

Believing Fully in Him

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[0 : 00] Brilliant, thanks Beno. All friends, hands down, my favourite chapter in all of the Bible. If we can get our heads around this, if you're new here today and you don't know who this Jesus is, then you have picked a fantastic week to join us today because if you grasp who this man Jesus is and what he can do, then it's got the power to change absolutely everything.

Now, a friend of mine once made an observation about how we live our lives as human beings and I want to bounce it off you today to see what you make of it. They said this, they said, isn't it funny how we spend our youth trying to get riches and then when we get older, we spend our riches trying to get youth.

You having that this morning? Right, and this is the point in the service where I try not to make eye contact with anyone, but wherever you find yourself on that timeline today, you've got to say that there is an element of truth in what my friend was saying.

Right, if some of you were around in the 80s, again, looking at my script, German pop band Alphaville, do you remember them? Sang back in the 80s, we want to be what? Help me out. Want to be forever young.

Yeah, do you remember that song? We want to be forever young. And there's something deep inside of us that wants to be forever young. In fact, I was reading just the other day about a 45-year-old American tech entrepreneur called Brian Johnson.

[1 : 38] You heard of him? Brian Johnson. He spends, and get this, an estimated \$2 million a year on the perfect blend of 100 vitamins and supplements as prescribed for him by his specialist team of doctors and nutritionists to try and keep him feeling, and get this, like he's 18.

\$2 million a year he spends on this. And as human beings, we kind of make our peace with this whole concept of the circle of life, as Elton John sang, the circle of life that moves us all.

But the problem is that every time we experience death, it doesn't feel natural at all, does it?

And you've got to say, as human beings, even in the year 2023, with all the advancements in technology and medicine that we have at our disposal, we've got to hold our hands up and say that we still do not have an answer to our biggest problem.

And into our coffin-shaped conundrum steps this man, Jesus, who at a funeral of all places flips the entire way of the world on its head.

[3 : 11] Spoiler alert, verse 44, a dead man came out.

Which means that C.S. Lewis was right when he said, Christianity, if fogs, is of no importance. But if true, it's of infinite importance.

The only thing that it cannot be is moderately important. And so the invitation that this same Jesus extends to us today is to get him in our lungs, whatever is going on in your life today.

And I know some of you are going through some stuff, okay? Whatever is going on in your life today, get him in your lungs. And take his hand and let him teach you three wonderful things about him.

And here is the first one. This is teaching us that we can trust fully in his perfect timing. Now come with me to the text.

[4 : 30] No word of Scripture is ever wasted. There are so many details in here that I'd never really seen before, before I really stopped and studied this. We pick up the narrative at verse 1. We learn that one of Jesus' friends called Lazarus is sick.

Now Lazarus lives with his two sisters, Mary and Martha, in a town called Bethany. Bethany. None of these details are wasted, right? This is historical fact.

You can find Bethany on a map. Presumably you could meet Mary and Martha if you were to try and find them. They would have told you this story, which is why John records it all. Verse 5, John

wants us to know and see this.

Verse 5, that how did Jesus feel about this family? He loved them. So he's telling us right up top that everything that is about to happen flows from Jesus' deep love for this family.

Lazarus is sick though, prognosis critical. And in desperation, do you see how the sisters, they send word to Jesus?

[5 : 51] At verse 3, they say the word is come and see our brother. Right? You're the only one, Jesus, who can help. Would you come? Would you come with your presence?

Would you come with your healing power? And they say, Lord Jesus, we need you to come because we love you, you love us, we need you here.

Now, question, how would you respond to something like that? You know, I remember when my uncle died at Christmas time, as soon as I learned that we were talking hours, not days, that very quickly moved to we were talking minutes, not hours, I jumped in the car and I went.

Went. So what we would do, but incredibly, Jesus, upon hearing this news about the people he loves, says, verse 5, I'm staying here two more days, which means this is 24, sorry, 48 hours of no show.

And his reason, verse 4, is so that his glory might be displayed, that they might see something utterly transforming about who he is.

[7 : 19] And that's what he means when he says verse 14, I'm glad I wasn't there, so that you would believe. Believe what? Believe in him.

You see, this God is in the words of Isaiah chapter 25, this God, his ways are not our ways. Our father, his thoughts are higher than our thoughts.

And this God, his heart towards his children is steadfastly and it's wonderfully good. And you need to know that here today if your faith is in him, whatever is going on in your life today, his fatherly perfect heart towards you is steadfast and perfect.

Because Jesus so loves us and he so loves this family that he uses the darkest moment in their lives to do the deepest work in their hearts in order to draw them closer to his perfect heart.

You see, here's my confession as I come off the back of this. I think, as I've studied this this week, that I've grossly underestimated Jesus' commitment to me.

