

Title:            **OUR FRIENDS ARE ASLEEP.**

Text:            John 11:11

Subject:        *Between Death and the Resurrection*

Date:            Sunday Morning — February 14, 2005

Tape:            *John #73*

Reading:        *Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:7*

Introduction:

I want to pick up right where I left off last Sunday morning. You will find my text in John 11:11. The Lord Jesus here declared to his disciples, — “*Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.*”

**Proposition:** That which our blessed Savior said about Lazarus is true of all those blessed dead who die in the Lord. — Their bodies sleep in Christ in the earth.

We have many friends and loved ones whose bodies we have buried in the earth. How many times we have bidden farewell to one we loved with burning tears running down our cheeks because we knew they were about to leave this world. But, with regard to those who have died in faith, who have died in Christ, we may say, as our Lord Jesus did of Lazarus, “*Our friends are asleep.*” That is the title of my message. — **OUR FRIENDS ARE ASLEEP.**

**BACKGROUND**

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In the previous verses the Lord Jesus received a touching message from Martha and her sister, Mary, telling him that Lazarus, the one he loved, was sick. Two days later, after Lazarus had died, he headed to Bethany.

**The primary thing revealed** in John 11 is the fact that our Lord Jesus Christ is “*the resurrection and the life.*” Everything in this chapter shows us the blessedness of that revelation. **Resurrection can be displayed only where death has come in,** and that which is emphasized here is the desolation death brings and man’s helplessness in the presence of it.

First, Lazarus himself is dead. Then Thomas speaks of the disciples accompanying the Lord to Bethany that they may die with him (John 11:16). Then Martha comes before us. Though in the presence of Christ, she could think only of the death of her brother (John 11:21). The same was true of Mary (John 11:32). Finally, the Jews who had come to comfort the bereaved sisters are seen “*weeping*” (John 11:33). And, even as the Lord stands before Lazarus tomb, they have no thought that he was about to raise Lazarus from the dead (John 11:37). What a background this was for our great Savior to display his wondrous glory as “*the resurrection and the life!*”

**SPIRITUAL DEATH**

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We have before us a picture of physical death, the death of the body. But that is only the figure and the result of something is far more solemn, tragic, and dreadful. The natural man is dead in trespasses and sins. And “*the wages of sin is death.*” When the first man, our father Adam, sinned he received those fearful wages. In the day that Adam ate of the forbidden fruit he died, died spiritually. Death was passed upon him and upon all men, as the penal sentence of divine justice. **Adam died not only as a private individual, but as the public head and federal representative of all his race.**

If you cut down a tree, severing of the trunk of the tree from its roots, it dies. Its branches, twigs and leaves wither. In like manner, the fall of Adam drug every member of the human race with him into death. That means that every child born into this world enters it “*alienated from the life of God*” (Ephesians 4:18), lost and spiritually dead.

All men by nature, the world over, are spiritually dead. There is in none even a spark of life which might be fanned into a flame. **Fallen man is dead. Being dead, if he is to live, something must be done for him that he cannot do for himself.** — “*Ye must be born again!*” Life must be given to you from without, by the mighty work of God. Life must be imparted to you. Christ, who is life, must be

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formed in you. How is it that dead sinners are given life? How can the dead be made to live? The Lord Jesus must come to raise the dead...

- By the Merit of his Blood.
- By the Power of his Spirit.
- By the Word of his Grace.

That is what we see so strikingly and so beautifully illustrated here in John 11. Lazarus was dead; and the Master said, “*I go that I may awake him.*” **How utterly helpless we are in the presence of death!** — You who are dead are helpless! — Your friends are helpless! — This preacher is helpless! — But, blessed be God, there is One who is able to save to the uttermost! Christ is not helpless! He can cause the dead to live!

**If the sinner’s problem was merely a matter of ignorance** in the sinner, we might overcome that by clearly reasoned statements of the truth. **If it was merely a stubborn will** that stood in the way of the sinner’s salvation, we could depend upon our powers of persuasion. **If the sinner was only sick, we could induce him to accept some remedy. But in the presence of death we are impotent.**

**“With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible”** (Matthew 19:26), our Savior said in answer to the

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disciples' question, "*Who then can be saved?*" Here the light breaks in and shines forth "*for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby*" (v. 4). Man is helpless before death; but Christ is not helpless! — Lazarus could not raise himself to life. — His loving sisters could do nothing for him. — His sorrowing friends could weep; but their weeping was neither heard nor meaningful to Lazarus. He was dead. — Then, he who is, himself, "*the resurrection and the life*" steps into the picture, and everything changes!

