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September memory verse Psalm 119:105 (NKJV)

¹⁰⁵ Your word *is* a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.

Commentary on John Chapter 11, by Chuck Smith 9.2.2020

Now we remember that John is carefully picking out certain incidents in the life of Jesus by which he might prove that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the living God, bringing people to a faith in Him, as such, that through that faith they might have the life of Christ imparted to them. And he testifies there were many other things that Jesus did which he did not record, but these he recorded that you might believe. And so John is writing from a slant, trying to encourage faith. At the end of the epistle, he again declared that if all of the things were written that should be written, all of the libraries could not hold the books that should be written on the subject of Jesus Christ. So, he is carefully choosing certain events, and he has been pointing out different types of miracles that Jesus did. And in our last study, we studied the miracle of the man who was born blind. And the proof that it offered, that no man can open the eyes of the blind, except he is from God.

Now, he comes to one of the most powerful proofs of the deity of Jesus Christ and of His Messiahship, as we come to the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

There was a certain man who was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany ([Jhn 11:1](#)),

Bethany is just a little village just over the top of the Mount of Olives on the eastern slope toward the Judean wilderness away from Jerusalem. It's just adjacent there to Jerusalem. And it is called here, interestingly enough,

the town of Mary ([Jhn 11:1](#))

Which gives us just a little insight into Mary, the sister of Lazarus. Mary was a special kind of a person that, when you think of Bethany, you think of Mary. She is that kind of a sociable person, so friendly, so sociable, that everybody knew her and it was just her town. It was just the town that Mary just sort of had captivated, no doubt, by her friendliness and sociability and all. It was just the town of Mary. You say, "Oh, Bethany? Yeah, that's the town of Mary." She was very devoted to Jesus, was sitting at His feet just drinking in and learning, when Martha, her sister, said, "Lord, make her come and

help me. It's not fair." And Jesus said, "She's chosen the better part, Martha. You're always so busy, wanting to make sure everything is set just right, and all, and everything is just so, but Mary has really chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her" ([Luke 10:40-42](#)). And, of course, she was the one that anointed the feet of Jesus with the costly perfumes. So the town of Mary--very special. I'm looking forward to meeting Mary. I'm certain that she's just a special kind of a person that you'll just like knowing. Her sister Martha was also a very outstanding person, but of a different temperament than was Mary.

(It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.) ([Jhn 11:2](#))

Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick ([Jhn 11:3](#)).

It is interesting to me that they did not make any demands that Jesus heal him. All they did was inform Him, "The one you love is sick." And they knew that Jesus would respond, respond to the need because of that relationship they had with Him. And so, they didn't feel it was necessary to tell Him how to respond or to demand the response. Just to declare, "Lord, the one you love is sick."

So, when Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby ([Jhn 11:4](#)).

Now, there was a purpose. God had allowed this sickness in order that God might demonstrate His power through Jesus Christ in the raising of Lazarus.

Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. And when he heard therefore that he was sick, he abode for two days still in the same place where he was ([Jhn 11:5-6](#)).

So John felt it was necessary to point out that Jesus really loved them. It wasn't a lack of concern, but there was a deliberate waiting of Jesus for two days. At this point, Jesus was down at the Jordan River, about twenty miles from Bethany. And in those days, you figured with travelling with a group that you make about ten miles a day. And that was just an average day's journey. So, just about every ten miles along wherever you were going you would come either to a village, or if there were no villages in that span, then they would have the inns, the enclosures where you could stay. And inasmuch as it's pretty barren between Bethany and Jericho, no villages at all, about halfway there is an inn. This is what was quite common in those times. If no villages, then the establishing of an inn, so you make your ten miles. Your goal is to get the ten miles to the end where you go into the courtyard.

And an inn isn't like a hotel or a motel, either one. All it is is a walled-in area with a little house where the innkeeper stays, and there is a well, usually, in the center of the courtyard. But you could just get next to the wall and be sheltered from the wind. It was

just a place to spend the night, get water. They provided no food. Just a shelter was all that it was, not even a covered shelter.

