and for one, even denying knowing Jesus at all.

But for now, they travel with Jesus to Bethany where Lazarus is dead.

When they get there, they discover he has been in the tomb for four days. This shows that in fact, even if Jesus had rushed to his friend when he first got the message, Lazarus would have died before he got there. He possibly died soon after the message had been sent.

The four days in the tomb is significant. Jewish belief held that the soul left the body after three days, so after four days there is no hope of the soul rejoining the body. Lazarus was well and truly dead; there could be no doubt.

The period of mourning was seven days, so the mourners were still gathered with Mary and Martha in the house. There were several Jews, most likely Jewish leaders, with them.

Martha hears that Jesus is coming and goes out to meet him.

She acknowledges that if Jesus had been there then her brother would not have died. I don’t think she is necessarily being accusatory at Jesus for taking his time, but she knows he can heal the sick and he would have done so if he were here.

Interestingly she adds that she knows that even now, “*God will give you what you ask.*” But she doesn’t expect that to be Lazarus coming back to life, for when Jesus simply says, “*your brother will rise again.*” Mary interprets that to be at the resurrection on the last day. Not in the next half hour!

I think her belief that God will still do whatever Jesus asks, is showing that even though her brother died, she still believes that Jesus can heal others. Her faith in him and his power to heal is still alive.

Sometimes our faith might waver when we feel that Jesus was not with us when we needed him, when perhaps he didn’t heal a loved one, or answer a prayer. We may then doubt in his power, we may doubt his love for us. We might question his very existence.

Perhaps some of you have experienced this doubt. And you wonder why Jesus heals one but not another. I pray you can hold onto faith, believing that Jesus is with you, he knows your doubts and he feels your pain.

We see this in the story here, he feels the pain of Mary and Martha.

But firstly, he tells Martha the most wonderful message of the gospel. He says,

“I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.”

There have been other “I am” statements in John, statements that reveal Jesus’ true identity. “I am the bread of life; I am the light of the world”. This statement declaring him to be the resurrection and the life is the high point of these “I am” statements. “I am” refers to God’s name revealed to Moses at the burning bush. When Jesus says, “I am”, he is saying he is God! And he is saying if you believe in me you will live and never die!

Martha responds that she believes he is the Messiah, he is the Son of God, and he is the one coming into the world.

Jesus’s statement here, brings such a message of hope for those who believe.

If we believe in Jesus, then new life, eternal life begins now. Not just after we die. This has been the message in all the stories we have been reading the past few weeks. Jesus offers new, transformed, bubbling with the spirit, life for us today.

Martha goes and calls her sister Mary to come to Jesus. She wants her to be comforted by Jesus too and hear his words of hope.

Mary comes still weeping and probably loudly wailing for her brother along with the other mourners. Jesus is deeply moved; his spirit is troubled.

‘Jesus wept’. The shortest verse in the bible, but oh so profound. Theologian Tom Wright uses a few more words in his translation, he says, “Jesus burst into tears!” Jesus knows he is going to raise Lazarus from the dead and soon there will be rejoicing, but he joins the sisters in their grief. He shows such empathy. He felt their pain. That’s why I say Jesus knows our pain and he does empathize with us. He weeps for our pain and for the pain and suffering around the world. He must be weeping for the world right now...

In this situation Jesus does act and bring Lazarus back to life, an act to bring about belief in him as the Son of God, and to bring glory to God. It was his final ‘sign’ before his own death and resurrection and should have given his disciples hope...

He goes to where Lazarus has been laid and asks for the stone to be removed. The sisters would have had to give their consent to this, which despite their concern for the smell, they agree to Jesus’ request. It seems they have a mix of doubt and faith in what Jesus is going to do. Jesus reminds them that if they believe then they would see the glory of God.

We too, if being honest, will often have that mix of hope, faith, and doubt. But like Mary and Martha it is good to take a step of faith and allow the stone to be rolled away, to see what Jesus might surprise us with. A glimpse of God’s glory perhaps.

So that all who are gathered will connect Jesus to his Father, to God himself, Jesus calls out thanking God for hearing him. God already knew his prayer to raise Lazarus. God still likes to hear us pray even though he already knows what is on our hearts and minds.

Jesus simply loudly calls; "*Lazarus, come out!*" And the text says the "dead man came out", though obviously he was no longer dead! He was very much alive, needing the grave clothes removed, and no doubt a good wash and some clean clothes, (though Tom Wright suggests there was no smell, there is no comment about an odour, no holding of noses as he came out, for he was no longer a dead man).

We don't hear that tears were turned to laughter, but we can only imagine, as Jesus turned their sorrow into dancing.

What we hear is that this miracle, this sign, did achieve Jesus' aim. God was glorified and many came to believe.

Soon we will be turning to Jesus own death, not through sickness, but because of the unbelief of the ruling Jews. We may rightly weep as we remember Jesus' suffering on the cross on Good Friday, and then we will wait until the stone is rolled away and rejoice as we celebrate Jesus raised from the dead on Easter Sunday. This is what he asks us to believe in, his death and resurrection, so that we will have new and eternal life in him.

He offers this life to us today. He longs to see more lives transformed just like Gram Seed.

He calls us from death to life.

He wants us to live lives that give God glory.

Will you believe in Jesus and ask him to give you new life today?

Let's pray;

Jesus, we acknowledge you as the life and the resurrection. Thank you for offering us new life. I pray you will help our unbelief, fill us with your spirit and give us eyes to see your glory. May we live each day in the power of your Spirit, living and working for your glory.

In Jesus name. Amen.