

Lessons from the Grave

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Preacher: John Hannah

[0 : 00] Good morning everyone. Yeah, so we spent some time yesterday at St. Barnabas in Sia Yingpun actually. It's really a center for the homeless and the needy in the local western district.

There are actually two groups of people. There are actually people who are from the elderly and also for the homeless in the region. And they have physical needs of course, you know, food and shelter.

But also spiritual needs is more what the focus is for the center also. And so we also talked to the center people there while we were serving.

They actually have special needs for Saturday and Sunday for volunteers especially. Because that's where a lot of the events happen also. Bigger events happen on Saturday and Sunday. Yeah, and I think one area which we can really help in is in terms of their spiritual needs.

A lot of these people are very lonely. They are elderly, 80s and 90 years old. But they are still living alone. And they really just want someone who can just care for them and share with them their lives.

[1 : 05] So I think one area which we can help in is to just take the time to talk to them. Pray with them and counsel them. And just to let them know that someone is there to care for them and to act as a channel of God's love.

So I think this is really just one area which apart from just worshiping in here, we can bring our worship out into the community to serve them. Let's pray.

Our Heavenly Father, this morning we come to worship you as a family. We bring you our thanksgivings and praises. Blessed is the King.

You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive all the glory and honor and power. For you have created all things.

And for your pleasure and by your will, we are created and have our beings. Not only you created us, but you have also sent your Son, Jesus Christ, to save us, to redeem us, and one day to restore us.

[2 : 10] For all this, we lift up our praises to you. We thank you for planting Watermark Church in the District 15 of Hong Kong to give us a spiritual home in this place.

Thank you for giving us a pastor who loves you. Thank you for building him a pastoral team of leaders who shepherd us. Lord, please keep them in good health and protect their families and loved ones.

Command them to teach us your truth. And enable them to set an example in life, in love, in faith, in purity.

O Lord God, grant us a teachable spirit to follow their examples to imitate Christ Jesus in life, in love, in faith, in purity.

Help us understand and experience your love, so that we may exercise how to love and forgive one another. And so by loving one another, people around us will come to know that you are the Lord and we are Jesus' disciples.

[3 : 29] Lord, if there are any seekers among us today, Heavenly Father, would you help them feel the presence of God right now as we worship you?

Through the preaching of your word today, would you draw them closer to the cross to receive Jesus' salvation?

And if any here who is weary and heavy burdened, Father, would you help them to find rest and healing in you through the worship this morning?

As a church on the hill, our community groups are seeking ways to serve the Hong Kong society. We do pray for your guidance, wisdom, sensitivity, and the spirit of love to engage us with the right

opportunities in order to minister to the poor and the needy in a manner that they could feel the difference in life as if God has touched them.

As the holiday season of Thanksgiving and Christmas is approaching near, Holy Spirit, please inspire us with more interesting ways to share Jesus' love with our friends and relatives and colleagues and neighbors.

[4 : 53] Oh, Lord God, just like you added to their number daily in the early church, we are earnestly praying our Heavenly Father will be adding those who are being saved to our number at Watermark continuously.

So that the grace that is reaching more and more people, reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

That's truly what our hearts desire for you, Father, that your glory will overflow in this church. In Christ's name we pray. Dear Jesus, thank you so much for the city of Hong Kong that you have allowed us to live in.

What a privilege we have to live in the gateway to Asia. We pray for our relationship with mainland China. Give us your heart for this country. We ask for you to put Christians in leadership positions in our government, whom have integrity to be a light for you throughout Hong Kong.

We pray for all the Christians in Hong Kong, in media positions, in art positions, in education, as well as all the churches around, to reach out to each part of Hong Kong and to be the hands and feet to share your love to others who do not know you yet.

[6 : 20] Please help us to be faithful in our serving you, no matter how small or large our parts may be. We entrust all of our outreaches that Watermark is doing throughout this city to you.

