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JOHN 11

John Series: Get a Life in Jesus

[PRAYER] ...challenges that we experience. And one of the encouraging things, Lord, is to come together and recognize we're not alone in this. We can share this request with each other, that we can come before you as our gracious God. So Father, we're asking you now to provide your grace of healing, your grace of guidance. We ask for your special grace of peace in our lives. Lord, we ask your Holy Spirit to just fall on this place today. That you would look in our hearts, make it sensitive to what you want to share with us from your word. In Jesus' name, we ask, amen.

We sang some great songs this morning about *Worship the King*. We sang about His majesty and so on. That's what I've been thinking about this week, just the majesty of God. But I think we have to be really careful with the majesty of God because when we say the majesty of God, we speak about His great plan and His power. But I think sometimes His plan may go a little bit of a different direction than we had hoped or intended. Things don't go the way that we thought they might go, so we end up going through a challenge or a struggle in our lives or some major event that's quite painful.

Today Jesus pulls back the curtain in our passage in John 11 when He heals Lazarus or raises him from the dead. I mean tragedy takes place there. He raises him from the dead and when He does we are then able to learn from this whole experience.

I have appreciated the things we learn from the conversations. There's three people He's going to talk to. Today we'll zero in on the conversation with Martha where Martha is going to learn about the majesty of God and so are we. And then He zeroes in on Mary where we're going to learn more about compassion in the midst of this tragedy that they experienced. And then we're going to look at His interaction with Lazarus and see the power of God. That's where we're headed this morning.

In order to do that, I want to start by reading the first part of the passage in John 11:1-16. So would you stand with me as I introduce and we set the table for the conversations in this passage. Read along in your Bible, take notes in your Bible. This is the passage in John 11.

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."

When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, and then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

"But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?"

Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light."

After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."

His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

You may be seated.

I'm kind of amused by Thomas. He's the doubter and it sounds like Eeyore there. "Okay, we'll go with Him. We can die with Him." That's just a little insight into Thomas as we're thinking this whole story through.

Let's take this a little bit at a time and try to get our bearings here in the passage. This town of Bethany is about two miles from Jerusalem where Jesus spent a lot of time. So Jesus would go to Judea or Jerusalem area and Bethany was a short distance away. So when He went to the temple or He went to the Jerusalem area, He would often stay in these people's house.

Now it's very clear that this is Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. They are brother and two sisters. And this next phrase is put there for us to know that this is a meaningful relationship for Jesus. Because this is the same Mary who is the one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped His feet with her hair. There's a relationship there. And whenever there's relationship, there's reason for expectations. They are going to have some expectations here that aren't met. But every relationship has expectations. So we'll see that as we go through. They're going to have pretty significant expectations because Jesus is a significant friend of theirs. So it seems kind of reasonable some of the things that are going on, but some of it is a rather challenge for us to get.

But the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick." When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."

So we're going to see here that we're going to go through a tragedy. It's a very disruptive, difficult, painful, brokenhearted experience of the loss of a loved one. Very difficult. Can I ask you how many of you have lost someone significant and it really made an impact on you when you lost them? Okay, so I want you to see that with each other because this is not something that's just happening to one person. This is a common experience that people have. It's an experience that breaks your heart. Your heart just aches in the midst of this kind of an experience.

In the midst of this though, Jesus is going to point to some things and teach us some things in the midst of painful, broken experiences. One of the things he's pointing to is God's glory is out there. It's the ultimate thing that happens in life. That the things that takes place in God's majesty and power and His plan, and anything that happens, God uses even brokenness to bring glory to Himself. So Jesus is illustrating that and He's going to talk about this glory through the passage. So think in terms of God being glorified even in the midst of brokenness and pain and suffering and challenges that happen in our lives.

Verse 5 says – *Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.* Now this is a very important verse that's put here because as soon as we start talking about God's going to be glorified and we experience pain, then we might feel like this isn't very caring, this isn't very personal, and I feel like this is very hard for me to have gone through this experience. Yes, I know God will be glorified, but I'm still hurting. So right here in the midst it says right here in the passage, let's just get this straight. You've got to know Jesus loved these people. This is very important to Him.

