

Guest Preacher - Rev. Iain Thompson (Retired)

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Preacher: Rev. Iain Thompson

[0:00] We're going to turn back to John chapter 11. And we can take us our text, the words of verse 5.

! Now, Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. But I don't want to confine the thoughts that I want to bring before you to that text.

I want to take some thoughts from the context in which that text is found. Now, it's hard for us at times to remember that our Lord had a true human nature.

Our thoughts sometimes might lead us to think that because He was the Son of God, because He also had a divine nature, that He didn't actually experience the things that we experience.

in our human nature. But He experienced everything that we experience because He indeed had a true nature, a true human nature.

[1:13] He was born as every child is born. He was born into this world through a human mother. When He took this nature to Himself, He was brought into the world as every human being is brought into the world by birth.

He was dependent on His mother to nurse him and to care for him, just as every baby that's born into this world is dependent on being nourished by their mother or by their parent or by others who may have to look after them from time to time.

But He had to experience all of that. He had to experience growing up, growing up physically, mentally and spiritually.

The first mention that we have of Him after He was born was when He was 12 years of age. And we're told that He grew in wisdom and in stature, that He had to grow just as every child has to grow.

And He experienced everything that we experience. He experienced hunger so that He had to eat to satisfy that hunger.

[2:39] He experienced thirst so that He had to drink to satisfy His thirst. He experienced weariness. He had to sleep.

He had to lay down. He had to sleep. He had to sleep. He had to sleep. He had to sleep. He had to sleep, as I said. And not only that, but when he began his ministry in this world after he was baptized at the age of 30, he began to experience things that no human being will ever experience. But he experienced it in his human nature. He was beaten up. He was slandered. He was persecuted.

And no doubt, he was cast down many times as a result of the unbelief of the people that he was seeking to minister to.

He was, as Isaiah prophesied, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. The apostle to the Hebrews tells us that he was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin.

[4:02] Well, that was part of his human experience. But what I want to focus on, particularly this evening, is that as a human being, he formed friendships.

And he was able to show sympathy. Because he had all the human emotions that we have. And amongst the friends that he made are the three people that we read of in this chapter.

Martha, her sister Mary, and her brother Lazarus. And that's what we want to focus on particularly. The friendship that he formed with this family.

So that's the first point we want to consider is that as a human being, he was able and he had a desire. Just as every human being has a desire to form friendships whilst he was in this world.

He didn't live in isolation, even although he was a class above every other human being that ever lived in this world.

Because it's only to his friends that he entrusts himself. In the same way that you don't tell everybody everything. But if you've got a close friend, you can unburden yourself to that person because you trust them.

Because they're close friends. Now in John chapter 15, we read there that he refers to the inner circle, the disciples, the twelve.

[11:45] Now he had many disciples, but these were his close followers, the ones that he formed a close relationship with. That he refers to them as his friends.

You are my friends. And because you are my friends, I have kept nothing back from you. I have revealed to you all that the Father has revealed to me.

So he was sharing what he had with them. He was entrusting himself to them because of this special relationship that he had with the twelve and with this family of three, of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

But the second thing I want to consider is that this family of friends were all different. They were all of the one spirit, but they were all different.

So we have diversity in the midst of unity. because they were all united in their faith. They all believed in who he was.

[13:03] But each one of them had their own personality. And each one of them had their own peculiarities. They weren't all the same. Now we know less about Lazarus than we know of the sisters.

But we know that he was a friend of Jesus. When he grew ill, his sister sent this message to him. He whom you love is ill. So we're told that Jesus loved him. And they sent that message, thinking that as soon as Jesus heard that, that he would rush to their aid.

And when Jesus did eventually come and he stood at the grave, he called him his friend.

And he wept at that grave because he was his friend. And those who stood by bore witness to that because we read there in verse 36, see how he loved him.

[14:12] Jesus had dined with Lazarus. They had enjoyed close fellowship with one another.

But we don't really know that much more than that. Except that he was a very close friend of Jesus. One that Jesus loved.