And so, being at the Jordan River, He was a two-day journey from Bethany. So they sent the message to Jesus. It took two days for the messenger to get from Bethany to the Jordan River. And after He received the message, He stayed two more days at the Jordan River before He began His two-day journey back to Bethany. So, you have about six days involved here. Or, if the messenger, say, ran all the way in one day, the fact that He stayed an extra two days and then made the two-day journey, you've got between five and six days from the time that the message went out to Jesus and Jesus' arrival at Bethany. But we notice that it was a deliberate delay on the part of Jesus. And during this deliberate delay, Jesus knew exactly what was going on in Bethany. "So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed for two days at the same place there at the Jordan River."

After that he said to his disciples, Let us go into Judea again ([Jhn 11:7](#)).

That is, into the area of Jerusalem.

His disciples said unto him, Master, the last time you were there the Jews sought to stone thee ([Jhn 11:8](#));

You remember, it was when Jesus was there and they said, "Tell us plainly if You're the Messiah." And Jesus again asserted His relationship with the Father, and they took up stones to stone Him. So they said, "Hey, Lord, the last time you were there, they tried to stone You. What do You want to go back for?" So,

Jesus said, Are there not twelve hours in a day? ([Jhn 11:9](#))

That is, twelve hours of light. And He's talking about what we call, well, the daytime, twelve hours of light. So, just the daytime.

If any man walk in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbles, because there is no light in him ([Jhn 11:9-10](#)).

So, it's "I've got to do My work while it is yet day" is what He is basically saying.

These things he said: and after that he said unto them, Our friend Lazarus is sleeping; but if I go, I may awake him out of his sleep ([Jhn 11:11](#)).

Now, what happens to a child of God is different from what happens to a person who is not a child of God in what we call death. And because there is a vast difference, the Bible did not use the term *death* to signify the departing of a believer's soul from his body. They just called it sleep. You remember when Jesus went to heal Jarius' daughter, and when He got to the house, the people were all wailing because she had

died. And Jesus said, "She's not dead, she's only sleeping." And they laughed Him to scorn, and so He put them out. Paul, in writing to the Thessalonians, said, "Now, concerning those that are asleep in Christ; I write to you that you sorrow not as those who have no hope" ([1 Thessalonians 4:13](#)). And so, it was a term that was used, and yet, not an accurate term, because there are those who have taken the idea of sleep then and created a doctrine of soul sleep. Your soul is asleep until the resurrection according to the soul sleep doctrine. But the Bible does not teach that. As we pointed out this morning, the Bible teaches that to be absent from this body is to be present with the Lord. So, in order that we might distinguish, though, the difference between a believer and a non-believer, as far as death is concerned; to the believer the term *sleep* was often used. And Jesus used it here of Lazarus. He said, "He is sleeping." Now, His disciples did not understand Him, and they thought sleeping like we think of sleeping. So, they said, "Well, if he's sleeping he ought to be getting better."

Jesus was speaking of his death. So Jesus said unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent that ye may believe ([Jhn 11:13-15](#));

Now, as John said, these things that he recorded were recorded in order that they might believe. And so Jesus is now again calling upon His works as a witness to His deity. "Believest thou not that I am in the Father and the Father in me, or else believe me for the very works' sake" ([John 14:11](#)). "The works that I do," He said, "they do testify of Me." Now, "I'm glad for your sakes I wasn't there..." Because had He been there, He would have healed him from his sickness. That would have been a glorious miracle, but He wanted even a more glorious miracle. He waited until Lazarus had died. In fact, He waited until he was buried. And they usually bury the person the same day, because they really didn't practice embalming in Israel to any great extent at all. And they would bury the person the same day that they died. And so, Jesus said, "I'm glad for your sakes that I wasn't there that you might believe when you see this miracle. You might really know and believe who I am."

So, "Nevertheless, let us go unto him." Now Thomas probably didn't understand completely what was going on at this point and felt he had to say something, and usually when you say something not knowing really what to say, you say something stupid. Someone said, "It's better to keep your mouth shut and let people think that you're a fool than to open it and dispel all their doubts."

