

THINK BIGGER

NOVEMBER 13, 2022 | WALKING WITH JESUS | JOHN 11 | PASTOR SCOTT TURANSKY

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, as we turn our hearts to your word, we ask that you would give us receptive hearts. Lord, I look at this particular passage at this particular time and I see it's so appropriate for our church and for several people here in our lives. In fact, all of us need the principles that are taught in this passage. So we ask that you would teach us and you would grow us today and comfort us. We ask in Jesus' name, amen.

Every person, every one of us must have a plan for sadness management. Sadness. Sadness comes on a scale. Some things are trivial or minor. I mean, you go to Starbucks and they get your order wrong. You might be sad or disappointed. Or you get on the road and there's traffic, or you have to go to a detour. That's sadness. But that's not anything like the difficult sadnesses that we experience in life. The sadness of a diagnosis, of a health challenge that you have, or a sadness of losing a marriage, or sadness of losing someone that you love. Those are just painful experiences.

As Christians, we have resources that we have access to that are so important and valuable. We're going to talk about those today. You just got to know, young people, if you're here today, you got to have a plan. Maybe it's the small sadnesses of life that you're practicing sadness management so you can deal with the bigger sadnesses of life.

I've been reading Cathy Joe's book. Her husband passed away and she wrote a book about grieving that's very helpful. Lorraine has written a book about grieving her son-in-law, Todd Beamer, was on that plane that crashed in Pennsylvania on 9/11. I talked to Dave Risoldi. He says he's been to seven funerals this year already and the year's not over, he said.

This morning I was talking to Fay Sortore in the kitchen. And she says that passage you're reading this morning you're talking about, I'm here to hear what you're going to say. Because her husband, Eric... I knew Eric, but years ago he passed away. And I just appreciate what Fay said. Because she says, "Here's what we say. We say when the diagnosis or when we the tests come back and they're negative, we go, 'God is good.' Don't we? We say, 'God is good.' But what if the tests come back and they're positive because there's something within the test being positive that we say 'God is good' because God is good all the time." Amen?

We're going to see that in our passage today. I mean it's hard to grasp in the midst of sorrow. It's hard to grasp in the midst of pain in our lives. We must have a plan to understand how God fits into that bigger picture. Because the human element of our lives is so hard.

You know, I think of Harold Munro whose wife passed away suddenly last Monday night. I've just been grieving in my heart about that this week. And of course he's here today grieving the loss of his wife that he loved so much. I think we all need this passage in John 11. Because there has to be a way for us in our human element to deal with sorrow. It's painful. You know, when we get to heaven, there's no more tears, there's no more sorrow. We know that. But here on earth, there is. And it's hard to address. It's hard to live with sometimes. It's overwhelming. It's that broken heart experience that we have. And we know that we have resources in Christ that are so important.

So as part of your plan, I would suggest that you memorize some scriptures that talk about the resources you have in your relationship with the Lord that can help us. Because whenever we experience a loss, that loss is difficult. But there's a lot of times we think we have gains in our lives. Oh, we have this in our bank account. Or we have this in our job. And when those things are gone, we go, "Oh, man, it's a terrible loss."

I want you to stand with me in preparation for this particular sermon. Would you stand up? I want to read a different passage of scripture than the one we're going to look at in John 11. I want to read this one from Philippians 3:7-8, which helps us deal with sadness management in our own lives.

It says – *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*

Hidden within those words are much of the secret that's going to be revealed in John 11 today. That we get to know Christ, and as we do, the pain is still there. the challenges are still there. I was talking to Mike and Charlotte this morning. It's just comforting to be here and to be part of what's happening. It's a challenge.

You may be seated.

There are other verses like Psalm 42 that I've memorized just to help me deal with sadness management. Which says – *As the deer pants for streams of water, so my heart pants for you, O Lord.* Psalm 27:4 says – *One thing I ask of the Lord and this is what I seek: that I might dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.* That God becomes this anchor, that Christ becomes this anchor in our lives that we can appreciate so much in the midst of the challenges and the misery or the sadness that we experience in our lives.

