

# SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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Fully Alive

PART

29

TITLE

For Your Sake

SCRIPTURE

John 11:1-16



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It's always a joy to worship with you. If you brought a Bible with you, if you want to turn with me to John chapter 11, we're going to be in the first 16 verses. If you did not bring one, there should be one near you in a seat there. If you don't have one at home, please take that home as a gift. If you're a guest here at Providence, welcome. If you're in this room or at home or somewhere else in the amphitheater, welcome, we're really glad that you joined us. But it's such a privilege to be able to worship with you.

As you turn to John chapter 11, just want to remind you, you've probably forgotten, but this week there's this little thing called an election that's taking place. There's just a few things that I just want to share with you here. They're going to be very brief, they're not tied to John chapter 11 outside of the fact Jesus is the King in John chapter 11, and he's going to be the king on Wednesday. But outside of that, yeah, absolutely.

So three things, okay, just as a way of just seeking to exhort you, okay? Everything that we do in life as a believer is intended to be an act of worship. We spend the entire summer showing you how everything God calls us to do is an act of worship. So if you have not already voted and if you vote on Tuesday, I would encourage you to view it as an act of worship. If you remember what that means, it means that when you go there, you need to go there conscious and aware of the worth of Jesus Christ and the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, right? To know how worthwhile he is, for you to be conscious of him when you're there, but also to remember that his work was completed on the cross, and he rose from the dead.

So you have the Spirit of God living in your heart if you know Jesus Christ as Lord. He's going to go with you into that voting booth. There's a lot of people, there's a lot of ideas about how to vote this year, and you've read probably a lot of them. Maybe you're more confused than anyone else. So what I would encourage you to do is to spend some time with the Lord. One day, the only person that's going to care about your vote is going to be you when you're standing before God and you have to give an account for everything you've done. So how you vote should be primarily steered by your time when you stand before your maker. Okay? So vote your conscience and leave, and then leave, right?

Second this is this, right? And leave, exactly. Okay. Second thing is this, is no matter how you feel when you wake up on Wednesday morning, whether you are relieved or whether you're in tears, I want to exhort you to utilize all of the that emotion, and to transform it into fuel to propel you to tell somebody about the gospel. You see, you have been given, and I have been given, and we as a church have been given something more powerful than a leader or a law or a vote, and that is the power unto salvation, it's the gospel message that can change people's hearts.

You see, God's word tells us that we as the church have the most power on the entire Earth, because we have something that transforms the hearts. When the heart is transformed, then the culture can be transformed. It doesn't happen the other way around. So let's be gospel faithful people who are telling people about Jesus this week. Okay?

The third thing I want to exhort you is to remember that Jesus is on the throne. He's there now. He's going to be there Wednesday, okay? So let's talk to him now, okay?

Father, we love you, we thank you that as we open up your word and as we will contemplate all the things that are happening around us in our culture, we thank you God that you are sovereign. This chapter is going to teach us that you're sovereign over death, death itself. God, that you are the victor, and we praise you, and we acknowledge you. I pray, Father, in particular 'cause these verses, these first 16 verses deal so much, Lord, with pain that you permit in the lives of people, God, knowing that there's so many even in this room that are burdened by either your place or your pace in their life, or the challenges that are before them. They have great disappointments, Lord, even death and sickness itself. I pray, God, that you would minister in a way that I simply can't. So would you speak through weakness and give us understanding as we prepare to take the best supper of the whole month? We love you and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

So about eight years ago, during a really busy season of life, to where I didn't have the best balance at work in my life. I came home, opened the front door, and I looked over to the left, and there's a couch there. My wife, Tabitha, was sitting there, and she was crying. So I did what all good dads do, I said, "What did those boys do to you," right, is what I said, which was not the best thing to do, 'cause well, it wasn't the best thing to do. She said, "It wasn't them, it was you."

Now, I didn't know what I did, right? But I knew at that moment I was supposed to know what I did. So I wasn't quite sure what to say, and so I just said, "Sweetie, I know that I'm ... probably should know exactly what I've done, but can you just remind me? What is it that I've done that's brought you to the place where you're crying?" She says, "Nothing." She said, "And that's the problem." She says, "You've done nothing." She says, "I know that you love me and you care for me and you're committed to me, but I need you to do things that prove that you're thinking about me, too."

