



### Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however, 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



### Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



## HG41: The Miracles of Jesus (6/6) *Dead Man Walking*

**John 11:1-45**

### Home Group Study Notes

28<sup>th</sup> November 2010 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN  
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION  
**BEFORE** THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group  
with you, along with any previous notes and  
other resources that might be helpful.*



### Welcome/Ice Breaker (10 mins)

Christmas will soon be upon us, with presents 'flying all around'. If money was no object, what would be your 'ideal' Christmas present?



### Looking Upwards (10 mins) *Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise, or listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers; etc.





## Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read through the text for this study, John 11:1-45, and any references given below, alongside those in the sermon notes, then answer the following questions - you may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss your answers with your Home Group.

**1:** Have you ever experienced the heavens being silent in prayer? Times when there seems to be no response from God at all - especially when it comes to praying for healing? As you reflect on this, how did/does this affect your faith?

**2:** The shortest verse in the Bible is John 11:35: "Jesus wept." How does Jesus crying for a friend make you feel?

**3:** Paul spoke about how Jesus used both the divine and the practical in bringing about a miracle. Is it possible that we spend too much time in prayer for healing and not enough time in doing something practical? Discuss why this may, or may not be true.

**The Crowd's Faith in the Power of Jesus, vs 38 - 45:** Vs38: *Jesus, once more deeply moved* (we have that same word again, feeling angry and disturbed) *came to the tomb*, and he asked for the stone to be removed. The stone is a physical obstacle. Jesus doesn't wave his hands and the stone vanishes, he asks those nearby, vs39: *to take away the stone*. There's always this remarkable combination of the divine and the human at work in Jesus' miracles isn't there? Martha answered vs39: *Lord, by this time there will be an odour* (The Greek is more blunt, *He stinks*) *for he has been dead four days*. Jesus reminds her: *Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?* It's hard to imagine how they could understand Jesus' power over death/grave unless he demonstrated his power in a sign of this kind.

Jesus prays a simple prayer of gratitude, spoken aloud so that all could hear, vs41-42: *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 you sent me.* Jesus wants all who are there to be aware that he is in partnership with God the Father in this and not some black magic practitioner! He calls on God to work and he has not the slightest doubt, that he will. After he prayed he cried with a loud voice, vs43-4: *Lazarus, come out. Lazarus came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen and a cloth around his face.* It's said that if Jesus had not used Lazarus' name, he would have emptied the whole cemetery! I can't help but think that the loud voice of Jesus wasn't only for Lazarus' benefit; it was for the benefit of the crowd too. Jesus wanted them to hear that it was his voice that summons the dead. Lazarus comes out and life returns to his body. What an experience/sight that must have been. Jesus had authenticated his claim to be, vs25: *the resurrection and the life*, which he later proved conclusively by his own resurrection from the dead. Apart from Jesus' own resurrection, this, without any doubt, is the greatest of miracle of all. I haven't seen people raised from the dead – but I believe it.

The name Lazarus means *God has helped*, and Jesus understood that Lazarus needed more than life, he needed freedom. So he offers instructions, vs44: *Take off the grave clothes and let him go.* Again we have this mix of the human and the divine. Life (physically and spiritually) is something God alone can give. However, unbinding people is something we can be involved in. We can help them to be freed from the past. We can show love, compassion, fellowship etc.

**Conclusion:** Jesus asked Martha: *do you believe that I am the resurrection and the life?* And I believe he is asking that same question this morning. Do you believe that God can really do all that He has promised to do? Do you believe that God has a plan and a purpose when prayers go unanswered? Our actions and attitudes often suggest that we don't. We say we have absolute faith and trust in God's power, but we act as if we don't really expect the miraculous to be part of our everyday lives. Perhaps we need to change our heart and believe in a God of the impossible and see what difference he can make to our lives. As we marvel at this fantastic, extraordinary, supernatural, miracle, we need to remember that Lazarus eventually, died. And, whilst Jesus sets many free from the curse of death, the tragedy in Bethany, vs46, as is it today, is that there are still those who choose not to believe.

*Heavenly Father, sometimes I feel like Lazarus dead in the tomb.  
Sometimes I feel like a dead man walking. I need you Lord Jesus in my life.  
I pray that you will free me from the chains and habits of the past.  
I pray that like the disciples, I can have faith in Jesus' wisdom.  
That like Martha I can have faith in Jesus' authority. Like Mary I can have faith in Jesus' love.  
That like the crowd I can have faith in Jesus' power.  
Help me to live according to your resurrected life.  
Help me, both today and in this next week, to meet with you and to know  
The empowering presence of your Holy Spirit in my life - whatever it takes. Amen.*

because God can give us so much at sad and difficult times in our lives. Martha's faith is placed right where ours often is. How many times have you said to yourself: *I know God has worked in the past, and I know that he will work again in the future, but today, well, today is not the day of miracles.* In the daily grind of life we think: *Those days have gone. God can't work that way now.* Martha had a faith in future hope - of resurrection on the last day. She has her theology right but, like us, has forgotten that God works in the here and now.

