

I Am the resurrection & the life

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[0 : 00] I hope people don't see me as well. It's a wonderful story. A true story. Okay.

John chapter 11, reading from verse 1. Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary, and her sister Martha.

This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. So the sisters sent word to Jesus, Lord, the one you love is sick.

When he heard this, Jesus said, this sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it. Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

Yet, when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days. Then he said to his disciples, let us go back to Judea. But Rabbi, they said, a short while ago, the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?

[1 : 10] Jesus answered, are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he is no light.

After he had said this, he went on to tell them, our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to wake him up. His disciples replied, Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.

Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. So then he told them plainly, Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe, but let us go to him.

Then Thomas, called Dinnitus, said to the rest of the disciples, let us also go, that we may die with him. On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

[2 : 23] Lord, Martha said to Jesus, if you had been here, my brother would not have died, but I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask. Jesus said to her, your brother will rise again.

Martha answered, I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said to her, 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? Yes, Lord, she told him. I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into this world.

And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. The teacher is here, she said, and he is asking for you. When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him.

Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.

When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house comforting her noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

[3 : 37] When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. Where have you laid him, he asked.

Come and see, Lord, they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, see how he loved him. But some of them said, could he not he who opened the eyes of a blind man have kept this man from dying?

Jesus once more deeply moved came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance.

Take away the stone, he said. But Lord, said Martha, the sister of the dead man, by this time there is a bad odor for he has been there for four days.

[4 : 37] Then Jesus said, did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God? So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, 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 that you sent me. When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, Lazarus, come out.

The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, Take off the grave clothes and let him go.

Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. What are we accomplishing? They asked. Here is this man performing many miraculous signs.

[5 : 40] If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him. And then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation. Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was the high priest that year, spoke up, You know nothing at all.

You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than for the whole nation perish. He did not say this on his own.

But as high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation. And not only for that nation, but also for the scattered children of God to bring them together and make them one.

So from that day on, they plotted to take his life. Well, you'll need your Bibles open at John 11 as we follow through in this story together.

There will be headings on the screen. I'll give you a nod, Xavier, as to when they are. Well, let's pray and ask for God's help as we look at this together.

[7 : 11] Let's pray. Let's pray. Our Father God, we thank you for the gift of life, for physical health and strength that you have given to each one of us who is here this morning.

We thank you for the tea and coffee that we have just had. But Father, we realize that we also need to be alive spiritually.

And we need your help for that. We need the power of your Spirit to be speaking to us. Helping us to understand what you have done.

Helping us to come to terms with what it means that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. So help us to engage with your words.

Help us to listen. Help us to hear what you are saying. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[8 : 16] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, we've all been there, haven't we?

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. God. I want us to follow with Jesus, to go with him as he visits the home of the bereaved, to sit with Jesus as he comforts the mourners, and to stand with Jesus by the grave.

I want us to see what he does at this funeral. I want us to hear what he is saying. I want us to feel his pain, and to experience his life.

[9 : 33] Going to this funeral that we have just read about is going to be hard. There will be mixed emotions. We might be upset. We'll struggle to understand.

We'll even be angry. But above all, I think we will be filled with an uncontainable hope. So let's engage ourselves as we walk with Jesus to this funeral.

And the first thing is, is to see, at this funeral, to see the supreme love of Jesus. Just one more. Mary and Martha and Lazarus were a very close family.

But soon their closeness was going to be broken by death. Lazarus, we read, has become ill in verse 1. They were a wealthy family.

We know that because Martha, she was the one who had poured the perfume on Jesus' feet. We know that that was about a year's wages that she'd spent on the perfume.

[10 : 42] So they were a very wealthy family. No doubt they'd spent a lot of money on doctors. But they obviously couldn't do anything. So Lazarus was sent home to die.

And his sisters, Mary and Martha, feared the worst. Verse 3. Having tried everything, verse 3, When I was at college, one morning during a lecture, I got a call to say that my mum was on the phone. So I went out to take this call and my mum was in tears. My dad had just had a stroke and he was in hospital. And without delay, I ran to my room, I gathered a few things together, got a lift to the train. I used buses and taxis to get home as soon as possible, all the way from Belfast down to Waterford. It wasn't critical, it was serious enough. But out of love from my father, I got there as soon as possible.

Nothing was going to stop me. Now wouldn't Jesus do the same for the family that he loved? Well, apparently not.

[11 : 59] Look at verse 5. Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. But when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.

Jesus was up in Galilee at the time, which was about a hundred miles away from the home of Lazarus. It would take at least three days' walk to get there.

This was an emergency. But yet Jesus stayed where he was two more days. Now rather than loving, it seems like he couldn't care less about poor Lazarus.

