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The Ones Jesus Loves

John 11:1-3

Intro: We have now come to one of the greatest and most exciting chapters in John's Gospel. **Ch11** records the raising of Lazarus from the dead. It also is great because it gives us a little more insight into the humanity of Jesus as well as further revealing His divine power and attributes. **Ch11** is also important to every Christian on a personal level because what John records in this passage is merely a preview of exciting things to come for every believer!

The raising of Lazarus is the last miracle of Jesus that John records. Of course, this wasn't Jesus' last miracle before going to the cross but it certainly was His greatest and it's also the one that aroused the most response from both His friends and His enemies. Some may ask, "How can one miracle be greater than another?" That's a valid point because for any of us, changing water into wine is just as impossible as raising the dead. This miracle is said to be greater because of what it points to, what it reveals – the Lazarus story provides greater revelation of who Jesus is.

John only records 7 miracles in his Gospel and he chose these miracles to serve as a progressive revelation of the person and work of Jesus Christ. In **ch2**, the motive for turning the water into wine was to reveal His glory and increase the faith of the disciples. What did this reveal about Jesus? His unity with the Father in creative power and that He is the One who brings joy. While this is true and great, it doesn't necessarily knock our socks off. But in **ch4**, Jesus heals the nobleman's son long-distance. This revealed His power to overcome the debilitating effects of sin and heal illness. The healing of the lame man in **ch5** reveals that Jesus came to save us from the bondage of sin. The feeding of the 5000 in **ch6** showed that Jesus alone can satisfy the hunger of the soul (Bread of life). Healing the man born blind in **ch6** reveals that Jesus is the Light of the world, giving both physical and spiritual sight. Each one of these miracles or signs serves to progressively expand our understanding of exactly Who Jesus Christ is.

Thus, **ch11** records the greatest miracle of Jesus' earthly ministry. This progressive display of the Lord's power over nature, sin and sickness

comes to a climax here in the total victory of life over death. This miracle reveals that Jesus is the source of eternal life; that it may be enjoyed here and now and furthermore, the same divine power that raised Lazarus from the dead will also raise every believer to a new and better existence beyond this life!

True, Jesus had raised others from the dead before: Jairus' daughter and the son of the widow of Nain (all wake, no funeral) but Lazarus had been in the grave 4 days. Here was a miracle that could no longer be denied or ignored by the Jewish religious authorities but the real reason this miracle is greater is this: if Jesus can do nothing about death, then whatever else He can do amounts to nothing. The Apostle Paul declares this same truth in **1 Cor 15:19**. Death is man's last enemy but Jesus Christ came to defeat this horrible enemy and He did so totally and permanently. Oddly enough, it's this miracle of life over death that directly leads to His arrest and subsequent execution.

1-2- It's not often that the Gospel record provides insight into the close friend relationships of Jesus but the exception is made for this family. Here is a reference to 3 people who love Jesus and, while there's not a lot said about them here, there is enough mention of them in the Gospels to provide character studies on each and good applications.

Martha is the last named but we'll start with her because in many ways, she's the most prominent of the 3 but also because this miracle had the most pronounced effect on her life. In fact, the resurrection of her brother seems to be the turning point in her life. Fortunately, we know more about her than what's told in **ch11 (Luke 10:38-42)**. The fact that Martha was serving was not the problem here. It's that she got all worked up about it and was being unkind to others as a result. She has one guest (Jesus) but Martha was so worked up about His visit that she wanted Mary to leave Him alone in the living room until the chores were done.

Jump to another story in **John 12:1-2 (Mt 26, Mk 14)**. This was a large party, 16+ people at Simon the leper's house. Once again, Martha is serving and doesn't seem the least bit put upon or stressed over it. In the 1st story she had 1 guest and was troubled; in the 2nd, she had lots of guests and it not troubled but seems to serve with a light spirit. What made the difference? The only thing that happened between these 2 events was the resurrection

of her brother and it was through this that she learned to get her mind off herself and onto the Lord.

How do we know this was the case? By her use of the pronouns me and my in **Lk 10:40** – she uses them 3 times! Martha's mind wasn't focused on Jesus or on the welfare of Mary. She had her mind on herself and because of this, she felt unappreciated, neglected, and abused. Later, when she had gotten her mind off herself and onto the Lord, she lost those feelings and did what she did gladly.