Jesus told Martha a profound truth, vs25: *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 this?* At that moment of grief and sorrow Martha's faith in the authority and uniqueness of Jesus came to life – death had caused her to think about life and death in a deeper way. She responds, vs27: *Yes Lord, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of God.*

**Mary's Faith in the Love of Jesus, vs28-37:** Mary had a very different temperament to Martha. She was the shy type who preferred to stay at home to be consoled by her friends. It was the same Mary who anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped them with her hair. Mary had a deeper understanding of truth. But she, too, couldn't understand why Jesus hadn't come to Bethany sooner, vs32: *Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.* But if Jesus hadn't delayed his coming, Mary would not have seen how much Jesus understands human sorrow and suffering, because when Jesus saw her and the others weeping he was so moved he began to weep himself.

Jesus' reaction here is highly significant, vs33: *He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.* It's very difficult to capture in English what the Greek text is saying here. The word for *deeply moved in spirit* is a word that only occurs three or four times in the New Testament, and in each place it's associated with a sense of indignation and anger (Cleansing the Temple). Why does Jesus feel disturbed and angry? Was he was angry at the power of sin and death in the world? Maybe ... but let's not forget that Jesus had earlier said that Lazarus' death is a joyous occasion for the revealing of the glory of God and of His power as the resurrection and the life.

It was actually after Jesus asked where they had laid Lazarus, and it was as he started out to the tomb, that he wept. The word used here is not the same as the word which described Mary's and the Jews' weeping earlier. It's a word that literally means *he broke into tears*. His grief overwhelmed him so much that he broke into tears. Jesus loved Lazarus, but he is not weeping because he died. He knows he is on his way to raise him from the dead. He knows that in a few minutes this weeping crowd will be transformed into a rejoicing people who will hardly believe what will have taken place. He knows that Mary and Martha are going to have their dear brother back again in their arms. Jesus is weeping because he is sharing their heartache. He is weeping in sorrow at the sense of desolation and loss that death brings. He is weeping out of empathy and sympathy for his friends. What a beautiful description of the nature of Jesus.

I don't know about you, but I couldn't relate to a Jesus who wasn't able to share my grief. A Jesus who never wept could never wipe away my tears. A Jesus who never suffered mental anguish would be able to understand my pain. A Jesus who had never experienced grief would be able to share my sorrow. I find it very reassuring that Jesus was prepared to acknowledge his innermost feelings and was never afraid of letting others know, exactly, how he felt! I'm sure there's a lesson in there for us somewhere. Jesus' response assures us that he understands and cares about human sorrow. And, just like Mary, our faith in the love of Jesus can be strengthened in times of bereavement. The Jews responded, vs36: *See how he loved him!* I think they missed the point! However, some of them, quite legitimately, asked, vs37: *Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?* Jesus hadn't done what they expected him to do. Yet!

**4:** Paul Said: *“Martha had a faith in future hope - of resurrection on the last day. She has her theology right but, like us, has forgotten that God works in the here and now.”* How might we refocus our theology as we approach this time of Advent and look forward to the return of our Lord Jesus Christ?

**5:** Isn't it comforting to know that Jesus can relate to so many different people? I wonder, who/what do you relate to the most in this story? The disciples, and their faith in Jesus' wisdom? Martha, and her faith in the authority of Jesus? Mary, and her faith in the love of Jesus or the crowd and their faith in the power of Jesus?

**6:** There's no doubt that our series on the Healing Miracles of Jesus has touched the hearts and minds of many. What, for you, has been the most significant aspect of this study? What has encouraged you the most? What will you 'carry' with you into your future Christian life as a result of these studies?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



## HG41: The Miracles of Jesus (6/6) *Dead Man Walking*

John 11:1-45

### Home Group Sermon Notes

28<sup>th</sup> November 2010 - Revd Paul A. Carr

**Introduction:** If I was to ask what is the hardest problem to handle in the Christian life – I'd be given several different answers. The hardest problem, for me, is what do I do when God does something different and doesn't act the way I think he should? It's a bit like that in the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Here, Jesus seems to do the opposite of what those nearest to Him expected Him to do. Jesus' attitude to death, of course, and that of his followers is, probably, *the* most distinctive mark of Christianity.

The great American evangelist D.L.Moody would say before his death: *Some fine morning you will see in the newspapers, D.L.Moody of Northfield, Massachusetts, is dead - don't you believe it! I shall be more alive that morning than ever before!*

I've had the privilege of praying with many folk, over the years, and more recently a dear friend at my previous parish, who have been close to death and, though I'm expected to minister to those I visit, the opposite has always been true. How? Because of the faith, hope and trust in Jesus as Lord and Saviour that believers have and the promise of eternal life that awaits them when this time on earth is over. But what's the basis for such a positive attitude towards death as shown by those who Jesus as Lord and Saviour? The raising of Lazarus gives us some answers because we learn how God can use 'unanswered' prayer, sickness, death and bereavement to strengthen the faith of His disciples; and make a positive attitude to death possible and, most importantly, to His glory.