But I don't get the next statement. The next word is *so*. He loves them, *so* this is what He does. *So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.* See that's the part that is confusing, it seems to me in the passage. If I have a good friend who calls me up and says, "Scott, I just fell off a ladder. I need to get to the ER. Will you help me?" I don't say, "Well I got twenty more minutes on my video here. Let me finish watching my movie and then I'll come." I don't say, "Let me check my calendar and see if I've got an opening." I stop what I'm doing and I go and help the person. But there's something going on here that seems odd to me. I don't know if it seems odd to you, but the word *so* is right there. He loved them, so this is what He does. He waits two more days. It seems unusual.

Here's one of the things I learn about the Lord. Whenever something unusual takes place, often God is doing something, we just don't know what it is. Something unusual could be something tragic, or bad, or it could be something really good. But often God is working in the unusual things that are taking place.

You know that story in the Old Testament where Eli is the priest and little Samuel comes to work for him in the temple and be there. Three times Samuel comes in to him in the night and wakes him up. Parents, you know what that's like. The kid comes in and "Yes, what do you want? What do you want?" Eli knew this is strange. Something's wrong here. So he says, "When you go *back, lie down.* When your name is called again, say '*Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.*'" Because Eli realized God is doing something here. Talk to God about it.

So we have to somehow realize that in the strangeness of events in life is often where God is doing something that we don't understand. I don't understand. This is hard for me to grasp that this is so.

So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed there two more days. What's going to happen in the passage is that the curtain here is going to be opened up and we're going to get to connect the dots and see why Jesus waited two more days. The reason is that He's going to raise their belief level. He's going to increase their belief and that is far more significant than anything that can go on in their lives. He's going to raise their belief and help them understand something more. And that's part of what God wants to do in our lives. It's not about making us happy, it's about growing us. Our belief factor needs to grow in order to make it through the other challenges we're going to experience as well.

Let's continue and see what God does with this. In verse 14 – *So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there."* Again it sounds to me to be so unusual. Can I say unusual? Because I don't want to question what God is doing. Jesus doesn't seem to defend Himself, He's just making a statement. But the reality is He's doing something here because He has an end in mind to glorify the Father and He also has another end that's getting there, which He describes here. He says – *"I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe."*

There are times...and I know that if you've gone through a real significant challenge whether it's a health challenge or a losing a loved one or something like that, it just really puts pressure on you. We have a choice in that moment to believe. So we can move more in our direction toward God, or we can become closed off, bitter, hurt, damaged. So we want to move in a way that strengthens our belief. Does that mean the pain goes away? No, I don't think so. I don't think that the pain of the loss of someone you love ever goes away. I think it lingers. But I think you can use that. So every time that pain is there it reminds you of something God wants to do in your life, wants you to grow closer to Him, to understand Him.

As we continue in the passage in verse 17, it goes this way: *On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.* We're going to enter into our conversation with person number one, Martha, to see more about the majesty of God. Four days. That means he's really dead. He's definitely dead. This is not he's dead a little bit. He's totally dead. Okay?

Verse 18 – *Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.* Comfort them. What do you say to someone who's grieving the loss of someone who's very valuable? Sometimes you don't know what to say. Right?

In our small group it's like my think tank for the sermon. I took some notes on what they said this week. Here's some things people say that often aren't helpful. "Get over it." That's kind of blatant, but here's some others. "There's a reason for everything." Now there's nothing wrong with some of these statements. The problem is they appear kind of blunt when someone needs to be cared for, right? "There's a reason for everything." "Give it God." "You'll see them again someday." "They're in a better place." The problem is in those moments it's hard to take that kind of thought and be comforted by it.

They're trying to comfort Mary and Martha in the midst of this. Knowing how to comfort someone in the midst of pain is a challenge sometimes.

