

## Our Hope of Life John 11:11-16

We have been going through this extraordinary chapter that details the resurrection of Jesus' friend Lazarus. The chapter starts out that word is sent to him from Mary and Martha that Lazarus is sick. And we are told that Jesus loved this little family so he did something so unexpectedly in the passage and that is that he stayed an extra two day, and the result is that Lazarus has died. And after that he announced that they are going to go to Judea where Bethany is located. The disciples wonder about the wisdom of this decision knowing that the Jews had already tried to kill Jesus. But Jesus knows and teaches that our days have already been mapped out. And no one can take Jesus' life before his time. But it is also a call for all of us to make the best use of our time for the glory of God.

With that said, Jesus is now ready to go to Bethany and then on to Jerusalem where he will be delivered over to the religious leaders and then the Romans and will be crucified on that Roman cross. And just before he goes to the cross we have this wonderful section that teaches us about life and death with the raising of Lazarus.

And I find this section so glorious as we even consider our own death, which is closer than it ever has been before. And Jesus talked about death differently with different groups of people. For those who did not follow or believe on him, he talked about it as leading to eternal judgment, a place of eternal fire where the worm never dies. With the rich man and Lazarus there was a chasm which no one could cross, and people's destiny is fixed after death. But for the believer it was the exact opposite. It was called not eternal punishment or death but eternal life. It was our great place of rest. We will even see that it is the Lord Jesus who goes away to prepare a place for us, and it is none other than him who will receive us to himself. However great eternal death is to the unbeliever, it is the exact opposite for the believer. Death is something awful, and it is loss and eternal loss for the unbeliever but for the believer it is great gain. We gain eternal life with our beloved.

And we say it so often but we have to say it again and again - this world is not our home. It is not our destination or our hope. And the glory that causes us to persevere and causes us great hope and even to respond in the ways that God wants us to respond in the here and now is to realize our great hope of life with Christ. We talk about being with Jesus and the glory of life eternal. Our hope is not the here and now but to be with him. And the more heavenly minded we are, the more we live for him and delight in him regardless of our circumstances. And is this your great hope? When you find yourself discouraged or trodden down by the world do you ever refocus your heart and mind on your great hope of being with Jesus? This world will run you down. And it is amazing how often we lose sight of our hope, and therefore we lose our hope and our joy. We look at other believers and they seem so happy and joyous and celebrating Jesus, and we think that they just have easy lives. But their life is touch by the fall just like yours. The difference is the rock solid hope they have in Christ and keeping that hope central in our lives.

And one of the things that causes that hope to rise and dominate in our hearts, and therefore create a joy that is indestructible is hearing what Jesus taught about death. It is so comforting and assuring. It really does lift the burdens of living in this

fallen world and encourages our hearts to press on to the finish line when we see Christ. And I want us to see a couple truths about Jesus' teaching about death. And I want us to see how we view death, and that Jesus teaching on death is meant to change us.

1. Jesus' teaching on death. Vv. 11.

I often think so often we go through a verse like this and we do not contemplate or slow down to see the significance and glory of the words that Jesus has spoken, so we cannot enter into the glory and the hope that His words are meant to instill in us. Everyone has some sort of view about death and what happens in death. Some teach that the body rots in the ground, and that this is all there is. Some teach that you are reincarnated. Others teach that you are absorbed in the great nothingness whatever that is. But here is God in human flesh dwelling among humanity. Here is the one who controls ultimate life and death teaching on life and death. We would do so well in hearing him and trust in what he says.

Look how verse 11 begins, **"After saying these things, he say to them, 'Our friend Lazarus.'**" Notice who Lazarus is. He is "our friend." It is an amazing statement on two fronts. One is that Jesus has entered into relationship with us. He considers us his friends, not his enemies or just one of many in the flock, but it speaks of closeness and a bond that we have with none other than deity. What a friend we have in Jesus! And it shows his care. The disciples do not want to go because of the danger, but Jesus cares for his friends. He cares for Lazarus. He cares for the grieving of Mary and Martha. And he is willing to go and even meet the needs of those who suffer. And the second thing why this is so amazing is that we are many times never willing to go. Think of a prayer request that goes out. How many respond? How many call or try to reach out to the one who is grieving. It is so easy to say I don't know them. But if they are a believer, they are not just Jesus' friend but our friend. We are called to enter into their lives even if it brings great discomfort.