So let's enter John 11. I want to tell you a story. This is a story that John told us in his word. We know the story is true because it's in the Bible. John 11 says this: *Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.* Now these three people were friends of Jesus. These were some of His closest friends. *It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill.* We don't know what the sickness was. We don't know if it was expected he would recover or not. But it was serious enough to get help. *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."* Somewhere in the midst of suffering and pain,

God is glorified. Sometimes we don't even know why or how. *Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.* It's a very important statement there. He loved them.

Now, everything up to this point in the passage I get. It makes sense to me. Humanly speaking, I can grasp this. The next statement, I can't grasp this, humanly speaking, in my own my own heart. I have to go into the supernatural. I have to trust God for this next statement. Because it says there – *So* (not 'and' or 'but'), *when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.* So if we summarize this, He loved them so He stayed away from them for two more days. I don't get that. Because sometimes in my mind, I'm saying, "Lord, if you loved them, you would solve their problem. Lord, if you loved me, you would care for me. Lord, if you cared about me, you would take away this problem I have. Lord, if you're all powerful, then you would fix this thing that I'm dealing with." And He doesn't.

This is where it gets into the part of God's glory and His sovereignty that I don't understand what God is doing. We get a glimpse of it here in the passage. But not everyone is raised from the dead. Not everyone's problems are fixed. There's this glory of God that's bigger than I understand that I must trust in and recognize. So this becomes an important part of the story that He intentionally waits on purpose because He loves them. Wow. Fascinating. I can't grasp it in my own heart. It's hard for me to understand, except through trust, that God is doing something here that I don't really understand or know what's going on.

Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?" In other words, they're saying, "You've got to be kidding, Jesus. We just left there in the last chapter, remember? They were going to kill us. You don't want to go back there again." *Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him."* Jesus is saying we have resources that supersede the human resources that are out there. They're trying to kill us, but we are in the light. We have the light. This is going to be one of those keys that we need in our lives to deal with the sadness that we experience in our own hearts so that we have the light. When we have the light, then we have something that's bigger than what's going on just on an earthly level.

After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." I probably would have said the same thing. Lord, why are you going there? If he's just sleeping, he's going to wake up. *Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly...* And I like it when Jesus speaks plainly. I need that. Just tell it to me straight, Lord. I want to know that. *He speaks plainly, "Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe."*

I'm going, well that's really interesting. *I'm glad that I was not there so that you may believe.* Do you know what the love language is of God? God's love languages is trust. Oh, He likes praise and He likes obedience. But His love language is trust. As we enter into trust, we believe. We're going to see that over and over in the passage. That's what the song that Doug sang. "Do you believe?" This belief is so powerful in helping us to manage the sadness that we experience in our lives.

He says, "I want you to grow in your belief is what He's saying here. *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.*" He sounds like Eeyore. The Eeyore of the disciples.

I love Thomas. Thomas often says things that we're thinking. You remember Thomas. He gets the nickname Doubting Thomas because he wasn't in the upper room in the evening service that they were having and he missed out. They told him, "Thomas, we've seen Jesus," and he says, "I'm not going to believe that until I see Him. I'm actually going to see Him." So the next week, Jesus reveals Himself to Thomas and he says, "I believe." And Jesus says, "*Blessed are those who believe and don't see.*" Thomas is that that guy who when Jesus was saying to His disciples in the upper room, He says, "I'm going to go away and I'm going to prepare a place for you. There are many homes in my father's mansion, and when I leave, you'll be able to come after and follow me there." And Thomas speaks up. I think when he speaks up, the other disciples are saying, "Well, I'm glad he said that." Because he says, "Lord, we don't know where you're going. We don't know how to get there." And because Thomas said that we have those special words in the Bible in John 14:6 where Jesus says, "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life; o one comes to the Father, except through me.*"

So I really appreciate Thomas. And this is a demonstration of his faith. He says, "Okay. We're going to go die with him. We'll take him all the way to that place. Because we know that where else can we go? We're going to follow Him."

Tradition tells us... I was just watching a video this week, about how Thomas after all of these events that we're seeing take place, he migrated all the way down to India, to the western side of India, where there's a Christian community still today. And he shared the gospel with those people in India. What a powerful guy, a man of faith.

Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. I mean, this guy's really dead. Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. Martha said to Jesus... Listen to these words. Because when a person is grieving, sometimes they say things that are just raw, they just come right out of their hearts and unfiltered sometimes. It seems that Martha is making a statement like that in saying – "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

It's the ifs that we say to God sometimes. Lord, if you would just fix my problem. If you just loved me then you would not do this. Okay Lord, if you would just do life the way I think it should be done, I could have the pleasure I want, I could have the comfort I want in life. Lord, if you would do this. Those are the painful words that are coming right out of her heart that I think we often say in our lives. If you're a young person, in a relationship with someone, and they break up with you, you know, just that aching pain you have in your heart. It's that pain, it's that heartbreak, broken-hearted feeling that Jesus is stepping into the middle of here.

But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to him, “Yes, I went to the Sunday school class. I heard all about that. I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” In other words, I got the theology down, God. And I think sometimes we say that. Lord, I got the theology down, but my heart still hurts. I’m in pain. I ache about this. So yeah, tell me about the theology. I got it.

*Jesus said to her... And this has got to be the key to the whole passage because He’s moving from the works to the person. Instead of us saying, “Lord, if you would just do it the way I think you ought to do it, then I’d be fine. Jesus is saying look at me as the person. You want to get to know me as the person. You want to trust in me as the most important thing in your heart. That doesn’t make the pain go away of a loss, but it does allow us to work through that pain in a way that’s supernatural. Where some people who don’t have a plan for sadness management find their pain, moving them to bitterness. Find themselves moving to despair and even thoughts of self-harm. But we need a plan that’s going to help us in the midst of our suffering and our pain to recognize that it’s Jesus that we rely on. That He is *the resurrection and the life*. So we move to one of the I Ams in the book of John. There are seven of them. There are also seven miracles in the book of John; this is one of them. We’re in the midst of this experience. And we’re learning that Jesus says – “*I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?*” Those are the words from the song that Doug sang. Do you believe this?*

Because it's this belief in God as our comforter, God as our heavenly Father that allows us to experience and work through the sadness that we experience in our lives. The brokenness of our world. We live in a broken world that's painful and we will experience those things while we're here. Do you believe this?

She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.” Yes, she's got it down. She's made the statement. This is where she needed to come so that she could leave Jesus now and go back into the world, into life where people are. I think we come to the Lord, we connect with the Lord, we experience something with Him that allows us then to try to function then in the rest of our lives. Even though we're still grieving. We have to go on, we have to experience life. We have to carry this burden that we have, yet go on in life. That's what she's doing. She leaves Him now.

When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, “The Teacher is here and is calling you.” And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

Now, we know who this family is. We've had a story about them already, Mary and Martha. That Jesus had come over to eat, which apparently He did regularly, maybe even that was His place where He lived when He was up in Judea. And Martha was busy making the meal and she was getting things all set for the meal. She's annoyed that her sister is not helping, that she's just sitting there with Jesus. And she's saying, “How could she just sit there? Can't she see the work

that needs to be done here? Can't she see all the things that have to happen to get the meal on the table? I'm doing this all by myself." Martha's love language, I think, was service. But she was feeling irritated that Mary wasn't doing that. And so she says in that story, she goes to Jesus, "Jesus, would you tell her to get in the kitchen and help me get the stuff on the table?" And Jesus says, "Martha, Martha, you are worried about so many things. But one thing is important. One thing. And Mary is doing what is better." And so Mary there is worshipping the Lord, listening to Him. She's in a relationship with Him that's powerful. That I think is a key to what's going on in this passage. Because she's going to say the same words that Martha did. But I think her attitude in the midst of her pain is a little different than Martha's attitude.

See if you pick this up too. *Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet.* She was used to doing that, to going before the Lord and getting at His feet and worshipping and recognizing how great He is and how important He is. That's got to be part of the key to dealing with the brokenness in our world and experiencing the pain and suffering that we experience in our lives.

She fell at his feet saying to him (same words), "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Maybe they had been saying that to each other. Where's Jesus? If He had been here he wouldn't have died. So now they say it directly to Him. I think God is big enough to take on our comments, our responses. I don't think we have to clean them up to come before the Lord. I think we can take our raw comments before God and we can say, "Lord, if you would have been here, he wouldn't have died."

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping (notice He's seeing what's happening, He's watching them crying), *he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.* These are important words. That inside of His own spirit, He was upset about what was going on. Very vivid terminology here. He was upset inside.