Jesus is going to comfort Mary and Martha in different ways. Watch what He does with Martha. I find this to be quite interesting.

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Well that's a true statement, I'm sure. But do you hear the expectation in her voice? That she's saying like you have a responsibility to be here. You should have fixed this problem. You're the friend of Lazarus. There's almost this sense of this isn't how it's supposed to happen and you could have done something about it, but you didn't. You must not care is the kind of suggestion. At least that's how it feels.

I think that expectations in relationships are good because they draw us together, but expectations in relationships can also get us into trouble. Can't they? I mean if we have expectations even in a marriage or a friendship, in a marriage relationship you might have an expectation and if it isn't met then you get upset or angry about it. Because your mate didn't put gas in the car or didn't buy the food you wanted him to buy, or didn't call because he was going to be late, or whatever it might be. So we have these expectations that create problems for us. So expectations can be helpful, but they also can get us into trouble. The expectation here is getting Martha into a problem because she's starting to doubt God and Jesus' care for her. That gets into this problem for her, so Jesus is going to guide her in a way different than her sister.

Notice what He does with her. *Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life."*

So Martha says, "I know he's going to rise again." I got that. I'm homeschooled, okay. I went to Sunday school. I went to Bible study. I studied all these things. I know. I read the last chapter of the book and so I know that it all turns out great and God wins in the end. I understand that, Martha says. But you see Jesus wants to take Martha and help her understanding of majesty in God's plan and bring it down to her on a personal level. He wants her to get it and wants her to understand even bigger this whole idea of His greatness. So He makes this statement and says to her: *"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die."*

Now notice the word *belief* in here again? Because Jesus' goal here is to increase the belief. Because Jesus knows that if you go through the pain of a loss of some kind that there's an opportunity for belief to grow there, for your relationship with God to grow deeper, and for something really significant and valuable to take place inside of your heart.

We were talking in our small group about a loss of a child. That is a unique pain that some of you have experienced. I know I've talked to some of you. Rose and Rich lost their daughter. I was talking to Lorraine this morning about the loss of her son-in-law. And Lisa lost two of her children. That is a pain that I thank God I have not experienced. But there's a comradery that those people experience who have lost a loved one that no one else can know. You just can't know that unless you've gone through that pain yourself. It's a really difficult experience.

Some of you haven't physically lost a loved one, but you've lost the contact with them or there's conflict in that relationship that's weighing on you. Something's happened and you know that brokenhearted feeling where you ache and it even physically weighs on your body. It's just a challenging place to be.

One of the things that Jesus is trying to help Martha understand is that there's something that in those moments of such weakness and vulnerability and pain there is belief. And that belief in Christ in that moment is so significant and powerful that it does not make the pain go away, but it allows you something deeper and something bigger that as you experience that pain for the rest of your life, God is doing something. That's why you see many people who've experienced tremendous loss that start foundations, or they make the world a better place, or they become more compassionate people. Jesus knows that. So He's trying to draw her attention to something bigger than what she's experiencing in the moment.

So I'm going to read those verses again. He says – *“I am the resurrection and the life and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”* Notice the emphasis on believe. *Do you believe this?*

“Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.” That is a really big statement. You're the one we've been looking for this whole time. You're the fulfillment of all of this. Yes. She's getting back to this what is the most important thing, and that is this relationship with Christ.

From this conversation with Martha I go away from this realizing that Martha needed an approach, this more of a “let's think bigger” kind of an approach. This isn't the first time Jesus does this kind of thing. Remember when Martha was cooking in the kitchen? Mary was down by Jesus' feet and Martha says from the kitchen, “Hey. Jesus, would you tell her to get in here and help me in the kitchen?” And Jesus says, “What she's doing is better.” Wow. Martha had something to learn there and Jesus knew what Martha needed, so He's taking her on a particular path to help her see the bigness of God and who He is, even in the midst of this painful experience that she's in right in the moment.