Allow our community groups who so generously, through social settings, services like cleaning the beach, and this new opportunity in helping serve the poor in our area, also reap generously.

We submit all of Hong Kong to you, Lord, and we ask your continual mercy and love upon Hong Kong, we pray. We thank you, Father, for your creation.

The Bible tells us that in the beginning, you created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them. The beauty we see each day and night, and you declared it all good.

As we look at our world and all its varied cultures, we ask that you would call believers to carry the gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of the world and its many varied people groups.

[7 : 29] Help us to individually share the gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news that can change a life. God sent his son to be born in a manger in Bethlehem.

Live with mankind as a man, though totally God. Be crucified. He died. He was buried. He was buried. But on the third day, he rose from the dead.

He paid the price for the sins of the world. He paid the price for each of us. We only need to receive the gift. He made the way for each individual that would be born to have a relationship with God.

And Lord, we pray that you would also raise up influential leaders all over the world to lead with Christian principles and morals. Give them wisdom, knowledge, and courage to lead others in a godly manner.

Let us not forget to pray for the people and people groups around the world that are being persecuted for their faith in Christ.

[8 : 38] Give them courage, God. Provide them with daily strength and bless them. And finally, Lord, guide us as a part of the body of Christ to pray for other believers and for those who do not know you.

Give us boldness in sharing the gift of salvation with those God places in our lives, in our world. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Today's scripture comes from John 11, 1-16. Please follow along. Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.

It was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick, saying, Lord, behold, he whom you love is sick.

But when Jesus heard this, he said, This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified in life.

[9 : 59] Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. So when he heard that he was sick, he then stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Then after this, he said to the disciples, Let us go to Judea again. The disciples said to him, Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and you are now going there again?

Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world.

But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him. This he said, and after that he said to them, Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go, so that I may awaken you out of sleep.

The disciples then said to him, Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover. Now, Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he was speaking of literal sleep. So Jesus then said to them plainly, Lazarus is dead, and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.

[11 : 12] Therefore Thomas, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, Let us also go, so that we may die with him. This is the reading of God's word.

You may be seated. Logistics Well, for the privilege of coming, I am very grateful. Beyond compare. And for the privilege of thinking together about the Bible, I am grateful.

There is a reality that is beyond what we can observe. It is important to know that. It is important to embrace that.

It is important to live in light of that. So what I would like to do in a few moments that I have is to speak, to access, to gain a glimpse into that reality.

To lift our eyes from the shadows, to lift our eyes from the shadows, up to a different land. I would like to do that using a story that I think you and I all know.

[12 : 25] It is the story of our Lord's raising of Lazarus, Eleazar, in the Old Testament scriptures.

The one whom God helps is his name. When you read through the Gospel of John, what you observe is the point of the seven miracles that are found there is really not the point.

The point of the book is that John uses various discourses, various miracles and conversations to make the point of the claims of who Jesus is.

That he is the Son of God, that he is the Son of the living God, he will say in our text. When you think about the Gospel of John, there are three major talks or discourses that he gives.

One is in chapter 3, and it is his encounter with Nicodemus. If you know of that story, Nicodemus is a learned, religiously and politically astute man, a teacher.

[13 : 44] Jesus says to him, Are you not the teacher in Israel? And you do not understand these things. So, at a proper social occasion, in the cool of a closing day, Jesus had an interview, a discussion, with this great man on the rooftop, a rooftop in Jerusalem.

In the next chapter, it is not a rooftop, it is an intersection of various dusty roads at the foot of Mount Gerizim in Ebal, north of Jerusalem at a well.

There he meets a lady, unnamed, from tragic circumstances, both socially, morally, and religiously. And he seeks to help her to understand. In our chapter, you have the encounter with two distraught sisters.

The setting is sorrow and disorientation. Their brother has suddenly died. Unlike the other two encounters, this one includes the disciples, a faceless crowd, and a dead man.

[15 : 17] What is common in all three of these stories is our Lord's use of words that actually have a double meaning.