And when we consider that he stayed there two more days, you add on to that a three-day walk, that's five days. Well, there's a fair chance within those five days, Lazarus would be dead.

In fact, when Jesus does decide to go, we discover in verse 17, on his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

[13 : 06] Where's the love in that? Well, we need to read verse 3 through again, and we'll see. The sisters had sent word to Jesus, Lord, the one you love is sick.

When he heard this, Jesus said, this sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory, so that God's Son may be glorified through it. Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

And because he loved them, when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days. It's out of love that he stayed where he was.

In fact, he wants the disciples and us, the readers, to know that he has deliberately waited until Lazarus has died. Look down at verse 11.

After he had said this, he went on to tell them, our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I'm going there to wake him up. His disciples replied, Lord, if he sleeps, he'll get better.

[14 : 18] Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. So then he told them plainly, Lazarus is dead.

And for your sake, I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him. Now, why does Jesus do this?

It just doesn't seem right. He could have healed him from a distance. He had done that back in a similar situation in John chapter 4 with the official son.

He had sent word to Jesus. Jesus said, at this very minute, your son will be well. And he was. So why doesn't Jesus do this now? As soon as he heard the news from Mary and Martha, why doesn't he just say, he's okay?

He's healed. Well, as we'll see, Jesus wants to make it crystal clear who he is. He allows Lazarus to die.

[15 : 19] He allows the grief and the pain. He lets the burial take place to show everybody that he is the resurrection and the life.

If Jesus had gone right away, if he had healed at a distance, well, they'd never come to realize who he truly is. So it was out of deep love, verse 5, because he loved Mary and Martha, that's why he stayed.

It was out of deep love that he lets this funeral take place. Now that raises all kinds of questions for us. Just because Jesus doesn't do things our way does not mean he doesn't love us.

We might even say to ourselves, if God really loved me, he would heal my sick friend now. If God really loved me, then he wouldn't let my loved one die.

Do you ever think like that? I do. But this story, this funeral, is here to help us see that when we feel that God is most absent, when we feel that God doesn't care, when we feel that he's not answering our prayers, he is supremely in control of every detail of our life.

[16 : 42] In fact, in the most painful of times, as this story shows us, God is at work in our lives, working behind the scenes, to help us see and experience his love more clearly and more deeply.

And Mary and Martha and all those that are surrounding them will come to see the supreme love of Jesus in the way in which he acts.

So that's the first thing as we go to this funeral, is to see the supreme love of Jesus. The second thing as we go to this funeral is to hear the personal claims of Jesus.

Now we've just had this story read to us, and we know what the end of the story is. We know the outcome. It's a good outcome, isn't it? But we don't want to rush ahead.

We want to put ourselves into the shoes of Mary and Martha. So look at verse 17. On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and to Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.

[18:00] You see, they had no inclination at all of what Jesus was going to do. They had no idea. Lazarus was dead. Death had taken away their brother.

And now they were grieving for their loss. Even Thomas, back in verse 16, clearly hadn't a clue what Jesus was doing. He just comes out with some kind of random statement, like, well, let's go that we'll die with him.

Sounds kind of spiritual, but he hadn't a clue what was going on. Verse 20. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him.

But Mary stayed at home. Lord, Martha said to Jesus, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. Now, this only magnifies Martha's loss and disappointment.

If Jesus had come earlier, things would have been so different. But of course, Martha knew nothing of Jesus' deliberate and late arrival.

[19:02] So in some kind of half-hearted belief and clutching at straws, she asked Jesus in verse 22, I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.

Maybe there's something you could do. He's dead. He's in the grave. Not really expecting him to come alive. But perhaps there's something you could do. We can picture Martha.

Bloodshot eyes. Tears rolling down her cheek. Trembling in her grief. Pain etched on her face.

Lost and empty. Grappling for something to say. And then Jesus responds, looking intently into her eyes. Verse 23.

Your brother will rise again. Well, it sounds a bit condescending. It's as if Jesus is saying, now come on, Martha, don't be upset.

[20:03] He's going to be in heaven. It's the kind of stupid thing we would say at a funeral because we don't know how else to respond to people's loss. Has Jesus missed his classes on pastoral care?

Verse 24. Martha says, I know that he will rise again at the resurrection at the last day. Everybody knows that. But Jesus was not being condescending.

Like us, Martha had completely missed what Jesus was saying. And again he speaks, verse 25. Martha, 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? Begins to twig.

Yes, Lord, she told him. I believe that you are the Christ, the promised Messiah, the one to come from God, the Son of God, who is to come into this world. When people are grieving, we often talk about the person who has just died, don't we?

[21:20] Kind of how we cope with grief. To bring some kind of comfort. We remember things they said or things they did. And even at a funeral we kind of say things like, well, if they were here today, this is what they would have done or said.

