

The Lord of Life Part 1

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

Date: 03 September 2023

Preacher: Kevin Smith, Senior Pastor

[0 : 00] That's a beautiful song, is it not? What a wonderful hymn. One that's a classic, and sometimes the classics are taken for granted.

I hope you sang that and felt it in your soul. Amen. Just want to acknowledge my brother and sister-in-law, Sandy's sister, Joan, and her husband, David, you might have known they've been worshipping with us a little bit.

They actually have moved down to near, closer to Atlanta, sadly, than to us, but they're close enough. And so we are so glad to have them nearby once again.

We church planted together in the D.C. area, so it's glad that, and they get to visit. Now we get to see them often, so it's so cool. And today is their anniversary. Ah, L'Amour, L'Amour.

Congratulations. I believe Kyle and Brittany have anniversary this week, too. Ten years. I think they're out of town, but if you see them next week, give them a shout out.

[1 : 20] They got ten years. And who? And Bruce and Cynthia are probably a little bit more than ten years. Five-zero? Get out of here. You go.

Yes. Yes. Amen. Hope y'all taking notes. This is it. This is examples here.

You can do it. Let's pray. Father, thank you. We rejoice in the gift of marriage as you gave it to us. And thank you for those who are celebrating anniversaries today. So grateful. What a joy to know that you have been faithful to them and to all of us who trust in you as we give ourselves in the covenant of marriage.

Thank you that Christ and His church are the great example that we follow. And thank you for your spirit that lives in us so that we can maintain and keep our vows and do more, enjoy one another for years and years to come.

[2 : 27] That is your model. That is your method. And we praise you for it. Father, we want to lift up to you so much suffering in the world. You can't help but remember and think of our family in Maui, the fires, such loss of life, over a hundred people.

Will you just comfort their families, Lord, that they are grieving something that could have been prevented, but Lord was not.

And, oh God, have mercy upon them. Please be with them. Even as they seek to rebuild their homes and their lives, be with them. Be with our family in Florida, Lord, as Hurricane Idalias came through last week and wreaked some havoc.

Thank you that the loss of life was negligible, it seems, I think. We haven't heard any reports. But, Lord, the loss of property and just the terror of living through something like that.

Oh, will you comfort these people? Comfort them. Use your people. Thank you that we have churches in that area. Lord, use our churches to comfort and strengthen those communities that have been struck.

[3 : 45] Lord, may there be help, Lord, from even our government to help rebuild those towns and cities that have been hit the hardest.

Be with them, Lord. Oh, Lord, there are so many, so many who are hurting gun shootings. And, Lord, we've had over 400 mass shootings in this country this year.

How, Lord? Oh, God. Will you help us? Will you deliver us from the violence and the hopelessness that leads to it sometimes, or the greed that leads to it?

Oh, God. The anger, the pride that leads to taking another person's life. Even sometimes injustice that leads to it.

Oh, God. Will you help your people? Help us, Lord, to be agents of justice and mercy to our community, to our city. And all those who are suffering, Lord, may they find looking at us, they see the hope of Jesus.

[4 : 51] Help us to reflect hope, to speak hope and life. So, in that way, Lord, bless your word. May it go forth with that power that only you can give it to transform and give hope and life to those in the midst of life, in the midst even of suffering.

Speak to those who are hurting today in a profound way for your glory. Use your unworthy servant, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. John chapter 11, we're looking at verses 1 through 27. I'm going to read just a few verses to kind of whet your appetite. So, guys, I'm not going to read everything just for the sake of time. But let's start off. Verse 1. Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and his 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 sister 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 in it.

[6 : 09] I'm jumping down now to verse 17, so keep up back there if you can. Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had been in the tomb four days. 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 to meet him. But Mary remained seated in the house.

Martha said to Jesus, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 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, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.

Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.

[7 : 07] And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. 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.

Man, that is the word of the Lord. Please be seated. And thanks to you once again, praise team, for leading us in wonderful worship.