**What did he do?** He did that which must have seemed terribly strange to all who were present. He cried to the dead man, with a loud voice, "*Lazarus, Come forth.*" What nonsense! If Lazarus had the power in to come forth from the tomb, he would have walked out four days earlier. Had Mary or Martha, or any of the apostles cried, "*Lazarus, Come forth,*" he would have remained dead. **No man's voice is able to pierce the depths of the tomb; but here is a man who is God.** When he cries, "*Lazarus, Come forth,*" the same omnipotent lips that called a world into existence caused the grave to give up its victim, "*and he that was dead came forth!*" **That is exactly how the Lord Jesus Christ saves chosen, redeemed sinners by his omnipotent mercy and irresistible grace.** He calls them from death to life in the day of his power...

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- By a Personal, Particular, Distinguishing Call. —  
“*Lazarus, Come forth!*”
- By an Omnipotent, Irresistible, Effectual Call. —  
“*And he that was dead came forth!*”

But, between the time that he died and the time he came forth in resurrection life, our Savior tells us that Lazarus was sleeping. His body was sleeping in the earth in the arms of his Savior, who loved him.

“These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth” (John 11:11).

The Lord Jesus announced that Lazarus was no longer in the land of the living, referring to his death as “*sleep.*” That is what I want to talk to you about in the time that remains. **The Scriptures often speak of the death of believers, during that brief period between death and the resurrection, while the soul is separated from the body, as “sleep.”** In the New Testament, this figure is only used with reference to believers (1 Corinthians 15:20, 51; 1 Thessalonians 4:14; 5:10). This sleep refers not to some imaginary sleep of the soul, but to the sleep of the body in the earth.

(1 Corinthians 15:20) “But now is Christ risen from the dead, *and* become the firstfruits of them that

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slept.”

(1 Corinthians 15:51) “Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.”

(1 Thessalonians 4:14) “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.”

(1 Thessalonians 5:10) “Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.”

Let me show you seven things about this “*sleep*.”

**HARMLESS**

*First*, sleep is completely harmless. There is nothing fearful about sleep, but much for which to be thankful. Sleep is a friend, not a foe. So it is with death for every believer. David sang, “*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil.*” Such ought to be the triumphant language of every child of God. The “*sting*” has been from death (1 Corinthians 15:56, 57). It has no more power to hurt the redeemed, than a hornet has after its stinger has been extracted.

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“The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law. <sup>57</sup> But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 15:56-57)

**Illustration:** “*That bee can’t hurt you. Look. It left its stinger in me.*”

**RELIEF**

*Second*, sleep comes as a welcome relief after the sorrows and toils of the day. As the wise man declared, “*The sleep of a laboring man is sweet*” (Ecclesiastes 5:12). Death, for believers, is simply the door through which we pass from this scene of sin and turmoil into the world of everlasting glory and bliss. **1 Corinthians 3:22** tells us, “**death**” is **ours**. Sleep is a merciful provision, greatly appreciated when it cannot be found. Equally merciful is death for one who is washed in the precious blood of Christ. How thankful I am that I shall soon “*sleep with Jesus!*” — That I will not live as long as Methuselah! — “*He giveth his beloved sleep*” (Ps. 127:2). What a promise!

(Psalms 4:8) “I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety.”



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**Death is separation from the body. It must come. But it will be a welcome separation.** It will be a separation from a troublesome and hateful companion. **Richard Baxter** said, “It is like taking off a shoe that hurts my foot. It will be a welcome relief.” To put this body aside will be like laying aside a worn out tool when all its work is done. It will be dismissing a servant when his service is ended.

- **This body has been my greatest enemy.**

As much as I have loved and over-loved this body, I must leave it to the grave. There it must lie and rot in darkness, as a neglected and hateful thing. **These eyes** must see no more. **These hands** must move no more. **These feet** must walk no more. **This tongue** must speak no more. From the dust it came, and to the dust it must return; earth to earth, water to water, air to air, ashes to ashes. This is the fruit of sin. But, thank God, this body is only my shell, my tabernacle, my tent, my clothing, and not myself.

It has caused me pain, and toil, and sorrow. It has required my constant care and attention. I will be glad to put it aside. **I know by long experience that this body of flesh has been a painful lodging for my soul.**

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- **When I am free of this body, I will be free from the bondage of corruption and the prison of sin** (Romans 7:24).