We talk about how we're going to be there for those who have lost loved ones. How friends are going to help out. We say anything to express our comfort and our desire to help.

But not Jesus. He doesn't say anything like that. Instead he starts talking about himself. In the middle of Martha's grief and in the devastation of her loss, Jesus starts talking unashamedly about himself.

Don't think about Lazarus. Don't think about yourself. Listen to me. I am the resurrection and the life.

Jesus is claiming to not only raise the dead. He's not only saying that he has the power to give eternal life.

[22 : 32] He is saying that without me, there is no resurrection. And there is no life. Jesus is saying to us, take me out of the picture, remove me from the scene, and we are left with an eternal emptiness.

Defeated loss, without hope and void of any meaning and purpose. True life, he is saying, is not found in a church.

It's not found in a religion, or in a system of ideas, or a particular denomination. It's all about a person, Jesus Christ, who comes to Martha in her grieving, and the greatest thing that he could ever say is, I am the resurrection and the life.

In the face of death, he says, listen to me. Hear what I say. I am the resurrection and the life.

So we see the love of Jesus supremely at this funeral. We hear of his personal claims.

[23 : 50] And the third thing that we, as we go to this funeral, is to feel the restoring passion of Jesus. Look at verse 30.

Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, and was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews, who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how she quickly got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

Now in our culture, the grieving tends to happen before the actual funeral. People come to the family of the home, pay their respects, there's maybe a wake, then there's the removal, and then the burial itself.

Well in first century Palestine, you didn't have places to keep the body, and because of the heat and the subsequent decay of the body, you had to bury them straight away.

So as soon as somebody died, they were buried straight away. And so the mourning was all done after the burial. And it could last for up to a week.

[25 : 02] In this case, in this particular funeral, the mourning has been going on for four days. And to keep up the intensity of the emotion, you employed chief mourners.

People who would come and play sad music. And they would literally keep the whole grieving process going. It happens in many cultures still today.

And this is the scene that Jesus arrives into, verse 32. So when Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, do you see? They're all crying together. Jesus was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.

Where have you laid him? He asked. Come and see, Lord, they replied. And Jesus wept. Now it seems Jesus is also caught up in the emotion of the event.

[26 : 10] But don't you think it a little strange that Jesus would begin to cry when in just a few minutes' time he knows that the one they're all mourning for is going to come walking out of the tomb.

He's the only one who knows the end of the story at this stage. So why is Jesus crying? Yes, they're real tears. Yes, there is compassion.

But these are tears of anger. And at this funeral, we are to feel the raw emotion. Don Carson, who's written a commentary on this book, John's Gospel, has pointed out that the actual translation in verse 33 is not deeply moved.

It means outraged. Outraged. We are to feel the emotion of Jesus. So when we read verse 3, Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, and he was outraged in spirit and troubled.

Where have you laid him? He was outraged, not at the people because they didn't understand, but he was angry at death itself.

[27 : 36] You see, when God created the world, he made it a place of beauty. People were to enjoy it for all of eternity. But because of our rebellion against God, because of our sins, death entered into the world.

And it cuts short everything that we are to enjoy. The gifts of friendship, the relationships that we have with one another, all of them, at one stage or another, are all broken by death.

That's why we feel the pain, because it's not normal. It's not meant to happen. Death was never part of God's good design. It is an ugly enemy that breaks in and destroys what is good and beautiful.

And Jesus is outraged. He's angry at the pain that death brings. But that anger is not one that is out of control and temper-like.

It is a deep passion to reverse the consequences of death and put things right. for that's why Jesus came, to put things right in this world.

[28 : 50] Look at verse 38. Jesus, once more, and it's the same word, outraged, came to the tomb.

It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. Take away the stone, he said. But Lord, said Martha, the sister of the dead man, by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been in there for four days.

Then Jesus said, Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God? You see, now all the pieces begin to fit together. The reason for his delay, the reason why he waited two days, the reason why he said, I am the resurrection and the life.

We could picture the scene, all the crowds gathering around this tomb, the stone being pushed to one side, the shocked crowd standing by, the music stops playing, the weeping and the wailing are all silenced.

Verse 41, So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked up and said, Father, I thank you that you always heard me. I knew that you always hear me.

[30 : 08] But I said this for the benefit of the people standing here and for us, that they may believe that you sent me. When he had said this, Jesus called out in a loud voice, Lazarus, come out!

The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen and a cloth around his face. And Jesus said to them, Take off the grave clothes and let them go.

A dead and decaying corpse, so bad that it was beginning to smell, hears the voice of Jesus and responds.

Death itself obeys the commands of Jesus. Come out! and Lazarus comes out.