Thomas, which is called Didymus, said unto his fellow disciples, Let us go also, that we may die with him ([Jhn 11:16](#)).

Now, he probably...you remember they said, "Lord, why do you want to go back there? The last time you were there they tried to stone you." And he's probably saying, "Lord, it's fool-hardy for you to go back there. They're going to kill you." And so, he's saying, "Well, if He wants to go back, well, let's all go back and die with Him." In other words, "We're heading towards our death," in a sense.

When Jesus came, he found that he had been in the grave for four days already. Now Bethany was near to Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off ([Jhn 11:17-18](#)):

A furlong is about an eighth of a mile, so it's just about two miles from Jerusalem over to Bethany.

And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house ([Jhn 11:19-20](#)).

Now, Bethany is up near the top of the Mount of Olives on the eastern slope, and you can see from Bethany all the way down to the Dead Sea. And you can see the road coming from Jericho for miles, as it winds on up the hill towards Jerusalem. So, as you're looking out from Bethany, you can see them coming from a long distance. And so, they saw a company of people coming and they realized it must be Jesus and the disciples. And so, Martha left the people that had gathered to mourn and she came out on the path and met Jesus before He ever got to Bethany.

And then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died ([Jhn 11:21](#)).

Bitterness in her voice, no doubt, disappointment at least. "Lord, where were you? Why didn't you respond?" It was really sort of a rebuke of Jesus. "Lord, if you would have been here, my brother would not have died. Why didn't you come, Lord, when we called you? Don't you realize it's been six days?"

But I know, that even now, whatsoever you will ask of God, God will give it to you ([Jhn 11:22](#)).

Now there's a tremendous expression of faith, but I don't think that Martha was anticipating the resurrection of her brother. But yet, here is a very remarkable statement of faith, and maybe a hint, "Lord, you know, maybe--who knows? Whatsoever You ask of the Father, I know He'll give it to You." And it may be that she is suggesting at this point that He raise him from the dead. However, when they came to the tomb and He said, "Roll back the stone," they said, "Oh, he's been there for four days. He smells by now." But it could be that Martha somehow had that kind of faith, "Lord, I know that anything you ask the Father, He will give it to You."

And Jesus said unto her, Your brother is going to rise again. And Martha said unto him, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day. And Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: and he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And he who lives and believes in me shall never die. Believest thou this? ([Jhn 11:23-26](#))

A very radical statement that Jesus would not dare to make unless He were the Son of God. This statement is so radical, no man could dare make this statement without

immediately being classified as a lunatic, a madman. For someone to stand before you and say, "I'm the resurrection and the life. If you live and believe in me, you'll never die." The guy's got to be diluted, or he has to be the Son of God. And in this case, He was the Son of God. And then Jesus said, "Believest thou this?"

Jesus always demanded a "yes" or a "no." You could not be neutral. He said, "He who is not for Me is against me. You're not neutral. If you don't have a positive attitude towards Me, then you're against Me." Now, when He said, "Do you believe this?" you can either answer "yes" or "no." "Yes, I believe that; no, I don't believe that." And you can't move to a middle position. There is none. I either believe it or I don't believe it. It's a radical statement that marks Him as the Son of God, or as a raving madman. And you believe it or not. If you believe it, then you have the hope of eternal life; if you don't believe it, you have no hope for eternal life. There is no other hope, there is no other way. And so Jesus challenged Martha on her faith, and she responded,

Yes, Lord: I believe that thou art the Messiah, the Son of God, which was to come into the world ([Jhn 11:27](#)).

Now, because of this statement of Jesus, we realize that He said in the previous chapter concerning, "My sheep hear My voice," verse 27, "and I know them and they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish." Now, you see how inconsistent it would be to say that someone who had eternal life died. It's a total inconsistency of terms. "Oh, he has eternal life. Yes, he died yesterday." No, if you have eternal life, you can't die. And this is the record that God has given unto us life, eternal life. This life is in the Son, and he who has the Son has life. "I'm the resurrection and the life."

So then, what happens to the child of God that we say died? What has happened is that he has his spirit, which is the real me, has moved out of the tent, the temporary abode that God has made for my spirit, into the house, the building of God not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. This tent in which I am living is only a temporary measure for me. You never think of a tent as a permanent residence. It's always transient; we're moving on.

