



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 11: 28-44

Fall 2022

"Tears And Triumph"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning. Well, it's good to be here and we're back in John chapter 11. It's a lengthy chapter that we're dealing with it in three lessons. Jesus had a contentious discussion with some of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem and they threatened to stone Him; so He left the city and went to the other side of the Jordan. And while there He learned that His friend, Lazarus in Bethany, was sick.

And so He delayed going. Lazarus died; and Jesus came there four days after the burial of Lazarus. His family was in great distress and grief. He met with the first of two sisters, Martha, and we ended with verse 27 of John 11 where she made a great confession of faith. She said, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, *even* He who comes into the world."

So she was puzzled, confused over why He had delayed and not come and healed her brother. But her faith was still strong and she confesses faith in Him as the Son of God; something those learned men in Jerusalem in the previous chapter could not do. Well now we take it up in verse 28,

²⁸ When she had said this, she went away and called Mary her sister, saying secretly, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." ²⁹ And when she heard it, she got up quickly and was coming to Him.

³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha met Him. ³¹ Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and consoling her, when they saw that Mary got up quickly and went out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³² Therefore, when Mary came where Jesus was, she saw Him, and fell at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³ When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her *also* weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, ³⁴ and said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ So the Jews were saying, "See how He loved him!" ³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind man, have kept this man also from dying?"

³⁸ So Jesus, again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, "Remove the stone." Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been *dead* four days." ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. ⁴² I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me." ⁴³ When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." ⁴⁴ The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

John 11: 28-44

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word, and bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow together in a word of prayer.

Father again, it's always a pleasure to be with Your people. We had a wonderful evening together last night—a time of fellowship; a time of worship. And we have that

now. We have an opportunity to fellowship in Your Word and to explore this great passage of Scripture: This great event, this raising of a man from the dead and what it demonstrates about our Lord—and what it says about us who have put our faith in Him, the great hope that we have. It's but a picture of what is before us as Your people.

We live in a world that is very troubled, and confused, and dangerous, and temporal. We're here briefly. What lies before us? Well, we have a picture of it here for those who are in Christ, and those who have put their faith in Him—and it is glorious. We have the hope of life, life everlasting, and that is what the Lord unveils in this miracle and what He has spoken of to these two sisters who were grieving.

And we have the hope here, LORD, of knowing that while we pass through difficulties in life, and that we must all grieve at some time or another, and we must face our own end, we have hope in Christ. And so I pray, LORD, that as we study these things together, You would bring that out, and that You would open our eyes and our minds to it, and that You would make the applications that should be made—the great encouragement that we have.

But what we see here, LORD, is the greatness of Your Son, and the greatness of what He's done for us. And that's something we can live with, and live triumphantly with all the days of our life in this world. So bless us, LORD. We are dealing with a passage that deals with grief, and we are a people that grieve. And we have members of our congregation, and family members of our members as well, that are going through great trials and difficulties. Bless us spiritually, bless our health, keep us safe.

And bless us now, LORD, as we sing our next hymn, and then as we look to the text of Scripture that we've read. Bless us and build us up in the faith. May we rejoice in the Savior that we have, and may we serve Him faithfully in all that we do. And we pray these things in His name. Amen.

(Message) Death has been called 'the great leveler' because it doesn't spare anyone. The rich, the poor, the strong, the weak, all die. It conquers the greatest conquerors: Alexander and Caesar are dust. Napoleon is dead. Wellington lies in a crypt.

No one escapes the doom of death. And so mankind has always been enslaved to what the author of Hebrews speaks of as the fear of it, the "fear of death." (Heb 2:15).

Then Jesus stood before a tomb in Bethany and called to his friend, Lazarus, telling him to 'Come out'. And the grave yielded to His command and gave up the dead man. Christ demonstrated power unlike anything men possessed. —Divine power. Nowhere do find a more convincing proof of the Lord's deity than we do here in John 11: Even death obeyed Him.

And nowhere do we find a more convincing proof of His humanity than we do here in John 11, where we read the words, "Jesus wept." What an encyclopedia of knowledge is in that shortest verse in the Bible. He knows our feelings, He sympathizes with our sorrows because He became one of us, and still is—and always will be: God, who took on a human nature. He is a true man. And He can come to our aid and overcome our greatest difficulties, even conquer the grave, because He is true God—God the Son and true Savior, the all sufficient Savior. We see all of that here in John 11.

