

AM Isaiah 11:1-9 & John 11:1-27

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Date: 13 October 2024

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[0 : 00] The book of Isaiah chapter 11 verses 1 to 9. This is entitled The Righteous Rain of the Branch.

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit, and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, and his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.

And he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together, and the little child shall lead them.

[1 : 29] The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.

They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. Just to there, may God bless to us this reading.

Now next, we're going to read in the New Testament Scriptures from John's Gospel, chapter 11, and we'll read verses 1 to 27. This is an account, first of all, of the death of Lazarus, and then it brings in the famous words, I am the resurrection and the life.

John chapter 11, and from the beginning of the chapter. Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her 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.

[2 : 46] 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 through it. Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

So when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then after this he said to the disciples, let us go to Judea again.

The disciples said to him, Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again? Jesus answered, are there not twelve hours in the day?

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

After saying these things, he said to them, our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him. The disciples said to him, Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.

[3 : 53] Now Jesus has spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest and sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, Lazarus has died, and for your sake, I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe.

But let us go to him. So Thomas called the twin, said to his fellow disciples, let us also go, that we may die with him. Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already 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 and met 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.

[5 : 11] Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. 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. May God bless to us this reading also.

Now, we'll again... Now, I want us to look at the passage we read, or part of the passage we read, in John's Gospel, chapter 11. And it's from verse 17 to verse 27.

And if you want a particular verse, it's verse 25. Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. Now, there are two themes that I want to develop on the basis of this passage.

The obvious one is the teaching here given to Martha about Jesus as the resurrection and the life. But before we do that, I want to speak about this idea of delay in Jesus' coming.

[6 : 24] Now, what happened was this. Martha and Mary, their brother was ill. So they send word to Jesus, and they don't say, Please come and heal him.

But that is clearly what was in mind. But Jesus doesn't come. He deliberately delays. And only after a period of some days does he come to them.

And by that time, Lazarus is dead and buried. Why the delay? Why didn't he just respond to the request? To their faith?

Because he expected him to come and heal Lazarus. And we say that, you see, because it happens with us as well. Why didn't God respond to our request?

Why didn't he do things the way that we wanted? And the way also that would be for his glory. Why didn't he do it the obvious way?

[7 : 28] And of course, we give the answer, it was for the glory of God. But often enough, we can't see why it was for the glory of God. And that's of course not strange, because God is God, and you can't expect to understand everything that he does.

But here we've got a situation where it is clearly indicated that this delay was for the glory of God. But we also can see reasons given why a delay changed the situation in such a way that Jesus and God were glorified in a way that they wouldn't have been if he had responded immediately.

So, let's think about that for a moment. How can we understand this delay in a positive way? Well, I think there is this situation now, that instead of healing a sick man, he raises a dead man.

And instead of this happening amongst a few people, it happens amongst a crowd of people. Now, reflect on that for a moment.

What would have happened if Jesus had responded to the request of Martha and Mary? If he had gone immediately, he would have found a sick man attended by his sisters and maybe one or two neighbours had dropped in to help.

[9 : 02] And if he healed the sick man, well, so what? He had often healed sick people. It wasn't a big deal. It was a relatively small matter because it happens so frequently.

So, it would be a very low-key affair. But since he waited, it's a different scenario altogether. Because it's not a sick man that he finds, but a dead man that he finds.

A man that is dead and buried and whose body is already beginning to decompose. A man indisputably dead.

And he raises that person. Now, that's a miracle of outstanding proportions. It happened on other occasions, but in some ways, this was the most outstanding miracle of that nature that Jesus ever did.

It was a fantastic thing that happened. A man dead and buried, raised to life by the power of Jesus. So, the nature of the miracle was changed.

[10 : 10] Instead of something pretty low-key, it's got a high profile. Not only that, but we're told this. That this was near Jerusalem.

And a big number of Jewish ladies had come out to be with Mary and Martha and to mourn over their bereavement.

Now, numbers are important there. We don't know how many, but quite a crowd of people were there. And the miracle wasn't done in the quietness of the home, but out in the open air, where

everybody could see it, including this crowd of women.

And they were prominent women, one would gather, because they go back and they tell what has happened. They're reliable women whose testimony people will accept. And they're in a position to tell the leaders of the Jewish people what has happened.

So instead of a wee quiet miracle in the family circle, there's a big miracle done in public. And that was something that wouldn't have happened if Jesus had responded as the women had requested.

[11 : 23] Moreover, we wouldn't have had this teaching, presumably, because this is a teaching that's tied to the situation. How much poorer we would have been if Lazarus had been healed.

