

Not Yet - John 11:1-44

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Reading Vs. 1-16

B. The Green Dragon

1. There's a scene near the end of *The Return of the King*, the final film of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, that is incredibly moving.
2. Frodo, Sam, Merry & Pippin are sitting at a table in an inn. They've returned from their harrowing adventure, to the quiet & innocence of their homes in the Shire.
 - a. Their neighbors are oblivious to what's been going on in the wider world.
 - b. Not one of them knows how *close* the end has come.
 - c. None, except those 4 stalwart adventurers who each played a *crucial* role in defeating the evil that nearly destroyed their world.
 - d. The 4 began like their neighbors around them, whose biggest concern was what they'd have for lunch.
 - e. But now they're battle-hardened veterans who've come through fire & water, back to their homes – *but forever changed*.
 - f. They sit at a table in a familiar inn; a cup before them.
 - g. While the others in the room are laughing & dancing, our 4 look at each other across that table with a depth & gravity that reveals so much.
 - h. All that they have seen & done has *forever changed them*.
 - i. They're still Hobbits, but they are *more* than they were just 2 short years before.
 - j. They're *warriors*! They're *knights* in the service of the King of Middle Earth.
 - k. They're *courageous heroes* whose names have become the stuff of legends.
 - l. Without saying a word, the look on their faces as they gaze at each other across that table says it all . . .
 - m. The trials & challenges they've faced have shaped them into what they were created to be.
 - n. And while the things they've endured were hard, they're thankful for how they have changed them.

C. Our Change

1. What I find so moving about that scene is that it's a potent analogy to our lives.
2. Nearly all of us will go through this life experiencing numerous trials & challenges.
3. We'll see tragedy & find ourselves in the thick of the battle between good & evil.
4. What we must grasp hold of is that God has called us to play our part in defeating evil.
5. And to realize that it's *through the trials and seeming tragedies* that He's at work to mold & shape us into what we've were created to be.

Romans 8:28-39 • ²⁸ We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His

purpose. ²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. ³⁰ Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. ³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us? ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? *It is* God who justifies. ³⁴ Who *is* he who condemns? *It is* Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: "*For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.*" ³⁷ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

D. Raising Lazarus

1. John tells a story, the last of the miracles of Jesus he recounts, that teaches us an important lesson about all this.
2. The Jewish rulers have reached their final decision about Jesus – He must be gotten rid of at all costs.
 - a. Jesus knew they were angling to kill Him so He left Jerusalem & the region of Judea.
 - c. Taking the disciples over the Jordan River, they camped out there for a time.
 - e. That's where they are as ch. 11 opens.
3. One day a messenger arrives from the village of Bethany.
 - a. Lazarus, a good friend of Jesus' is sick & his sisters Mary & Martha have sent word, asking He come & heal their brother.
 - b. Jesus responds by saying that this illness will not end in death but in the glory of God.
4. As we read on, we find that Lazarus does die. Was Jesus mistaken?
 - a. Not at all; He knew his friend would die. But death was not the end of the story.
 - b. Rather, the *tragedy* of Lazarus' illness & death would become the occasion of a mighty miracle & the glory of God.
5. After getting the report, Jesus waited 2 days, then told the disciples it was time to head to Bethany.
6. Bethany was just shy of 2 miles east of Jerusalem, the center of hostility toward Jesus.
 - a. The disciples reminded Him of what had happened last time He was there;

- the rulers had taken up stones to kill him.
- b. Jesus replied that the time left for His mission was running out & there was work yet to be done.
7. Then Jesus told them Lazarus was asleep & He was going to wake him.
 - a. They thought Jesus meant Lazarus was *resting* in *recovery*.
 - b. They didn't understand the word "sleep" as referring to death because it wasn't used that way at that time. Jesus *begins* its use that way *here!*
 - c. 'Sleep' became a common figure of speech for the death of believers *because of this story*.
 8. Jesus then made it clear Lazarus had died.
 9. So they began the trip up the Road from Jericho toward Jerusalem.
 10. Just before arriving at the crest of the Mt. of Olives where they will be able to look down on the City of Jerusalem, they arrive at the village of Bethany.

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 17-19

17 So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. **18** Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. **19** And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.