We come into the story at verse 28. Jesus had deliberately delayed His return to Bethany so that He would arrive only after Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. The delay was not due to indifference toward Lazarus and his sisters, but really, love for them. He waited until death had become unquestionable so that they would see the glory of God. He wanted them to have the proof of His deity—to see His power to give life and understand the hope that they had for the future. And when He arrived, He spoke words of great hope. He told Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life." (vs25). And Martha confessed her faith in Him as the Son of God. (vs27).

Now He calls for her sister Mary, who had remained in the house; "The Teacher is here and calling for you.", Martha told her. (vs28). Mary made a response—and her response was immediate. She left her friends, left the house, and went to Him quickly.

Jesus had not yet entered the village. He remained at the place where He had spoken to Martha. And when the Jews, who were there consoling Mary, saw her leave the house and they followed her. They thought that she was going to the tomb to weep.

But instead, they followed her to Jesus where they saw her fall at His feet and say, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." (vs32). Well, you'll recognize that those are the same words, (in verse 21), that Martha spoke when Jesus came to her. And you can imagine that those were the words that the two sisters said to one another when Lazarus, their brother, died in Jesus absence.

She spoke them at His feet. I think that's significant. That's a place where she is often seen. In Luke chapter 10, the Lord visited the home and Luke tells us that Mary "was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word." (vs39). In chapter 12 of this Gospel, John describes Mary anointing the Lord's feet with "costly perfume." (vs3). She gladly put herself at His feet, the place of worship, because she worshiped the Lord. She worshiped Him because she adored Christ.

And we see that here. But her words were not a rebuke. They were like her sister's words, words of faith, mixed with sorrow, mixed with some confusion. She rushed to be with Him.

She had comforters. She had a number of them, friends who showed genuine concern for her and no doubt were a help to her. In times of grief, we need that. We need the consolation that friends can give. But there's no friend like Jesus. There's no consolation like the consolation He gives. And she, as a woman of faith, left everyone, left the counsel of her friends for that of the Lord.

The Lord was profoundly affected by this. Verse 33, "When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with here *also* weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled..." The language here is strong and unusual. "Deeply moved", (or '*groaned*'), signifies a loud, inarticulate sound, (and it's used elsewhere of the 'snorting of horses'). When it's used of men it indicates *anger*. Here it clearly describes a deep emotion that the Lord felt, to the point of anger so that He "was troubled".

Now He's not angry with Mary, nor angry with the mourners. (Grief and tears are the most natural thing at a graveside.) He was angry with the graveside. He was angry

with sickness and death. He felt indignation against sin and the ruin that it had brought on His creation. —Angry at the sorrow that it had caused his friends.

The Lord's emotional reaction to all this, all that He saw, was so strong that He seems to have shook under the force of it. John said, "He was troubled." This was a deeply troubled experience for Him. And then, when He was shown the place where the body of Lazarus was, we read the amazing words, "Jesus wept." (vs35). And in that simple statement we have one of the clearest proofs of the Lord's humanity. In a natural, spontaneous way, He grieved with His friends; He entered into their sorrows. F. F. Bruce wrote, "Here is no automaton, but a real human being."

All the Gospels, of course, teach the real humanity of Christ: His birth, being 'wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger', His growth in 'wisdom and stature.' We read also that He became *hungry* and *thirsty* and *tired*. We read all these things. He suffered all the limitations of humanity because He was a true man.

But here He suffered *grief*. He experienced what these mourners were experiencing. He's not only united in our physical life, but in our emotional life as well—so that whatever our grief may be, Christ knows it; He's entered into it. And that was predicted of Him. Isaiah prophesied that He would be, "A man of sorrows, acquainted with grief". (Isa 53:3). And because of that, He understands our condition.

The author of Hebrews makes that point as he developed the Lord's role as our great high priest. He wrote in Hebrews chapter 2 that, "He had to be made like (*us*) in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest." (vs17). He presently knows what we experience, (and really, He knows it better than we do). So, He can be a merciful high priest because of His humanity, not only in order to make a sacrifice for our sins, but also to be able to come to our aid when we're tempted. He understands that.

And in chapter 4 of the Book of Hebrews, we read that He 'sympathizes with our weakness', (vs15), and so we are to "draw near with confidence to the throne of grace." (vs16). And that's what we see here; that's what Mary was doing. She left everyone to

be with Him, fell at His feet, and boldly shared her sorrow with Him—and her confusion. She knew Him. She was confident in Him, and confided in Him.

I think that's a lesson for all of us. That's a pattern we should follow. We should do the same. Christ cares. —The whole Godhead cares. Jesus, in His humanity, is a revelation of the Father as well. And Jesus' tears show the concern and the care of the Godhead. Now this doesn't teach that God the Father weeps. —God the Father is a spirit. But it does indicate that He sees and that He is concerned for us.

