Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

I hope by now that you all know that in this first section of John’s Gospel we have a record of seven major discourses or talks of Jesus and seven great miracles of Jesus. Well, chapter 10 was about the last of the discourses and here in chapter 11 we come to the last of the miracles. So this is an enormously significant chapter.

I hope you also know by now that John’s purpose in writing his Gospel was so that we might believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and that by believing we might have life in His name. And at the heart of who Jesus is as the Son of God is His death and resurrection. And this miracle prepares us for Jesus’ death and resurrection, because Lazarus is a kind of **prototype**. And prototype simply means first type or early version. What happens to Lazarus prepares us for and points us to what is going to happen to the Lord Jesus.

But because Lazarus is actually **more like us than he is the Lord Jesus**, in that he was *just* a human being and a *sinful* human being at that, we will also see some important salvation truthes as we consider the death and resurrection of Lazarus.

But this chapter is not just about doctrinal matters; this chapter is also about **the grim reality of death**. There is profound grief in this chapter, including the tears of the Lord Jesus. And we need to speak about this. But there is also **a message of hope and comfort** in what Jesus says about resurrection and life. So it is entirely appropriate that on this Lord’s Supper Sunday we see **how the Raising of Lazarus Reveals the Lord of Resurrection Power**.

Now this is a big chapter but it seemed to me that there was value in taking it as a whole. That means we will not be able to consider every detail or doctrine in the chapter, but I trust that we will do justice to this miracle and the main points it set before us. So we will simply make a few comments about each section of the narrative but focus mainly on the major points of this miracle.

1. So let’s begin with vv1-6 and **the** **news of Lazarus’ death**.
   1. We know from the other Gospels that Martha and Mary were Jesus’ friends. He had stayed with them before. But this is **the first time we are introduced to Lazarus**, their brother. And we are told that he was ill. So the sisters send messengers to Jesus.
      1. Now, note that they do not *explicitly* ask Jesus to come to them. Any visit to Bethany, which was just a few kilometres away from Jerusalem, would have been very risky for Jesus, as is made plain by the disciples in v8. But judging from their response to Jesus when He did come, that if only He had been there…, it seems clear that they were hoping and implying that He should come and help.
   2. Now **v4 is very important to this whole episode**. Verse 6 tells us that after hearing the message Jesus “*stayed two days longer in the place where He was*.” And at first read this sounds callous, which means cold and uncaring. Why didn’t Jesus rush off to Lazarus straightaway and heal Him? But what Jesus says in v4 tells us that He knew the design and outcome of this episode; He knew that it would end with the resurrection of Lazarus, and that this would be “*for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.*”
      1. We are being given an insight into the secret will of God in these verses; Jesus knows that He will raise Lazarus and that this will reveal His glory and power.
      2. And we need to be clear also that **Jesus’ ‘delay’ was not the cause of Lazarus’ death**.
         1. We know already, from Jesus’ second miracle in this Gospel, that He does not need to be in the same town to heal a person.
         2. In addition, it is almost certain that Lazarus was already dead by the time Jesus got this message. Where Jesus was when the message came was probably about a day’s journey from Bethany. So you have the day of travel for the messengers, the two days that Jesus stayed where He was, and then His day of travel to get to Bethany. And when He arrived, He was told Lazarus had been in the tomb four days. It seems likely then that Lazarus died soon after the messengers left to go to Jesus, as bodies were usually buried the same day in those hot climates. So even if Jesus had left as soon as the message had arrived, Lazarus would have been dead when He got there.
         3. Again, the point is that the *resurrection* of Lazarus will reveal something far more wonderful about Jesus than would have the healing of Lazarus!
      3. And there is a great lesson about trust in all this. There was tremendous grief and confusion throughout these four days but eventually God’s purpose in these events became plain. Now, our trials may last for much longer than four days, andwe will not always get to know exactly what God’s purpose for every circumstance that comes into our life is. But what we do see here is that God is sovereign over time and life and death; He controls *all* things. And you know His promise in **Romans 8:28**, that He will work all things together for good for those who love Him. So whatever it is that is keeping you awake at night, trust in God!
2. Well, that brings us to vv7-16 and **the decision to go to Judea**.
   1. Jesus announces to the disciples that they are going to Judea, which basically means Jerusalem. And as I said a moment ago, any visit of Jesus to Jerusalem was an enormous risk at this time. And referring back to the events at the end of ch. 10, the disciples point this out to Jesus in v8.
   2. And Jesus then responds to them in vv9-10 by talking about there being **twelve hours** in a day and daytime being when you do not stumble and night-time being when you do stumble. Now these words of Jesus could easily be a sermon in themselves but we have to be satisfied today with the most basic explanation. They are a figure of speech. Jesus used the same figure of speech back in 9:4-5. What He is saying to the disciples is that **His time on earth is fixed** – the ‘twelve hours of daylight.’ Once these ’12 hours’ are ended by His crucifixion, it will ne ‘night-time.’ And the ’12 hours’ cannot be lengthened by the disciples convincing Him to hide and it cannot be shortened by any effort of the Jewish leaders. It is fixed by the eternal decree of God. So Jesus must use His allotted time well and do all that the Father has willed for Him to do.
      1. And of course, this was an important teaching moment for the disciples. Jesus was teaching them that they too had a fixed amount of time on earth before their death. And they too had to use that time well in the service of God.
      2. But this is true also for you and me, isn’t it. Because the Father is sovereign, He has already determined the moment in history when you will die. I am not trying to be morbid, just real. There is an invisible Facebook event on a set date that will be your death. And interested or IGNORE or NOT GOING are not options/you are GOING. And you can’t delay it or bring it quicker. And this is such an important message for our day. So much advertising space and time is aimed at delaying death – gyms, foods, diets, medicines, etc. And I am not saying that we should be unconcerned about making healthy choices. The question is, how much time and attention do we give to staying alive versus using our allotted time well to serve the Lord?
   3. Well, in vv11-16, Jesus then gently prepares the disciples for the fact that Lazarus has died, by first using the common way people spoke about death then, which was falling asleep, and then being plain and direct when they didn’t understand Him. But He encourages them in v15 by explaining that this event will be of great benefit for their faith.