It's interesting that in the Holy Land today there are still the Bedouins, a nomadic people who live still in their tents, and they move their tents from place to place. They keep their sheep and their goats and all, and they'll let them sort of work out a pasture area and then they'll fold up their tents--the ladies will, the men don't know how to handle tents--and they will move to another place where the ladies will set the tents up again. They are nomadic people. Now, it is also interesting that the Bedouins are, some of them, beginning to settle in areas, and when they start to settle in an area, when you know that the Bedouins have decided this is where they're going to settle, they move from tents into little shacks that they make. They start to build a houses.

And one day there's going to be a metamorphosis, for we shall be changed in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye. For this corruption must put on incorruption, this

mortal must put on immortality. I'm going to get a new body; I'm not going to die. Oh, people may say, "Oh, Chuck Smith died." No, not so. I've just moved into the new body, the building of God not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. So, the metamorphosis, I have the new body now designed to exist in a whole new environment. And I dwell now, as David said, in the house of the Lord forever.

So, "He who lives and believes in me," Jesus said, "shall never die. They shall not perish. I have given to them eternal life, eternal LIFE." And it is impossible that one with eternal could die, else it isn't eternal life. All it is is a change for the better, to be sure. From the tent to the house. From the temporary to the permanent. From the restricted to the unrestricted. It'll be fascinating indeed for us to discover what that new life and body will be like with Jesus.

"Do you believe this?" Jesus said. Martha said, "Yes, Lord: I believe."

And when she had said this, she went ahead, and she called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master has come, and he's asked for you. So as soon as Mary heard that, she arose quickly, and came to Jesus. Jesus was still at that place outside of the village, where Martha had met him. And the Jews which were with her in the house, who were comforting her, when they saw Mary rise up hastily and going out, they followed her, saying, Oh, she's probably going to weep at the tomb. Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother would not have died ([Jhn 11:28-32](#)).

So, He's getting the accusation now from the other sister. You see, Martha said the same thing, "Lord, where were You? Why didn't You respond? If You'd only have been here, things would have been different." And He's getting it again now from Mary.

And when Jesus therefore saw her weeping ([Jhn 11:33](#)),

He realized the grief, the pain she had gone through, and He loved her, He loved Martha, and He saw the pain. The pain of human limitations.

Jesus groaned in his own spirit, and was troubled ([Jhn 11:33](#)),

It bothered Him to see the pain of humanity.

And he said, Where have you laid him? They said, Come and see. Jesus wept ([Jhn 11:34-35](#)).

Now, there are those who suppose that Jesus wept, they say, because His friend Lazarus was dead. That's ridiculous. Why would He weep because Lazarus was dead? He knew that He was going to raise him from the dead in a few minutes. Don't you remember that Jesus said to His disciples down there at the Jordan River, "I must go to wake him out of his sleep"? And He said, "This is happened that the Son of God may be glorified, and I go that I may awake him out of his sleep." And then He said, "He's dead.

I'm going to raise him from the dead." So, those commentators who say that Jesus was weeping because His friend was dead haven't really read the whole text. He was weeping when He saw the pain and the sorrow of humanity, when He saw the pain that His friends Mary and Martha were experiencing as a result of death. And He wept for their grief. Jesus is moved by our infirmities; we have such a great High Priest, who is touched by our weaknesses. He sees us in our frailties. He sees us in our griefs. And He's touched by our feelings of grief and sorrow, by our weaknesses. He's just a loving and compassionate Lord, and One who is moved by our own sorrow and grief. And so, He wept for them.

It is interesting that in death, in reality we usually weep not for the person who is gone, but for those that are left.

Jesus wept not for Lazarus. You don't weep for the dead if they are in the Lord. If they're not in the Lord, then that's a different thing. "Them we sorrow as those who have no hope."

Then said the Jews, Oh, look how he loved him! ([Jhn 11:36](#))

They misunderstood completely His weeping too.