And we find that in the Old Testament. We find it, for example, in Psalm 6. David wrote that, "The LORD heard the voice of his weeping." (vs8b). And in Psalm 56, verse 8 he wrote, "You have taken account of my wanderings; Put my tears in Your bottle. Are *they* not in Your book?" he asked. The picture is of God gathering all of David's tears, like precious diamonds, and keeping a record of them. Paul called Him, "the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort." (1Cor 1:5).

People there at the tomb recognized that in Jesus, and they commented on it; they commented on His weeping, "See how He loved him!" (vs36). And they interpreted His tears correctly—He did love Lazarus and his sisters.

But what if the incident ended right there. What if the chapter concluded with Jesus drying His eyes and saying goodbye to Mary and Martha, and then going back beyond the Jordan where He would be safe? Well, it would be a story of sentimentality only. And those there expected nothing else but that. Verse 37 gives their thoughts; "Some of them said, 'Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind man, have kept this man also from dying?' " In other words, they took His grief as an expression of both His love and also His despair—as though He was grieving as the world grieves, helpless before the grave, which conquers all.

It shows how little they understood Him. They could see the humanity; they didn't doubt that He was a genuine man—but they didn't see His deity. So they only saw frustration in His tears.

But the Lord is never frustrated and His love always leads to action and remedy. His actions are never inconclusive. They always lead and conclude in a perfect conclusion.

He quickly took action. Still deeply moved, He approached the tomb. Calvin said, "He moved forward like a wrestler preparing for the contest." The tomb is called a "cave" with a large "stone" lying against it. He ordered that the stone be removed from the entrance. Martha objected. The effect of opening the tomb would be very unpleasant due to the four days of decay, (a reminder that Lazarus was really dead. —Four days dead.)

But the Lord reassured her of His promise that she would see "the glory of God". (vs40). Martha yielded and they rolled away the stone. Then Jesus offered a brief prayer, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me." (vs41-42). He prayed audibly so that the people could hear Him and make the connection between God and the miracle that He would perform in order that they would believe in Him.

The purpose was not to rescue Lazarus, (he was at peace with the Father). It was to display God's glory—to produce a sign which would authenticate His divine mission and lead some of them to faith in Him as the Son of God, (now that is essential that people believe that Jesus Christ is God).

We must believe that He's man, for only a man, a human, could represent humans in the great sacrifice that He made. But for that sacrifice to be of any effect, He must be God, the eternal Son of God. And if you can't believe that, then you cannot be saved. We can only trust in Him as the one who can give *life*, (the *life* He promised, *eternal life*), if He is God.

Now, staring into the dark, lifeless tomb, He lifted up His voice so everyone could hear, and He called Lazarus back from the dead; "Lazarus, come forth." (vs43). Suddenly, Lazarus' departed spirit was reunited with his lifeless body, made whole, and we read,

"The man who had died came forth...", still wrapped in the grave clothes, "...bound hand and foot...Jesus said, 'Unbind him, and let him go.' " (vs44).

That's the authority of Jesus Christ, the authority of the Son of God. He speaks with power; and He brings life out of death. In fact, it's often said that Jesus spoke with such authority that if He had not called Lazarus by name, all of the tombs would have given up their dead.

It was the seventh of the seven signs that John recorded in his Gospel—and the greatest of the Lord's miracles. It showed that Jesus Christ is Lord over life and death. And He gives eternal life to all who trust in Him as God the Son—and the Savior of the world.

The chapter began with a mystery. Why did Jesus, who loved Martha, her sister, and Lazarus, stay two days longer and allow His friend Lazarus to die—with the result that his two sisters, whom Jesus loved, grieved? Why did He put them through that?

And here the mystery is solved: It was for their good and the good of all the people who were there: To witness the life giving power of God and the revelation of Christ's deity and compassion. And Lazarus was allowed to have a part in this greatest miracle, which John tells us resulted in, 'Many of the Jews who had come there to Bethany believing in Jesus.' (vs45).

The Lord's delay caused the family pain—but it was for a purpose, born out of love. Lazarus was raised to life, and this is the seventh and the greatest sign. Each sign, or miracle, was carefully chosen by the apostle to illustrate a specific aspect of His divine authority.

The *first* miracle in the Gospel was turning water into wine in chapter 2, which revealed He is the source of joy and the source of the abundant life that He promises to all who believe in Him. 'Life lived to the full.'

The *second* miracle was healing the nobleman's son in chapter 4, showing that He has power over sickness and is the giver of health, physical health—as well as spiritual health. All health comes from Him. All good and perfect things come from Him.