1. Jewish funerals were fairly elaborate affairs.
 - a. The climate demanded the body be interred quickly.
 - b. So it was usually buried within a couple days of death.
 - c. As many people as possible attended the funeral procession from the house to the grave.
 - d. Then for 7 days there would be *deep mourning*;
 - 1) This was marked by heavy weeping & fasting.
 - 2) As many people as possible would just sit around showing honor to the dead by sympathy for the close relatives.
 - e. The 7 days of *deep* mourning were followed by 30 days of *light* mourning; marked by mourning clothes & caution against silly humor.
2. Following this tradition, many people showed up in Bethany to mourn Lazarus' death.
3. When Jesus & the disciples arrived, it was in the middle of the week of deep mourning, 4 days after Lazarus died.
4. This means he must have died not long after Martha & Mary sent the messenger.
 - a. It's a full day's journey from Bethany to where Jesus was staying East of the Jordan.
 - b. After He got word, He waited 2 days.
 - c. Then the journey *back* to Bethany would take another day, so this is the 4th day.
5. Why is this important? Why does John identify the day?
 - a. And more importantly, why did Jesus *wait 2 days* after getting the message of Lazarus' illness? It all stems from a belief that was in play at that time.
 - b. The rabbis taught that the soul hung around the body for 3 days after death.

- c. During this time, if enough prayers were said, or if the dead person had been good enough, the soul might re-enter the body and the person could rise.
 - d. But with sundown of the 3rd day, the soul *forever departed* & could *not* re-enter the body.
6. Jesus knew He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead – so He made sure no one could attribute the miracle to this goofy idea that Lazarus could rise *on his own*.
 7. Remember what Jesus said; Lazarus' illness was not going to end in death but in the glory of God. Jesus worked to make sure God was the One who got the glory.

B. Vs. 20-27

20 Now Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house.

1. More than likely, the messenger who'd originally gone with Jesus had made the return trip with Him, & as they neared Bethany, he ran ahead & told Martha Jesus was approaching.
2. Martha got up, slipped out & met Jesus on the road as He neared the village.

21 Now Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."

3. Interesting words to greet Jesus with!
 - a. Is this a *rebuke* or a *statement of faith*?
 - b. Is she *chastising* the Lord because He'd not come *sooner & healed* Lazarus,
 - c. Or is she saying, "It's too late now, but Lord, I know that *if you'd been here* You *would have* healed my brother"?
 - d. That's probably the way we ought to take it because of what she says in v. 22.
 - e. Her faith in Him is still solid, even if it doesn't go far enough.
 - f. She believed Jesus could *heal* her *sick* brother.
 - g. Now that he's dead, maybe Jesus can bring *comfort* to her & her sister's grief.
4. Jesus will comfort them all right, but that comfort will come through a means other than what Martha anticipated.
5. Jesus wanted her to understand this & to realize that her faith in Him, while good & right, didn't go nearly far enough.

23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

6. Most of the Jews believed that they would be resurrected at the end of time.
7. When Jesus said Lazarus would rise, Martha expressed faith in a theologically correct doctrine about something far in the future.

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life.

8. While Martha was *technically* correct in her doctrine, she'd made it the

application of what Jesus had just said about Lazarus, and that was NOT what Jesus had meant.

- a. He wasn't talking about the Resurrection at the end of time.
- b. Lazarus would rise in minutes.
- c. And he would rise because the ground & origin of Resurrection stood right there.
- d. Jesus is LIFE itself.

9. In John 5, Jesus said –

25 Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. 26 For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, 27 and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. 28 Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice 29 and come forth— those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

- a. That's quite a claim! But Jesus never made a claim without backing it up.
- b. The raising of Lazarus *was the proof*. It was His way to give substance to what He'd said.
- c. Many generations of believers like Martha would come & go before all is said & done & Jesus wanted them to have the confidence of knowing that death is not the end for those who believe in Him.
- d. Like Lazarus, they will all grow old or ill die, but death is not the end of their story.
- e. It's a temporary phase till they're raised by His command.

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. 26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.

10. We can really only identify a thing by its *final state*.

- a. You look at a tadpole but you see it for what it is – a *frog* in the making.
- b. You look at a caterpillar & realize that form is only temporary – it's a *butterfly* in the process of becoming what it IS.
- c. I look at you & I *don't see* lumps of animated dirt who mess-up & fall & get old & die –
- d. I see men & women who are in the process of becoming who & what you are really are – the Children of God who one day will look just like the Son.