But notice how he continues, **"Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep."** What an incredible metaphor to talk about death isn't it? We see here that Jesus knew that Lazarus had died. He is God and he knows the day and hour of our birth and death. None of this takes him by surprise. And we do see that this metaphor of death as sleep is used over and over in the word of God to describe the death of the believer. 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 talks about our hope, **"Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed."** Also Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, **"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."** If you think wrongly about those who have fallen asleep it will grieve you and cause you to have no hope. The N.T. talks over and over about those who have died in Christ as having fallen asleep.

Now here is the question: why does it employ this metaphor? And I think that is a good question. The reason why is because when we sleep we are at rest. Sleep is a state of blessing. There is nothing at risk. There is no danger around me. I am able to rest. We all know that sleep comes as welcome relief from all of the chaos and

adversity and sorrows of the day. After a long and fatiguing day, there is rest, and it is a blessing. When a believer dies, he rests from all the concerns and sorrows and struggles of this life. Think of all the things that your mind and heart are taken up with, whether it is family turmoil, deadlines at jobs, or it is struggles with sin, or health difficulties, or even worries about others. All of that ceases with death. There is absolute rest for the believer from all the burdens that consumed us in this life.

But also it is a great metaphor because sleep for the believer also speaks that what happens after one sleeps, and that is he awakes. After we die, there is a separation of body and soul. But there is coming a day when body and soul will be joined once again. Our great hope is to be everything that humanity was meant to be and that is both spiritual and physical in a new glorified human existence. Listen to 1 Thessalonians 4:16 **“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.”** Here the Lord comes back and with his voice the dead in Christ will rise. It is amazing to consider that Jesus is able to resurrect individuals that have been dead hundreds and even thousands of years. And in this passage he does it with his voice. The same voice that created all of creation is able to reanimate our bodies and gives them an indestructible humanity. And this is how simple it is for him - it is just like rousing someone from their sleep. Children, it is time to rise. It is time to get up and we will rise. And the dead in Christ will rise out of their slumber. It is amazing truth. Comfort your heart with this truth.

And notice how he continues with this truth in verse 11, **“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.”** Notice that the only one that can awaken Lazarus is Jesus Christ. The reason why there is such sorrow at death is there is nothing that anyone can do. Call the physician while he is alive but not after he has passed. But here is our Lord, our Saviour and our friend, and he alone is able and willing and will do what none can do, and awaken the dead body and join it with our spirits that will be with him. Look at the willingness of our Saviour - **“I go to awaken him.”** Notice the difference from the beginning of the verse. It is plural at the beginning “Our friend,” but here it is singular - “I go to awaken him.”

There is life after life for the believer. Let me ask you: how do you think of death? It will truly change your life if you believe and meditate on this great hope. 1 John 3:2-3, **“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”** Notice the cause and effect. The cause is our great hope that we will be like Jesus, and the effect is that if this is our hope it purifies our life. It will cause you to live a certain way. There is nothing lost in this life. Death brings us into the presence of God, and then at Jesus’ appointed time we will rise. Whatever you are going through tonight, comfort your heart with your great hope.

2. This hope is meant to change us. Vv. 12-16

We really do not give much thought or even much concentration on what we hope for in this life, and how it changes us. If you are hoping for something in this life and you do not get it or someone stands in the way of getting it, it will affect the way

you treat that person and respond in that situation. Anger and despair are on opposite ends of the spectrum but both many times are caused by a misaligned hope. And hope is meant to change you and how you respond to life. And if you hope in the wrong thing it will change you. It will change you from the inside out. God has given us a Biblical hope as a means of not only communicating that our future is secure but it is meant to change us in the here and now. So there are two questions this passage brings out: Where and what are you hoping in? And secondly, how is that hope changing you?