1. Well, that brings us to vv17-27 and **Jesus’ conversation with Martha**.
   1. As we have noted already, when Jesus arrived at Bethany, He learned that Lazarus had been dead four days already. Many Jews had also come to lament with Martha and Mary about their loss. So Martha goes to meet Jesus to speak with Him.
      1. She says in v21 reveal that she believed Jesus could have healed Lazarus if He had been there. And that is to Martha’s credit. But as we noted earlier, Jesus has already healed a boy near death when He was not in the same town as the boy. So **Martha’s faith is not yet fully formed**. It needs more knowledge for her to truly understand who Jesus is and what He came to do.
      2. But again, to her credit, Martha then goes on to say, “*But even now I know that that whatever you ask from God, God will give you*.” And that sounds like a wonderfully open-ended confession of faith that could include resurrecting him now. However, what she goes on to say seems to rule out her thinking that as possible. Nevertheless, her words do leave all doors open. And there is a good lesson in this for us also. We often encounter situations in life that seem humanly impossible to us – advanced cancer or another serious disease, critical injuries, war, etc, and we don’t even know what to ask God for, or we wonder if there is any point asking God for healing or safety, etc. Well, let’s remember Martha’s confession of faith, which is both indefinite “Whatever?” and unrestricted “Whatever!” Let’s be like the Apostle Paul who prayed, “*Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think*…”
   2. Well, Jesus then tells Martha that her brother will rise again. Martha thinks Jesus is referring to the general resurrection at the end of time. And then Jesus makes this stunning declaration about being the resurrection and the life. He says, “*Whoever believes in me, though He die, yet He shall live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die*.”
      1. And Jesus is **not saying in v26 that Christians can escape death** but that natural death cannot prevent eternal life. I expect you have heard people speak about a grave as a person’s final resting place. When I officiate at the funeral of a believer, I usually make a point of saying that this is **not** the person’s final resting place. We know, because of what the Bible teaches, that at the end of time the bodies of all those who have died will rise from their graves and be reunited with their souls (1 Thess. 4:16 & 1 Cor. 15:52ff).
      2. You see, we human beings were created to live. Death came as a result of the Fall. Death is an awful intruder in creation that each of us must face because we are sinful. But beyond death we will all live again. The question we need to answer then, and it is the most important question you will ever consider, is **where will you spend eternity**?
         1. And your answer to that question depends on your answer to the question Jesus next asked Martha, which was, “*Do you believe this*?” Do you believe that I am the resurrection and the life?
         2. You see, after the general resurrection comes the Day of Judgment. And all those who have trusted in Jesus Christ will be welcomed into eternal life while those who have rejected Jesus Christ will be condemned to an eternity in hell. Matthew 25 speaks plainly about this great separation – eternity in heaven or eternity in hell. Which is it for you? Have you repented of your sins and trusted in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins? Do you live a life of daily repentance and faith?
   3. Well, Martha’s response was magnificent! She gives a stunning confession of faith, even though, as we have said, her faith is not yet fully formed. But it will be with what she is about to witness in relation to her brother and then in relation to the Lord Jesus. And I hope and pray that you too confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God!
2. But that brings us next to vv28-37 and **Jesus’ conversation with Mary**.
   1. And here we have **one of the most powerful and poignant passages in the whole Bible**! The crowd goes with Mary, thinking that she is going to the tomb to weep. She meets Jesus and says the same thing her sister had said to Him. We read that she was **weeping**. The Greek word used suggests a loud wailing. Today we might say she is crying buckets! And the crowd with her were weeping also. And this loving and compassionate Lord and Saviour was “*deeply moved in His spirit and greatly troubled*.” His profound love for His friends and His sorrow and even righteous anger at death as a consequence of sin brought Him also to tears, as we see in v35, “*Jesus wept*.”