By reason of sin, this body has become mortal, beastly, and vile. **My friends, somehow, we must learn to treat this body as a perishing thing.** I do not mean that we should be reckless about our health. That would be a great evil. But I do mean that we spend too much time, care, and money pampering, soothing and satisfying this body. Soon, very soon, it will rot in the grave. **It is your soul that is important.** — “*What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, (for the comfort of his body) and lose his own soul?* (1 Timothy 6:6-8).

“Godliness with contentment is great gain. <sup>7</sup> For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out. <sup>8</sup> And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.” (1 Timothy 6:6-8)

**BRIEF**

*Third*, sleep is just for a short time. We lie down and soon rise again. Sleep is brief, and getting briefer with the passing of years. We sleep for just a few hours snatched from the day. In the morning we awaken and rise to a new

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day. And death is but a brief sleep. Soon there shall be a morning of awakening and resurrection to a new day!

“And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2).

On the glorious resurrection morning the dead in Christ shall be awakened, to sleep no more, but live forever throughout the perfect Day of God.

(1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. <sup>14</sup> For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. <sup>15</sup> For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: <sup>17</sup> Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. <sup>18</sup> Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”

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**“So shall we ever be with the Lord!”** — Did you get that?  
— **“So shall we ever be with the Lord!”**

**REST**

*Fourth*, sleep is a time of rest. The work of the day is exchanged for sweet repose of the night. This is what death means for God’s saints.

“Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors” (Revelation 14:13).

This applies only to the intermediate state, between death and resurrection. When we receive our glorified bodies there will be new ministries for us to engage in, for it is written, *“His servants shall serve him* (Revelation 22:3).

**SHUTS OUT**

*Fifth*, sleep shuts out the sorrows of life. In sleep we are mercifully unconscious of the things which trouble us and cause us pain, sorrow and grief throughout the day. **The sleep of night gives us welcome relief from that which troubles us by day. So it shall be in death.** Those who are with Christ in Paradise know nothing of the tears which are

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shed on earth. Holy Scripture does seem to indicate that God's saints in heaven are keenly aware of what is transpiring here. They are certainly made to rejoice when the salvation of sinners is heralded on high (Luke 15:7, 10). And they appear to be watching us in our race, aware of what we must face and overcome, but altogether without sorrow, fear or tear (Hebrews 12:1-2).

“I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.”  
(Luke 15:7)

“Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.”  
(Luke 15:10)

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset *us*, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:1-2)

**EASILY AWAKENED**

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*Sixth*, a sleeping man is easily awakened. Death is compared to a sleep is to emphasize the ease with which the Lord will awaken our bodies. To raise the dead (impossible as it appears to the skeptic) will be simpler to him than rousing a man from sleep. **Nothing so quickly awakens one who is asleep as the voice of another, especially the voice of one who is dearly loved.** So we are told “*the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth*” (John 5:28-29).

**PREPARATION**

*Seventh*, sleep is a time of preparation, a time when the body is fitted for the duties of tomorrow. When a man is awakened from sleep he arises refreshed and invigorated, and ready for what lies before him. **In like manner, the resurrected believer will be endued with a new power. The limitations of his mortal body will no longer exist.** That which was sown in weakness shall be raised in power.

(1 Corinthians 15:40-49) “*There are* also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial *is* one, and the *glory* of the terrestrial *is* another. <sup>41</sup> *There is* one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for

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*one* star differeth from *another* star in glory. <sup>42</sup> **So also is the resurrection of the dead.** It is sown in corruption; it is raised **in incorruption:** <sup>43</sup> It is sown in dishonour; it is raised **in glory:** it is sown in weakness; it is raised **in power:** <sup>44</sup> It is sown a natural body; it is raised **a spiritual body.** There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. <sup>45</sup> And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam *was made* a quickening spirit. <sup>46</sup> Howbeit that *was* not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. <sup>47</sup> The first man *is* of the earth, earthy: the second man *is* the Lord from heaven. <sup>48</sup> As *is* the earthy, such *are* they also that are earthy: and as *is* the heavenly, such *are* they also that are heavenly. <sup>49</sup> And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.”

**Just what do you reckon “a spiritual body” is?** — I don’t have a clue; and I doubt anyone else has a clue. But it seems obvious to me that it must be a body without the limitations with which we are now encumbered.

- **Luther** suggested that the resurrection body be as agile as thought.
- **Augustine** said in the resurrection body we will move to any place as soon as we will.
- **Jerome Zanchius** wrote, “As birds being hatched, do fly lightly up into the skies, which being eggs, were a heavy

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and slimy matter; so man, being hatched by the resurrection, is made pure and nimble, and able to mount up into the heavens.”