How much richer we are because Jesus let them die and then raised them from the dead. Because we've got this teaching that we're going to look at this morning.

So, we can see in this case how this was for the glory of God. Now, that is of some encouragement to us. How many situations there are where we ask God and it doesn't turn out as we hoped for or even as we expected.

Things don't seem to have improved. And he denies us our request. And we've just got to see it's in the hand of God.

He knows better than we do. Do you think we can tell God what's the best thing for him to do? It's he who tells us what's the best thing for us to do.

[12 : 31] And we can therefore say this is for God's glory. We don't know always why it happens the way it did happen although we have to acknowledge that sometimes we do know why it happened that God didn't answer our prayers.

And looking back we'll be able to say hi, it was good for us that we didn't get our prayers answered. He knows best. But it doesn't always happen that we can see the reason but we can trust him that he does all things well.

There was an old man in Caithness when we went there to live a good number of years ago. He lived with his sister who was single and everybody naturally who didn't know them well thought here's an old bachelor living with his old spinster sister.

But he wasn't he was a widower. He only married when he was 44 and his wife died within two years.

What a blow! What a terrible thing to happen! You wait so long to find the right person and she's taken from you. Only 29 she is. And he writes on her gravestone ask for God his way is perfect.

[13 : 47] That's it. His way is perfect. He knows best. That's the delay then. Now we turn to the main thing here which is the teaching that is given to Martha on this occasion.

Now it's interesting that Jesus deals with Martha and he deals with Mary and maybe if we're here another time we'll look at that all being well. But he deals with them in a very different fashion.

His approach is tailor made to their circumstances. Now just look at how this happened in Martha's case. Look at the circumstances first of all. We're told here that Jesus heard that Lazarus was dead and when Martha heard that Jesus was coming she went and met him.

So this doesn't happen in the house it happens on the road. Jesus is coming Martha hears about that and goes out to meet him. Now my scenario is this that somebody on the outskirts of the spots on the road and goes to greet him and says do you not know that Lazarus is dead and buried four days now?

And he says yes I know I know and she says to her boy away you go and run and tell Martha that Jesus is here and the boy goes to the house and Martha's in the yard or in the kitchen because she's a very practical person and the boy tells Martha Jesus is here and she goes out and meets him on the roadside.

[15 : 26] Something like that is the scenario that I have. He hasn't come to the house where everybody is he meets her out on the road in some way. Now that's the outward scenario.

Let's look at the inner scenario in other words let's look at Martha's starting point here and then we'll look at the teaching that she's given and then we'll look at the end result of that.

So where was Martha spiritually or even theologically at the beginning of this incident and how did this teaching change her opinion about things?

Well undoubtedly here is somebody that was disappointed. If you had been here she says Lazarus would not have died. She had had hopes but they were unfulfilled.

But even in that statement there is faith. They had trust in Jesus to do something to do something positive. And indeed there is still faith in this woman.

[16 : 28] The delay hasn't deterred her from trusting in Jesus. Even now I know that whatever you ask from God God will give you. So there's a pretty strong statement I'm still trusting in you.

You didn't come when we hoped when we wanted but I'm still looking to you and I know you can do things for us. A very very strong trust she's got still in Jesus.

But what interests me is the ways that she looked at Jesus. The sort of role that she saw him having.

The sort of characteristic feature of him. Whatever you ask from God God will give you. Jesus is somebody whose prayers God answers.

Now that to my mind really puzzles me a wee bit because it's quite unique. If you ask people who is Jesus they say oh Elijah or Jeremiah or one of the prophets.

[17 : 34] Who is Jesus the Messiah? She'll come to say that too and we'll look at that in a moment. But she's not saying that at the moment. Other people have said he's a prophet from Galilee. Others would have said he's a miracle worker.

But Martha doesn't say he's a miracle worker. He's a man whose prayers God answers. He's a man of God. He's a man close to God.

She doesn't see him as having this power. It's a derived power that came from above. And I don't know how to categorise that but all I can see is it's unique and worth us thinking about.

Here's a person whose way of looking at Jesus was not oh he's a miracle worker. He's one whose prayers God will answer. He's a man of God close to God.

And that will develop later. But that's her starting place. That's what she says about Jesus. He's a man that can help because God answers his prayers.

[18 : 37] But there's another point that is worth noticing. And it's this. Jesus begins with a simple statement. Your brother will rise again. Now that's an interesting statement and it's a testing statement because it can mean two things.