In chapter 3, with Nicodemus, he said, You must be born a second time.

But that second time term could also be translated, you need to be born again. Nicodemus does not understand that.

And he says to the Lord, How can a man who is old be born of his mother's womb a second time? And our Lord replies to him that you must be born with a different kind of birth, one whose origins are as the wind and the rain.

When he talks to the lady who is coming for water at a very odd time of the day, he says to her, I will give you water of such a quality that you will never thirst again.

[16 : 36] She is thinking about what is 21 feet below her in a well dug by Jacob. But Jesus says to her, If you drink the water that I will give you, it will be as springs that bubble up forever.

In this chapter, Jesus plays a double meaning of the word sleep. The disciples got it right.

If his friend is sleeping, why hazard his life in a rebellious Jewish leadership setting? Because he'll wake up.

But the words sleep and dead are the same words. What is interesting about our story is that Nicodemus speaks, the lady at the well, though unnamed, speaks, but the central figure in this story

doesn't say a word.

He is dead. In the first two occurrences, there was no miracle.

[18:02] That is observable. He talked to Nicodemus, and the day ended. He talked to a lady at the well, and the disciples returned.

But here, at the end of the story, which is ultimately not the real point of the story, is a miracle.

When you analyze the miracles in John's Gospel, there are seven.

This man is an artist as well as a literary figure. Seven is the number of completion. This is the ultimate miracle in our Lord's life and ministry, at least according to John.

When you look at our little passage, which is not literal, it is a story. It is a tragic story. In it, there are three parts.

And what I would like to do in the few moments that I have is to tell the story. The story begins with a request.

[19:10] And that request is that a person that Jesus loves has met with tragedy.

The second part of our story, beginning about verse 17, is the encounter of Jesus with these two interesting sisters.

And the third part is the raising of Lazarus. So I'd like to simply tell the story and then apply the story. The setting of the story is in the first three verses.

And we are introduced to three adults. They are siblings. They share a special intimacy with the Lord. In verse 3 and verse 5, it is said that he loved them.

They lived in the little town of Bethany, on the eastern side of the slopes of the Mount of Olives.

They are a family facing the wilderness, about two miles from the city.

[20:19] They are well-to-do people. And we know that because they live in a very large home where multitudinous guests could gather, in this case, to mourn.

They are a socially prominent family within their city. And they are wealthy enough to own a private burial tomb for their family.

We know little of Lazarus. Of course, he does not speak. His name means, the one whom the Lord helps. We know a bit more about Martha and Mary.

We know that Martha is the oldest. Mary is the youngest. But in our text, Mary is mentioned first, probably because of the anointing in chapter 12.

Martha is an active lady. She is stoic. She is reserved.

[21:26] She is industrious. She is alert to what's going on around her. She is a sensitive, responsible woman.

Mary, on the other hand, is a contemplative sort. You always find this lady sitting. She is meditative. And she is devotional. And we basically know what happened. Their brother became sick. And with a great degree of prudent wisdom, they know what to do.

They know Jesus, the great healer. He is a day's journey away, the Bible says. He is in the place where John had baptized him in the river Jordan.

Sixteen miles, eight hours walk, a day journey. And so they dispatch a courier to tell them that, to tell Jesus that Lazarus is sick.

[22:44] When Jesus hears this, the Bible says that he does not immediately rush to Jerusalem and Bethany.

He waits two days. The disciples say, well, if he's asleep, the dear guy will wake up.

But Jesus says, he is dead.

The disciples say, we've already been to Jerusalem. We have understood that the religious leadership is seeking to kill you.

If he is asleep, why do we have to go? And Thomas, who is an interesting disciple, whose character is characterized by disbelief, despondency, and devotion.

[23:54] He finally says, let us go and die with them. Jesus' answer to them is in the form of an illustration.

It is important to be in the very center of the will of God. And the center of the will of God is more important than the circumstances and exigencies and tragedies of life.