11. Jesus wanted His followers to have this confidence through the centuries, so He waited till the 4th day, then came to Bethany so He could raise His friend.

12. After making this clear to Martha – He asked, v. 26 -

Do you believe this?" 27 She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

14. Instead of saying, "Yes, I believe," Martha says, "Yes, I believe that You are

the One the Scriptures said would come & reverse the Fall, the Redeemer Who will lift the curse & conquer sin & death.”

C. Vs. 28-32

28 And when she had said these things, she went her way and secretly called Mary her sister, saying, “The Teacher has come and is calling for you.”

1. Martha didn't want to alert the mourners who'd crowded into her home that Jesus was there.
2. Just as she'd had a private audience with Jesus, she wanted her sister Mary to have the same privilege, so she told her quietly that Jesus was nearby & wanted to see her.

29 As soon as she heard *that*, she arose quickly and came to Him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come into the town, but was in the place where Martha met Him.

3. Once Jesus entered Bethany word would quickly spread He was in town & a crowd would gather. So He had stopped on the road just outside & waited to meet the sisters.

31 Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforting her, when they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, saying, “She is going to the tomb to weep there.”

4. Since it was the mourners' aim to comfort the family, when they saw Mary get up & leave, they figured she was going to the tomb to mourn there & followed her.

32 Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.”

5. This is the exact same thing Martha had said & makes you wonder if the two hadn't been saying it to each the last few days.

D. Vs. 33-37

33 Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled.

1. Here's a case where transmission into English falls short of the original.
 - a. “Groaned” is a bad translation; the Greek word is best rendered as “*snorted*.”
 - b. It's that sound of indignation you make when you're seriously ticked-off.
2. Picture the scene - There's Jesus & the disciples, sitting on some boulders on the side of the Jericho Road.
 - a. Here comes Mary; several paces behind her is a small crowd.
 - b. Their clothes identify them as *mourners*, which is made even more clear by their tears.
 - c. Mary throws herself at Jesus' feet & sobs out the painful words of anguish – “Lord, if You'd been here, my brother would not have died.”
 - d. Jesus looks at all this grief & grows really, really angry.
 - e. Not at Mary or the mourners – He's not upset that they have failed to

- recognize Him as the resurrection & life.
- f. He's ticked *at the devil*, at the sin & death that has caused this *same scene* to be replayed *billions* of times throughout history.
 - g. This was precisely why He came → to conquer death.
 - h. Here was the sorrow & grief that so touched the heart of God with compassion that He would send His Son to end it.

34 And He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." 35 Jesus wept.

3. The word speaks of great sobbing cries.
 - a. This wasn't a single well-timed tear that stole down his face.
 - b. This was a heart-broken cry of sorrow.
4. In the book *The Centurion Principles*, Jeff O'Leary recounts an interview he did with a crew member of Marine One, the helicopter that shuttles the President.
 - a. He doesn't say which President it was, but he was touring the tornado-devastated Midwest.
 - b. They were flying over the wreckage so the President could get an idea of the extent of the damage.
 - c. But the President wasn't looking out the window – he put his back to it & proceeded to play cards to his staff.
 - d. After 20 mins. the helicopter landed at a school where a huge crowd of mourners had gathered.
 - 1) Some had lost loved ones; all had lost homes.
 - 2) They were going to walk with the President through the streets of their ruined city.
 - e. As the President prepared to get off Marine One, he took a glass of water, splashed a few drops on his cheeks, smiled to his staff, then, changed his expression to one of grief, & walked down the ramp, looking distraught.
5. As Jesus stood near the tomb of His friend, this wasn't a rehearsed drama He acted.
6. The sorrow *overwhelmed* Him. He felt what we feel when a loved one dies.
7. He knows that grief, that crushing sense of sorrow that causes you to sob so deeply you can't catch your breath.
8. Isa. 53:3 says that He is a man of sorrows, Who is fully in-touch with our grief.
9. Hebrews tells us He has felt what we feel. [4:15]

36 Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!" 37 And some of them said, "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?"

10. And the answer to that is "Yes" – of course He could have.
11. But He didn't – & He didn't for a good reason – to show that His power is even greater than the power to heal. He has the power to give life to the dead.

E. Vs. 38-44

38 Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.

1. Here's proof Jesus is fully experiencing the loss of His friend; His emotions are

a bit like a roller coaster.