Does he refer to the resurrection from the dead in general? Or is this a promise of raising Lazarus on this occasion? He puts it in this way to see what Martha is going to say.

And she takes it as a reference to the general resurrection. resurrection. I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day. Now that is quite an important point to make.

Many scholars quite wrongly I think say that they had no idea about the resurrection and the life after death in the Old Testament. Which I think in general is really quite a bit of nonsense.

But it is true that not all the Jews people believed in the resurrection. The Sadducees as a party for example didn't believe in the resurrection. resurrection. And it was only the Pharisees who did.

[19 : 44] And they were progressives in the eyes of many people. But he or she has taken up these ideas which are quite right and biblical. I know that he will rise again at the last day.

Now that's a good thing to believe. And we must remember that this is our starting point. It isn't that Jesus is saying here as the great revelation that he's making.

There's life after death. death. That's not the big thing that he's talking about here. She knows that already. People are going to be raised from the dead at the last day. So that's her starting point.

She sees Jesus as a person close to God whose prayers God answers and she knows that death isn't the end of things. That life will come at the last day.

Now on top of that we then have Jesus teaching. what does Jesus teach her in those circumstances? Well we've got it in the well known words. I am the resurrection and the life.

[20 : 45] Whoever believes in me though he die yet shall he live. I am the resurrection and the life. Now this is one of the key statements of John's gospel.

One of the great I am sayings which if you know your gospel at all you'll be familiar with. I am the vine. I am the door. I am the good shepherd. I am the resurrection and the life.

So what does it mean? Can we put it in plainer terms? Because this is a picture of course in a way. Well look at that statement I am the good shepherd.

What does that mean? It means that you put all the qualities of a good shepherd together and you say Jesus fulfills that model.

a good shepherd is this, a good shepherd is that, a good shepherd is the other. Put them all together and where do you find all these things exemplified? You find them exemplified in the life of Jesus.

[21 : 48] He's a model for us in regard to what a good shepherd is. He is the good shepherd. Now if you say that about this statement I am the resurrection and the life.

We would therefore have to say that Jesus is a model of what resurrection and resurrected life means. So he's inviting us who know the whole story now to think about him dead and buried. There in regard to his outward life he was gone. The voice was silent. The familiar face showed no emotional response if you spoke to it.

There was no movement there. He was powerless. In as much as he couldn't speak he was prayerless we might say. Dead and buried.

Lifeless. And then look at what happened. He was raised from the dead and his life was restored to him. And so he was vigorous again and he spoke once more and he was active once more and responsive to people once more.

[23 : 00] And he was taken up into heaven and he was seated at the right hand of God the Father in the place of honour and authority so that he's got the ear of the Father. And there he is praying for his people powerful because in the place of authority.

What a change. Life restored. Death abolished. Everything renovated on a higher plane. So he's the resurrection.

Look at his life and you'll see that. Look at what happened to him and you'll see that. A pattern of it. Look at the life that he gained. Look at that as a pattern. That's what he's speaking about.

If you want to know what resurrection means, look at my resurrection. If you want to know what life means, look at my life at the right hand of the Father. I was taken up to heaven and equipped to live a life in heaven at the right hand of God.

That's life. That's resurrection. That's part of what he's saying here. He's a model for us to look at. And we can therefore think that as he was raised from the dead, we can be raised from the dead.

[24 : 14] As he was equipped to live in heaven, a new body with different qualities, so that's the way it will be with us. In that sense, he is for us the resurrection and the life.

But that's by no means all that he's speaking about here. Paul says somewhere that Jesus Christ is our righteousness.

Jesus Christ is our righteousness. Now if Jesus were to say, I am your righteousness, what would it mean? It wouldn't just mean that he is a model for our righteousness, although he is that in many respects.

It doesn't mean simply that there's a pattern that is displayed and we can look at it and say that will be our pattern as well. It may include that, but it certainly doesn't mean that.

He means, I am your righteousness. I acquired righteousness for you. When I came into this world, I came in human nature. I came to live out life in the terms in which you live out life.

[25 : 26] I came to complete the law of God and I did it perfectly. I worked out a perfect righteousness in my life. And when I died on the cross, I satisfied the demands of God's justice.

And I was doing this representing my people. As I lived for them and acquired righteousness on their behalf, so I died for them and acquired right standing with God on their behalf.

And to say, I am your righteousness means that it's through me, through my work, in union with me, that you acquire a righteous standing with God. You don't get right with God by working hard at it and achieving it on your own terms.

