The message today, is going to be Part A of a 2-part message. We've been studying the Gospel of John, and today we're up to chapter 11, which is where Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. Today's message is going to cover vv1-37, but we'll keep the whole reading together (vv1-53)

And once again, because it's a long passage, I thought it will flow better if one person does the reading, (Georgie).

The raising back to life, of someone who has died – it would have to be one of the most <u>amazing</u> miracles.

Imagine the great sense of having a "second chance"… (not for the person who's died, but for those who mourn).

When someone dies, there's always regrets:

- things that we have left unsaid;
- the guilt of the things we've done that we wish we could amend;
- wishing we'd taken the time to go and visit them;
- wishing we had another chance to patch things up…

Usually, when someone dies, there is no 2nd chance for that sort of stuff.

Anyway, Lazarus wasn't the only person in the Bible who was raised from the dead.

- Elijah raised the widow's son;

- Elisha raised the Shunammite woman's son;
- There was some random bloke, who when they threw his body into the same grave as Elisha, he came in contact with Elisha's bones, and he got up again.

- Jesus raised the widow's son; and
- He raised Jirus's daughter.

In Matthew 27, as Jesus dies on the cross, in Jerusalem, some tombs came open, and "many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised…

In the Book of Acts:

- Peter raises Tabatha to life; and
- then when Paul was preaching, he went on and on and on, and poor old Eutychus fell asleep & fell out a 3rd-story window & died. And Paul went downstairs & raised **him** back to life.

But out of all of the resurrections in the Bible, the resurrection of Lazarus probably stands out because he's been dead for 4 days.

Since Biblical times, there have also been numerous claims of people being miraculously raised back to life… Some of these claims, I would take with a grain of salt; others, may well be fair dinkum… Just don't believe <u>everything</u> you hear.

Do what Jesus said to do "Look at the evidence of the miracles themselves"…

There are some, who are not very discerning, and so, there are some, who very easily get taken in by <u>false</u> claims of miracles.

Some folk, are what I refer to as "miracles junkies" – they are addicted to miracles – they are on a constant quest to <u>see</u> and to <u>experience</u> something new. It seems their greatest source of excitement in life, is to hear about another miracle, and so they grab hold of every claim that someone's been raised from the dead in the Name of Jesus…

But as we get into today's reading, we're going to realise, the **greater** resurrection, is the resurrection to **eternal** life. You see, Lazarus was raised from the dead. Beauty… God was glorified through this (praise God). But, how many of you have met Lazarus? You haven't, have you, because he's dead…

And Yes, our God is the God of 2nd chances… But for most of us, our 2nd chance doesn't look like a Hollywood movie, where someone gets their life extended to achieve something important (and probably fall in love) before they are called back to paradise…

For most of us, the 2nd chance comes in our baptism (or in what baptism represents) – the putting to death, of our old sinful self, and being raised – being born again into a new, eternal life, in the Lord Jesus Christ… That's the miracle of the 2nd chance: The old sinful self, being put to death; Being born again, (righteous; Holy) into Christ Jesus.

Anyway, let's pick it up at the beginning.

Mary, Martha and Lazarus, are a brother and sisters, and they're all very good friends of Jesus. They live in Bethany, about 2 days[i] journey from where Jesus is currently preaching. (2 miles from Jerusalem)

Lazarus is sick. And he must be so sick, they decided to send a message to Jesus…

"Lord, he whom you love is ill." 4 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, for those who heard Jesus say that, they're probably assuming "Good stuff: He's going to go and heal him." But, we know better. The Son of God, was going to receive even greater glory, by raising Lazarus back to life.

Now, V5 says something extraordinary: Jesus loved that family so much, when He heard that Lazarus was crook, "He dropped everything and came straight away…" Is that what it says???

No. He loved them, and so, when He heard Lazarus was crook, He stayed where He was for another 2 days…

BTW, have you done the sums on this?

- Jesus is 2 days journey from Bethany;
- He waits 2 days before He leaves;

- When He gets to Bethany, Lazarus has been dead for 4 days.

- Therefore, the point at which Jesus gets the message that Lazarus was crook, is about the moment that Lazarus died…

  Remember, communication didn't happen as fast as what it does today. (there was no sending of a text message "Lazarus has just died")…

What John is clear to point out though, is Jesus' delay, is not because He didn't love them…

And, this (in itself) is a lesson for you and me:
When **our** prayers are not being answered in the way we want them to be answered, or when God is delaying an answer to our prayer, sometimes we might begin to question, "Does God <u>really</u> love us???"