Let's go to the second conversation. The second conversation is the one with Mary. Notice what takes place because it is completely different. Because Mary is the one, we're told in verse 2, she is the one who broke the perfume on Jesus' feet. She is the one who was sitting at Jesus' feet and talking to Him. If I was going to describe her in a word, I would say she's sentimental. She's this person who's run by emotion. Watch Jesus and His interaction with her.

After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.” When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there. When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Same statement as Martha, but Jesus is going to respond differently.

Notice His response. *When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"* They're pondering the same thing we're pondering here this morning.

Verse 38 – *Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb.* Do you see the emotion Jesus is experiencing? He's upset about this. Now He's not upset because He misses Lazarus and Lazarus died. Because He knows in just a moment He's going to shout out, "Lazarus, come out!" and He's going to be with him again. So He's not grieving the loss of Lazarus as Mary and Martha are. But He's upset by the pain of brokenness.

When we go through brokenness in our lives, it is painful. God is compassionate and He cares about that pain. If we only talk about the truth without the love, we miss something really important. Whatever problem you're experiencing, whatever trial, whatever pain, whatever loss you're experiencing, you need to know that Jesus is the one who walks with you through the valley of the shadow of death. He's the one who's right there in a compassionate way. Upset at the pain that death and trials cause and brokenness happen. He's disappointed in life's pain that takes place. Just like you are. When you experience a divorce or you experience some kind of a loss of a job or something, the pain that exists in that moment is something Jesus knows.

It's very clear to Mary, this is what she needed. She needed someone to just emotionally care for her. And God wants to do that in a very special way. So He does that with Mary and weeps with her. I just love the picture of His compassion. God cares and He loves us in the midst of the struggles.

Well there's one more character in the story I want to look at and that's Lazarus. Because in this part of the dialogue or the interaction, we're learning about God's power. So let's go to that part of the passage.

Verse 38 – *It was a cave.* He went out to the tomb, and in those days the tombs were often these caves with a big, flat stone that would be rolled down into a trough and it would block it off so that no animals or people wouldn't normally want to go in there, but nothing could get into to get to the body that had been prepared and put into the tomb. So that's the picture here.

It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. And Jesus says, "Take away the stone." "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days."

See Jesus could have, as in His own resurrection, had the stone rolled away a different way. The angels could have rolled the stone away. He could have just said, "Move," and the stone would have listened to Him and the stone would have moved away. But He doesn't do that. He tells them to move the stone away.

If you're going to see resurrection, if you're going to see life, you're going to have to be willing to move the stone away. We can complain and say, "It stinks in there." There may be some areas in your life that you know need to be addressed in your own heart. That you're covering them up with a big stone and you can't experience the life you know unless you're willing to open it up

and allow God to do something in the midst of that. It's painful sometimes, even to do that. But that's what He's saying to Mary and to Martha. Move the stone away. Because He wants to do something deeper.

If you're covering something up, and sometimes you've just got to do it. You've got to move the stone away and allow God to do that deeper work. He wants to do some work in our hearts. He wants to do resurrection work. He wants to do life. He wants to bring this something into our lives that can help us deal with the challenges, help us wrestle with the things that need to be wrestled with. All those things are taking place. She says, "This is going to be difficult because it stinks in there." And that's how it is sometimes. It's going to be tough. You roll it away, you're going to have to work with whatever you got in there to try to deal with it. That's what Jesus wants to do sometimes in our own lives is to let's deal with it. Let's open it up.

So Jesus said (notice the words again because these are the key words in the passage, we've seen them several times) – *"Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"* Belief is this ticket to experience God's grace in a bigger way. *"You will believe and you will see the glory of God,"* He says.

So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe (there we go again – that they may believe) that you sent me." So this is for the disciples, this is for the Jewish people that are around. Believing in Jesus is the most important thing. It will help you through the trials, it will help you with the lingering pain of the loss of a loved one, in this case. To be able to deal with that, it's the belief that's going to happen. Belief in Jesus Christ is going to help you. *Believe that you sent me.*

When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice... So He's really loud, He's calling out, and He says, *"Lazarus, come out!"*

Now some people have said it's really good that He said Lazarus, because if He just said, "Come out," then everybody would be coming out everywhere from the dead. But He calls Lazarus and He says come out.