[8 : 57] And can I put it to you, there's something that I want you to bask in today. Do not be in any doubt, no matter what's going on in your life just now, of his utter commitment to you.

This Jesus is way more committed to us than I think. we think he is. Well, let us not be quick to dismiss the possibility that the Lord, out of his love for us, is teaching us lessons in seasons of life that don't seem to make much sense to us.

We were at a wedding yesterday, sitting next to a man called Leonard. Leonard was telling me about how his youngest daughter, she was born six weeks prematurely, and rushing from Kirkcaldy to the sick kids when it was over there just by the meadows, and being told the story about how his daughter, one of her lungs had collapsed and the other one was just about to go, and the doctor's saying, there's nothing more we can do, and he's looking at the stats on the vent machine that said 98, which he then figured out meant this machine was running at 98% capacity, there's not a lot more we can do for her, and he said in that moment I had to come to grips with the fact that I wasn't holding her life in my hands, the doctors weren't holding her life in their hands, it was like some kind of guess who where all the tiles had gone down, and he said for the first time in my life I wasn't in control, but it was as if

God stepped in at that point and said, I am. In the bed next to them with some other little girls was a devout Christian family, and the two of them have remained lifelong friends ever since, because in that moment he said it was like God brought people into my path, and the doctor said there's nothing more we can do, and all of a sudden they came back an hour later, you won't believe it, actually that figure's dropped, again an hour later, actually that figure's dropped again, and actually the long story short, this girl is now celebrating, not without her health difficulties, understand, she's now celebrating her 21st birthday really soon, and he said nothing has changed my perspective on life like going through that, oh that the Lord, he teaches us out of his love for us, lessons about life that we would not learn any other way, never doubt his commitment to you, dear friends, in the words, and some of you remember this old hymn by William

Cowper, judge not the Lord, by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace, behind a frowning providence, he hides a smiling face, Jesus invites us today to know that we can trust fully in his perfect timing, and secondly, he wants us to know that we can lean fully into his gentle heart, you

see, back in the story, another 48 hours have passed, which means by the time that Jesus and his disciples, they get to Bethany, you see John underscore it, Lazarus has been dead for four days, now presumably that's to underscore the fact that Lazarus is dead, right, you read around this and there are some kind of myths doing the rounds in the day that a person's spirit hovers over them three days after they're dead, and so some people think there is the possibility of resuscitation, and so four days could well be the fact that Jesus is saying, no, this man is dead, he's dead, and when they reach Bethany, do you see how Jesus and his disciples, they encounter this scene of deep grief, of people weeping, of pouring their hearts out, they're consoling each other, they're mourning the loss of their friend Lazarus, and right in the middle of it are these two sisters, they're utterly shell-shocked by the painful reality that's just played out in front of them, and here's what I love, and I'd never thought about this before until I saw it this week, look at the text, do you see how when eventually

[13:28] Mary and Martha see Jesus, do you see how it's made so clear that they ask him the exact same question?

Martha at verse 21 and then Mary at verse 32, do you see it's the exact same question? Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died, so Jesus has taken this question from both of them, but if you think about it, it's not a question because it's not a point that's meant to invite deep discussion, it's a point that's meant to convey to Jesus their utter pain at what's going on in this moment.

Where were you, Jesus? I thought you loved us. How could you have let this happen? We sent word to you, we know that you got the message.

Who even are you Lord? Have you been there? If you have, I want you to see what comes next because isn't it incredible that Jesus responds to their exact same question in profoundly different ways?

Could it be, and here's what I want you to listen to, could it be that Jesus perceives that Martha's biggest need in this moment is to know that he's in control?

[14:58] And this same Jesus perceives that Mary's biggest need in this moment is to know that he cares. And dear friends, we have a Jesus who excels in both.

love. Because do you see Martha who has some understanding verse 24 of the resurrection on the last day. And I take it she's taking that from the words of Job.

Job would say, I know my redeemer lives. Jesus says, I am, and he's using the divine title there of God himself. He says, I am the resurrection and the life.

And what he's doing is he's taking the knowledge, the hope that she has, the longings that she has in an event, and he's taking it and he's connecting it to himself.

Everything that you hope for, everything that you long for, you'll find it in me. So that her faith is no longer in an event. No, no, no, he wants to transfer that faith fully to him.

[16:10] Martha's biggest need in this moment is to hear Jesus say, as it were, I've got him and I've got you and I've got your sister.

And then we get Mary and here's what I love about Mary. Do you see verse 20, how Martha hears this news about Jesus is near? What's Martha's reaction, verse 20?

What does she do? She runs to him, right? But what does Mary do? Do you see it? What does she do? She stays at home. Now, can I read between the lines a little?

Could it be that Mary is just so disillusioned with Jesus? She's so angry, unupset, and feels let down by him that she cannot bear to go?