And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." And then it says – *Jesus wept.* Why is He crying? He knows He's going to raise Lazarus from the dead in just a few minutes. Why is He crying? I think Jesus is crying because He sees the brokenness that exists in our world and how painful it is. Don't you experience that when you hear some people's stories, and you go, "Oh man, my heart just goes out to them. I feel the brokenhearted part of their life." We can't experience in the same depth that that other person is experiencing it. But because we're human, we can connect with that same painful emotion. And Jesus was human. He was God and He was human, and He felt the pain and the suffering that exists in our world. And it's for that reason that He's crying. He's crying because we live in a broken world. We live in a place where all kinds of bad things happen, struggles take place that we didn't expect, we didn't want to happen. And they upset us. And they are difficult for us to manage in our lives.

Jesus wept. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" They don't understand. They think He's weeping because of Lazarus because Lazarus has died. So He's weeping like everybody else. *But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?"*

*Then Jesus, deeply moved again... Same words – deeply moved in His heart. You’ve just got to experience that and know that. Because when you experience pain, you need to know that Jesus is right there to experience that pain with you. When He sends the Holy Spirit, He calls the Holy Spirit the Comforter who comes alongside of us to comfort us in our pain. And so *Jesus is deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.* So John’s outlining the picture here in our mind. We’re imagining a cave with a big stone in front of it and the people all kind of looking around because now we’re at this place. Maybe there’s some flowers around, maybe it looks kind of nice. And they come to this place to mourn at the graveside.*

And Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” That’s a little weird. But I think maybe they thought, well, this is like Jesus wants to see him one more time to say goodbye to him. It’s kind of like when we do a funeral, sometimes there’s an open casket. The reason some people do have an open casket is so that they can see that person again. It helps them grieve and kind of say goodbye a final time. I think that’s what they’re imagining Jesus wants to do is open the tomb so He can say His final goodbyes.

*Martha (the practical one), the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.” The New American Standard says *a stench*. But I love the King James Version. It says *he stinketh*. The point is, this is bad. You don’t just open up a grave. In that warm climate, this is not going to be something pleasant to open this up.*

Jesus says to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?” So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said... He’s going to say this so everybody can hear. He’s going to pray out loud so other people can hear what’s going on in the mind of God and Jesus. So He’s praying out loud and He says – “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.” Because belief is the love language of the Father. And belief has got to be part of this ability for us to cope with our own brokenness and pain and suffering that we experience when we’re sad because of some kind of a loss, whether it’s a loss of a job or a loss of health. It can be anything that we lose. And Jesus is right there. The believing in Jesus is that pillar that allows us to have this anchor to carry on and do what we need to do.

When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” He could have whispered. He could have just thought it. He could have just waited. The tomb was open. We would’ve been amazed that the guy comes out. He didn’t. He calls out with a loud voice, a commanding voice. Some say it’s great that He put Lazarus at the beginning because if He just said “come out,” then all of the dead people would’ve come out and we’d have an army of these people out there. But He says, “Lazarus, come out.” And everybody’s just waiting there. Can you imagine being in that situation? What a stunning thing. The tomb is rolled away. Jesus yells at the guy and says, “Lazarus come out of there.” And everybody is standing around. They don’t even know how to respond. I think that’s how they must have felt in that moment.

The man who had died came out (that was bizarre), his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. This is the mummy story of the Bible. This guy comes out dressed as a mummy. He’s got his head all wrapped, his arms wrapped, his legs wrapped, and he

comes walking out of this tomb. He doesn't come out with a smile or something. He's all wrapped up. I'm going, wow, this is a really interesting story.

You know, it just kind of reminds me of salvation. We are all dead in sin. There's nothing we can do to get rid of our deadness. The only thing we can do is trust Jesus Christ who calls us out of the tomb from darkness into light. We receive Jesus Christ into our lives, and we have this new life, we come out of the grave and we enjoy the beauty of living in this life. But still, we come out with grave clothes on many of us. I would say probably all of us come out with grave clothes on. So we need each other. We need each other to say, "You know, I'm glad you're out here alive. But let me help you with those great clothes. That anger that you have probably isn't befitting to you in this new life. Let's help you deal with that anger." Or "you know that addiction you're struggling with. Let me help you unwrap that so that you can experience the life and the light that God wants you to enjoy."

