



**So that you might believe**  
**Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead**  
**John 11:1-44**  
**Preacher: Pastor Roy Summers**

Today we conclude our series of sermons on the seven miraculous signs of Jesus recorded by John in his Gospel. The seventh sign is the raising of Lazarus from the dead after his body was in a tomb four days.

John has entwined his account of this miracle with Mary and Martha's personal sorrow and so we can perhaps best get into this story by asking some questions:

Do Christians suffer? Simple question - we all know the answer is yes, we live in a fallen world in which everyone will suffer for, "man is born to trouble as sparks fly upwards" (Job 5:7)

Do godly Christians also suffer? Or is immunity given to the best saints?! Answer? The godliest Christians also suffer; think of blameless Job and the apostle Paul.

Does suffering always accomplish some good in the life of the afflicted believer? Yes, for "in all things God works for the good of those who love him." (Romans 8:28). We may not always see that good, but by faith we believe good will come.

Does suffering always come to an end? Yes, it does, either in this world or in the world to come, where there will be no more curse, and where God will wipe every tear for our eyes.

Our last two questions are not so easy:

5. Do Christians sometimes suffer for the benefit of others? Could it be that a trial they are passing through is not primarily for their own good, but for the good of someone else?

6. And, are trials sometimes allowed to display the glory of God? Not for our ultimate good, not for the good of those around us, but for the glory of God?

These latter questions are more difficult to answer because, while none of us want to suffer, if we know that the suffering will accomplish some good in us and for us, that may make it easier to bear..... but if we hear that someone else may be reaping the benefit of our suffering, we are bound to ask, "Is that fair?" "One person suffering for the benefit of another?"

This morning, through the suffering of Mary and Martha, the answers to these more difficult questions are revealed, and we gain a deeper understanding - and a greater comfort - to adversity in a fallen world.

Let me give you the answers straight away: Jesus allowed Lazarus to die with all the sorrow that caused to sisters Mary and Martha, (a) for the benefit of many relatives who became believers through the resurrection of Lazarus (verse 45); Jesus allowed this suffering, (b) so that God would be glorified in his Son, whose almighty resurrection power was revealed (verse 4).

Did Mary and Martha benefit from the trial themselves? Yes, no doubt their faith in Jesus grew, but the main purpose of this most testing event was the glory of God and the conversion of sinners.

It's my hope that through John chapter 11 we will gain a deeper perception of the trials we must all pass through - and hence a greater comfort in them; that we will ask beyond the "what is God doing for me, in me?" questions to the "who around me might be blessed?" and "How will God be glorified?" questions.

Think of Job. Were his sufferings allowed for his own benefit? I am not sure. I do know however, that the story of his life has comforted countless other believers over the years. And we know that God was glorified through his trials, because Satan was proved a liar in heaven's court! "Job will walk out on God if his comforts are taken away." But did he? No! Because the gift of divine faith is a powerful thing. God was glorified through Job's trial.

Think of Jesus. And then the supreme example of the Lord Jesus Christ. At the heart of the Gospel is the story of a man whose sorrows were exclusively for the sake of others! Jesus did not suffer and die for his own good, no, "He bore our sins in his body on the cross," (1 Peter 2) It should surprise no disciple of Jesus, then, if his followers should also sometimes be called to suffer for the benefit of others, and the glory of God.

### The Story

Let's run through the story.

Dedicated family. This little family, brother Lazarus and sisters Mary and Martha, loved Jesus. (i) You may remember the occasion when Jesus went to their home and Martha got upset at her sister because Mary was just listening to his words, while Martha felt she had to do all the work! (ii) And you may remember how this Mary poured expensive perfume on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair, out of pure devotion to him. This trio loved Jesus and Jesus loved them too—John says so three times:

- Verse 3, When Lazarus was ill, the sisters sent him word, "Lord, the one you love is sick."
  - Verse 5, "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus"
  - And verse 36, as Jesus wept over the death of Lazarus folks observing said, "See how he loved him!"
- Apply Upon this dedicated, loving family trio, two great sorrows fell, a serious illness followed by a tragic death. Do godly dedicated worshipping believers suffer? Yes they do. Is suffering a sign that God does not love us? No, not at all!