Thank you. I want you to know that sin has two of the most ugly and ill-behaved children the world has ever seen.

I said sin now. Not you, sin. These children are twins. Their names are suffering and death.

Death is the oldest and gave birth to triplets. Spiritual death, physical death, and eternal death.

Suffering, however, gave birth to so many kids, we can't even count them.

[8 : 19] Illness, aging, war, injustice, pain of all sorts. Poverty, COVID, hurricane Edalia, Maui wildfires, etc.

Suffering and death are the great enemies of humanity, being the children of sin. Neither were part of God's creation, originally.

Both are the result of sin entering our world through humanity's rebellion against God. But nobody wants to hear that. People will say, I wasn't there.

It's not my fault. I haven't done anything wrong. I'm a good person. Well, my loved one is a good person. Why do we have to suffer like this or like that?

Why do we have to die before our time? The only thing people really want to know is, how do we get rid of suffering and death?

[9 : 31] That's really what we want. How do we minimize them at least if we can't get rid of them totally? How do we minimize suffering and death? You see, if your God was really good, he would do something.

You see, the obvious conclusion to such questions assume that suffering and death, as horrible as they are, they have no meaning and have no purpose.

Is that true for you, Christian? Do you view suffering and death as having no meaning and no purpose? Do you really believe your suffering and even your death matters?

Do you really believe that? In chapter 10, Jesus told us that as his sheep, he gives us abundant and eternal life.

It's hard to believe that, isn't it? Because life is so full of suffering and death. He gives us abundant and death. He gives us abundant life.

[10:47] Really? But then chapter 11 comes along and he proves it. Chapter 11 and chapter 10 kind of go together.

And you got excited. And you got excited. I heard you when I read that great I am statement of Jesus. I am the resurrection and the life.

You got excited. That's the key thought in this passage. We're going to take the chapter in two parts, I think, today. Part one today. Because this chapter is about life.

It's about life. It's about life and all of his nitty-grittiness. It's about life on the ground. Not up here somewhere where you're floating in the clouds.

But no, the Bible is real. The Bible is about life on the ground. Life in a fallen world with a God who is greater than anything. So, the first thing I want you to notice is, well, the idea here is that Jesus is the Lord of life.

[11:54] And so, each point is going to bite off of that in some way. First of all, the Lord of life has purpose in our suffering. Verses 1 through 4.

Remember, I read them. You got your Bible in front of you, I hope. So, I'm going to just hope that you remember when you're looking at it, okay? So, follow me. See, our Lord knows this family personally.

Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. He seems to know this family personally. He's been a guest in their home before. We know this because Mary is the one who sat at the Lord's feet, listening to His Word, while her sister Martha was in the kitchen with the biscuits and the gravy and the pork chops making meals.

Making dinner. And she got upset because Martha wasn't helping her. Mary wasn't helping her. You remember that story, don't you? So, He's been to this house before. We see in the passage that the town where they live, Bethany, is actually near Jerusalem, about a couple miles.

So, it stands to reason whenever Jesus had to go to Jerusalem for the festivals, that He would stop by their place and enjoy a time of refreshment and just fellowship.

[13:12] Verse 2 says that Mary did one of the great acts of devotion to the Lord. She anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped His feet with her hair.

That's powerful. That was likely her dowry. Part of her dowry anyway. And she used it because it would have been expensive. And she uses it to display her devotion to Jesus.

Can't go through all of that right now, but the text mentions it. Mary was devoted to Christ. Martha loved Jesus.

Lazarus and Jesus were tight. There was a friendship there. Close family friend.

So but so that when the sisters sent word that Lazarus was sick, they simply described him in verse 3. They didn't say his name.

[14:16] He whom you love is ill. Do you feel that? He whom you love. They knew Jesus would know who they meant.

They didn't even ask Jesus to come. Notice the text. They didn't ask Him to come. They knew He would. Application time.

Do you understand, child of God, that you are whom the Lord loves? Do you see yourself that way? Do you understand that you too are whom the Lord loves?