The thing is, God's ways are not our ways; God knows best… And sometimes (or maybe often), we **will** go through a time of suffering and grief, not because God **doesn't** love us, but because God **does** love us. (The fact that God loves us, was settled once and for all at the cross (We're going to see that next week, in Part B))…

Sometimes we go through suffering and grief and loss, **because** God loves us; and it is <u>through</u> suffering and grief, that our faith is strengthened, and God is glorified… It is through suffering and grief, and in the way the Spirit of God

carries us at these times, that we become more like our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Suffering Servant…

Anyway, 2 days after He gets the message, Jesus says "Righto fellas, we're heading back to Judea now." (Bethany's in Judea (not far from Jerusalem (2 miles))). And the disciples warn Him, but, hang on a minute Jesus, don't forget that this is the place where the Religious Leaders are trying to stone you.

And Jesus says: "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. 10 But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him."

In other words, Jesus is the Light of the World, right??? If Jesus hides Himself away, it looks like He **does** have something to hide – it looks like the Religious Leaders were right to condemn Him (because it's the baddies who hide themselves away)… But, if Jesus openly goes about the business of God, the world will see the spiritual light that He truly is.

And then He says, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I'm going to go and wake him up.."

During the week, I came down with a bit of a head-cold. I woke up during the night, shivering, had a headache (bit of a temperature), sore throat… And the next morning, Robyn said to me, "Just sleep – have the day off. It'll be good for you."…

And that's obviously what the disciples were thinking. "Why would you go & wake him up. If he's sleeping, that's the best thing for him…." (Mind you, they were 2 days travel away. How long did they think he was going to sleep???)

So, Jesus just came straight out with it. "Lazarus has died, 15 and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

There's a bit of a hint there: Through Lazarus' death, Jesus is going to do something, that helps the Disciples to believe.

And Thomas ("doubting Thomas"), says, "Oh well, let's go with Him, and we'll die too." and they head off

Anyway, when Jesus gets near Bethany, Lazarus has already been in his tomb for 4 days.

Mary and Martha are in town. There's a whole bunch of visitors from Jerusalem (only 2 miles away), who have come to console them.
John records it as:
19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother.

Now, often when John uses the term "**the Jews**", he's referring to the Jewish Religious Leaders, **or** the Jews who are

against Jesus, and it's usually a hint that there's soon going to be trouble…

But at this point, it seems they're doing a good thing. They have come to console Mary and Martha, at the death of their brother. The trouble comes later, and we'll get to that next week.

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet Him. She meets Him, before He gets to town.

And what she says, seems like disappointment and faith, mixed together.

"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

Right, there's the disappointment. "Jesus, You could have done something, and this wouldn't have happened."

Some people use "disappointment" as a justification for faithlessness… "How can I believe in a God who let this child die?" "How can I believe in a God, who allows all this suffering in the world?" Alright, they use their disappointment, as a justification for faithlessness.

But Martha demonstrates "faith", despite the disappointment.

21 Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."

That, my friends, is a magnificent prayer of faith. "I know, that whatever **You** ask for, Jesus, God will do…"

I've come to the conclusion that most of the time, when God doesn't answer my prayers, it's because I'm asking for the wrong thing. (You'd never do that, would you?)

Do you remember how Jesus taught us to pray? "Your will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven."…

You know what: In the height of human arrogance, the name-it-&-claim-it brigade dare to **tell** God what His will is… How dare we, have the arrogance to tell God what His will is. His ways are not my ways; His goodness and His plan, is so much greater than what I can perceive…

If God had answered all of my prayers,

- I wouldn't be teaching God's word here today (I'd be back on the farm in Goondiwindi)

- I wouldn't have gone through the hard times that have shaped Robyn and I to be who we are today;

- I'd probably be married to my first girlfriend, or maybe married to someone who was never my girlfriend, and miserable.

I am so glad that God has not answered all of my prayers, because He knows what's best. And I am increasingly learning to pray like Martha prayed (I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.), and to pray like Jesus taught us to pray: "Your Will be done"…

In faith, Martha believed that God would do, what He has promised to do – that Lazarus **would** rise again in the resurrection on the last day."

We know this. **We** believe this. Jesus said something that we proclaim at every funeral we do: He said:
"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

Do you? Do **you** believe this. Martha believed it. The only way that she could believe this, is because first she believed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, Who has come into the world…

So,,, she knew it was God's will, for Lazarus to rise again on the last day… But in hopeful faith, she left it open for Jesus to do something more. Remember she said: even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."

What a faith.

Let's come back to V25, because this the key verse for today:
25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

When Jesus returns, those who believe in Him (who have died), will rise again to eternal life. But every generation of Disciples of Jesus, hope that they are going to be the generation who are still alive when Jesus returns. These are the ones of V26 when Jesus says: [26] and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.

Those who are still living, when Jesus returns, do not go through death. They transition from life, to eternal life.

Paul says (in his first letter to the church at Thessalonica),
1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 (ESV)
[13] But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. [14] For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

[15] For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. [16] For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

[17] Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord

in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.
18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

And, what an encouragement those words are.

BTW, when it comes to end times, the most popular teaching coming out of America at the moment, is what's called the pre-tribulation rapture – that all of the Christians are going to be sucked out of the world before the great tribulation begins. That is not what the Bible says.