Now the next part of the picture, just get this in your mind. Just try to imagine what it's like. Okay. They move the stone away, He yells into the tomb, *"Lazarus, come out!"* and this is what takes place. It's like *The Mummy Returns* movie, right? But *the dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.* Okay, so this guy is probably staggering out of the tomb. Okay? He gets out of there. Can you imagine the shock that other people are experiencing because now they have seen the power of God? Power that doesn't just deal with the small stuff in our lives. This is big. The power to even deal with death itself.

Each one of us will face death personally. When we think of our own mortality, when we think of our own challenges, that can be a rather scary place to be and to think about. It's important for us to recognize that Jesus is saying here, *"I am the resurrection and the life."* That for the Christian death is a bump in the road in eternity. That we're in this for the long haul. We've got Jesus Christ. Because we believed in Him, we have Him resident in our lives, and He's guiding us through even the most difficult personal experiences that we might have.

So the dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Notice Jesus' words in this passage. He said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." Wow. It just reminds me that sometimes when we've got to work through stuff in our lives we need other people to help us. Don't we?

It's a privilege to be part of a fellowship where I can share my personal need and problem that I'm going through or you can share your need or we can share the struggles that we're facing. And sometimes we sit with someone and they help us take off the graveclothes. Because we really need that because we're stuck. We just can't do it ourselves because we're all wrapped up in ourselves. Sometimes we need someone who's going to come along and help us see God's grace. To help us experience, help us move our hands and feet again in a new way. That God wants to do something really special. Because resurrection is who Jesus is.

Well let me show you a passage from Isaiah 61. *He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes. So notice the context here is this comfort in the midst of mourning. God wants to do something in the middle of all of that. He wants to give beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks (an oak is the idea of a really strong tree) of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his glory. It says splendor, but it means glory. That's what we're talking about again. God's glory.*

That's the promise for us. That with belief, in the midst of pain, God does something in our lives. It doesn't remove the broken-heartedness or the lingering memory, I should say. But what He does is He allows that pain to become something in us that's more focused on who God is and what He wants to do.

So I think we need a prayer for our own personal lives. So I'm going to take you to a prayer that Paul prays for us. He's praying it for the Ephesians, but it's a prayer that we can have for ourselves in Ephesians 1:17. Let me read this as a prayer for us because I think this is what God wants for you and me.

Paul says – *I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious (see the word glory again there) Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. We need that. Lord, give me the spirit of wisdom and revelation for me personally. I need it, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart (where you feel the pain) may be enlightened in order (that you may have three things) that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. Notice power for us who believe. The same theme we've seen all through these words today. And notice what this power is like. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.*

God wants us to have that power and know that that power is available to us to deal with the struggles that we face, the challenges that we experience so that we can receive that power. The prayer is that we'll be able to know Him better. That we'll be able to get to know these things that He wants for us and we'll experience Him in a new and powerful way in our hearts. We see

the majesty of God, we see the comfort of God, and we see the power of God in this passage. I trust that God will use this to help you to move forward in your life, whatever that challenge might be.

If you've never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, I want to encourage you to do that today. To say, "I want this. I want Christ in my life. I need this. I can't go through my life without Christ. I need Him in my life." When you admit you're a sinner and you ask Jesus to be your Savior, then He comes in. And He comforts us. And He forgives us. And He empowers us. I need that. I think we all need that today.

Would you stand with me? Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, I pray especially for those who are going through some significant challenges that just need your power and your grace and your strength and your comfort. Lord, create testimonies in our lives that we can share with others. Give us the ability to encourage one another as your word says. Because we've experienced your power in our heart and lives in a real way. In Jesus' name, amen.