So I sat down and I recognized that I was in a pace that wasn't healthy, and it was healthy for her or for our family. I apologized, but I was also consciously aware of something that I'd done three days prior to that that she did not yet know, that was thinking about her and was being intentional that she couldn't see up until that moment. You see, one thing you need to know about me, is I don't like to shop ever for anything. I just don't like to shop. Up until that point, I had never bought any clothing for a woman, ever. But I was just aware, you know, that I've never done that, that might really communicate love to her.

So I got a Land's End magazine and I called the lady, and I'm kind of going through, and I said, "Okay, I like this coat," and there was some pants and some shirts. But the very first one, it was a coat. I still remember the coat. In fact, it's a great coat. It fit, it was awesome. It was a brown coat. And I said, "Okay, I like this coat right here." And, you know, the numbers. And she says, "Well, what size do you want it in?"

Oh, and it shows I don't shop very often, 'cause I ... I said, "How about a small?" She said, "No, I need a number. I need a number." I said, well, I said, "I had no idea." She says, "Is she a petite or a woman?" I said, "She's a petite woman. I don't know, what does that mean?"

So literally, I guessed on every one of them, and I just guessed low. I just guessed low, and I thought, "Let's go with that." Every one of them fit perfectly. Nothing went back. I think it was a miracle, honestly, I think God just ... grace, you know, he just helped me at that moment. But you go, "All right, he has to get to John 11 quick," so we're just going with this, right? It's this, this act of love, right, that she could not yet see, and of which I could not yet speak, would appear the very next day.

When you look at John chapter 11, outside of the fact that he did not fail as I had failed, what you do see though is, this link is this, is that we find real people with real enduring pain, real hurts, and they're all wondering, "Where is Jesus? Why is Jesus not here? Why is Jesus not helping? He could be here. He could be doing things to help me at this very moment." Only to find out at the end, that Jesus had been thinking and he had been working and he had been laboring for their good all along. So, if you're going through a really difficult time right now in your life, and you're wondering where is Jesus, this text can give you a great deal of hope and maybe truth as well. So let's read it together.

He says, "Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent to him, saying, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.' But when Jesus heard it he said, 'This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.' Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when he had heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then after this he said to his disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.'"

And it says that his, "disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you wanting to go back there again?' And 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.' After saying these things, he said to them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.'"

You know what his disciples said to him? "'Lord, if he's fallen asleep, he'll recover.' Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.' So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'"

So, I want to show you three things, but they're all contained in one sentence, right, one thesis sentence that I just want to put on the board for you. If you know, sort of, where we're going. And it's this, it's that Jesus permits pain in the lives of people he loves, because he's patiently working a better plan. Jesus permits pain in the lives of people he loves deeply, because he is patiently working a better plan. So let's break that down into smaller points.

The first one is this, is that Jesus loves us deeply. He loves us deeply. The story begins, you see in verse one that Mary and Martha, they send word to Jesus that their brother Lazarus is ill, terribly ill. What Jesus does is stunning, and John wants to record it. But before he records what Jesus does, John wants to set the table to show that Jesus had a unique relationship with this one particular family, and he does it with four different sort of phrases. One of the phrases is in verse 11, when Jesus says, "Our friend Lazarus ..." Jesus doesn't talk like that all the time. Now he calls us, his body, friends, right? But in his daily conversations that were all recorded in the context of these gospels, it's very rare when Jesus talks about other people, and he says, "Hey, there's my friend John." But he says it of Lazarus.

The second clue we have of their unique relationship is in verse five, where it says, "And Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus." The third clue that we have is in verse three. When the sisters want to get word to Jesus, how they tell him is this, "He whom you love is ill." Then the fourth clue is in verse two, when we're told there that Mary was the sister, and John kind of backs up for a second and says, as an editor, "You need to know who this Mary is. This is the Mary that's going to anoint ..." In fact, he says, "Who anointed," as if it's past tense, "the feet of Jesus with this expensive nard and then wiped his feet with her hair."

Why that's so significant is because in John's gospel, it hasn't happened yet. We're going to read that in chapter 12, verse 3. But John, who's now 50 years removed from the resurrection of Jesus Christ, when he's penning and writing all of these things down, he sees the whole scope. So what John is doing, is he's selecting the parts that give the clearest evidence for the usual love relationship that Jesus had, not only with Mary, but also with Martha and with Lazarus.

