

John 2:1-11 & 11:1-44

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 March 2017

Preacher: Paul Johnston

[0 : 0 0] Well, let me add to Ian's welcome. It's great to see all of you today. And I trust as we turn in just a moment to God's word, we'll continue to hear from God because I believe he already has got so much to or has had so much to say to us through all that we've sung and through what we've said already. Things don't always turn out quite as we expect, do they? They don't turn out as we expect sometimes in small things like how we plan to spend the day on Sunday, like in my expectation not to be here in front of you today. They don't turn out quite as we expect at times in small things, but they also don't turn out quite as they expect in the massive things of life either, do they? And I wonder what our response is in those circumstances where things have taken a massive change of direction and they're not what we ever thought they would be. I hope in these circumstances, our response might be to cling to Jesus and to trust him like never before. This week with the children, I've been speaking a little bit towards the end of the day about two of the miracles that Jesus performed. And in a minute, I'm going to ask

Anne and then Ruth just to read to us. We're going to read first of all from John 2 and that miracle of turning water into wine. And then we're going to read from John 11, the miracle of the raising of Lazarus. Two very different miracles, but the situations being situations where very unexpected twists and turns are taking place. So look, would you, as we hear them to how Jesus reacts to these circumstances, enter in if you can to the thoughts, the emotions and the actions of Jesus. And just as we prepare to listen, I want to reflect on what we've already sung as a context for what we're about to hear. We've sung, forever God is faithful. His love endures forever. Water you turned into wine, out of the ashes we rise. Our God is healer, awesome in power, our God. When I fear my faith will fail,

Christ will hold me fast. For my saviour loves me so, he must hold me fast. In the context of what we've sung, let's listen to God's word now. First of all, Anne in John 2.

On the third day, a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, they've no more wine. Dear woman, why do you involve me? Jesus replied, my time has not yet come.

His mother said to the servants, do whatever he tells you. Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from 20 to 30 gallons.

[3 : 1 0] Jesus said to the servants, fill the jars with water. So they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet. They did so and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He didn't realize where it had come from, although the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, everyone brings out the choice wines first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have too much to drink. But you have saved the best till now. This, the first of his miraculous signs Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory and his disciples put their faith in him.

So this is quite a long reading. So I invite you to listen to the narrative rather than the words and don't think of it as a reading. And we'll have a look at John chapter 11, verse one. Now, a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister, Martha. This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.

So the sister sent word to Jesus, Lord, the one you love is sick. When he heard this, Jesus said, this sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's son may be glorified through it.

Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days. Then he said to his disciples, let's go back to Judea. But Rabbi, they said, a short while ago, the Jews tried to stone you and yet you're going back there. Jesus answered, are there not 12 hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble for he sees by this world's light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles for he has no light. After he'd said this, he went on to tell them, our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I'm going there to wake him up. His disciples replied, Lord, if he sleeps, he'll get better. Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. So he told them quite plainly, Lazarus is dead. For your sake, I'm glad I was not there so that you may believe, but let's go to him. Then Thomas, called Didymus, said to the rest of the disciples, let us also go that we may die with him. On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem and many Jews had come to Mary and Martha to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. Lord, Martha said to Jesus, if you'd been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.

Jesus said to her, your brother will rise again. Martha answered, I know he'll rise again in the resurrection at the last day. And Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe me? Yes, Lord, she told him, I believe that you are the Christ, the son of God, who was to come into the world. And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside.

[7 : 16] The teacher is here, she said, and is asking for you. When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. Now, Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house comforting her noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there. When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. Where have you laid him? He asked.

Come and see, Lord, they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, see how he loved him. But some of them said, could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?

Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. Take away the stone, he said. But Lord, said Martha, the sister of the dead man, by this time there is a bad odor for it has been in there for four days. Then Jesus said, did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God? So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here that they may believe that you sent me.

When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, Lazarus, come out. The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, take off the grave clothes and let him go.

Thank you, Anne and Ruth, for reading that so beautifully to us this morning. I want to simply bring us an invitation to trust this morning. An invitation to trust. To trust in so many different circumstances. To trust, perhaps in a deeper way than we have been trusting Jesus Christ. Proverbs chapter 3, verses 5 and 6 say this in what are perhaps some of the best known Proverbs.