And in verse 28, Martha says to her, the teacher is asking for you. Jesus has drawn her out here to him.

[17:16] He knows precisely the pain and the questions that are going on in her heart. And he says, I want you to come to me with that. And in a flash, do you see how Mary's running for him?

And I take it that's why others notice it. It must have been such a sprint that she's just up and she's at it and she's out. as she falls at his feet and the floodgates open and it all comes bursting out of her.

And for the eggheads out there, what follows is the shortest verse in the Bible. Right? But make no mistake, boy is it one of the most profound.

In response to seeing the utter devastation which Lazarus' death has brought upon those who he loves, do you see those two words? Jesus wept.

Now is that not incredible? That Jesus would come, he would enter our world and that he would stoop and here he is crying at the death of his friend.

[18:32] Why is he crying? I've thought about this all this week. Why is he crying? Was he deeply moved by the loss of his friend? Absolutely. Does Jesus know the sorrows and the scars which each of his people bear?

Definitely. But if you think about it, if the only reason that his tear ducts opened was that he simply misses his friend, well he's just got to wait five minutes and he knows himself that that one is going to be over pretty quick.

Which strikes me as a classic case of crocodile tears. But what we need to see here is that there's something bigger going on here.

As Jesus watches death wield its teeth, the death that's in our world because of our sin and our rebellion against our creator, the death that is here that's causing chaos in people's lives, this Jesus cries because he is incensed.

These are tears that are a concoction of love, of determination and of outrage at what's happened in front of his eyes.

[19:48] Are you not grateful for a Jesus like that? Can you imagine if Jesus were stone cold at this point? if he wasn't moved at all with compassion by the trials and the pain of his people?

Imagine if he was some kind of James Bond figure taking instructions from M. What is it M always says to Bond? Don't get too what? Emotionally caught up in the mission because if you do then you're going to jeopardize potentially the whole thing.

If Jesus was like that would you want to worship him? I know I wouldn't. A God who cares not to hoots for what you and I are going through in life.

But I want you to know here today that we do not have an arm's length Jesus. Jesus wept and what his tears are proof of is the truth that this is not the way that it was supposed to be.

And I think the problem that I face and I'm sure we all face is that we have got so good in our culture at pretending it is. You know there's so many stereotypes about British people.

[21:10] One of them is that they were particularly good at doing the stiff upper lip. Right? Some of you might remember Chaz and Dave back in the 80s. What was their song?

Mustn't grumble. Right? Just get on with it. Keep on going. It's what we Brits do. We just get on with life. But here is Jesus giving us permission to know what we instinctively know to be true deep down at every single funeral that we attend.

Every time we see a friend who's suffering and in need. And every single time we've tried to process the tragedies that befall us in this world that this isn't right.

And it's just like the time when a warning light goes on on your car dashboard. And it's your car's way of telling you that something is not right.

Do you not find that every time we go through this that the death light as it were goes on in our hearts on the dashboard of our lives and says something's not right.

[22:19] You see death according to the Bible is an unwelcome intruder in God's good creation. And what that means is that Christians of all people should not be people who bottle it.

Our world doesn't know how to mourn. There's no grid. There's no way to process it. But Jesus gives us here a way to of processing our grief.

Jesus gives us here permission to join him in crying over a broken world. And I think that means that as Christians we should be the people who have got a full understanding of what grief and death is.

And it gives us permission to be able to feel the depths of it because we join him here in crying knowing that death is not right.

And I wonder if some of us here we need to come to Jesus today not to bottle it. Some of us are maybe angry at him. Some of us don't know what to do with him. But Jesus if that's you here today hear his call to you like it was to Mary to come to him.

[23:35] You see Jesus wants us to know that we can lean fully into his gentle heart and then just lastly he wants us to know that we can rely fully on his powerful words.

Come with me to verse 43. You see Jesus in a spirit of defiance he calls for the stone in front of Lazarus' tomb to be rolled away.

Now I love Martha's instinctive response to that particularly as you get it in some of the older translations of the Bible. She says Lord by this time surely he stinketh.

He's been in the tomb four days. The odour, the smell, what are you doing to us Jesus? And when you think about it what a hugely insensitive thing for Jesus to say.

Talk about things that you don't say at a funeral. This line has got to be right up the top there has it not? Everyone stop what you're doing, let's have that coffin lid off and let's see if we can do something about it.

[24 : 40] That's effectively what Jesus is saying here right? And yet Jesus is deadly serious. None of us would want a God who didn't care. Neither can I suggest would any of us want a God who couldn't do anything about it.

Like some kind of lucky mascot you have in an exam when you were young. I mean honestly what use was that? Well very much in keeping with how it started at the beginning of the Bible story and there was a group of us who met this week and I loved thinking about this again.

