

I Am The Resurrection And The Life

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to turn now to John's Gospel, chapter 11, and the text that I'll be hanging the sermon on is found in verse 25. I actually think I gave Laura, my fault obviously, the wrong reading for John's Gospel, but not to worry, I didn't want to interrupt anything and to change it. So the text that we're looking at is John 11, verse 25, Jesus said to her, to Martha, I am the resurrection and the life. Now, as you probably remember, I've been going through those I am sayings in John's Gospel, but I think the last one that I went through was way back in October, so it seems like quite a long time, and they've not sort of come, you know, quickly one after another, so it's very difficult,

I think, when you're bringing a series like that and it's so spaced out. But anyway, the last time it was meant to be this statement, I am the resurrection and the life, but I get carried away, you may remember, those of you who were here, with the amazing faith that Martha displayed in this conversation with Jesus. So what I thought I would do is half of this sermon, the second half, will be on the resurrection and the life, but the first half is going to be on the context.

But before we go into that, I just want to ask a question. What justification do Christians have for believing that Jesus is the saviour of the world?

Well, there are those New Testament documents, four of them, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and these are the only documents that tell us about the times of Jesus, the teaching of Jesus, and the claims of Jesus. Now, you could call this a presupposition or an assumption or whatever you like, but obviously Christians assume that these documents are trustworthy.

And in John's Gospel are those I am claims of Jesus. They're astonishing claims. For instance, Jesus said, I am the bread of life. Imagine meeting someone in Dumbarton Road or Crow Road, and this is what they said to you. He said, I am the light of the world. He said, I am the door.

[3 : 1 2] Through me, if anyone enters, they will be saved. He said, I am the good shepherd. I lay down my life for the sheep. He said, I am the resurrection and the life. He said, I am the way, the truth, and the life. He said, I am the vine. These are just some of the astounding claims that Jesus makes. And I want to explore with you, as I've said, this fifth I am saying, I am the resurrection and the life. Now, when I say I'm going to look at the context first, I'll tell you what I mean by that. I mean the set of circumstances that pertained during the life and times of Jesus leading up, for example, to this remarkable claim, I am the resurrection and the life. We're going to explore the context under two headings. What I want to call Christological signs. And secondly, Christ's consciousness of what he calls my hour. Just as there are seven I am sayings in John's gospel, so there are seven signs in John's gospel. And sometimes the sign and the I am saying converge as they do here. There's a damaging statement by Jesus in John 12. It was actually in the next verse after we stopped reading there in John 12. 30. 37. No, it's not John 12. 37. Anyway, the statement was that in spite of all the signs that they did not believe. Let me just say to you that in John's gospel in chapter 2 in verse 11, we read this, this, the first of his signs,

Jesus did at Cana and Galilee and manifested his glory. Note that word sign. And then in John 20, we have towards the end of the gospel, John 20 verse 30, now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book, but these are written that you may believe Jesus is the Christ. So when I mean by Christological signs, I mean that these are evidence that John regards pointing to the person of Christ, the identity of Christ, and indeed his work. In other words, they're John's theological understanding of who Jesus Christ is. And you see that he uses those signs, he brackets those signs at the beginning of his gospel, that's where the brackets are, and at the end of the gospel. And yet, as we read, or we didn't find that verse, but in spite of all the signs, they still did not believe. Now, that tells us, does it not, that fact, that statement, in spite of all the signs that they did not believe, that there are reasons other than the evidence of Christianity for Christianity as to why people refuse to believe. That it's not all to do with, they don't think that the case for Christianity is compelling enough. There are other reasons.

Faith, you see, in Jesus is a whole of life commitment to follow Jesus. Faith is not some kind of, merely, merely mental asset to, or ascent to Jesus. It's a whole of life commitment. I used to work in insurance at one point, many, many years ago. And sometimes I arranged mortgages for people, and sometimes they wanted a mortgage protection policy. And I would ask them what kind of policy that they wanted? Did they want a term only, or a decreasing term, or a whole of life?

