

# Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

For reply: Email: [truthfortoday@aol.com](mailto:truthfortoday@aol.com)

**Broadcast Date:** 12 March 2017

**No.** T0980

**Speaker:** Dr. Yannick Ford

## I am the Resurrection and the Life: The Family at Bethany and Journey to Judea (John 11:1-19)

Good morning. Today we start a new series, "I am the Resurrection and the Life", and that's based on the wonderful incident we have in John 11:1-57 when the Lord Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead and He gave out those profound words, "*I am the Resurrection and the Life*" (see John 11:25). Today we're going to look at the first part of that chapter, John 11:1-19, and that's the journey of the Lord Jesus to Judea. So we're going to see:

- How the Lord Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick;
- What He did about it;
- What His disciples thought; and
- How He explained it to them.

The thrust, really, for today, the take home message, if you like, is to remember this simple but profound truth that's going to be illustrated by the passage, and it's this: the Lord knows what He is doing, and what He does is motivated by His love. So I'll just repeat that: the Lord knows what He is doing, and what He does is motivated by His love.

### How the Lord Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick

Let's start with the passage, then, John 11:1-2, they're the verses which introduce this new topic to us. "*Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.*" Now, we read about Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42. If you have time later on, you could turn to that passage, and there we read that Martha had made Him a dinner. Now in the passage that we've just read, Luke 10:38-42, it speaks about Mary anointing the feet of the Lord. We don't actually read about that incident until we come to John 12:1-8, so that happened after the raising of Lazarus, but these verses set the scene, don't they, and they show us a family that loved the Lord: Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. It was a family that loved the Lord and a family that He loved. Now there was a sickness come in, would the Lord heal them? Let's see what happened.

Now it says in John 11:3, "*Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, 'Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.'*" A simple message. They weren't telling the Lord Jesus what to do, they were just appraising Him with the situation, and I think that's a great example of faith and humility. Like I say, they just told the Lord the situation, they didn't say what they thought He should do about it. There's a lot we can learn from that, isn't there? Often when I'm praying, I'm tempted to tell the Lord, really, what I think He should do about this or that situation, but that's not right, is it? He's the Lord, He knows what He is doing, but He does love us to tell Him - tell Him our problems, tell Him our concerns, tell Him our requests, and then we can wait with thanksgiving and see how He's going to answer.

### What Jesus did about it

Now, what did the Lord Jesus answer when He received this message? Let's look at John 11:4-6. We read as follows, "*When Jesus heard that, He said, 'This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.'* Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was." There's a great deal we can learn from these verses, too. First of all, we know that the Lord received and considered the message. From Mary and Martha's point of view, with the Lord apparently delaying his coming to Bethany, they could well have wondered if He had actually received the message, or whether He would act on it, but obviously, clearly, He did. Now here's another lesson that can encourage us with our prayers: Mary and Martha might well have wondered, had the Lord heard, what was He going to do, but He dealt with the matter straight away.

He declared to His disciples that the situation was for the glory of God (John 11:4). We sometimes might wonder, indeed, how all things can work together for good (see Romans 8:28), but here we've got a little insight, if you like, into what the Lord Jesus was doing and how He was, indeed, going to work things out. All things were going to work out for good. Not only did he deal with it straight away, but what he was doing was motivated by love. We know that

because we're specifically told in John 11:5, *"Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus."* So we can be sure that when we pray the Lord's answer is always motivated by His love for us, and for a glorious purpose. We might not get an answer straight away - Mary and Martha must have wondered what was keeping Him - but, we with the blessing of knowing what happened as recorded to us in John 11, we know that He did deal with it straight away, and that He had God's glory in view, and that He was motivated by His love for them all.

All of this, then, helps us to understand John 11:6 which says, *"So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was."* Taken on its own, John 11:6 would seem inexplicable, wouldn't it, and out of character but, as we have the Holy Spirit's interpretation of the whole situation, we can understand what was really happening. So all of this, as I say, is written for our encouragement. When we pray we can be sure that He hears. Of course, what we ask for is not always wise, is it? But He does know, and He is motivated by love.