And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind ([Jhn 11:37](#)),

Referring to the last notable miracle there in Jerusalem,

Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man would not have died? And Jesus again just groaning in himself came to the grave. It was a cave, and there was a stone there upon it. And Jesus said, Take away the stone ([Jhn 11:37-39](#)).

Now Martha, you remember, said, "Lord, I know that anything you ask God, He would do." And it was Martha who said,

Oh, Lord, by this time he stinks: he's been dead for four days. Jesus said unto her, Didn't I tell you, that, if you would believe, you would see the glory of God? So they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, Father, I thank you that you have heard me. And I know that you always hear me: but because of the people which stand by I'm saying it, that they may believe that you have sent me ([Jhn 11:39-42](#)).

"Believest thou not that I am in the Father and the Father in Me....the works that I do I do not of Myself, but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works. Believe Me, or else believe for the works' sake," Jesus said. Now He's giving another great proof that the Father is in Him and He is in the Father, that He is one with the Father. He's offering

now another great proof. "And so, I'm only saying this, Father, not for My sake, but for the sake of the people that are here; that they may believe that You have sent Me."

And when he had thus spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth ([Jhn 11:43](#)).

One commentator said that had He just called "Come forth," the whole graveyard would have been resurrected. So He said, "Lazarus, come forth!"

And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes; and his face was bound with a napkin. Jesus said unto them, Loose him, and let him go. Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him. But some of them went their way to the Pharisees, and told them what Jesus had done. And so, there gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and they said, What are we going to do? for this man is doing many miracles. And if we let him alone, all of the people will believe on him; and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and our nation ([Jhn 11:44-48](#)).

Now, John gives us here a little bit of the insight to the conspiracy to put Jesus to death. It was that these religious leaders were fearing their position. You know, "We won't be the big shots any more. We'll loose our jobs. And we'll loose our position. What are we going to do? We've got to do something. If we don't, our jobs are threatened."

And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, You know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, that the whole nation perish not ([Jhn 11:49-50](#)).

Now, John is saying he didn't understand what he was saying fully. He was the high priest, and because of that position, he was now prophesying that one man should die for the nation--a very interesting prophecy. The high priest later offered a prophecy when Jesus was hanging on the cross. He said, "Others He saved, Himself He cannot save." Very true! If He saved himself, He couldn't save others...you can't do both in His position. Had Jesus come down off the cross, He could not save us. So he said, "Others He saved, Himself He cannot save." Very interesting statement, and yet, very true because he was a high priest speaking prophetically. Here now, speaking prophetically as the high priest, "Don't you realize it's necessary that one man die that the whole nation perish not?" Die for the people in order that the whole nation perish not.

And so, John points out that he was not really saying this of himself:

but being the high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation; And not for the nation only, but that also that he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad. Then from that day forth they took council together to put him to death. Therefore Jesus walked no more openly among the Jews; but went from there unto the country near to the wilderness, unto a city called Ephraim, and there he stayed with his disciples ([Jhn 11:51-54](#)).

So Jesus went back down towards the Jordan River, did not stay around Jerusalem after the raising of Lazarus.

And the Jews' Passover was nigh at hand: and many went out of the country up to Jerusalem before the passover, to purify themselves ([Jhn 11:55](#)).

Now, it was necessary to go through the purification rites in order to participate in the Passover. And you would go up to Jerusalem and you'd take a vow before the Lord and you'd go through these purification rites.

You remember when Paul returned to Jerusalem, there was a feast coming that Paul was desiring to get to Jerusalem for this feast. And so, when he arrived, because he wanted to participate in the Jewish feast, he was going through the purification rites. And that's when someone from Asia spotted him and said, "Hey, isn't that the guy that's been preaching to the Gentiles everywhere?" And they raised a big ruckus over Paul when they saw him in the temple going through purification rites. And so, many of the Jews would go early in order that they might go through these purification rites, in order that they might participate then in the feast.

And so,

They sought for Jesus, and they were talking among themselves, as they were standing in the temple, [and they said,] Do you think he's going to come to the feast? Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a commandment, that, if any man knew where he was, they should let them know, that they might arrest him ([Jhn 11:56-57](#)).