Wow, what an amazing story. As he comes out of the grave, I'm going this is so bizarre. I'm thinking about poor Lazarus. Okay, he died. He's four days in heaven. He's in heaven and he's talking to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph and Daniel and all these people. He's having a conversation and then he gets the word. "Hey, you're needed back over here." What?! "You're needed to back over here and you got to go back down." I do?! So Lazarus goes back down to earth. I just got to tell you when I die, do not pray that I'll come back to life. Please. Don't pray, because I'll be rejoicing in heaven. I don't want to leave heaven and come back to New Jersey. I want to live in heaven and enjoy that.

The next statement that we read here is about as bizarre of a statement as I can see in the passage. It says – *Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him.* The reason I think it's so bizarre is why doesn't it say everybody? Why didn't every person who saw Lazarus come out of the grave believe in Him? That's so bizarre. I mean there's some people who say, "If I saw a miracle I'd believe." You know this verse just describes the human heart and how sometimes the human heart can be so calloused and cold. We need the grace of God just to come to Christ and be able to respond to Him. But many did.

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. It sounds like tattletales to me. They went to the Pharisees. So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."

You see, the Romans govern that whole part of the world, but they let the Jews govern themselves as long as they were doing okay. If they became a problem, then they would not allow them to govern themselves and they would take privilege away. So now Jesus is threatening their own sovereignty here. So it's a problem. So this is really fascinating what happens, and John records this for us.

But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year (so the high priest is going to make a statement, a really important statement – he doesn't even realize what he's saying) said to them,

“You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.” What he's saying is, we're going to get this guy, Jesus. We're going to kill him so that the rest of us can maintain our sovereignty under the Roman rule. One man will die instead of the nation will die. One man will die on behalf of the people. That's what he's saying.

He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation. And we know what those words mean. Jesus Christ died on the cross so that we could experience the atonement of Jesus Christ. We could experience that relationship with Him. One person died so that the nations could experience closeness with God. What an amazing, ironic statement from an unbelieving high priest to grant that very interesting statement here. And not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. So from that day on they made plans to arrest him, put him to death.

Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there to the region near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim, and there he stayed with the disciples. Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand. Get ready because we're entering the last week here of Jesus' life on earth. Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves. They were looking for Jesus and saying to one another as they stood in the temple, “What do you think? That he will not come to the feast at all?” Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where he was, he should let them know, so that they might arrest him.

And so the scene is now set for the last week of Jesus' life here on earth. The scene is set for Him to come in as the triumphal entry on the donkey. And then for the events of that week to come before He's crucified on Friday. All of that scene is set now as we leave this particular story. We'll be excited to read more about this.

But let's just go back here and think about this just for a moment. As we think about the plan that each one of us must have for dealing with sadness in our lives. You know, Fay pointed this out to me in our conversation as she was just reflecting on the story. Lazarus eventually died. He was raised from the dead, but he eventually died. All of us will experience that in our own lives. We will die unless Christ comes before then. And the question is, do we believe? Do we believe in Jesus Christ? Because that is the ticket really, to be able to enjoy eternal life in heaven with the Lord, to believe in Jesus Christ.

The belief that we have also, though, helps us deal with the earthly challenges that we experience, the sadness that comes our way. It is difficult to experience what we do on earth. And we need the grace of God. Trusting in God is so important and valuable. Brokenness exists in our world. We will all have to experience sadness in whatever happens. We need to recognize that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. When we focus in on Him, it allows us to be able to walk through, even in the midst of pain and sorrow to go forward.

And lastly, we need the brothers and sisters. We need the fellowship that we have, the comfort that we experience here. Charlotte was saying just being here is comforting, as we experience

our relationships together and enjoy those. Like taking those grave clothes, we need those other people around to help us with that.

I trust that you will think about this. Because if you're not experiencing pain now, you will. You want to have a plan to be able to address that in your own personal lives.

Let's pray.

[PRAYER] Father, I need this message in my own heart and life. I just pray, Lord, that you would give me strength, because I face pain and challenges in my own life. Lord, I want to trust you as that one thing. One thing – that I seek to rely on you and to trust you for everything that I do. Lord, you know the people that are hurting here today because of a loss in their lives and the sadness they're experiencing because of health issues, or because of job issues, or because of loss of a loved one. Lord, I pray that you would comfort them as you do in that special way, that you would touch their hearts and allow them to continue on in their lives today. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.