And it is amazing to look at the dialogue going on here. The disciples who are often slow to understand the words of the Lord misunderstand the words of Christ, and think that Jesus is talking about that Lazarus is resting and not dead. And if he is resting then he is getting better and there is no need for us to put ourselves in harms way. Let's stay in this deserted and safe place. People are coming here and you are blessing them. And it is amazing when our hope is just in the here and now, it is all about self-preservation. It is all about how I am faring, and the ease of living, and does not care about others. And it also brings out the point in this passage when our minds are taken up with how I am faring and my hope is in the here and now, then there is an inability to see spiritual truths. If death can rob me of what is important to me, then don't go to Bethany. Our temporal hopes blunt the greatness of what Jesus says here. It causes us not to sacrifice and give up what is here for what is to come. Jesus is meant to make my life, my marriage, my family, my financial goals all work in the here and now. And the whole truth of Philippians 1:21 seems so foreign, **"For to me to live is Christ, to die is gain."** Maybe dying does not seem the least bit of gain to you because your so consumed with this life. Maybe for you to live today is not about Christ. Maybe it is just about you. Yes, Lazarus, Mary and Martha might need us but why put ourselves in harm's way?

Jesus corrects their thinking, and very bluntly says that Lazarus has died, which might even seem to them a further reason not to go. But look at what Jesus says next because, again, if you do not know the end of the story, this would seem a strange thing to say, **"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.'"** Now notice what it says here. Jesus says that "I am glad that I was not there." Now we realize there would be some benefit that would be accrued to the disciples and others because Jesus was not there. But we have to ask the question: what would have happened if Jesus was there? What would have happened if Jesus was present? And of course the answer is quite simple. Lazarus would not have died. He would have been healed by Jesus Christ. And here is the amazing thing about the ministry of Jesus: no one ever exists in death or stays dead or dies in the presence of Jesus. Even the two thieves on the cross die after Christ. Whether it is the widow's son of Nain or Jairus' daughter or the brother of Mary and Martha - death cannot exist in the presence of the one who is life. At Nain we read in Luke 7:14-15, **"Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, 'Young man, I say to you, arise.' And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother."** Jesus is our life. Death does not exist in his presence.

And Jesus says here is that he was glad that he was not present when Lazarus died. And why is he glad again? He could have saved so much grief? And the answer is because of the greater hope that would be instilled in all who witnessed this among his followers. This is the pinnacle of the seven signs or miracles that are recorded in the Gospel of John to teach us and cause us to see Christ and trust in him. The only greater sign is his own resurrection. But this is the one who has power over death. Think of the blessing that is brought to Mary, Martha and Lazarus; along with the blessing to the disciples and all present, and even we who read these words. The resurrection of Lazarus from the dead has a profound impact on others. It changes how they think of their own destiny and how they think of Jesus. He has become more glorious and more necessary in their lives and in our lives.

And here is the thing, so many would be encouraged and strengthen in their faith because Jesus went to awaken Lazarus from the dead. God has given us a spiritual resurrection. We were dead and trespasses and sins. We were dead spiritually but God has made us alive in Christ Jesus. And that life, spiritual life that was absent so that you could not and would not serve Christ, should encourage other believers to follow Christ. It should cause other believers to be encouraged. Look at the life he has given so and so, and it causes others to persevere and grow in Christ. Let's me ask you - is your life and your Christianity having that other-worldly effect? Is it causing others to think of Christ and his power and the hope to come? Christ magnifies his glory and who he is through this giving of life. Our lives should be a testament to the power and glory of Jesus Christ and the life that he has given.

Because look how this paragraph ends off, "**So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'**" As they go, praise God for Thomas' willingness not only to go but to suffer for and with Jesus. We realize it would falter but after the resurrection of Christ - later he would give his life for the cause of Christ and his gospel. But it is amazing sometimes to look at the contrasts in the Scripture. And it is easy to miss it in this passage. Jesus says that Lazarus has died and he goes to give him life. But Thomas is still thinking about the threat of stoning and not life. He still has not gotten the message of Jesus. There is a sense of despondency and the inevitable. Death lay in the future. And maybe he can't imagine life without Jesus. This is the one that after the resurrection of Jesus could not imagine that he was risen because his death and separation from him was just too painful. And there is a great lesson. God is not finished with Thomas and he is not finished with us.

He wants to instil that great hope of Jesus Christ and life after life in him. Imagine the expectancy of going to Bethany if he really heard the words of Jesus. There must of been some doubt because he says these words to the disciples and not to Jesus. And there is a real sense of defeatism in these words. And Jesus is slowly and methodically changing his hope. But it does beg the question because our hope does change us - where is your hope? What is the driving hope of your life? Do we realize, truly realize what Jesus has not only given us in the here and now but guaranteed us in the life to come? I beg you meditate on your hope. It will lighten any burdens in this life and cause us to delight and rejoice in our Friend Jesus. What a Friend we have in Jesus!