It starts with God and what does he do with Adam? He breathes the breath of life into his lungs. It's lovely intimate language about this God who's intimately involved with his creation.

He breathes life into Adam and just like that as Adam becomes a living being is God breathes breath of life into him. Jesus speaks into the abyss, into the chaos, into the darkness and this must have been the weirdest thing if you were there to see this.

And he breathes life into Lazarus. And the man who was verifiably dead, again this man wasn't in need of resuscitation, this man was in need of resurrection, this man, his hands and feet still bound with cloths, he hobbles out.

[26 : 09] That's some kind of comedy sketch, isn't it? Hobbles out. And Jesus says, do you notice the last words there at verse 44? He says, let him go.

The question for you, who's Jesus speaking to there? Yeah, he's speaking to his disciples. I take it those in earshot who can hear exactly what's going on, let him go.

But who else in a more deeper profound way is Jesus speaking to? Who needs to let him go? Who no longer has a claim on him?

Death itself. Let him go. And so here's the top story on your Bethany News at six. Lazarus lives. And as wonderful as this moment is, joy, celebration, dancing, delight, as special a moment as this is, the thing is that one day Lazarus will die again.

It's not like he somehow obtains immortality from this point on. No, no, he will die again, but boy, would that have been a different funeral. Would you not love to have been at Lazarus' second funeral?

[27 : 29] I don't imagine the sense of loss was any deeper. It would have been just as deep, the sense of grief and loss, but boy, would I imagine the sense of hope would have been phenomenally more because of this episode.

Because I know the one who speaks and he brings life back from the debt. And what was wonderfully foreshadowed here was a day that was coming not so long after this one, when another stone would be rolled away from the tomb.

And another man who was verifiably dead would walk out, except there's a difference. Because unlike Lazarus who would die again, Jesus, dear friends, the one who loves us, the one who holds us, the one who knows us, he will never die again.

So the same question that Jesus asks Martha is the one he asks us today as we close, is do you believe?

Will you put your faith in me? Even when you don't understand, even when it looks like all is lost, do you trust me that I've got you and I've got this? Because I am the resurrection and the life.

[28 : 49] you know, just as we close, can I tell you about a chat that I had recently with my eldest daughter? So the moment we're potty training Eve, it's messy, but Chloe's watching on one day and she's laughing at it.

And I say to her, listen, I remember what it was like when you were that age and I was changing your nappy, we were trying to get you off nappies, trying to get you onto the potty. When you were really little, I was helping you go to the toilet.

And then I tried to teach her a little life lesson and I said, the funny thing about life is that, see when I'm old, you will be doing the exact same thing for me. And her eight-year-old brain, she processed it and eventually she got what I was saying.

And I said to her, I said, listen, will you look after mummy and daddy when we're old? And she said, I guess so. Which admittedly wasn't the reassurance I was looking for.

But it got me thinking on this passage as well. See when you and I are our weakest moments in life. Where will we turn? where will we go?

[30 : 14] What do we need to know most when our physical energy fails us? Who do we need to know most on those days when we are mentally done?

Who do we need to know when the bad news comes that, as you like, it rips the rug out from underneath our feet and we have got nowhere else to go? Who do we need to know in our weakest moments in life?

We need to know the Jesus here who invites us to know that because of our faith in him, in the weakest moments of our lives when nothing seems to make sense, that we're held by and loved by the strongest and most loving of saviors.

Jesus says, I am the resurrection and the life. So why don't we pray? And just before I pray, let's respond to this rightly.

And I know some of us, this is really raw what we thought about today. And if you've, anything that we've said or thought about today that you would love to pray about, we would love to do that with you after the service.

[31 : 33] It should be the most natural thing that we do together as a church family. But perhaps in the silence now, friends, you need to run to him like Mary. He invites you to come to him.

Maybe your prayer is one that Martha experienced and knows, Lord, help me know that you're in control. So why don't we pray and just in the silence, bring your own heart before this Jesus, who knows us and loves us.

And then we'll finish and we'll stand to sing our closing songs. Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind who have no hope, for we believe that Jesus died and he rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus, those who have fallen asleep with him.

Therefore, encourage one another with these words. And so, Father, I pray that your spirit would be at work in our lives right now. Would you help us grasp and know this Jesus, who shows us here that he is in the control, and he is one who completely cares.

So, Father, whatever is going on in our lives today, Lord, as a church family, we would bring our prayers to you, and that we ask that by your spirit that he would be at work in our hearts, bringing that knowledge of this Jesus.

[33 : 20] Father, we just thank you today for your commitment to us, your people. Father, what a wonderful, mind-blowing chapter of the Bible.

Father, would you massage it home to our hearts now, and would the message of the risen Jesus go forth in our hearts into the rest of this week, we pray, in his lovely and in his worthy name. Amen. Amen.