My bible says, the dead in Christ will rise first… And some try to tell us, "Oh yes, there's going to be a secret resurrection that nobody knows about. That's not what my bible says. My Bible tells me that on the authority of the word of The Lord, the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

There's nothing secret about that. The Lord Jesus said that on the day that He returns, the whole world will see it, like lightning in the East, can be seen in the West…

There's a verse I've been repeating often as we've been working our way through the Gospel of John. It's the reason the Gospel was written.

20:31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Now, at this point, Martha says those exact words:
Jesus said, Do you believe this?"
And she said: 27 …."Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

That, is the sort of faith that Jesus is looking for, folks. It wasn't an amazing miracle that made her believe. She already believed. She believed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who came into the world… The whole purpose of this Gospel being written, is so that **we** would believe the same thing, and that by believing, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

So she believes. Martha then heads off, to get Mary. Jesus still hasn't entered the village. He must be somewhere on the outskirts. And when the Jews see Mary leave the house, they assume she's going to the tomb, so they follow her.

Mary comes to Jesus, falls at His feet, and her words are similar to what Martha said, but not the same. She expressed the same disappointment, but without the hopeful faith.

She said:

"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

And Jesus expresses 2 different emotions.

The first emotion, most of our English translations, tend to play it down…

Have you ever encountered raw grief?

I will never forget the first time I encountered raw grief. Raw grief happens, when somebody who is young and healthy, all of a sudden, unexpectedly dies.

I think it was the first year of our marriage, we were living in Dalby. Our minister was younger than what I am now. He had children in HighSchool… Without any warning, he dropped dead of a heart attack.

He and his wife were a team. They did everything together. In ministry, she was to him, what Robyn is to me…

A couple of hours after he died, Robyn and I went to visit the widow…
And I was nervous. What do you do at a time like this? What do you say to someone who is in a state of utter grief and despair???

I learned that day, you don't have to say anything. You won't have the words to fix them. It's about being there.

I have never seen such utter, raw grief.

- *She sobbed;*
- *She howled;*
- *She shook…*

And all I could do, was

- *wrap my arms around her; and*
- *hold her;*
- *cry with her;*

- *have no other place to be.*
  to be there as long as it took…

That, is what raw grief looks like. But remember, this is only a couple of hours after he died.

By the time of the funeral, there was still sadness, but the raw grief had gone. The raw grief was overcome with the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to come…

Now, Lazarus has been in the tomb for 4 days. Mary is weeping; The Jews are weeping…

And V33 says:

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.

Now, we tend to view that as "Oh, Jesus is grieving like they are"… But that's not the picture we get in the original Greek. The word translated as "deeply moved", some bibles have a little footnote there, telling us that He was "indignant". That's a better translation of the Greek. That's how Jesus was moved – That's why He was greatly troubled…. He was indignant. This shouldn't be like this.

As 1 Thessalonians 4: (ESV)

13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

You see, there are some who have no hope. And it is **right** for them to be filled with grief.

My biggest fear when I went into Bible College, about becoming a minister, was about when I would have to take a funeral of a non-Christian… What hope can I give to a family, when there is no hope to be had… And I've found that, all I can do, is to preach the gospel, and proclaim a hope for those who **do** believe.…

And over the years, I love doing funerals for Christians (not because I wanted to see them die), but because it's a celebration – it's a celebration that this is not the end. *As the Salvation army would say, they're promoted to glory.*

Death is not the end.

1 Thessalonians 4:6 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an

archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

Wow!!! What an encouragement!!!

But, when Jesus saw Mary, and He saw that she was grieving the same as the supporters from Jerusalem,,, He was indignant. It shouldn't be like this.

But, He wasn't callous. His second emotion, is because of His mercy and compassion… When He met Mary in her grief, He had great empathy for her… Yes, He was indignant; As a woman of faith, she shouldn't be grieving like an unbeliever grieves… But, in compassion, He wept <u>with</u> her.

As Disciples of Jesus, when another Christian whom we love, dies, Yes we are sad/grieve/weep… And when we seek to comfort a brother or sister in Christ, who have lost someone dear to them, there is a time for us to hold them and cry with them.

And it may not be immediate, but there will come a time, where if they are still deeply burdened by their grief, we remind them over and over again, of the encouragement and the joy of the resurrection we look forward to…

This is what we believe.
Jesus said:
"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

Yes, we do believe this. And so, we are not without hope.

We're going to leave it there, and Part B comes next week.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,
We want to thank You for the great hope we have.
The words of Jesus are so true.
He is the resurrection;
He is the Life.

And we thank You
that You give to us,
what we do not deserve.

The promise that by having faith in You,
we will be raised back to life.

Lord

help us to comfort one another with these words;
and help us to console the grieving,
as we weep with those who weep,
while giving hope to look to the future.

We look forward to the resurrection,
and we pray Come Lord Jesus.

Amen.

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[i] Kruse, C.G. (2003) *John: an introduction and commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries). ***Comment 11:17***