So he said, you are safe if you walk in the daylight. But if you walk in the night, by which I think he means, apart from the will of God, you will stumble.

So he waits two days. And then he comes. Mary, or Martha, who is obviously the more aware elder sibling, though there are tensions between these girls, goes out to meet Jesus.

And she says something rather wonderful to him that is an indication of her profound grief.

[25 : 17] She says to him, if you'd been here, my brother would not have died.

Is she expressing a rebuke for his heartiness? Or is she expressing the distortion of the tears in her eyes?

I don't know. And then she says this.

Ask the Father, because he hears your prayers. But if you look at the word ask, it tells us a lot about the distortion.

Because the word ask is always used of an inferior making requests of a superior.

[26 : 25] Jesus is not inferior. She knows that. She says in our text, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

She is sad. She is sad. And sadness does what it does to all of us. It clouds our vision. It scrambles our mind.

And Jesus says to her, your brother will live. She says, I know he will live in the resurrection in the last day.

And then Jesus says, the fifth of the great I am's of John's Gospel. I am the resurrection and life.

If you believe in me, you will live. And Martha says, I know you're the Son of God.

[27 : 30] I know you're the Messiah of this time. At that point, she hurries off to her sister who is sitting, entertaining these paid mourners that fill their living room.

And she says to Mary, the master is here. And he is calling for you. What a wonderful way.

So Mary rises. And the mourners follow her, thinking that she has gone to the tomb to mourn.

And Mary says in verse 32 exactly what her sister had said. Master, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

And Jesus says to her, where is he buried? Of course he knows. But that is not the point.

[28 : 43] And so they go to the grave. And there is a stone over it, as there always is.

And Jesus gives a command. Remove the stone. Mary says, he has been buried already for four days.

She did not say this, but we know this. That burials in the Near East, given its climate, is immediate.

And in Iran and Sapphira were buried the day they died.

He has been dead for four days. It is not pretty. And Jesus, weeping, has the stone removed.

And in a loud, loud voice, he says, Lazarus comes forth.

[29 : 56] Which is amazing to me. Because this man is dead. Death brings with it the incapacity to hear.

So why is he calling in a loud voice? For this man is dead. And the answer, I think, is this. He is not talking to Lazarus.

He is talking to a vast crowd of people that are beginning to assemble for the Passover, Israel's great feast of remembrance, of deliverance, wherein he will become the great deliverance.

And we all know the end of the story. Wrapped in the clothes of death, strips of cloth that bound him, this man heard the command and was brought to life.

And the Bible tells us that Jesus said to unbind him. That's our story.

[31 : 13] It's one of the most interesting stories across the pages of Holy Scripture.

The question then becomes this, for all of us. What do we make of this story? What do we carry home to face another week from this little text of Holy Scripture?

What I would say is this, very simply. One. That the Lord, though transcendentally sovereign, is one who is moved by our disappointments and tears.

You and I worship a God who is absolutely above us, in enormous transcendence and glory and power.

Yet the wonder of the Christian faith is that this guy, this God who is so austere, so other, so powerful, is a God of condescension.

[32 : 37] He is a God of compassion. I have met many people who are compassionate but powerless. And I have met people who are powerful and compassionless.

But our Lord Jesus is all powerful, able to wipe every tear from our eyes, and all caring.

In verse 33 it says that Jesus saw her weeping.

And verse 35 says, Jesus wept. What were they, these tears? These tears, there were tears of love for the tragedy and hurt in this family.

Jesus knew the end of the story. He didn't say to the girls, suck it up. A great day is coming.
[33 : 53] Aren't you glad that your brother is in heaven? Which he was.

But he was brought back, but that's another story. What strikes me here is that I've met a lot of people who try to comfort me by casting me into heaven when my life on earth is a hell. But Jesus didn't do that. Jesus knew the end of the story. Yet, confidence of how things would turn out never made him a stoic.

He entered into pain. He knew its genuine terror. But he did it. So I would say that Jesus is the sovereign Lord of time and history.