What about us? There's nothing wrong with serving. We're all called to it in some way so the question isn't should I serve but whom am I serving and how? Are you serving yourself? Are you trying to build a reputation for yourself? Or are you serving Jesus? Is your mind set on Him? If you're bothered about many things as Martha was or if you feel neglected, your mind is on yourself and you need to renew your acquaintance with Him who imparts new life and causes us to forget ourselves. If you're truly serving Him, you'll count that service a pleasure and if others are not helping then that is all right: you're not serving them or yourself, you're serving the Lord.

Lazarus is shown in a different light. We see Martha and Mary talking but not Lazarus. Lazarus says nothing; he's perfectly silent in Scripture. Yet, in **12:10-11** we see that Lazarus has become a great and effective witness of Jesus!

How is this possible if he never says anything? 1st, Jesus raised him from the dead and everybody knew it. If you heard the story and wanted confirmation all you had to do was go to Bethany and see it for yourself. 2nd, and just as important, Lazarus was effective because he was with Jesus and identified with Jesus (**12:2b**). His proximity to Jesus was just as much a testimony as what happened to him. His presence at the table showed that his life was identified with the One who had accomplished his resurrection.

Now, I'm pretty sure none of us have been physically raised from the dead but that's okay because this miracle is simply an illustration of spiritual resurrection, something that every believer has participated in. If you're a Christian, you have been made alive spiritually; Jesus has performed a resurrection within you. But, do you give evidence of it? Do you identify yourself openly with the One who performed that resurrection, as Lazarus did?

Every believer should be able to give a verbal witness of what Jesus has done in their life but not every believer is a Billy Graham. Your testimony of Jesus is not limited to words. As Christians we should be especially careful that our lives demonstrates the reality of the resurrection that Jesus has performed in us so that others might turn to Him and believe in Him because of what they see. It's possible to have a great verbal witness and still bear little fruit because your lifestyle destroys your witness. It's also possible to say little and still have a deep and lasting witness because your life is clear evidence of Jesus Christ's great grace and power.

Mary is an interesting and delightful character because we always see her being at Jesus' feet ([Lk 10](#), [Mt 26](#), [Mk 14; 11:32, 12:3](#)). Why did Mary anoint Jesus with the ointment? Because of His coming death ([12:7](#))! This means that of all those who were with Jesus during the final months of His life only Mary understood He was going to die for sin. How did she know this when so many others failed to see it? She had spent so much time learning at Jesus' feet.

The use of the ointment suggests something else: since Mary understood what Jesus was about to do and because she loved Him for it, she was ready to give Him her all. We know this because of the value of the ointment (1 yrs salary) and the fact that she broke the box ([Mk 14:3](#)). Mary gave her most valuable possession and gave it so completely that she even broke the box lest some of the precious substance should remain.

Have you given your most precious possession to the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you given yourself? If you haven't then you're holding something back. Maybe you've never understood that He actually gave His life for you? Maybe you don't really love Him above all else? Many think that if they give their life to Christ, it will be wasted. But it won't be wasted - it will be invested. Besides, Jesus, the greatest banker who ever lived, pays great dividends.

3 different individuals, each affected by their close contact with Jesus. Are you like them? Have you been affected?

These were 3 that loved Jesus but as we'll see in the next verse, they were also 3 who were loved by Jesus.

3- As we saw in **vs1**, our story begins with a problem – Lazarus was dying. This is a problem we all can identify with for either it has touched us already or is going to. Close relationships are hard to come by (family or friends) and those we're able to develop are highly prized; we'd give anything to maintain them. But still, time to time, the natural calamities of life intrude in our happiness and a close friend or family member is taken. In moments like these, some question the presence or love of God. Even those who don't doubt God's love and faithfulness find their faith tested.

What should we do at such times? Do what Martha and Mary did: they told Jesus about their problem! The fact that they did this is pretty significant but how they did it is even more significant!

Before we look at how the sisters approached Jesus, we need to deal with a blatantly obvious point in this passage: even those whom Jesus especially loves get sick and eventually die. The sisters approached Jesus on the basis of His love for Lazarus. They loved Jesus, sure, but His love for them was greater. Still, Lazarus was sick and failing. The Greek implies "deathly sick" or "sinking." Sickness in a believer is in no way incompatible with the Lord's love for him. Maybe Mary and Martha were surprised that someone whom Jesus loved could be sick. There's a suggestion of this surprise in the word "behold." But they shouldn't have been surprised for 2 reasons.

1st) The man whom Jesus loves is still just a man. It's the nature of humanity to suffer bodily ailments. C. H. Spurgeon said, "The love of Jesus does not separate us from the common necessities and infirmities of human life. Men of God are still men. The covenant of grace is not a charter of exemption from consumption, or rheumatism, or asthma." So let's learn from this and not be surprised when we or those we love suffer illness. The Bible says with absolute clarity, "it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (**Heb 9:27**).