A little illustration of something that happened to me might be helpful here. About twenty-five years ago, when I was a student, I was concerned at one point as to whether I had true faith, whether I really believed the things in the Bible. I wanted to believe but I didn't feel as if there was anything inside of me. I got very concerned about it, I prayed to the Lord a lot about it. I didn't seem to get any answer. It drove me to reading the Bible, specifically the epistle to the Romans, and I read that epistle again and again, and it was through reading it that I got the peace, the assurance, the comfort that I really needed, and looking back, I can see the wisdom of God in not answering me with a feeling or with a snatch of a word here or there. I needed to be driven to His Word, His Word that doesn't change, that was there in black and white even if my feelings changed the following day - I could still read it. And so, looking back now, I'm glad that I apparently had no answer, but at the time, it was quite concerning really! And so, the Lord Jesus, as I say, He knows what He is doing and an apparent delay in the prayer, in an answer to prayer, I should say, is not an evidence that He hasn't heard.

### What Jesus' disciples thought

Now let's go back to our story, and we've got up to John 11:7 now let's read John 11:7-8. *"Then after this He said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.' The disciples said to Him, 'Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?'"* The Lord is now going to act for Lazarus. He's waited those few days and now He's going to take that journey to Bethany, but the disciples are understandably fearful and they sort of try to dissuade Him. They say to Him, *"Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?"* You know, it must have been a hard life for the disciples in many ways.

Sometimes we see them, don't we, depicted in stained glass windows, and they always seem like a very respectful sort of crew around the Lord Jesus, moving along in a dignified way but actually it must have been difficult. They would have shared to a large degree, wouldn't they, to the rejection of the Lord Jesus by the majority of the people; they would have shared in the hatred that was shown to Him by certain sectors, and you can understand that they weren't too keen on going back to a place where, only a few days before, they had tried to stone the Lord Jesus. It must have been a challenge for them, mustn't it? But this incident shows us how determined the Lord is to help us. He stayed two days where He was on purpose because He knew that was the best thing to do, and He knows the end from the beginning, but now that it was time to act, nothing was going to put Him off. He was going to go whether there was danger or not.

### How Jesus explained it to them

Let's carry on reading, in John 11:11, where the Lord Jesus says to the disciples, *"Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up."* Just a little thought here: what a wonderful way of describing Lazarus as *"Our friend."* What if we heard the Lord refer to us like that, we would be thrilled wouldn't we? But that's how the Lord Jesus considers us, and notice too the *"Our friend"*? He associates the disciples with Him. This is a good lesson for us, isn't it, as well to remember to show love to each other? Romans 14:15 speaks about *"that brother for whom Christ died"* and that's something I need to remember if I'm tempted sometimes to be annoyed with someone, a fellow Christian. I need to think, well, they are *"that brother [or that sister] for whom Christ died"* (Romans 14:15): they're very precious to the Lord, and I should display a heart of love towards them also.

*"Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up"* (John 11:11) This shows us too, the Lord's perspective on the death of the believer. It's called 'sleep', because for the believer it's not the end. It shows us too that the Lord Jesus is indeed *"the Resurrection and the Life"* (see John 11:25). *"I go that I may wake him up"* (John 11:11). Now of course, the disciples didn't really understand, did they? So they say in (John 11:12), *"Lord, if he sleeps he will get well."* I mean, that made sense in a way, if he was sleeping, they thought, he'll be getting the rest he needs, perhaps he's not in a fever any more, and he'll get better. Why go all the way down to Judea where it's dangerous, why put ourselves in a dangerous situation when he's getting better by himself? And so the Lord had to explain it to them. John 11:13 says, *"However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus said to them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead.'"*

The Lord Jesus had to explain it plainly to them, and then in John 11:15 he says, *“And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him.”* There’s another encouraging point for us. We see His care and concern in John 11:15, and His care and concern was for many. Not only was it going to be a blessing for Martha and Mary, who were going to receive their brother back from the dead, but it was going to be a benefit for many people. He says, *“I am glad for **your** sakes that I was not there, that you may believe”*, and we read later on in John that many people believed because of this astounding miracle.