And that is the thing you must hang on to in times of distress and suffering and certainly in death. Don't let go of that, brothers and sisters.

You are whom the Lord loves. He declared His love by dying for you on a cross and drawing you to see that as your personal encounter.

[15:27] He drew you to Himself. You don't believe because you just happen to believe. Jesus drew you to believe. Otherwise, you wouldn't.

We've seen this before. I won't stay there. He loves you. And that's what the enemy and the world and even our own fallenness, the Bible calls the flesh, will attack when you're suffering.

You start asking these questions. Does God not love me? If Jesus really loved me, how could He allow this tragedy to take place in my life?

See, that's where you get attacked. If He loved me, I wouldn't be going through this. That this text is clear.

That even in the face of an untimely death, Jesus loves His people. It's right there. He loves us. He loves you.

[16 : 34] In the face of your suffering and pain, don't listen to the world or sometimes don't even listen to your feelings. Listen to the word of the Lord.

Jesus is expressing that love, His love for them in a way they could not understand at that moment, but it was still love. Jesus, even the text, Jesus speaks here.

He says, this illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God so that the Son of God may be glorified in it.

In verse 5, Jesus loved Mary and her sister and Lazarus. In the face of their pain, there's something at work here that goes, that's more important than their comfort.

There's something at work. All right. All right. All right. All right. All right. All right. All right. There's something at work here. All right. And that's something in the times of hardship and suffering, something, that's something that is at work through the love of God is the glory of God.

[17 : 47] It is for the glory of God that the Son of God might be glorified. Family, to be a vehicle of God's glory as His child is an expression of divine love.

It is a privilege to be, to have the glory of God manifest in your life. When the apostles were beaten in Acts chapter, I think it's chapter 4, when the apostles were beaten for their faith in Jesus, the Bible says they went away rejoicing because they had been counted worthy to suffer for His name. You see? The glory of God was more important than their comfort. That doesn't mean they liked it. That doesn't mean they went away going, I'm so glad we got beaten after death.

Let's not get crazy, right? But let's see the bigger picture. And that's what tends to happen.

Sometimes we get—I know I do. I get nearsighted.

And I can't—the big picture is right there in front of me, but I'm looking at the minutia. I'm looking at what I'm going through, and I'm not thinking about the kingdom. I'm not thinking about the glory of God.

[19 : 05] I'm thinking about Kevin Smith. And Kevin Smith hurting. He don't like hurting. I'm not a masochist now. I don't like pain. Hello. But the glory of God is what the universe and even our suffering as God's people is all about.

Psalms 19.1, right? The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork. The heavens! I mean, look up at the heavens. What do you see?

I mean, John Piper is helpful here. He points out that all that wasted space in the universe to house one planet with life made in His image.

Why does God—all that space—he would think He would have put—this would be Star Trek, right?

And we have Vulcans out there and Klingons and Cardassians.

You know, but no, it's just us, y'all. I know some people want to believe, but no, it's just us. God is making a point. He is manifesting His glory in all the vastness of the universe so that you and I can go, wow!

[20 : 18] Oh my God! You know, we can realize how small we are and how vast and glorious and powerful and beautiful our God is.

I'm enjoying—I love the Hubble, that new telescope. What's it called now? Somebody help me out. The one they lost in the space. It's better—it's even better than the Hubble. Anybody know what it's called? I forget. Huh? Wham.

Say it again. Wham. Wham. Thank you. Wham. Wham. That thing is showing us stuff. Woo! Have you seen those pictures of the black holes and solar flares and planets, galaxies?

God. That's all I got to say. God. The heavens declare His glory. Points to His Maker. His glory is greater than we can imagine, and we're smaller than we think.

In the movie Interstellar, I got a few movie quotes and a few book quotes. We'll see how far we get to that. I got a few—I love the movie Interstellar. Anybody see that with Matthew McConaughey?