[10:04] Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do and he will direct your paths. And I wonder as I look around and as we look into our own hearts, how are we doing in this business of trusting the Lord with all our hearts and not depending on our own understanding? I ask that particularly to what I guess are the vast majority of this gathering.

people who are already, who have already said that they are followers of Jesus Christ. But despite, and we know that that involves simply believing in Jesus, but still the challenge comes, are we really trusting in him with all of our hearts? But I'm very conscious that some here may feel that you're not yet a follower of Jesus. And so the question comes, can you really trust him? Can you trust him with everything? Let's look at some different aspects in which people were challenged about whether or not they really could trust Jesus with everything and these two miracles that we've seen this morning. So first of all, I think there's a challenge about trusting Jesus with some of the small and relatively mundane aspects of life. We perhaps struggle to enter in fully to the story in John chapter 2 of this wedding feast that had been proceeding for some time and then the wine runs out.

But if we think about the bigness and greatness of who God is, if we think about all that God is doing in this world, and we then think about the wonderful truth of God becoming a human and stepping into this earth and ultimately coming in order that he might die and pay the price of our sins and rise again in order to redeem mankind back to God, that heart of our gospel. And we then think, how is Jesus going to demonstrate his power for the very first time on earth? It's probably not really the case that we would first expect him to demonstrate his power by taking about 700 litres of ordinary water and turning it into the very finest of wine in order that a wedding celebration, which was taking a turn for the worst, could be restored in order that Jesus' mother, who had a role in that wedding, could be delighted in what her son was doing. And in order that Jesus would have this first opportunity to demonstrate his power. Of course we could take hours looking at it, but for today I want us simply to realise again that there is no circumstance that might seem too small for Jesus to step in and act. I want to encourage us to encourage us if we've been bearing things on our own hearts and minds and if perhaps we've been unsure about whether the God of eternity and whether the Jesus of the cross and the empty tomb is really caring and interested about it. I want you to think about that wedding celebration and I want us to be reminded that Jesus is interested in the everyday mundane situations that might be occupying our minds today. The things that we might not feel we can really talk to anyone else about or maybe even the things that we are talking to others about but we've not been talking to God about.

We can trust Jesus in the small situations and then we move right through, we skip through all that Jesus has been saying and doing and the other miracles and we come to John 11 and we come to perhaps the other extreme. Not now a celebration going wrong but now a life that's been snatched away, now death that is facing a family before they ever expected it and in this situation we're asked, can we trust Jesus?

Can we trust Jesus when things have taken a disastrous turn? And we're reminded again, yes, we can trust him and I want to dig a little bit deeper here.

[14 : 31] I want us to explore ways in which we can trust him even when he delays. I want us to explore how we can trust him even in our doubts and how we can trust him even in our pain and I hope we can look a little bit about the fact that we can trust in his love, we can trust in his power and we can trust in his abundant provision. There's quite a lot there and we will move quickly through it. We can trust him even when he delays. Because isn't that one of the most striking features of the passage that Ruth read to us? This narrative that Jesus is told, Lord, the one you love is very sick in verse 3. And we know that Jesus does indeed love Lazarus. That was commented on later in the chapter. Look how much he loves him. But Jesus does not rush to rescue this situation.

Verse 4, he hears about it. He says, Lazarus' sickness will not end in death. Verse 5, although he loves Martha, Mary and Lazarus, he stayed where he was for the next two days. Finally, after two days, he said to his disciples, let's go to Judea again. Can we trust Jesus even in his, even when he seems to delay? We see Martha and Mary when Jesus does finally come to him, curious as to why Jesus has not come earlier, puzzled and struggling with this whole reality of Jesus' delaying. Listen to what Bruce Milne in his Bible Speaks Today commentary says about the delays of Jesus. He says it in the context of us having to recognize that we know so little about God's timing as human beings. We know so little about why from the fall right through to Jesus choosing to come in his incarnation, why that period of time elapsed, why that length of delay. We know so little about why it is that Jesus, following his resurrection, promised that he would come to earth again, and yet in 2017, we continue to await his return. We recognize great mystery in God's timing.

But Milne says this, his delays do not contradict his love. He loves us fully and truly when he remains in Transjordan ministering to others' needs, just as much as when he journeys to Bethany to minister to our needs. And his delays are not final. He will come in his own time and way. He is never late for his disappointments. Can we trust Jesus even when he delays? I know that there are some of you who have been praying for years and years and years for God to do things, and you're still waiting. Trust him even when he delays. For others, maybe it's not been that sort of period of time at all, but you're struggling with the delay of Jesus. Trust him in his delay. And can we trust him even when we have to acknowledge that we are a whole mixture of doubt and disbelief? It maybe seems like a complete contradiction.