**The Disciple's Faith in the Wisdom of Jesus, vs1-16:** If we look back to chapter 10:40, we see that Jesus and the disciples had left Jerusalem and gone to the Jordan River, a two-day journey from the city. Lazarus was a great friend of Jesus and lived with his two sisters Mary and Martha in the village of Bethany. When the message reached Jesus that Lazarus was sick, Jesus responded, vs4: *This sickness will not end in death. No. It is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it.* The interesting thing here is that Lazarus was already dead when Jesus received the message because it took two days for the messenger to get to the Jordan, and, by the time Jesus returned to Bethany, Lazarus had been dead four days but we'll see how this apparently tragic event strengthened the faith of those involved.

Vs5-6: *Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ... when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.* He doesn't say let's rush over before he dies. It's strange to believe that Jesus deliberately waited. We're so used to responding to critical illness with immediate action - you know, get them to the hospital, ambulance, flashing lights and so on. It seems incredible that Jesus, knowing that his dear friend was ill (or in this case dead) stayed where he was for two more days. It's worth remembering that Martha and Mary's hearts were broken over the loss of their brother. Jesus' presence with them would have been a tremendous comfort yet, knowing they needed his comfort, knowing they desired his presence, so much so they'd sent a messenger, he still delays. Why? Is the question we all ask, isn't it? Why? Because He loved them!

How often when we come to the Father for help, when our heart is breaking over something and we desperately need God to intervene - nothing happens! How many times have we cried out to God and said: *Things are so bad it can't get any worse. Lord, do something!* But you've received no answer? It's hard to wait in those circumstances. Sometimes, it's hard to believe.

Ronald Dunn has written a very helpful book about unanswered prayer called: *When Heaven Is Silent*. Have you ever experienced the heavens being silent in prayer - when there seems to be no response from God at all? It's happened to me several times. When it does happen, we always interpret God's delays as God's denials. We say: *He didn't answer my prayer. Prayer's a waste of time. It doesn't work. What's the use?* I've got to admit that I've reacted in the same way.

It's one of those difficult moments when God does things we don't understand which, at times, both baffle and discourage us. Matthew Henry: *The God of Israel, the Saviour, is sometimes a God that hides himself but never a God that is absent; sometimes in the dark, but never at a distance.* It's worth remembering those words in Isaiah 55:8: *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, and my ways are not your ways.* What this story tells us is that: ***a delay in answering is not a sign of God's indifference or his failure to hear, it's a sign of His love.*** The delay will actually help to make us stronger and is not designed to hurt us.

Imagine the reaction in Bethany as the messenger returned with the news that: *this sickness will not end in death* - when Lazarus had already been dead for two days? How do you think the sisters reacted? They must have started to have serious doubts about all that Jesus claimed to be. Two days pass and this time it's the disciples who are surprised as Jesus makes plans to go to Bethany, vs8: *But Rabbi, a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you and yet you are going to go back there?*

Have you noticed how many times Jesus confounds his disciples and how often they don't understand his actions? But, as ever, Jesus knows exactly what he is doing, he them, vs11-12: *Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to wake him up.* And they reply: *Lord, if he sleeps he will get better.* Jesus reminds them, vs14: *Lazarus is dead; and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe.* Let's go!

**Martha's Faith in the Authority of Jesus, vs17-27:** How many times must Martha have said: *Oh, if only Jesus were here.* She must have been shattered by the failure of Jesus to do what she asked. No doubt she felt the same as others who have prayed desperately that God would save a relative or a friend from death only to find that God has not answered in that way.

Martha hears that Jesus is on his way and she goes to meet him and greets Jesus with the phrase that must have been on her lips when Lazarus was sick, vs21: *If you had been here my brother would not have died.* I don't believe this is a word of condemnation. Martha is not saying: *Lord, why didn't you come sooner?* Rather, Martha's word is one of regret: *Lord, I wish you could have been here, because if you had, my brother would not have died.* Her faith in Jesus is such that she still believes he can help vs22: *But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.* Jesus replies, vs23: *Your brother will rise again.* Martha didn't fully understand what Jesus was saying and trots out the Orthodox Jewish belief about the resurrection on the last day, vs24. If she'd fully understood she would have responded: *How wonderful, Lord! That is exactly what I expected you to do now that you have come.*

Martha isn't expecting the immediate resurrection of her brother. She has yet to understand that Jesus can do more than heal the sick. What, then, is she looking for from Jesus? She's looking for the comfort and the release that God can give to a heart that is burdened and torn with grief -