[21 : 26] Okay, thank you. There's a—he has the best quote in that movie. It's so profound. Here's what he said. He said, We used to look up at the sky and wonder at our place in the stars.

Now we just look down and worry about our place in the dirt. He was an—he was a NASA flyer at that point in the movie.

You see, when we lose the wonder of God's creation, we end up then focusing on our experience. We end up looking down from the glory to the dirt to which we will return. And we get ugly and angry.

Humanity was made by God to seek, view, enjoy, and display the glory of God who created the heavens and the earth. If we reject his reality and glory, we end up giving ourselves to lesser

glories, lesser gods.

[22 : 37] And they just can't satisfy us in the face of suffering and death. Your cause that you love so much, your political party, your favorite whatever, will not satisfy you in the case of suffering and especially when you face death.

Do you no good? You need something better. Glory. Glory. I use that word, but it speaks of the revelation of the majesty, honor, splendor, beauty, greatness, transcendence of God made visible. It's a big word. It's a big word. When you look—when you see the—when you see the glory of God in the Bible, a lot of times, light. It's just light.

And folk are falling down. You just can't—but his actions, what he does reveals how he saves his people, how he blesses his people.

That reveals his glory, and supremely that glory is seen in Jesus. The image of the invisible God. The manifestation of his glory is Jesus.

[23 : 57] He comes, and what do we see? Beauty, beauty, kindness, compassion, greatness, power, love. The glory of God.

Paul bursts out in praise over this in 1 Timothy 1.17. Not on the screen. Let's hear it. He bursts out in praise. To the king of the ages. To the king of the ages. Immortal, invisible, the only God.

Be honor and glory forever and ever and ever. Amen. He bursts out. He's writing a letter to his pastoral associate, and he just has to stop.

Because he's talking about the gospel. He's talking about Jesus. And he has to just stop for a minute and say, praise break. In the life of God's people who follow a suffering Savior, part of our suffering is so that people around us can see God's power and majesty in us.

Watch this. Watch this. As we trust Jesus in the midst of our pain. You see, he's not glorified if we're not trusting him.

[25 : 15] Without faith is impossible to please God. Faith is God just wants you to trust him. He's not asking you to do great things. He's not asking you to, you know, to be the next apostle.

Not saying he won't use you profoundly, but that's not what he's calling. He's just asking you to do one thing. Trust me. Now, trust starts here, but it has action.

But trust me. Second Corinthians 1.4, when talking about comfort, he says, speaking of God the Father, who comforts us in all of our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction.

With the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. Tongue twister, I know. But I think you got it. I think you can follow it. God is at work for his glory in our suffering.

And when he comforts you in the midst of it, so that then through you, he can get greater glory as you comfort others with that same comfort. But if I don't trust him, I don't experience the comfort and I have nothing to give you.

[26 : 26] We see his love and purpose.

We see his love and purpose as more important than his comfort. His love and purpose are for his glory.

And we say, Lord, come on, the old folks will say, have your way. Have your way with me. I'm yours. I'm yours.

Just give me strength to make it through. Just don't leave me alone. That's what I'm asking Jesus. Just don't leave me alone. If I got to go through this, don't leave me by myself.

Because you know if you leave me by myself, what I might do. And it won't be good. Even though we trust him imperfectly, but by his great grace, God still gives glory because he's working in you.

[27 : 33] The Gospel Transformation Bible says something pretty neat. He says, it says, the gospel is a story of our God doing all things well, not all things easily.

His name is Abba Father, but this does not mean that he leads his children in a life of complacent ease and comfort. That's a good quote. The second thing I want you to notice is that the Lord of life's timing in our suffering is not our timing.

Oh, boy. I had to say it, didn't I? The Lord's timing is seen in two ways in this passage. Timing as far as Lazarus' suffering, of course, but more importantly, timing for his own suffering.

You see, this will be his final trip to Jerusalem. For now, it is time for him to die. Chapter 12 begins the last week of the Lord's life. Chapter 12 of John.