You get righteousness from God by coming to the Saviour and resting upon Him. And through union with Him, you experience that righteousness that He acquired on our behalf, in our name.

That's the sort of thing that that speaks about. And if you know the Gospel, I think you'll get a glimmer at least of what that means. Now, if you apply that to this statement, I am the resurrection and the life, it doesn't simply mean that our resurrection is going to be patterned in His, or our life in heaven is going to be similar to His.

[26 : 45] It means that these things come to us on the basis of Jesus' resurrection. Just as He died for us, representing us, taking our situation and living it out on our behalf, as it were.

So it will be that when He is raised from the dead, we will take on that experience because we're united to Him. Because we're united to Him, we can say that He died for us.

But because we're united to Him through faith, we can say that His resurrection is ours. And therefore, if we ask, how are we going to be raised from the dead?

It isn't simply because He's going to come and give a shout of command and everybody's going to be raised. It's because He died for sinners and rose again for their justification. And everything that happened, He was doing on behalf of others so that His resurrection becomes ours as well.

And that's why Jesus says here what He does say, I am the resurrection of the life. whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. It's faith in Christ that matters.

[27 : 51] It's making a commitment to Him that counts. It's trusting in Him that counts. Because that's what unites us to Him. It's what brings us together as one with Him. So that as He shared our death, so we can share His resurrection.

And that's the key to everything. And that's what Jesus is saying here. And that's pretty solid and far reaching teaching. He's not simply saying, isn't it wonderful there's life after death?

He's saying to Mary, to Martha, you believe that already. Well, here's something you've got to take aboard as well. All that has happened is going to happen because I'm going to die and I'm going to be raised from the dead.

That's the basis of it. That's the guarantee of it. It's all going to happen because of me. It's in me that you find these things. It's not just the power of God, not just the grace of God. It's because I'm going to go that path myself on behalf of my people and therefore I'm going to get for them this resurrection experience that is patterned in mine and comes to them on the basis of my work for them.

And that is a pretty mind-boggling thing for Jesus to say to Martha at this stage. So that's the wonderful teaching given. Now, let's just see how she reacts to this.

[29 : 04] What was the end point? Jesus says, do you believe this? And she says, yes Lord, I believe you're the Christ, the Son of God who is coming into the world.

Now, what are we going to make of that? Well, she moves away from simply saying, you're a man that's close to God whose prayers God will answer. And she says something I think quite significantly different and better.

First of all, she says, you're the Christ. That is the Messiah, the promised King, the promised King of old. God. Now, I wonder what made her say that and what was in her mind when she said that. Because you see, this is an interesting thing. People said different things about Jesus as the Messiah because they had different concepts of who the Messiah really was and of what he had come to do.

The Samaritan woman who we looked at at some stage when I was here before, she said, this is the Christ who told me all things that I ever did. He was a prophet to her, a prophet.

[30 : 09] So the Messiah was to the Samaritan woman a prophet. To the disciples, the Messiah was a king of Israel. It seems to me they had a pretty nationalistic outlook about things.

The disciples had at the start anyway. They saw the Messiah as somebody who was on David's throne and would bring about the independence of the nation and would be a king according to the pattern of David, their forerunner.

And even after Jesus was raised from the dead, they said, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? I think that denotes a pretty worldly outlook. Yes, Jesus was a king, but a king over a nation.

Now, what does she have in mind when she says Jesus is the Messiah? He's king. Yes, no doubt that's bound up with the idea.

But what made her say that? Because he's got power over death. He's not going to reign over a nation. He's not going to be the king of the Jews.

[31 : 15] He's got power over death itself. That's what Jesus has been saying. And when she takes that to Bore, she says, you must be the Messiah. Because you're king. And you're not just king in this world in outward or physical, material or nationalistic sense.

You're king in a greater sense, the greatest sense than we could ever imagine. You're the king over death. You rule over death. That's what makes her, I think, say you are the Messiah.

She recognised his kingship in a way that I doubt if anybody else recognised it at that stage in history. A remarkable thing that comes out here. And then she says, you're the son of God.

Now, I have difficulty over this because quite obviously, and we'll maybe say a wee bit more about this this evening, quite obviously, the title son of God can be used as the equivalent of the Messiah.

Now, if you haven't thought about that, just think about the words of the high priest to Jesus. Are you the Christ, the son of the living God? Now, the high priest wasn't saying, are you the Christ, are you the second person of the Trinity?