Now why? Why would John spend this time doing this? He didn't have to. He could have said, "Some guy name Lazarus," he's never met, or met a couple times. But instead, he's goes through all this effort, and I think he does it for this reason. He wants us to feel and see the special love that Jesus had for this family, because he knows what Jesus is about to do is not going to feel loving or seem loving to you and to me.

So, before we get there, what he actually does ... by way of application for the fact that Jesus loves you, I just want to encourage us as a church family. All right, let's consider the love of Christ each morning. Now I would encourage you to open up your Bible and to read the scriptures, to have something called "a quiet time." That's what some people call it, right? It's just where you're reading the Bible, and you're being reminded through the story of the scriptures of the love of God for you. I would encourage you to put into your car, right, some card with a verse that just reminds you of the love of God.

Why this is important is because when you go through the day and you go through the week, if the last time that you've heard about God's love for you was the last time that you were in church, there will be disappointments that will creep into your life, and you'll have no context, no immediate resource that day to absorb those disappointment or the mystery of God's ways, his pace, his place in your life. So if you're stuck in traffic, and you're thinking, "This is terrible." And you look down, and you go, "You know what? There's a God who's sovereign over all things who says he loves me," that I can wait in this traffic maybe a little bit different than if I am not conscious at any way about the love of God.

You see, you and I, we need to be reminded of this love. This love is a remarkable love, because it's not connected to a bridle that we tug in the heart of Jesus through our good works or through our sad looks. He's not like a puppy that wears the cone of shame after he's messed his leg up, like my puppy is right now, right? And he looks up, and he's so sad looking, and that I should go outside and pet him a little bit more, right? This is not how Jesus loves, he loves you from the core of his heart. It has nothing to do with what you do for him. It's because he loves you.

The Bible tells us that his love is so amazing that he created us to have a love relationship with us. Even after we sinned, walked away from him and rebelled and broke fellowship with him, the Bible says that out of love for us, he made a promise. That promise was to send a rescuer who would come to this Earth, who would live a righteous life, and then he would die a death that we deserved. He'd be put into a grave and then he'd rise from the dead. This is exactly what Jesus did. It was all for grace. He gave his life as a sacrifice, but he also gave his life as a substitute.

You see, some people think that Jesus died in order to give us a second chance. Friend, you would fail if he gave you one other chance. He could have died to give you 10,000 chances, and you would have messed all 10,000 chances up, and so would I. We didn't need more chances, we need someone to fulfill it for us, and that's what Jesus did. He walked this life in righteousness, and when we trust him after he rose from the dead, it says that he imparts, he gives us as a gift all of his righteousness, so that we stand before him totally unashamed, totally innocent before him, righteous. He does all this because he loves us.

So let me just exhort you as a people, you're going to go through hard things this week. Do not allow for the last time that you've been reminded of the love of God to be this day. You will need to be reminded Thursday for the difficulties of your Thursday. So remind yourself of his love.

Well, what did Jesus do? This is the second thing, is that Jesus permits pain in those he loves. He permits pain in those he loves. So you and I, we have a hard time thinking of love this way. When we have children, we try to protect our children from pain. If they experience pain, sometimes we even feel like we're doing the wrong thing. But Jesus loves us deeper than wanting to remove temporary pain.

The word that perhaps unveils the mystery of his love in this passage, maybe more than anything else, only has two letters, and it's the word "so." You see it in verse six. It says, "Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus so ... " or therefore, " ... when he heard Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was."

Now some of you didn't really string that together, so let me say it in a different context. What if I came to you and said, "Brian Frost loves Tabitha, his wife, so deeply that when he heard that she was stranded on the side of the road in his car, he stayed another two days where he was before going." You think, "I have no concept for that kind of husband." But this is the Savior of the world. It's a difficult reality, isn't it? It's mysterious. His ways ... and you think, "Wait a minute. What did he do? Jesus deliberately set the stage this way and people had to experience pain for the stage to be set." You say, "Well, it wasn't that bad, because he knew he was going to raise Lazarus from the dead." I suppose that helps in some way, but it didn't help Lazarus. He had to die. We love the story of Lazarus, but this is the only dude that I'm aware of who had to go through death twice. That's not appealing to me at least.