As I've said in Luke's gospel, we learn that Martha was the one who first invited Jesus into their home.

And she seems to be the one who managed the home. She was a hospitable friend. She made a great effort in making sure that Jesus was well looked after to the point that she complained to Jesus about her sister Mary for not helping her.

Because she wanted to give him the very best. And she wanted to enlist the help of her sister to ensure that he would get nothing but the best whilst he was in their home.

[15:32] But the Lord rebuked her for that. And he told her that she was making too much fuss. You are anxious and troubled about many things.

Now, in chapter 12, if you care to go on and read it later on, you'll see that he was again in their home. and that Martha was again serving him.

But she doesn't get any rebuke on that occasion because she had learned to get her priorities right. In the first instance, she was actually making the meal more important than Jesus himself.

And that's a danger for every Christian. That we're so taken up with the service that we want to give him that we're giving more emphasis and more energy to that than we are to Jesus himself.

The one that we would desire to serve. yes, we must serve him, but we mustn't make our service more important than he is.

[16:50] And that's the mistake Martha did on the first occasion. But she learned not to make that mistake again. So that when she served him a meal in chapter 12, there was no reason to rebuke her.

We learn of her that she was a person who spoke her mind. Because she wasn't afraid to complain to Jesus about her sister Mary for refusing to help.

And when he didn't come, when a message was sent concerning Lazarus, she wasn't afraid to complain that he hadn't come. Because one of the first things that she said to him when he did come was, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

As if she's complaining, why didn't you come earlier? Why didn't you answer our petition? We sent you a message that Lazarus was sick and you didn't come.

If you had come, he wouldn't have died. So she's not afraid to express what's on her mind even to the Lord. And that's what the Lord wants of all of us.

[18:02] He doesn't want us to pretend we're happy if we're not happy. He wants us to bring what's troubling us to him so that he might get the opportunity of allaying our fears and possibly explaining why he has dealt with us the way that he has.

Sometimes we'll never know, but on occasions we will know because he's willing to reveal these things to us. Now, the third member of the family, Mary, was different from Martha.

When Jesus had to defend her against the complaint that Martha had made against her, he says concerning her, one thing is necessary, and Mary has chosen the good portion which will not be taken away from her.

although practical matters had to be attended to, it would not distract Mary from the opportunity of listening to the teaching of Jesus.

Because if we're not willing to listen to the teaching of Jesus, how are we going to know how we're to serve him? how we're to behave ourselves as we go forth in this world as his witnesses.

[19:33] We need to learn from him if we're going to be factual witnesses, witnesses, and we need to deal with things the way he dealt with things, rather than think that we know better, and just go trundling on making a mess of things very often, because we haven't taken on board what the word of God actually teaches us concerning the way that we're to behave towards our fellow human beings.

while Mary wouldn't miss the opportunity of listening to his teaching, and she seems to have felt her brother's death more keenly than Martha did.

Excuse me. I think I did that the last time I was here as well, so I'm sorry for that, and I'm sorry for the person that might have to dry it up. But Mary was a person who wanted to listen, but she was also one who appears to have been affected by her brother's death more than Martha had, because she seems to have been weeping in the house, and when a message came to her from Martha that the Lord had come, she went running out, and the Jews followed her thinking, she's gone now to weep at the tomb.

because it was obvious that she had done quite a lot of weeping, because she was deeply grieved by her brother's death.

And when she met Jesus, she fell down at his feet, saying the very same thing that Martha had said, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

[21:30] so we see that the character of the two sisters are quite different, but they have several things in common. Both believed in Jesus, both were warmly attached to Jesus, both delighted to honor Jesus, yet they were quite different.

and the point that I'm making here is that a lot of people are under the impression that once you're converted, that we all have to be the same.

Christian. And some Christians think because other Christians are different to them, no, they're not really Christians because if they were, they would do things the way I'm doing it.

And they wouldn't go to that place because I certainly wouldn't go to that place, or I wouldn't have said that. And they think that everybody has to be like themselves.

But that's the beauty of the human race. We're all unique. We all have our own personalities, and God doesn't want to change that.