Can we trust him even in our doubts? What I love about the gospel accounts, or one of the things I love about them, is the degree of honesty that we see about the doubts that others have. So first of all, we see Thomas, who in a kind of classic commentary here says, when Jesus finally says that he is going to go, Thomas says in verse 16, let's go to and die with Jesus. There's something about Thomas. Do you know the character that he really reminds me of as I've been thinking about him? I'm also, I wouldn't like to suggest that we only read the Bible to our children. We also are reading Winnie the Pooh at the moment. And the character Eeyore just really resonates for me in terms of Thomas. Eeyore is always there, isn't he? Quite faithful, quite loyal, but always totally miserable. Just waiting for absolute disaster to come upon him. And that's Thomas. Okay, Jesus, I know that I will stick with you, but I know that you're probably making a terrible mistake and we're all going to die. There's Thomas, otherwise known as Eeyore, still managing to trust and follow Jesus, even in his own doubts.

And then there is Martha. There's Martha. And in verse 38, when Jesus says, roll the stone aside.

[19 : 47] And Martha's saying, look, Jesus, he's been there for four days. There's going to be the most awful smell. Four days. And while she's expressed this confidence that Jesus can do incredible things, you get this sense of, come on, Jesus, let's not play around here. It's too late now. Maybe day one, maybe day two, maybe day three. We could look into lots of significance about beliefs at the time, about what was perhaps going on in those first three days. But four days, it's final, Jesus.

Jesus, I'm not sure I can really trust you after all this time. But Jesus works despite the doubt and the disbelief that he was surrounded by.

And I wonder whether Martha and Mary would look back on that encounter and be so glad that Jesus had delayed and been so glad that Jesus had not turned away from them or been angry with them because of their doubts and their struggles to believe. I don't think Jesus does respond with that anger here in the passage in response to that disbelief and doubt, but responds with great grace and compassion.

Can we trust him when he delays? Can we trust him when he doubts? Can we trust him when we feel great pain? Because Martha is the one who kind of runs to meet with Jesus in verse 20. When Martha got word that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. Let's just think about Mary for a minute or two. Mary's pain, it seems, was such that she couldn't even leave the house. Martha was the one who absolutely could bolt out and start having this dialogue with Jesus. But Martha has to go and try and get to meet Mary in verse 28. She left Jesus and returned to Mary. She called Mary aside from the mourners and said, the teacher is here and wants to see you. So Mary immediately went to her. Verse 31, we read more about Mary. Verse 32, when Mary arrived and saw Jesus, she fell down at his feet and said, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. I don't know if there's a mix of anger, but there's also profound pain on the part of Mary. I want us to understand this morning that we can trust Jesus in the midst of our pain. And the wonderful truth is Jesus comes along here and doesn't immediately take that pain away.

what he does is come and share in that pain and suffering. Verse 33, when Jesus saw her weeping and saw the other people wailing with her, he was moved with indignation and was deeply troubled. And then verse 35, the shortest verse in the Bible, and one of the most profound, Jesus wept. I trust that as some of us think about the pain that we are feeling and experiencing this morning, we feel today or we realize today through his word that we can trust Jesus in that pain because he does not stand aloof. He does not stand unconcerned about our pain. But as Jesus looks on this situation, he's moved, he's deeply troubled, he's absolutely full of emotion at the situation that confronts him. We see real empathy with Mary and with all of those others who are struggling. There's some sense here and many commentators and those who are studying it will differ slightly as to exactly what's going on here. But there seems to be a real sense of anger as well at all that's going on. Not anger at the people in front of him, but anger at the reality of death.

[24 : 17] Anger at the way in which the devil has come in and is screwing things up and has led to this man being in that tomb when he should still have been with his family. Anger at the reality of that suffering, devastation, pain and loss that Lazarus's death somehow or other just depicted as the devil would ravish or wreak his havoc in so many different circumstances. And Jesus comes and simply enters into the pain of that moment, deeply troubled and weeping. Some respond to that by seeing weakness, do you see it? Verse 37, some said this man healed a blind man, why couldn't he keep Lazarus from dying?

But Jesus' deep empathy with us in every situation is not in any ways a mark of weakness, but is another reminder of his love. As some recognized where they said in verse 36, see how much he loved him.