**All who trust Christ alone as Savior and Lord have the assurance of God’s own Word** that at that glorious day, when Christ shall come *“to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all that believe,”* they shall be found among the blessed *“dead which die in the Lord!”* Let us therefore await with holy joy and expectation the hour of God’s appointment, when by death the separation soul and body shall take place. By this means he makes us ready for the Christ’s coming, for his triumph and glory!

Are the personal triumphs of Christ to be manifested before the assembled creation of God in that day? — Is the dust of God’s saints the preparatory means for the greater display of Christ’s power and glory? — Does this temporary separation of my soul and body give occasion for my God and Savior to get glory by me? — If so, then it cannot be doubted that death is for us a blessing to be anticipated, not a curse to dread!

**Surely salvation in Christ is worth living for; and the personal glory of Christ in raising me from the dust is worth dying for.** May God give me grace, with increasing rapture of soul, to anticipate the time of my appointed



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departure! It shall be nothing more and nothing less than my body falling asleep in my Savior's arms at night to be awakened by him in his likeness in the morning!

No wonder calls this our "*blessed hope!*" The fulfillment of it shall be eternally blessed beyond imagination! **Christ will, at his second coming, "change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself"** (Philippians 3: 21).

I remind you, again, that the separation of body and soul is but a brief, temporary separation.

- **The body sleeps** in Jesus' arms in the earth.
- And **the soul lives** during the time of separation in the unceasing enjoyment of the presence of Christ.

But, soon, the morning of the resurrection shall come, and the Son of God "*shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God,*" then there shall be a glorious reunion of soul and body, not for me only, not for you only, but for the whole election of grace. All the bodies of all the sleeping saints shall be raised at once, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye! All shall at once be united to Christ, the glorious Head of the body, united without the possibility of separation forever, to Christ and to each other!

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**What will be the joy of the bride in that hour! What will be the triumphs of our Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ himself,** when he shall come, *“to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all that believe!”* Imagination fails to form the least idea of what must be the feeling in that reunion of soul and body. The two parts of self, separated in a moment of sorrow, bereavement and death, shall meet and be forever united in the joy and glory of the Lord!

- **The cold, clammy sweat of death** on the body, in which the soul left it, shall be changed into all the warmth of life and immortality!
- **The body, sunk in weakness,** shall be raised in power! It was sown a natural body. It shall be raised a spiritual body!
- **The soul shall come down from above with Christ and in the power of Christ,** perfumed out of the ivory palaces, and the body shall rise to meet the soul, now through Christ changed from a vile body to a glorified body, as much prepared and as fully qualified for the everlasting enjoyment of Christ, as the soul!
- That shall be what Paul calls **“the redemption of the purchased possession!”**
- **Then Christ shall present us,** body and soul, *“faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy!”*

He who redeemed my soul, at his own appointed time, regenerated my soul. And my body is no less precious to

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him than my soul. He who redeemed my body as his purchased possession shall, at the divinely appointed time, regenerate my body, too, with life everlasting.

(Romans 8:10-11) “And if Christ *be* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin; but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup> But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.”

**These have been the thoughts and meditations of my heart for many weeks, without significant interruption.**

Needless to say, I’ve been enjoying life more fully than ever! I pray that I will never have these thoughts far from my mind, that I may continually look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life, crying to the Lord Jesus with his Bride of old, — “*Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn my Beloved, and be thou like a roe, or a young hart, upon the mountains of Bether*” (Song 2:17).

**But O how vastly different that day shall be for you who are without Christ.** If you die in your sins, if you die without Christ, after the death of your body, nothing awaits you but “*the second death,*” your everlasting separation from God in hell, among the torments of the damned! —

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**No sweetness**, just ever-increasing bitterness! — **No rest**, just ever-increasing toil! — **Not blessedness**, just ever-increasing cursedness! — **No hope**, just ever-increasing hopelessness!

**Yes, you, too, shall be raised from the dead, but it will be unto “the resurrection of damnation,” not “the resurrection of life.”** Your body will be raised only to suffer more acutely the eternal torments of the damned in the lake of fire. **What an inconceivable, everlasting nightmare hell must be!** — The thick darkness! — The undying worms! — The unquenchable fires! Oh, may God the Holy Spirit graciously give you life in Christ, may he graciously give you faith in the Son of God, and cause you to flee from the wrath to come! Seek ye the Lord while he may be found. There is no hope beyond the grave.

O Spirit of God, O Almighty God of all grace, O Blessed Savior, come, snatch chosen, redeemed sinners as brands from the burning, for the glory of your own grace!

Amen.