      1. I think I have told you before that one of my favourite passages in the Bible, if we are allowed favourites, is **Hebrews 4:15**. There we are told that in Jesus we have a high priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses, because He faced every temptation we face, but never sinned. And it is because of this that we can turn to Him in confidence “*that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of* need.” The death of loved ones is a very difficult and painful thing to endure. But in your moments of grief and sorrow, know that your Saviour has been there Himself. He knows your pain. He will give you grace to help in your time of need.
3. Well, our next section is vv38-44. And here we see **the resurrection of Lazarus**.
   1. Now, before we look at the details and the significance of what happens here, we have noted that this is the **last miracle of Jesus** **that John records**. So boys and girls, I want to test your Bible knowledge here. Are you ready? Think back to the 10 plagues in Egypt. Do you remember that story? Can one of you tell us the first plague? I hope you can help us because a lot of the adults are starting to look quite nervous! Moses turned the water into blood. And what was Jesus’ first miracle in John? He turned water into *wine*! So while Moses’ sign was a symbol of judgment, Jesus’ sign is a symbol of joy and abundance! And what was the last plague in Egypt? The firstborn son was killed. And here, Jesus’ last sign is to *raise* *someone* *from* *death*. So again, while Moses’ sign was a sign of death and judgment, Jesus’ sign is a sign of life and joy and new hope! And just in that biblical observation there is a wonderful message about Jesus!!
   2. Well, Jesus came to Lazarus’ tomb. He then ordered the stone rolled away. Martha is aghast, telling Jesus that it is going to stink because Lazarus has been dead four days! But Jesus calls on her to watch and have faith. So the stone is rolled away. Jesus then prays and He prays for the benefit of those listening, as we see in v42; He wants them to understand who He is. And He then commands Lazarus to come out and Lazarus comes out like a walking Mummy, because he is all wrapped up in the burial bandages. And Jesus then orders him unbound, which is what happens.
   3. Now, if you were here last week, I hope you remember that we talked about the **doctrines of grace – TULIP** – Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints. Well, they are all very visibly on display here!
      1. **Total Depravity** – Dead four days. Tomb. Burial bandages. Lazarus was dead! He had no ability to raise himself and come to Jesus. He could only come to Jesus if Jesus gave him life. And it is the same with all human beings. In our natural condition, we are *spiritually* dead. We cannot come to Christ by ourselves; the Spirit of Christ must first spiritually resurrect us – give us a new nature that can come to Christ.
      2. **Unconditional Election** – Did Lazarus choose to be resurrected? No. Jesus chose to resurrect Lazarus. In fact, did you notice that Lazarus does not say a word during the whole episode! What we are told repeatedly though is that *Jesus loved Lazarus*. So Lazarus was chosen for resurrection because Jesus put His love on Him. And it is the same with all those that God has elect/chosen to salvation. **Ephesians 1:4** says, “*In love* *He predestined us*…”
      3. **Limited Atonement** – Did Jesus call all the dead in that area to come out but only Lazarus chose to come out? No, everything Jesus did was focused only on Lazarus. And it was 100% effective. And it is like that with salvation – Jesus died on the cross only for the sins of the elect, and every drop of blood did and is doing what He intended it to do.
      4. **Irresistible Grace** – Do you think there was ever a chance that Lazarus might have stayed dead and not have come out of the tomb? No way! When Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out,” there was only ever one outcome – Lazarus coming out! And in the same way, when the Spirit of God calls one of God’s elect to trust in Christ, that is what happens – they trust in Christ.
      5. And finally, **Perseverance of the Saints** – Now, to be sure, Lazarus eventually died again, as must all human beings. But the same power that raised him from the dead ordered him unbound because now he was to be preserved in life. There was never a danger that 3 seconds after staggering out of the tomb, Lazarus would keel over and slip back into death. He had been brought back to the fullness of life and he would be preserved in that state until he had to pass through death to eternal life. And so it is with all God’s elect – God will cause them to persevere in faith and bring them through death to eternal life.
      6. So the resurrection of Lazarus is a powerful picture of salvation!