[22:53] He wants us to keep our personalities. He wants us to sanctify the personality that we have, and he doesn't want any of us to try and be someone that we are not.

He wants us to be ourselves. And that's what we see in this family. They're all different, but they're all Christians.

They all have the same desire. They want to honor Jesus. They want to serve Jesus. But they do it in a different way because they have their own characteristics and their own personality.

And they're all doing it through the personality that they possess. And the final point I want to bring before you is that the friends of Jesus are not exempt from afflictions.

If Jesus wanted to, he could have healed Lazarus. And he could have done so without even having to go and see Lazarus. He could have done it at a distance.

[24:05] From the time that he received the message, he could have commanded that he would have been healed and not moved from the spot that he was in. But he didn't do that.

When he heard Lazarus was ill, he deliberately delayed. He didn't rush off. We're told that he told his disciples Lazarus is ill, but he made no move to rush to his side.

Even or two sisters had appealed to him that his friend was sick, he had allowed Lazarus to suffer and he allowed him to die and he allowed his sisters to suffer bereavement.

The objective that God has in allowing our afflictions is to change our souls. It doesn't just set lessons before us.

It produces changes within us because we will never really get to know who Jesus is until we come to realize the need that we have of his grace.

[25 : 29] we can read about him, we can sing songs of praise towards him that proclaim his tender mercies but we will never really understand these tender mercies until we actually suffer.

And it's in our suffering that we give him the opportunity of showing these tender mercies to us, of showing us the need that we have of his grace and the willingness that he has to provide that grace. Now I may think that I have a friend but you won't really know if you've got a friend until you need him or her. And it's when you're in your need that you learn who your friends really are.

And it's when the Christian is in need that they come to experience what a friend we have in Jesus. Because he's always there for us.

He never lets us down. And he will always give us the help that we need in our time of need. Not before, not afterwards, but when we actually need it.

[26 : 54] he's always going to be there for us. And this is what he wants us to experience. That we have a great friend in him.

As the hymn writer said, what a friend we have in Jesus. If we experience sorrow and bereavement in our souls, it brings us closer to him.

and it gives us to draw nearer to him and to become more dependent upon him. And that's where we learn who we actually have in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the one who comes to experience that will sing with Solomon, Solomon, my beloved is mine and I am hers.

He is the chiefest among ten thousands. You couldn't ask for a better friend than the Lord Jesus Christ.

[28 : 05] And that's why he allows us to go through difficulties in this world, bereavements, afflictions, but we're told that he experienced these things.

Whatever we go through in this life, we cannot surpass the grace that is available to us to help us in our time of need.

So that when we're going through a trial, he can draw alongside us and say, and assure us. Now, people can try and draw alongside us when we're grieving, but unless they've gone through that particular grief at that time, they cannot enter into our experience.

They might have a desire to show sympathy, but they cannot convince us that they know what we're going through. In every trial that we're going through, but Jesus can assure us, I know exactly what you're going through, because I was there.

And whatever your temptations are, it is nothing compared to the temptations that I suffered.

Whatever your trial is, it is nothing in comparison to the trials that I went through and overcame.

[29 : 29] And I did that for you, so that when you're going through that, you can come to me and I can assure you, I understand you, and I'm willing to give you grace because that's what I died for, so that I might help you in your time of need, even in your death.

I will be with you and you will triumph over it and you will come to experience the power of the resurrection because that's what I've earned for my people, that you might rise above everything that you're going through and that you might have the victory over it.

And this is where we get the new song that the psalmist so often speaks of. He put a new song in my heart. Did they not know the songs?

Yes, they knew the songs. They had learned the songs. It's the same song but it's got a very different meaning. It's one thing to know one thing intellectually.

It's another thing to know it experimentally. And he puts a new song in our hearts. We sing it with notes from our hearts that we could never put into the song beforehand until we actually came to appreciate what a friend we have in Jesus.

[31 : 00] Jesus. We give him the honor and the glory that he deserves to receive. And the Lord's people are not strangers to his compassion.