Now the lack of comment by John at this point speaks louder than words. He doesn't say anything much about the reactions of the people. And I think the reason is is because we are to stand.

[31 : 30] It's almost as if we're just to pause there and watch and wonder at what just has happened. By walking to this funeral, we feel and we witness the restoring passion of Jesus Christ.

So we see the love of Jesus, we hear his claims, we can feel his raw passion, but the fourth thing as we go to this funeral is to know the promised hope of Jesus.

This was an amazing funeral. But before we walk away from this funeral, I want us to come to one more funeral. Because not everybody was happy with what Jesus did.

Look at verse 47. We go on from the excitement, the joy, the ecstasy, if you like, at the end of verse 44, and then those who didn't like what Jesus was doing.

And there's plenty of people who don't like Jesus and they get very angry with what he does and the claims he makes. Verse 47. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin.

[32 : 52] That was like their kind of religious council. What are we accomplishing? They asked. Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everybody will believe in him.

And then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation. You see, rather than acknowledge and submit to the power of Jesus, they saw what he did.

They were there. They want to get rid of Jesus. They want to keep on to the power for themselves. They want to keep things at kind of a low-key level. They don't want the Romans interfering with anything.

They don't want Jesus as king because they want to be king. Much like most people in this world, they want to be king of their lives and they don't want to accept Jesus for who he is.

But they had failed to read the signs. Look at verse 47. They say, here is this man performing many miraculous signs. Miracles and this miracle of Lazarus is like one big giant signpost.

[33 : 59] The miracle of Lazarus is a huge big sign pointing beyond itself to someone else and something else. It points us away from the death of Lazarus to the death of Christ.

And it points us away from the rising of Lazarus to the rising of Christ. Verse 49. Then one of them named Caiaphas, he was the high priest that year, spoke up.

You know nothing at all. You do not realise that it is better for you that one man die for the people than for the whole nation perish.

In other words, listen guys, all the ways we've been trying to get rid of Jesus isn't working. So we need to get rid of them. We need to kill him.

But little did they know that the death of Jesus would only bring life for the world. Look at how John comments on what Caiaphas said.

[35 : 05] He writes his own commentary, verse 51. He says he didn't say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation.

And not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, for people everywhere to bring them together and make them one. Caiaphas didn't really know what he was saying. He was just speaking on a pure human level, getting rid of Jesus. But John could see that he spoke more than he actually intended. Jesus' death would be a death for the nations.

He would die on a cross. His death would be a death for people like you and me. He would die in place of us. That's what we celebrated on Good Friday. He would be buried for us.

But his death wasn't going to end in life. He would rise again. He would conquer the grave, promising new and eternal life to all who would believe. God's death.

[36 : 10] This miracle was truly wonderful for Lazarus. He got a few more years out of it. It was certainly great for Mary and Martha.

They got his brother back again. But let's face it, it didn't happen to us, did it? We weren't there. But the whole point of this story is this story can be our story too.

Jesus promises life beyond the grave. He promises hope today because Jesus is the resurrection and the life. He is the one who died for us.

He died our death. He rose again so that all who believe in him will live. Yes, we are all going to die, sooner or later. But by faith in Christ we will enjoy eternal life with him. We will enjoy an eternal life in his new creation where there will be no more crying and no more tears.

[37 : 24] There will be no more sickness, no more suffering. There will be no more invites to a funeral. there will be no more parting of loved ones.

There will be no more death because Jesus is the resurrection and the life. let's pray together. Amen. Our Father God, we thank you so much for this incredible story where we can see the supreme love of Jesus love for us.

not always working the way we want him to work, but always working in such a way that we can feel and understand and deepen our love for him and his love for us.

Help us to accept his claims, to hear what he is saying, that he is the resurrection and the life and that without him there is no life. Thank you for the wonderful insight into your passion, your pain and your anger at death itself and the destruction and the pain that it brings.

[38 : 58] thank you for thank you that you came to reverse death, to conquer it, to defeat it. But most of all, help us to know the promised hope for ourselves.

Help us to trust what you are saying to us this morning, that this is not just some random story in a book of fairy tales, but this is God, the creator of heaven and earth, who came to this world as a person in Jesus Christ, who lived for us, who died for us, who was raised again for us so that everyone, whoever we are, whoever puts their hope in him, will live and have eternal life in the new creation.

we thank you for your awesome power. We thank you for Easter Sunday and that we can celebrate it today. May we bring this hope and this good news with us.

In Jesus' name, Amen. We're going to sing a well-known song in Christ alone.

and I'm waiting for you to hear, to go to the next verse. Thank you. Good one. Amen. Next time I'm going to go home in the next one. Thank you. Family