What you see here is this, is here's Jesus, he's allowing ... you see all the suffering was real. They had a real burial. There were real tears. Not only did he die, but you notice he died by illness. What does that mean? It means that when you die by illness, there's pain involved. He just didn't fall asleep and didn't wake up. He suffered to the point of death, and Jesus allowed all of this to take place. He didn't stop it from happening.

You know, there's a lesser pain that you see in the story, significantly lesser, but it's still a pain that you and I experience almost every day, and that is anxiety. He tells his 12 disciples, "Let's go to Judea." And they started saying ... all of a sudden anxiety starts to creep in their heart. He didn't have to say it to them. He could say, "Guys, you're going to stay here. I'm going to go somewhere. You just enjoy this refreshment at the Jordan River. Things are going really well here. You just stay." He goes, "No, let's go. We're going." All of a sudden, they're like, "Wait a minute, the last time we were there, people were trying to stone you to death." And he says, "You know what, guys? There's 12 hours in the day, we're going to walk in the day. We're going to be okay." He goes, "I have a plan." He goes, "Our friend has fallen asleep, and I'm going to go wake him up."

Now imagine the angst in their heart, right? They're like, "Okay, wait a minute. You mean to tell me that we're going to walk a hundred miles to a dangerous place in order to wake up a good friend from a good nap? That's what we're going to do?" And so he says, "Guys, he's dead. Lazarus has died, but I've got a plan, so we're going to go." Now Jesus has already shown in John chapter 4 that he can do long-distance healings. He didn't have to go, he has authority over all things, but he intentionally went. I just love Thomas, don't you? Verse 16? "Let us go that we may die with him." Here's a man who's one part pessimistic, a hundred parts devoted. He's like, "All right, well if this is it, it's been fun. It's been a good ride everybody. Let's go ahead, and let's just go and die. Let's go die with him," right? But he permits this pain in those he loves.

So the application here before we talk about the why is this, is let's be thankful that the Bible reveals Jesus' mysterious ways. Friends, imagine how hard it would be to process the complexities of your own life and the disappointments and the diagnoses if the Bible painted a picture of walking with God where nobody ever felt stress and nobody was ever buried, no one ever had to wait.

You see the pain that we experience in life, is the pain that we read about in the Bible. Abraham had to wait 24 years for something to be fulfilled. Joseph was falsely accused. Some of you have been falsely accused. You know, you think, "That's just not right." Ruth faced widowhood, as some in this room. Hannah faced infertility, as is some in this room. Samuel knew the pain of being rejected, as do many of us in this room. David knew great depression and the insurmountable pain of burying a child, as do some in this room. Isaiah was martyred for his faith. What you see about all of these people is that God loved all of them, and he permitted all of this to take place in their life.

You see, God's sovereignty is startling, but his silence would be suffocating. If he did not tell us his mysterious ways, to try to comprehend the persecuted church today, suffering children, infertility, having to wait, tragic deaths without these windows into God's incredible love and God's incredible way and his plan would be simply too much for all of us. This is why the Bible has to be read as it's written and preached as it's written. For people to stand up and say, "If you follow Jesus, you're going not to have any pain whatsoever." Those pastors place their people literally in dangerous places, that when real life happens, the next day they have no context within the scriptures looking God-ward for any solution whatsoever. That's not what the Bible says.

So we should be grateful as a people, and we should read our Bibles, and we should take comfort when we need comfort. These people walking through the shadow of death, just like we do, and they endured. \*see, this kind of gratitude allows us not only to rest but to trust when we're going through such difficulty.

And that gets us to the last part, right? Jesus loves deeply, he permits pain in those he loves, but why does he do all this? Well, Jesus permits the pain because his love is committed to a better plan. It was the love of Jesus, John tells us, for this family and for Lazarus and for his own disciples and for you and I and all of John's readers throughout all the generations, that led Jesus to permit Lazarus dying. You have to ask the question, how is that love? How is it possibly love what Jesus did here in this context? This is where we need a really good definition of love. You see, love gives us what we need the most, not what we want the most. It gives us what we need the most. You see, when someone is willing to die or to let our brother die to give us or our brother the kind of belief that allows us to savor and enjoy the glory of God forever in heaven when we deserve to go to hell and be separated from God forever, that is love.



I want you to notice that Jesus tells us why he does all this. It's in two different places. It's in verse four, Jesus says, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God ... " And then he says, "... so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." In other words, Jesus is giving us the window into his motivation. He goes, "I'm allowing this to happen so that the Son of God may be glorified." In other words, what he's saying is, "My glory, and not this man's death, is the ultimate outcome of what this is really going to happen here."