We admire his beauty. Now we may admire the beauty of God by studying his word, by studying what God has done for us, but it's like admiring the beauty of a house without ever actually entering

into the house.

But once you enter into the house, you don't just see the beauty that's on the outside, you see the beauty of the house from the inside. And that's the intimate relationship that God establishes with his people.

That friendship that nothing can sever. There is no power in heaven or on earth that can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, O Lord.

And that's the friend that we all need. Now both these sisters had a natural desire to avoid the grief that they were going to suffer as a result of their brother Lazarus dying.

[32 : 31] No one wants to experience bereavement. We don't want our loved ones to die. That's a natural inclination. love of But he allowed them to go through that.

He allowed them to experience that bereavement. Why? Well, through it they were going to come to experience a deeper measure of the love that he has for them.

And when we experience the deep love that he has for us, we can begin to express a deeper love for the ones that we love.

Just imagine how they behaved towards Lazarus after he brought him out from the tomb. They would have appreciated being in Lazarus' company more than they ever had before.

Imagine one of your own loved ones that has died. if they were brought back from the dead, you wouldn't deal with them in the same way.

[33 : 39] The things that you have regretted, that you said or did when they were alive, you will never make these mistakes again. You will appreciate them more.

And imagine what it's going to be in the resurrection when all our loved ones who died in the Lord are brought back. Not only are we going to have a greater and a deeper love for the Lord who made this possible for us, but we're going to have a greater and a deeper love for those who are united with us and who have been brought back to life.

And the life that shall never end, where we will never make the same mistakes again, because we're going to a place where there is no sin, a place that is ruled by righteousness, a new heavens and a new earth.

Isn't this the great hope that every Christian has? Isn't it well worth suffering the afflictions, the trials, and the temptations, the bereavements, and the difficulties that we encounter in this world, if it's going to give us a deeper and a greater relationship with God and with one another in the kingdom that he's preparing for us?

Well, may God grant that he would bless to us these thoughts. Let us pray. Our Father in heaven, you're the all-wise God and you're the one who will always do that which is right.

[35 : 19] and even although we question at times through our ignorance because we cannot see the end from the beginning, when we go through trials we wonder why you're allowing these things.

But we believe that you have a purpose and we believe that part of the purpose is that we might come to appreciate more the grace that you have made available to us to help us to overcome whatever it is that we're being tried with to help us to appreciate the great love that you had for us when you were prepared to sacrifice your own son so that whosoever would believe in him would not perish but have everlasting life.

And you're preparing a glorious life, far more glorious than the life that we have in this world, the life of the resurrection. And we're asking you, Lord, that you would help us to focus on these things so that we might overcome whatever difficulties that we do encounter, just as Jesus was prepared to suffer the sufferings of the cross for the joy that was set before him.

Because that joy is set before us. And we're asking you, Lord, that you would help us to focus on the inheritance that will yet be ours when we receive the fullness of our salvation and all the blessings that Christ has purchased by his death.

To his name be the glory. Hear and accept our prayers for giving us for our sins, for we ask it in his precious name. Amen. We're going to conclude by singing in Psalm 73, and that's on page 316.

[37 : 11] And we're going to sing from verse 25. Whom have I in the heavens high but thee, O Lord, alone?

And in the earth whom I desire besides thee there is none. My flesh and heart doth faint and fail, but God doth fail me never. For of my heart God is the strength and portion forever.

We're going to sing to the end of the psalm, Psalm 73 at verse 25. Whom have I in the heavens high but thee, O Lord, alone? Amen. If I in the heavens high but thee, O Lord, alone, and O Lord, in

the earth who might each high besides thee there is none.
My flesh and heart doth need and fail, but God doth fail me ever.
For all my heart would inch the strength and portion forever.
[39:01] ! For Lord, in that the fire from here forever perish shall!
let thou thou pouring from before thou hast destroyed all.
But surely it is good for me that I from years to on.
In God I trust that all thy words I may declare abroad.
now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the
Holy Spirit rest and abide with you all now and forever more.
[40:28] Amen. may may