Yet, that did not exclude a compassionate identity in the pains and temporalities of life.

[35 : 15] Jesus, standing before a tomb, knew that sorrow would be turned into joy. But it did not take away from his compassion.

So my first question is this. Does it do it for you? Have you let a misapplication of truth hide the expression of true compassion?

Second, why did Jesus wait for two days? Why does he wait to bring us comfort sometimes?

He can do it in an instant. But why does he linger? And why is it that you and I will carry some of our pains to the grave?

When he is an all-caring, all-loving, infinite, compassionate heavenly father. And the answer to that is this.

[36 : 33] To strengthen our faith. God brings us trials. What did he say? You will see the glory of God.

What is the glory of God? The glory of God is the expression of his character. And it's only in pain. And it's only in trials. It's only in the backdrop of the darkness of our days that God writes in brilliant colors the word grace.

To know the darkness is to know grace. He says in verse 15 to his disciples who already believe this, that you might believe.

So what am I saying? I'm saying faith is always an organism that needs to grow. It's not static.

[37 : 46] There are degrees of trust in all of us toward God. His desire is to deepen our trust.

Is that your view of suffering? Third. He raised this man from the dead.

To verify his claim. That here is one and the only one who is Messiah.

He is a prophet greater than Moses. Deuteronomy 18 verse 18. Why did he cry out in a loud voice? I don't see Jesus crying out in a loud voice often. When he stood before Jerusalem. When he stood before Jerusalem. He cried out. Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem.

[38 : 49] I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks. But you would not. When he hung on the cross. In a loud voice. He cried those words.

It is finished. It is finished. It is finished. It is finished. You and I will hear it one more time. When the angels say it at the end of time. It is finished.

Why did he cry out in a loud voice? Not to inform Lazarus. Lazarus. Lazarus has suffered auditory depletion.

He cried out in a loud voice. He cried out in a loud voice. So that Jerusalem would hear. Hear what? I am one. I am one. Who is the fulfillment of all the promises.

Of all the Holy Scriptures. They spoke of me. And there is the proof.

[39 : 53] A dead man. He has come to life. Fourth. I think the story is here.

To reveal the nature of the rebirth. When he talked to Nicodemus. He said. Nicodemus.

It is the core of the evening. The wind is blowing off the Mediterranean. You can't see it. But you know it is real.

Because you experience its evidence. On your skin. The wind. The wind. The wind. The wind. The wind. equally invisible as the wind.

You need to be born a second time, not from a womb, but from heaven. And I have come to show that to you.

[40 : 58] He said to the lady at the well, this unnamed lady, and I think the reason Jesus left her unnamed is she is me. She is all of us.

Twisted life. He said to her, if you drink the water I will give you, you will never thirst again.

And she ran off leaving her bucket at the well. She came to fill it, but she was so full of through water that she left it and went into the city to the men that she had served promiscuously to say, this

is not the Messiah, is it?

And here it is to teach us that to enter God's family, we must be born from the dead. dead people have no auditory skills. Without hearing, there can be no doing.

[42 : 25] If I can't hear, how can I respond? There's only one answer. There has to be a gift given so that you can hear.

And that gift that is given, that is capable of bringing the living dead to life, is the voice of our Lord. I am the resurrection and the life. I am it. It's a gift.

We need to accept that gift. The question is, have we? It is the greatest question you will ever answer in this life.

It is one that you will not be able to answer in the next life. Finally, why is the story here?

[43 : 34] It's to show you and I hope. After darkness comes light. You and I are walking in a shadowed land.

The best and highest privileges of it are temporal. And they point to something far better. So I would say, what Jesus said, what Martha said to Mary, the teacher is here.

He's calling for you. The teacher is here. He's calling for you. Jesus said to Martha, do you believe this?

Do you believe this? There is a reality that is beyond what can be observed.

It is important to know that. it is important to embrace that. It is important to live in light of that. Hear the words of our Lord.