[32 : 27] Because there's no way that the high priest could possibly have said that. The title son of God was another way of speaking of the Messiah. Because in one Old Testament Psalm, we've got

this idea that the Messiah is going to say, you are my father, he shall cry, you are my God alone. So there's the promised Messiah, and he's saying to God, you are my father. And so the Jewish people took up this idea that the son of God is another title for the Messiah. That's the way I believe it is in the New Testament.

usually. But is that all that there is to it here? I don't know. But I can't but think that there's maybe more to it than that.

After all, in this gospel, Jesus speaks of himself as the son. And he's not talking about himself as the Messiah. He's talking about a unique relationship with God. And this is what he's been specially noted for.

You're a man whose prayers God answers. You've got a closeness to God that others haven't got. And it seems to me that when she says you are the son of God, she's approaching the truth that we were talking about with the children.

[33 : 38] Namely, that he's the second person of the Trinity. She's not there yet, I don't think. But she's well along the road to that. And that, to my mind, makes this a most remarkable statement that she's making.

So you see, the development there's been. Before this she believed in a general resurrection but didn't really have any great concept of how it happened except by the power of God. And now she knows how it's happening.

It's going to happen because he's Lord over death. And therefore she could say you're the Messiah because you're Lord over death. Before she could say you're a man close to God whose prayers God's hears.

And now she could go a wee bit further and say you're so intimate with God that you really are the son of God. Remarkable development. And a wonderful insight that she's got here to the purposes of God.

Just as well Lazarus died. Or we wouldn't have had this. So what is this teaching us? Well, quickly. This teaches us first of all the importance of the body.

[34 : 42] The body matters. The body is not a disposable container for our spirits. That we can throw away and discard like a piece of rubbish when we're finished with it.

The body matters. It's part of us. Abraham died and was buried. Abraham was buried because his body was his and shaped who he was.

Our genetic structure contributes to our identity. It makes us who we are. And that's why the body is so important in the Old Testament and in the New Testament.

So that it cannot be treated as something that's going to be left in the grave. It's part of us. It's part of what makes us who we are. It's part of our identity.

And we cannot leave it and contemplate it being left in the grave under the power of death because the body matters. The second thing is resurrection is the great hope of the believer.

[35 : 49] Now I don't want to go against the sort of things that is constantly said at funerals. To die is to be with Christ which is far better. I don't have a shadow of a doubt about that.

But our redemption is not complete until our bodies are raised from the dead. It is wonderful, it will be wonderful to meet with God. after our death in a spiritual form and we have real perception of that and a real awareness of him.

But things won't be complete until we are raised from the dead. Then we shall see him face to face. But we won't see him face to face before then.

We won't because we won't have a face to see him with or eyes to see him with. A person may say at a funeral, there she is now and God puts her arms around her and looks into her eyes and says well done good and faithful servant.

Now at one level that's absolutely true but don't take it literally. We can't have arms put around us until we're raised from the dead and nobody can gaze into our eyes until we're raised from the dead and resurrection from the dead is the ultimate hope of believers.

[37 : 06] We've had our teaching watered down by secular thought and Greek philosophy actually goes back to belief. But anyway, we've had our thinking watered down and we've thought that to be with Christ is far better.

That's it. No, to be with Christ is far better. But there's something better still and it is when our bodies are released from the pains of death and we're reconstituted body and spirit in the presence of God to live for him forever.

Make sure that that's the hope that you cherish in the gospel, you who are believers. And the third thing is, this is ours in Christ. It's a fearsome thing to think about that everybody is going to be raised from the dead.

The trouble is, what is going to happen then? Those who are raised from the dead, believing in Christ, will have the sort of resurrection life that he had. Others will be raised from the dead and they'll never die.

There will be no annihilation because death has been defeated, death has been abolished.

Therefore, a person can't simply be annihilated and that means there's a terrible fate awaiting those that aren't in Christ, that aren't believing in him.

[38 : 23] So, that's the challenge for us. Let's make sure that we say, this is my hope for the future. I'll be raised from the dead on the great day when God comes to call his own, when Christ comes back to call his own.

I'll be raised from the dead and I'll be raised to the sort of life that Jesus himself experienced. Let's make sure that that's our hope through trusting in the saviour, through repenting of our sins and turning from them and putting our trust in him and saying, to me, to live is Christ.

Everything depends upon him. My hope is placed in him. My life is dependent upon him. My hope for the future rests upon the fact that he was raised from the dead.

Everything depends on him. Let's make sure that we can say, yes Lord, I believe. May God bless to us his word.