And Jesus, of course, moved by compassion, then calls Lazarus to come forth from the grave. Can we trust him when he delays? Can we trust him even in our doubts? Can we trust him even in our pain?

And then what are the various aspects of his character that we might be encouraged just to really cling on to, just to really trust this morning? In that delay, they were being encouraged to trust in his love.

Reading about this again in the same commentary by Bruce Milne. I was encouraged to read this.

[26 : 18] Despite the massive propaganda to the contrary, our Lord's purpose is not primarily to make us happy, but to make us holy. He loves us too much to leave us part saved, part remade, and part sanctified.

And perhaps we need to expect him in his love for us to allow things into our lives, which in our self-centered pursuit of happiness, we would exclude.

Do we recognize the truth of that? That if it was simply up to us and our self-centered pursuit of happiness, we would not have these things coming into our lives at all.

Some of us as parents can think of the requests that can be made in the course of a single day from a young child. That even if we feel that we have bestowed absolutely everything on them and treated them in all sorts of ways, you can almost be guaranteed, almost especially if you've treated them in all sorts of ways, towards the end of the day, there'll be requests for so much more, an indignation that so much more is not being bestowed upon the child.

Because we are not always best at judging what is best for us. And I wonder if this morning we can trust in Jesus' love, even in the circumstances that might at times cause us to question that love.

[28 : 00] Have a read of Romans 5. Have a read of the way in which God brings things into our lives in order to refine us and remake us and in order ultimately to demonstrate to us the greatness of his love and compassion.

Can we trust in his love? Can we trust in his power today? What power he exerted turning that water into wine. What power he exerted bringing to life the man who had been dead for four days.

But of course in this passage, John 11, we see echoes of other things going on. We see echoes of the much greater power that Jesus is going to demonstrate.

As he actually says he's not only going to be able to raise Lazarus from the dead, he's going to be able to raise from the dead every single human soul. And he is also going to be able to give life, life in all its fullness to those who are knowing only death and decay.

So John 11 verse 25, let's not miss this. Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die like everyone else, will live again.

[29 : 12] They are given eternal life for believing in me and will never perish. Do you believe this, Martha? And I know many of you are trusting Jesus with all of your hearts for your eternal destiny.

You're trusting in his power to raise us from the dead, to take us to heaven, to be with himself, not because of what we have done, but because of what he has done through his love for us and through his death for us on the cross.

Some of you are perhaps not yet there. Perhaps today is the day as you dig into more of who Jesus is and why he came and what it means to follow him, to really get to that point where you say, Jesus, I trust you.

Jesus, I realize that becoming a Christian is not about what I can do. It's simply about believing. It's simply about me depending wholeheartedly on you, Jesus, for my eternal destiny.

We'd love to speak to you if today could be the day where some of you take that step of faith and trust in Jesus for the first time. But I'm pretty confident that some of us are trusting in his power to save us eternally, but we're struggling to trust in him for some of the circumstances that face our lives today, tomorrow, the week ahead and the month ahead.

[30 : 33] If we can trust him with our eternal destiny, I trust as we look at this passage today, we might also trust him with our everyday situation.

And finally, as we close, can we trust in the abundance of the provision for us? And in this, I come back in some ways to John chapter 2, to what always takes me aback as the complete extravagance of that miracle.

In some ways, the holy unnecessary extravagance associated with the filling of those six massive stone jars of water and the provision of hundreds of litres of wine for that audience.

And we're encouraged to trust in the fact that Jesus has plans for each one of us. Plans to prosper and not harm us. Plans if we're to trust in him.

To do amazing things with our lives. And I hope that all of you, whether at university or setting out in that, whether working, whether looking after little ones, or whether in retirement or feeling that you're drawing towards those latter stages of life, would keep hold of the ways in which God wants to use our lives in a really abundant way to bring him glory.

[31 : 57] Let's not settle. Let's not settle for something poor and miserable. Let's not settle for second best. Let's not settle for a life which we feel is just marked by struggling to get by.

But let's trust in his love. Let's trust in his power. And let's trust in the abundance of his provision today. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, may it be the case that we trust you.

Wherever we're at in this life's journey, whatever challenges we face, whatever doubts and uncertainties we have about the future, help us.

Help me to trust you wholeheartedly with it all. May we be individuals and may we be a church that is marked by a true dependence on you, Lord.

May we be trusting in the Lord with all of our hearts and not depending on our own understanding. May we be acknowledging you in all of our ways.

[33 : 16] And would you direct our paths. Amen.