[44 : 57] I am the resurrection and the life. He that believes in me, though he dies, shall live.

God is the God we thank you, our Father, for the Holy Scriptures because they point to you and to know you, the one of which it points is to know life.

we thank you, our Father, that you have delivered us from our darkness, that you are the resurrection and the life.

You are the answer to living and you are the answer to the grave. We thank you for the deep hope that burns within our soul.

Father, I pray, dear Father, that those who have not been brought from the cave would hear what Jesus said.

[46 : 05] The Master is here. He is calling for you. Do you believe these things? And, Father, we believe these things.

We truly believe these things. and we truly love you. And we thank you in Jesus' name.

Amen. They hear amen. Amen. Hey, if you're here for the first time or you've been here a billion times, I don't think you can do a billion times in two years, but if you need someone to pray with you, need someone to talk about things, we have trained prayer counselors up front.

It's all confidential. Come see the elders. Come see the staff. We would love to pray with you. Don't leave here with a burden on your heart or something that you feel like God's been talking to you.

Come talk to somebody and let's pray with you and listen to what Christ has to say to you today.

Thank you, Dr. Hannah, for sharing God's word with us today. Also, we don't pass around offerings around here. There's little blue envelopes and we do that. We've been on a journey for two years.

[47 : 09] We feel like everything that we do is acts of worship to the Lord. And so as you respond to what Christ has done in your life, we just ask you to respond with your finances too because he's given us all things and that helps us to do the outreaches we've talked about and all those things.

When you leave, don't just rush out. There's food and drinks and what you've heard today over and over is that this is only 20% of what we do as a church. 80% is done in community outside in Hong Kong and other places.

So if you're not in a community group, please sign up. There's a table out there. Sylvie will be at the table and we would love for you to join a community group and go on this journey that we're on. We have them all around Hong Kong.

We started a couple on the Kowloon side and so this is your chance. Don't leave here without signing up for a community group, okay? Next week, the cloud is moving and so we are at West Island School in your bulletin.

There's maps to get there so don't come here. I don't know what's going on here. I think a wedding. Next week, we'll be at West Island so we will see you at West Island and also I wanted to, my lovely wife, what we like to do is we like to, we wanted to bring up John and Carolyn and would you guys come up here for just a second and join us?

[48 : 25] So they have been a huge part for us as a couple and as a church. They are here at massive sacrifices to themselves.

They actually flew in from Israel on a group and so they've just been huge servants to us. When we got married, I was still in seminary. Christina had no one to talk to.

She needed someone really badly to talk to and so she sought out Carolyn and Carolyn has been a huge answer to our prayer and I would spend all my money to bring you guys back as much as I could just because of how you ministered to us.

And so with that and all the Israel trips they've taken us on, they've taken us on three Israel trips so one with Island, one with Watermark and then the next one coming up May 16th. And so we just wanted to, this is a very small token but it's what you mean to us as a family and as a church family that's a symbol of your serving us.

Yeah. Thank you so much. And so, yeah. So let me pray for us and we can go out and I pray that you would think about that reality beyond what we see.

[49 : 39] That reality is Christ. Father, we thank you for this day. Thank you for your mercy and your grace. We pray for those of us here who are still in the tomb.

Pray that they would hear your voice in amazing ways of love, mercy, grace, compassion, all those things we've sung up and we've hooked to your word.

We pray that they would hear that voice and they would walk into a new life of your son. Father, we pray for the rest of us here who often sometimes go on a journey and sometimes we miss hearing that voice because we've listened to so many other voices around us, talking to us and pulling our distractions away from the centrality of your son.

Father, we just beg forgiveness and faith and mercy. We thank you. We thank you. You freely give grace whenever we ask.

Even when we don't, you're always here. And so we come to you and we worship you this morning. We thank you that you are amazing and we can trust you.

[50 : 49] It's your gift. We love you and we pray all these things for your son Jesus. Holy name. Amen. God bless you. See you next time.