* 1. But also, as we have already said, Lazarus is a **prototype** of Jesus. For Jesus will also die and be buried in a tomb with a stone rolled in front. And He will also rise from death and come out of the tomb. The key differences though are that Jesus was sinless and not deserving of death, that He raised *Himself*, and that His death brings salvation for everyone who believes in Him.

1. Well, that brings us sixthly and finally to vv45-57 and **the responses to the resurrection**.
   1. And in terms of the responses to the resurrection of Lazarus, v45 sounds quite positive as we read that many who saw what Jesus did believed in Him. However, we have talked a number of times about **the difference between miraculous faith and true faith**. Miracles impress people but usually just for a short while. It is knowing that your only hope for eternal life is Jesus Christ that creates true and lasting faith. And it will take the death and resurrection of Jesus for this miraculous faith to become true faith.
   2. And it is the inability of miracles, no matter how amazing they are, to bring people to true faith, that we see here. For while some believed, others ran off to tell the Jewish leaders about what Jesus did. And the response of the Jewish leaders is the exact opposite of faith. Unbelievingly, if you will pardon the pun, the eye-witness reports of Jesus’ “many signs,” as we read in v47, now including Lazarus’ resurrection!, make them even more determined to kill Jesus! And then we get this stunning speech of the high priest **Caiaphas**. His advice, in v50, is that it is “*better … that [Jesus] should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish*.” He meant this as a political expediency; let Jesus die rather than the Romans kill us all. But John explains that the Holy Spirit was speaking through Caiaphas to prophesy about Jesus. Without the death of Jesus, we would all die and be condemned to hell. But by the atoning death of Jesus, we may have peace with God and eternal life in heaven! And this is what we see in vv51-52 as John explains that Jesus came to die for all the children of God.

Well, Jesus then withdraws from Jerusalem, as we see in v54, until the time for the Passover feast arrives. And all the people, and all the chief priests and Pharisees are on the look out for Jesus. In the next few days the ‘twelve hours of daylight’ that have been allotted to Jesus will draw to a close with His crucifixion. But there is still much for Him to do and say over the next few days, as we shall see in ch’s 12-17.

What we have seen today though is that death is a foe that Jesus came to defeat! And while we will soon eat bread and wine that symbolize His broken body and poured out blood, we do so because death could not hold Him. He is the resurrection and the life!

*Lo! Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb;*

*lovingly He greets us, scatters fear and gloom;*

*let the church with gladness, hymns of triumph sing,*

*for her Lord now liveth, death has lost its sting. Amen.*