John covers the last week of Jesus' life more intensely than any other Gospel writer. His disciples are shocked. If you have it in front of me. His disciples are shocked that he wants to go back.

[28 : 44] Because they don't know God's timing. See, we're always shocked about God's timing. We don't know it. So we go, oh, what are you doing now? Are you serious? They're really upset.

They say to him, Lord, don't you remember? Kevin Smith paraphrased. Lord, don't you remember chapter 10? They tried to stone you and arrest you.

Now you want to go back there again? You want to show up in the very place where these folk are trying to, they got a contract out on you, Lord? Something wrong with him, Peter?

I mean, they didn't get it. In verses 9 and 10, Jesus responds. He says, listen, listen, are there not 12 hours in a day?

If anyone walks in a day, he does not stumble because he sees the light of this world. Remember, he is the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles because the light is not in him.

[29 : 46] Jesus is simply telling them, he got work to do. He's got work to do. He's got a job. He's on a mission. And the daylight is the time of his working where his light is shining for the world to see.

And he's got to get going. He's got a destiny to fulfill. He knows this. And he's telling them, while I am the light of the world, I got to do this. And by the way, as long as I'm working, you're going to work too.

And so he's telling them, my timing is not your timing. But then it gets more personal.

Because what about Lazarus? You see, he does not go to Lazarus right away. The Bible says he waited two more days. When the letter comes, he whom you love is sick.

Jesus says, got it. He even says, it's not unto death. It's for the glory of God and that I might be glorified in it. And then he sits down and has dinner.

[30 : 56] Then he wakes up and maybe heals a few more people. Goes to sleep that night. Wakes up the next day. I mean, he waited two extra days.

Do you understand what Mary and Martha were thinking at this point? Where is he? We know where he's located. It don't take that long for him to get here.

Why is he not here? Hmm. Martha, when Jesus finally shows up, she's like, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died.

Timing. Jesus even says to him about, you know, he's trying to explain, he's talking to his disciples. And they say, he says, listen, Lazarus is asleep, y'all.

And they said, well, Lord, if he's taking a nap, you're going to get better. Jesus waited until he died. He says, then he says to them, he does a, oh, here we go.

[32 : 06] I told you I got some quotes. He, he, he, I can't help it. He did a Bones McCoy moment. That Star Trek, the original Star Trek, Dr. McCoy. He did a Dr. McCoy.

Dr. McCoy in every episode, the original Star Trek, every episode, he would say, he's dead, Jim. Every episode, DeForest Kelly, I saw an interview with DeForest Kelly, who played that.

He hated it. He got sick of it. He said, every episode, he's dead, Jim. He said, I would change it around. Jim, he's dead. Dead, he is Jim. I mean, he got Yoda on us.

I mean, so, so, so, so Jesus actually looks at them and says, he's dead, guys. I mean, he's dead.

And they're going, dead? What kind of timing is that?

What kind of timing is that, y'all? Is that love? Is that compassion? He's dead.

[33 : 10] And then he tells them, because, see, the point here is the Lord of life builds our faith and our suffering. That's the point on this. Because he says to them right away, verse 15, for your sake, I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe.

But let us go to him. What was the point? Jesus said, I was glad I was not there. Because I'm going to do something in your faith on this one.

You see, your faith is a problem here. I'm going to help you with your faith. I'm going to do something with your faith. I'm going to build your faith through the suffering here. I'm going to build your faith. It wasn't even their suffering.

It was Lazarus and his sister's suffering. But I'm going to build your faith through their suffering.

Wow. See, your suffering may not only be about your faith growing, but it might be about the faith of others growing.

Not just comfort, faith. See, as God works in your life bringing healing and help, others will be encouraged to trust Jesus too. Jesus will build their faith through others' suffering, this family's suffering.

[34 : 26] It is interesting that the man later known as Doubting Thomas says some deep faith here, though a bit pessimistic. In verse 16, he says simply, Let us also go that we may die with him.

See, they think Jesus is going back to be executed. They don't know that's the plan. They don't know the plan. God don't always tell you the plan.