2nd) God often uses illness to speak to our hearts and lead us forward in the Christian life. That is, it's often used by God for our good. David knew this, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes" (**Ps 119:71**). Sickness helped David to love and understand the Scriptures. It's been the same for multitudes who've been tested by it. Sickness has been a trial. But it has been a trial that was used by God for our good (**Rom 8:28**).

Also, sickness in us is sometimes used by God for the good of others (**v4**). If

God is glorified by a Christian's illness, then the illness is for God's good and for the good of all who see this particular demonstration of His glory. In the case of Lazarus, for 20 centuries believers have been getting good from it; and even today, as we study it, we are the richer because the beloved brother of Mary and Martha died.

Of course, this doesn't mean that we should desire sickness. Nor does it mean we should not ask Jesus to heal the sick. Here, the words of the two sisters give an example of what we should do in times sickness and how we can pray about it. Note: the first thing they did was pray. Or rather, they brought the matter to Jesus. It's always good and acceptable to bring troubles to Jesus. In fact, it's always good to be in communication with Him about everything. Mary and Martha showed great wisdom in acquainting Jesus with their problem and so do we when we do the same.

The 2nd characteristic of their prayer was the basis of their appeal. Was it that they had hosted Him so often and He owed them something? No. Was it that they had remained faithful and true to him when other disciples had dropped away? No. Was it that they loved Him? No. The basis of their appeal was that He loved them! They took refuge in God's love, not in the love of man. Good thing too because there's no comfort to be found in the love of man. .

Suppose their appeal had been that they loved Jesus. That would've been true at least in part, they did love Him. But if they had appealed on that basis, they'd soon be asking, "Have we loved Him enough? Has our love been pure? Have we offended Him?" The honest answers to those questions would have thrown them into a swamp of self-doubt. But that's not what they did. They loved Jesus, but they knew their love for Him would never be an adequate basis for their appeal. So their appeal was not that they loved Him, but that He loved them. He had loved them freely, when there was nothing in them to commend them to Him. He had loved them faithfully, when they were faithless. He'd loved them with an everlasting love as only God can love. This was the basis of their prayer and it's the only grounds that any of us can ever have in approaching the Almighty.

Besides, in coming to Jesus this way, the sisters came, not seeking their own will but the will of Jesus. They didn't actually make a request. Sure, a request was implied. Clearly, they wanted Jesus to help them by healing

Lazarus. If this isn't implied, why even send a message. But we should see that when they phrased the report as they did "...he whom You love is sick" they show by this form that they were seeking His will in the matter, not their own.

This is true in our prayers. It's not so much the words that are use but the desire of the heart. Yes, we'd like the trouble removed, the sickness healed. But is that your fundamental desire? Or is it that God's will might be done regardless of the outcome? Its only when we pray in that way that we're enabled to make our requests known to God so that "the peace of God that passes all understanding" keeps our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

We need that peace of mind only because God doesn't always act in the way we think He should act, or when! I'm sure when Mary and Martha clued Jesus into what was happening; they expected Lazarus to recover as soon as the message reached Jesus. Or they expected Jesus to come to their aid immediately. Neither happened. Instead of getting better, Lazarus became worse and died. Instead of coming, Jesus tarried for 2 more days and then arrived in Bethany four days after their brother's death. This tells us that Jesus may be completely informed of our trouble and yet act as though He were indifferent to it. We learn that prayer for the sick may not be answered. If this were not the case, no one would ever become sick or die so long as he had a friend or relative to pray for him. No, the comfort in our prayers is not in the fact that Jesus always answers them as we wish. He doesn't. It's that He, who made us and controls all circumstances, knows best and is well able to direct even sickness and death to His glory.

In 1873, A Christian lawyer named Horatio Spafford put his wife and 4 children on a luxury ocean liner sailing from NY to France. He expected to join them a few weeks later but he would never see his children again. The ship sailed peacefully across the Atlantic until it was accidentally struck by another ship and sank within 30 minutes. All 4 kids were lost to the waves. Upon hearing of this loss, Spafford spent the night walking the floor of his room in anguish. But, that's not all he did. As he shared his loss with his Lord, a loss that could not be reversed in this life, he found that peace that passes all understanding. The next morning he said to a friend, "I am glad to be able to trust my Lord when it costs me something." This experience stayed with him for later he sat down and wrote out these lines...

When peace like a river, attendeth my way; when sorrow like sea billows
roll. What ever my lot, Thou has taught me to say, It is well, it is well with my
soul. 😊