The *third* miracle, (*chapter 5*), was healing the lame man, showing that He is the remedy for man's spiritual inability. A great picture of how we are able to come, spiritually, to the Lord. —It's not in our own power. We have none of our own that can bring us to Him. He brings us, through the miracle of regeneration and irresistible grace.

His *fourth* miracle, (*chapter 6*), was the feeding of the multitude, which illustrated that He is 'the bread of life.'

His *fifth* miracle, (*chapter 6*), occurred when He came to the disciples on the Sea of Galilee, walking on the water, to demonstrate that He has authority over all of nature.

His *sixth* miracle, (*chapter 8*), was giving sight to the blind man, which illustrates that He is, "the Light of the world". Satan and sin have blinded people's minds so that they cannot understand and believe the things of God. The world is in darkness, but Christ enlightens. He gives spiritual understanding.

And now here, the *seventh* and climactic sign, (*chapter 11*), raising Lazarus from the dead. It shows Christ's authority over the grave, over hopelessness. He has authority to conquer death. He has authority to give eternal life. Earlier He said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life." And now, with His miracle of giving life to the dead, He has proven that those were not empty words.

Now Lazarus was not *resurrected*; he was *raised* from the dead, but *restored* to mortal life, to temporal life. Only Jesus has been *resurrected*. He rose, with what Paul called, an *imperishable* body, a spiritual body.

Lazarus came out in grave clothes, blindly struggling to leave the tomb, needing help to be freed from the linen wrappings. Jesus left the grave clothes behind and left the tomb under His own power. His body, as Don Carson commented, "bore the marks of His five wounds, but was not debilitated. It was empowered, capable of eating and being touched, and passing through solid walls." Lazarus was raised healthy, but mortal. Jesus

was raised with the power of an endless life. Paul called Him, "the first fruits of those who are asleep." (1 Cor 15:20). That's the Good News that the world does not possess.

Death is still with us. It is still 'the great leveler'. It conquers all, rich and poor alike, young and old; there is no escaping the grave. As Moses wrote in Psalm 90, verse 10, 'Our days may contain 70 years, or if due to strength, 80 years. Still it is but labor and sorrow. And soon it is gone and we fly away.'

Death is unavoidable. So 'the great leveler' has been described in our day as 'the great unmentionable'. Death is not an acceptable subject in polite company. People fear it. They don't want to be reminded of it. Outside of Christ, apart from faith in Him, there is no hope. 'Materialism', which is the great philosophy, the world view of our day, (at least in the west), 'naturalism', has no real lasting hope for the future.

'We die, and that's it. And then it's all over', that's what the world says. In fact, everything seems to point that way from its perspective. According to modern secular science, the universe is expanding at an ever rapid rate and eventually, in the distant future, will expand out into oblivion, resulting in a cold, dead, eternal night. That's the hope that the world gives. Everything will end, in nothingness and meaninglessness. Now that is a bleak life, and a bleak future. And so, as the author of Hebrews said, 'People have been held in slavery by their fear of death.'

But Christ delivers us from that fear. He sets us free from it because He has dealt with sin, finally and completely, at the cross where He died for our sins, eradicating them and canceling out our guilt.

Paul called sin, "the sting of death." (1Cor 15:56). Sin is the venom that kills. Death is like a terrible scorpion. But Christ took the sting on the cross and disarmed death—and was raised from the dead in a declaration from the Father of victory over the grave, victory over sin, and victory over death.

So now the power of death is broken. Death is like a great warrior who has been defeated and disarmed. Paul taunted death, much like David taunted the giant Goliath,

"O death, where *is* your victory? O death, where *is* your sting?" (1Cor 15:55).

Where is it? —Gone. Gone forever. Death is defeated and powerless.

That's true for every believer in Christ because faith joins us to Him and to His victory over sin and death and the devil—and joins us to His life and resurrection. We have His life now—and we will be resurrected.

But as I said, and as we all know, death is still with us. Paul died. Peter died. We all die. Death is still 'the leveler'. Paul called it "the last enemy that will be abolished." (1Cor 15:26). And it hasn't yet been abolished. So, what should be our attitude toward it? John Stott asked that question when he wrote, "It is still an enemy; unnatural, unpleasant, undignified. It's all of that."

That's true. Death is hard. It is unnatural. We were not created to die. We were created to live forever to God's glory. Sin interrupted that, so death came. It is unpleasant. It is a serious thing.