But then notice the second thing that he says. It's in verse 15. Jesus says, "For your sake, I am glad that I was not there so that ... " That's another purpose statement. "... so that you may believe." You see, we are all forced to process the pains of life through a set of blinders that literally hinders our ability to see as far as even tomorrow. You can't even see tomorrow, and what's good for you tomorrow. You and I, we think we know what's good for us tomorrow, but we don't even know that. But God is not hindered in such way, he's not encumbered this way. He sees all the way down every path and sees what is good for us and what is good for others.

You see, Jesus, you see here is committed to long-haul types of love, not short-term comfort. He's seeing eternity all at the same time when he's dealing with something that's so temporal in the life of these few people on this particular day. He's making all of his decisions on the basis of what he knows for eternity and not just their immediate comfort. He loves them so deeply ... John has sought to etch that into our heart. He has sovereign authority to stop all this. He's going to raise this dude from the dead next week. Or he did a long time ago. We're in Luke next week, right?

But listen, Jesus does all this. Then he says, "This is why. This is why I'm doing this, 'cause I can see all the way down the path to see what's good for you, but also what's good for every generation for the next 2,000 years," all the way to us, Providence. That everyone is going to have to be thinking and internalizing and processing the pain that they're going through. "I'm going to allow this to happen in a single family that I love so deeply, in order to nurture and instruct and shepherd people for centuries to come." So Jesus permitted Lazarus to die, he says for two reasons. So that we would see the glory of Jesus Christ, and so that we would believe. Now, do you remember why John has written? He says, "I have written all these things to you so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and in believing you might have life in his name."

So by way of application, let's trust Jesus, who's committed to our greatest good. Friends, listen. Between Lazarus' death and his resurrection, his family could not see how God would be glorified in it. They're not looking as we look upon the story. They see their brother in a tomb. Therefore, if that is where you stand today, and all of us do in some regard, right, not seeing clearly how God is going to be glorified in the disappointments of our day, the pain of our day, the pain of our loved ones. I think one of the things we could remember is, do not judge before the resurrection.

See, Abraham was given a son, and Joseph was finally exalted. Ruth was given a husband. Hannah was given a baby. Isaiah, who was martyred, he was given heaven. God's good to his people. He's doing more than we can see and more than we can know. So even if life today is very dim, the final resurrection will bring it to light. In the meantime, I exhort you to trust in Jesus Christ and to help each other trust in Jesus Christ by carrying each other's burdens. You see, it's beautiful that Jesus didn't just utilize the life of Lazarus in order to bring us good, he also came and gave his own life to bring us good. 1 Peter 3:18 says, "Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God." Because he did this, he is able to bring healing in our living and our healing in our dying.

God gave us this unique privilege called "The Lord's Supper." It's a unique way to remember the rescue that we've enjoyed, but also to profess our belief, our continuing belief in him. It's called The Lord's Supper. So for those who'll be serving us, if you want to go ahead and stand up and head to the back as we get ready. The supper consists of two elements. You guys know the bread and the cup. The bread's symbolic of his life on the Earth, his body. And the cup's symbolic of his blood that was spilled at his death.

But what you need to understand is to say these things and to take these things is literally to say within your heart, "I am believing in Jesus Christ, that he died for me, and he rose again. I'm trusting in him and him alone, and I'm following him today." So if you've not trusted Christ, we would as a church family, would simply ask you to let these things pass. If you have trusted Christ, you are welcome to take of these things. But the Bible tells us, before we take them, we should examine ourself. So as I pray, and then as these things are passed, while they're being passed, I would encourage you to ask God if there's any sin in your life that you've not confessed, to examine your heart and have him examine your heart. Confess anything to him, so that you can take these things with a clear conscious. Okay? So let's pray together.

Father in heaven, we're thankful so much for your grace in our life, and we're grateful, Lord, that even as we go through such terrible pains in life, that you are there, that you are with us. We're grateful. But mostly, Lord, we're grateful, God, that when we were in need of a rescue, that you fulfilled that perfectly in Jesus. So I pray, Father, as we prepare to take these elements, to remember this and to proclaim our faith in Jesus, that you would use this time to examine our hearts. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.



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