But he does say enough for you to trust him in the midst of your pain. But you're not going to know the plan. I hate to tell you that.

Maybe on the other side of glory, you'll see it all. We'll see it all. But he's not going to tell you why your business failed. He's not going to tell you why you got cancer. He's not going to give you the big, all the details of the plan.

What he will say to you is this. Trust me. I love you. I will never leave you nor forsake you. This life is not the end.

[35 : 38] Though outwardly you are wasting away, yet inwardly you're being renewed day by day. For these light and momentary troubles are achieving for you an eternal weight of glory that far outweighs the trouble.

Come on, somebody. See, that's the word of the Lord. See, he's going to give you his word. The question is, will you trust his word? Will you believe his word?

Do you know his word? The greatest study you can make is the word of the Lord. I don't care if you're getting a PhD in astrophysics.

If you don't have a PhD in the word, you are zero. We should all be seeking it. And I don't mean a literal PhD, y'all. You don't have to become a theologian like that.

But brothers and sisters, the word is where he gives us his promises. And in their case, he is speaking his word right to them face to face.

[36 : 44] And the question is, will we believe it? You see, if we believe his word, we'll find our faith being strengthened in our suffering. If we believe his word, we'll find that though his timing is not your timing, you'll be at peace because you know he's always right on time.

If you believe his word, you will find that in some way God wants to get glory in the midst of your suffering, in the midst of your pain. And he wants to glorify himself.

See, you'll know that. See, you'll know these things. And then you'll know how to pray. Because even when you know, sometimes it's hard to hang on. Come on, somebody. Even when I know the word of God, I sometimes need the, I need the spirit of God to help me hold on.

But I'm so glad that Jesus is holding on to me. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. So what are you holding on to right now?

Whatever you're going through, and most of us are going through something, some of us are going through things that are really tough. Really tough. And I'm not minimizing your pain in any way.

[37 : 59] All I'm saying to you is that if you belong to Jesus, he wants to bring glory through your pain. If you belong to Jesus, he wants you to trust him in the midst of it.

If you belong to Jesus, he's working to build your faith in the midst of it. If you belong to Jesus, I'm here to tell you that you may have a timetable in your mind, and it's okay to have that.

But he has a better timetable. Amen. And it may be different than yours. I'm here to tell you, you may lose some stuff. But what he has for you is far better.

I know it's hard to see it. Framie, I feel you. I'm feeling some, I feel the pain. I feel you. It's hard to sometimes believe that, that what he has is better. But who is the one talking to you?

Jesus. He's the one talking to you. The son of God himself is speaking to you from his word. He's the one speaking to you. Listen, if he says we have a better covenant, if he says do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, but seek those treasures above.

[39 : 14] If he's telling you that he's got glory for you, that he's got an inheritance for you. If he's telling you these things, that's what the Bible says now. If he's telling you, consider the source.

You can trust him. You can trust him. And you may need to talk to some people who've been through something. You need to give us some of these saints who've lived a little while and been through some hardships, and yet their faith is glowing and growing.

See, their suffering can be used by God to strengthen your faith in the midst of your suffering. Stop talking to people who don't know anything.

I mean, you know, give us some folk who know something so they can encourage you. And then go back to the people who don't know anything and try to encourage them.

I'm trying to help somebody. I don't know who it is. Jesus is the Lord of life. Not the Lord of death.

[40 : 24] We'll finish up next week, Lord of life. Father, thank you for your word. Thank you that your glory is real, and you will exalt yourself even in the midst of our pain.

And that's the best thing for us, is to see you glorified. Oh, if you are glorified, Lord, that's for our good. That's the best thing that could possibly happen, that we be vehicles for your glory.

So, Lord, help us to trust you. Help us to remind us how much you love us. And help us not to give ear to the devil's lies or to the world's confusion.

Help us not even to listen to our own flesh. Help us to listen to you. Show us your glory. And that's enough.

In Jesus' name, amen.