Paul was never cavalier about death, never flippant about the grave. And God isn't either, "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His godly ones." (Ps 116:15). 'He puts our tears in His bottle; and they are written down in His book.' (Ps 56:8). And often, death brings on fear and confusion to friends and loved ones. People wonder why the LORD didn't intervene in this, or that, situation to prevent death—the death of a mother; or the death of a child. It's what perplexed Mary and Martha. It perplexes us, too, at times. "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died," they said. (vs32).

The Lord did not scold them for their statement and their perplexity. But He did answer their question in His miracle. As the Lord's children, we need to do what those two women did. And that is take our fears, take our questions, take our perplexity to the LORD in prayer. People of God did that throughout the Bible.

But we also need to *know*, we need to *believe* it to be true, that the Lord does all things well. I may not seem that way at the time, at a time of confusion, but it is true—always.

And it will be revealed to be true to all of us in the future. Some day we will see that. Some day we will understand these things for He will make it known to us at a future date. He made it known to these, (there at the grave): To Mary and Martha and those who had come to comfort her at that time when He raised Lazarus.

We have to wait a little longer—until we enter into heaven; and then God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. He will make it all plain; all things will be explained.

In the meantime, though, this side of things, we live by faith, daily. We live by faith in God's Word, in all of Scripture, and in this particular statement that we have in John 11; "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies." (vs25). The promise to the believer is 'You will live.' "Not just that you will survive", Stott said, "but that you will be resurrected."

We have a glorious and a whole future. And I say "whole" because it's not just a glorious spiritual future, it's a glorious physical future. That's what we're promised. And as Jesus said, we "will never die", (vs26), meaning, not that we will escape physical death, but we will escape spiritual death, eternal death, making physical death just a transition into glory.

The moment we close our eyes in this world, we open them in the next, in the presence of the Lord—and in the presence of His countless saints.

So what should be our attitude in the present? Well, the same as Paul's attitude in Philippians chapter 1, verse 21. "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." To live is to serve Him. What a privilege. —Redeem the time.

But to die, oh, that's the reward; that's where we long to be! So, live now with confidence, and live now with hope, and live for the Lord .

Paul's path was like David's in Psalm 23, verse 4, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me." That was Paul. The Lord often told Paul that He was with him. We frequently read that—that, 'He was with Paul through the difficulties'. And He's with us. He is sovereign; He is in complete control

and our future has been determined by Him. By His death for us, and His resurrection, death is defeated. —There is nothing for us to fear.

And we need to be reminded of that because, nevertheless, death is a reality and it is a fearful kind of thing. It is an enemy. But I like how Spurgeon put it, speaking of “the valley of the shadow of death.” Those words were chosen carefully, and I would say brilliantly. We often pass through a dark valley, and it's always intimidating. But it is a shadow. And Mr. Spurgeon wrote, "Nobody is afraid of a shadow, for a shadow cannot stop a man's pathway, even for a moment. The shadow of a dog cannot bite. The shadow of a sword cannot kill, the shadow of death cannot destroy us. Let us not therefore be afraid."

Shadows can't hurt us, and the Lord is with us. That's the reality of the life of the believer in Jesus Christ. That's the Christian life, and that's the assurance we have. And that should shape our attitude.

When Christian and Hopeful came to the end of their dangerous journey and had to cross the last barrier to the heavenly city, the river signifying death, it was daunting for Christian. (One thing I love about *Pilgrim's Progress* is Bunyan gave a very realistic treatment of things.)

Christian comes to the end of this journey, (he's the main figure of this whole episode), and he's fearful. He enters the stream fearing. That's realistic. That's the way it is with so many of us. And so as he crossed, we read that he sank and he began to cry out in fear. But the difficulties were only momentary. He got his footing—and with his friend Hopeful, crossed safely and entered the city joyfully.

There may be times of trouble for us as we face this last moment of our existence—but it's a shadow. If we're in Christ, we're safe, and He'll bring us through. That's the encouragement we have. That's the promise. That is a certainty. So live with that certainty. Live hopefully. Live joyfully. Live not for self-gratification but for God's glory. Eternal splendor is our future.

But again, that's for the believer in Jesus Christ. If you've not believed, recognize your need of Him, and turn to Him, trust in Him, and have forgiveness and life. God help you to do that.

And help all of us who have, to rejoice in the sacrifice that was made for us, the greatest gift there is.

LORD, what a great blessing, what an unimaginable blessing it is, to be able to sing, "My debt is paid and the victory won The Lord is my salvation." But we can as believers in Jesus Christ. We have a glorious future before us because of that—and all due to Your sovereign, merciful grace. We thank You for that.

Now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace. In Christ's name, Amen.

(End of Audio)