Jesus was elsewhere when Lazarus fell ill, so Mary and Martha sent him word through a messenger. They were hoping Jesus would come to Bethany and heal their brother, but Jesus sent back the message: "This sickness will not end in death. No it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." (verse 4)

There it is, Jesus says that through the events about to unfold, God's Son will be glorified - his power to bring a dead body to life will be revealed.

Although Lazarus was seriously ill when Jesus got the message Jesus did not return to Bethany. In fact he set out on a short mission trip which means that by the time Jesus sets foot in Bethany, Lazarus would have died. But Jesus knows exactly what he is going to do – he is going to perform a greater miracle than the one the sisters are asking for!

After the detour Jesus heads for Bethany, by which time Lazarus has died. On the way he says to his disciples: "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."

The disciples don't understand this hopeful description of a believer's death, "falling asleep" and wonder why Jesus has to go to Bethany if Lazarus is merely asleep! Jesus spells it out plainly: "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

Thomas, a dedicated but complicated disciple says to the rest of the disciples :

“Let us also go that we may die with him.”!!

Arrival By the time Jesus arrived in Bethany Lazarus has been in the tomb for four days and lots of people have gathered to comfort the sisters. Martha went out to greet Jesus, but Mary was too disappointed to join her.

“Lord if you had been here my brother would not have died.” said Martha

If only things were different from how they are! How often have you and I said that?

“Your brother will rise again.” Jesus replies, meaning in a few minutes!

But his words go right over Martha’s head because in Jewish thinking the only resurrection of the dead takes place at the end of the world:

“I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day”

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

Jesus wants to turn Martha’s attention away from a distant event to the divine person talking to her! And of course it works, “Yes Lord I believe that you are the Christ the Son of God who was to come into the world.”

Mary joins Martha; “Lord if you had been here my brother would not have died.”

Jesus is deeply moved when he sees Mary and others grieving in tears and he himself weeps at the tomb

He commands the stone door to be removed, calls out in a loud voice, “Lazarus come out!” and in an instant a body that has been decomposing for four days is restored to life!

What power! What a miracle!

The outcome? Jesus was glorified, his mighty resurrection power was made known, and many people believed in Jesus!

“Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary and had seen what Jesus did put their faith in him.”  
(verse 45)

### Lessons about suffering

Let’s return for a moment to the questions we began with. Some listener may be thinking, “Surely the most significant teaching of John 11 is not the suffering of Mary and Martha but the power and glory of Jesus Christ.” That’s true, but (i) the many small details John has included about the suffering of Mary and Martha are intended to help us in our suffering, and (ii) we’re living through a period of history when many people are experiencing significant suffering of one kind or another and need help and comfort:

1. Jesus knows that we are suffering, just as he knew that Lazarus would die and his sisters would grieve.
2. Jesus allows our suffering, just as he allowed the sickness of Lazarus to lead to his death.
3. Jesus loves us when we suffer—just as Jesus loved Mary, Martha and Lazarus.
4. Jesus empathises with us in our sorrows, just as he wept with Mary and Martha

And then that deep truth:

5. Jesus wants to bless others through our suffering and bring glory to his name—just as he blessed many Jews with living faith that day, and glorified himself with this dazzling display of resurrecting power!

Apply. If we are to benefit from John 11, then, with the Lord's help. From today onwards, let us ask in every trial, "How may my suffering be a help to others?" and "How might God be glorified through it?" (PAUSE)

### The gift of Eternal Life

Many years ago I sat at the bedside of a Christian man who was dying. His eyes were closed as I read to him: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." When I came to the question at the end, "Do you believe this?" he thought it was me asking him a question personally! And he said Yes! Yes I do believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life! It was a wonderful experience! And his family and church were able to lay him to rest with great hope!

And if you trust in...

1. The one who can turn water / wine
2. Heal an official's son at a distance
3. Tell a man who has not walked for 38 years to pick up his mat and walk
4. Feed some 20,000 people, from five small loaves and two small fish
5. Walk on water to rescue his disciples
6. Restore sight to a man born blind
7. And raise a dead man back to life

If you trust in him, then you can face death without fear, but in the confidence and certain hope that one day your body will be raised to eternal and everlasting life, just as Jesus was raised from the dead!

As we end this series of sermons, we pray that God will give you living faith in his Son, and through that faith you will have the hope of eternal life.