And so now we’re beginning to see, aren’t we, the wisdom of the Lord Jesus in waiting. Of course He could have healed Lazarus. He could have gone straight away to Judea and put His hands on him and healed him, or He could have spoken a word from a distance like He had done in others of His miracles (see Matthew 8:5-13), and Lazarus would have got better. But in this instance, the Lord Jesus knew what was needed: He waited a few days; He made sure that when He arrived Lazarus would indeed have been dead, so that He was able to display clearly to His disciples, to Martha, and to Mary, and to many, many others who had come around, that He indeed is *“the Resurrection and the Life”* (John 11:25). And so, as I say, His waiting was for the glory of God, it was for the benefit of many, it was motivated by love.

Thomas then, in John 11:16, decides to go along: *“Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with Him.’”* Thomas, in a way, didn’t have great faith there, did he? But he did have attachment and devotion to the Lord. Perhaps He thought that the Lord Jesus would be stoned, that the trip would end in disaster. He wasn’t really realising that nothing could happen to the Lord Jesus unless He specifically willed it, unless the Father allowed it. But, as I say, he showed a great devotion to his Master. If the Lord Jesus was going to go down to Judea, he was going to go too, and he encouraged his fellow disciples. And it’s good, isn’t it, to have that little cameo shot of Thomas, not only to always refer to him as ‘doubting Thomas’, but here, perhaps, to think of him as ‘devoted Thomas’! It’s an encouragement for us.

Then we read on in John 11:17-19 *“So when Jesus came, He found that he [that’s Lazarus] had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.”* So He comes to a sad situation, doesn’t he? Lazarus had died of the sickness, whatever that sickness was, and he’d been in the tomb four days. There was no question about it, that he was dead, was there?

If someone had been in the grave four days, it was pretty plain and evident that the sickness had led to death, and that was that as far as they were concerned. We see that Bethany wasn’t too far from Jerusalem as it tells us in John 11:18, about two miles away, and as a consequence many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary to comfort them concerning their brother. And so then, naturally, there was an opportunity for many people to see the great miracle that the Lord Jesus would display, which we’ll be considering in the next sessions of Truth for Today.

So what have we learnt today from this passage, John 11:1-19, about the journey to Judea? Well, let’s remember the thrust, which, as I said at the start, was simple but profound, is that the Lord knows what He is doing and what He does is motivated by love. And we’ve seen that, haven’t we, in this section here?

The Lord Jesus knew what He was doing, He stayed deliberately two days. He needed to arrive at Bethany when Lazarus had been in the tomb four days, so that He would be able to display that tremendous miracle and show clearly that He was *“the Resurrection and the Life”* (John 11:25).

We saw too, though, that an apparent delay does not mean that God has not heard our prayer. The Lord Jesus **did** receive the message from Mary and Martha, He **did** act on it straight away. What He did would have seemed inexplicable to them at the time, but afterwards they would have realised that it was the best thing. And so the same with us. When we pray let’s have faith, let’s be sure that the Lord Jesus has heard us, that God the Father has heard our request, that it has been considered, that He is acting on it, He is acting on it out of love, and He will make all things work together for good (see Romans 8:28).

Perhaps, as I said earlier, what we ask for isn’t always wise, perhaps the answer needs to come at a later time or needs to come in a way that we, perhaps, don’t expect, but what we do know is that the Lord does know what He is doing, and what He does do will be the right time and the right answer, it’ll be for our blessing, it’ll be for His glory, and it’ll probably benefit many other people as well, which was the case with this miracle. So let’s be greatly encouraged at this prelude to the raising of Lazarus, one of the greatest miracles that the Lord ever performed.

We’re going to finish off with four sets of verses that I think are relevant to what we’ve been reading. First of all in Philippians 4:6-7: *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your*

*requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."*

Now let's turn to Romans 8:35-39, "*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: 'For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.'* Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Then we go to John 11, where we've been reading, but a little bit further down in John 11:25, the words of the Lord Jesus, "*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.*"

And then, finally, in John 5:24, "*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.*"

---

**Please Note:**

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.