2. Anyone who's lost a loved one will tell you that your emotions are all over the place.
 - a. You're sad, then angry, then numb, then calm, then angry again.
 - b. There's no charting where the emotions will go next.
3. Jesus goes from angry, to grief-filled, back to angry.

39 Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days."

4. When the group left the house to follow Mary, Martha tagged along.
5. When Jesus commanded them to roll away the stone, Martha, being the practical one piped up, "Oh no – don't do that! It's gonna' reek!"

40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ **Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me.** ⁴² **And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said *this*, that they may believe that You sent Me."**

6. Jesus offers up this prayer to His Father for the *sake* of the people standing round – & not just for them but for all who stand round the story here in the Bible.
7. This is something we all need to see – Jesus has power over death.
8. But there was only one way it could be made known – and that was through the death of Lazarus.
 - a. Martha & Mary & all their friends had to go through 4 agonizing days.
 - b. All so that the greater glory of God could be manifest & hope could be birthed in the human heart.
9. In the same way, you & I can only be changed into the people God created us to be through the trials, troubles, & sorrows of living in a fallen world.

43 Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" ⁴⁴ **And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go."**

III. CONCLUSION

A. *Where's Jesus*

1. There are so many incredible lessons to be learned from this story.
2. But the one I want to focus on is the seeming *delay* Jesus made between getting the message of Lazarus' illness & His going to Bethany.
3. Think about what happened during that delay.
4. It's clear from Jesus' knowledge of Lazarus' condition that He knew he was sick *even before* the messenger arrived. Why didn't He go to Bethany *then*?
5. Once the message came, He waited 2 days. Why didn't He go right away?
6. When He got to Bethany, Martha & Mary expressed their faith that Jesus *could have* healed Lazarus – Why didn't He?

7. Didn't Jesus *love* them? Didn't He *care*? Vs. 3 & 5 make it crystal He did.
8. It was at their home Jesus stayed when He visited Jerusalem.
 - a. They'd given feasts in His honor.
 - b. They'd opened not only their home but their *lives* to Him.
 - c. They didn't care if friendship with Him meant being kicked out of the synagogue as the rulers warned. Being loyal to Him was more important.
9. And this is how their hospitality & friendship is rewarded!
10. Jesus, the One who heals the blind & lame, can't come to heal the sick Lazarus!

11. Does it ever seem like you've been *overlooked* by God?
 - a. You're loyal & devoted to Him, but He's turned His back on you.
 - b. A loved one gets seriously sick, so you *plead* with God to heal, but the healing doesn't come. You watch while they slowly waste away.
 - c. You have *every confidence* God can heal – you've seen it before.
 - d. There's no doubt about God's power – & that only adds to the confusion – why won't He heal *now*?
 - e. "Lord, if You'd *been here*, my loved one would not have died."
 - f. And you can only conclude that God is NOT there!
12. But He *is* there – and the grief & sorrow you feel He feels *with* you.
13. The thing He knows that makes the different is the *outcome*.
14. He knows **the end** of all this, just as Jesus knew He would raise Lazarus.
15. But it did not keep Him from the anger & grief in the face of loss.

B. Not Yet

1. Here's the *take-away* today – the lesson: Death is *not* the end of our story!
2. ***Life is!*** But the end is *not yet*. We are living ***IN THE STORY***.
3. What we must never lose sight of is the end of the story which has already been written.
4. Death is not the end – life is.
5. Our loved ones who've died in faith aren't really dead.
 - a. Their bodies *sleep* awaiting the resurrection,
 - b. And while the bodies sleep, their spirits & souls go to be with the Lord.
6. In v. 23, Jesus told Martha, Lazarus would rise again.
 - a. Martha thought Jesus was just trying to *comfort* her & politely replied, "Yeah, I know – in the sweet by & by it'll all work out."
 - b. But Jesus had come to raise Lazarus *right then*, not off in some distant shadowy future.
 - c. And the whole reason He did so was to give substance to *our hope* in the resurrection; to make it *more* than just a religious platitude to comfort mourners.

7. As Christians, we need to have a ***radically different take*** on death from the rest of the world.
 - a. Jesus has *conquered* sin & death.
 - b. His victory *means* eternal life for us – a life that will really never know death.
 - c. Sure our bodies wear out & give up – but that's not death, not really.
8. And if death has been defeated & life is our eternal destiny, then what do we have to fear?