Now, a whole of life insurance policy, it's what it says in the tin. You keep paying it for the whole of your life. Well, faith is not something that is a single point in your life. Faith is a whole life commitment to Jesus Christ. And perhaps that's why that these people that Jesus is referring to when he tells us that in spite of all the signs, they would not believe.

The people of Jesus' day, you see, were worried about losing their position and power. Is it possible that someone here today is holding back from coming to Christ because of fear of losing something?

[9 : 04] Perhaps popularity. It's not easy to be unpopular. And popularity is something that, in a sense, all of us like to feel. We don't like to feel we're unpopular, but we probably like to feel that there's some degree of kudos for us. And something like that could be what could be keeping someone back from coming to Christ. Prestige, possessions. Jesus could say a person's life, a life that has meaning, that has value, that is worthwhile, does not consist in the abundance of things that they possess. And yet, perhaps there are many people that that is what gets them up out of their bed in the morning because they want more and more and more possessions.

The famous Simone Weil, French intellectual, who lived around the time of the Second War but died very young. She made a great statement in one of her books. She said, in this life we possess nothing.

And she's absolutely true. Because what we think we possess can be taken away like that. I wonder if all these people in Ukraine thought they had lots of tremendous possessions.

Remember this? The raising of Lazarus was the final sign of the seven signs that are in John's Gospel.

It was the final offer, shall we say, the final movement of Jesus to encourage those people to follow him and to come to faith.

[11 : 30] And it might well be, we must be careful in not coming to Christ and in not committing our lives to him. There's a verse in Scripture somewhere, I used to quote it a lot earlier in my Christian life, and it was in my consciousness a lot earlier in my Christian life. I've been a Christian for about 50 odd years.

And it was this, the Spirit of the Lord will not always strive with you. Maybe you've experienced signs. Do you know what I mean?

I mean, something has happened, or something has fallen into place, or not fallen into place, and you've wondered, could that be God speaking to me?

Could that be God striving with me? Christological signs.

What will it take for you to follow Christ? Second thing under this heading of context, firstly was the Christological signs, but Christ's consciousness of what he calls my hour.

[12 : 58] We read that already at the very beginning, remember? In Cana of Galilee, at the wedding feast, and they had said, they've got no more wine, and he changed the water into wine.

His mother approached him initially, and he said to his mother, my hour has not yet come. But then, if we fast forward in John's Gospel, to chapter 12, verse 27.

Well, we can read first verse 23. We read that about the Greeks wanting to see Jesus, and Andrew and Philip went to Jesus to say that there was these people that would like to see you.

And Jesus answered them, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. And then, in verse 27 of John chapter 12, he says, now is my soul troubled.

By the way, these words that are used of Jesus being troubled are very, very powerful words.

[14 : 27] He's deeply agitated, and perhaps even angry. I'll come to that maybe just a wee bit later.

Jesus, you see, from the very beginning of his ministry, from the outset, was aware of a terrible hour to which he was inexorably moving towards.

Namely, the redemption of the world through cross and resurrection. When we are in the chapter 11 and 12 of John's Gospel, we're more or less within a week of the death of Jesus.

About a week before he is crucified.

And the consternation that the thought of it brings to him. You know, there's a famous archbishop of Canterbury who lived in the Middle Ages called Anselm.

[15 : 43] And he has a famous book called *Cur Deus Homo*, which is Latin for, why did God roughly become a man?

This was the central reason that Jesus Christ came into this world.

Yes, his teachings are amazing and remarkable. Yes, his teaching is lofty and majestic and magnificent.

And his miracles, if you like, are breathtaking. But they don't touch on the actual heartbeat of why Jesus, the principal and central and core reason why Jesus came into this world.

In other words, why the incarnation? Why the life of obedience of Jesus Christ? Why the hanging on the cross?

[16 : 54] Why the life of obedience of Jesus Christ?

John shows us that the journey towards Lazarus that Jesus makes when he hears about his illness. Lazarus, who is Jesus' close friend, is littered with powerful allusions to this hour.

Let me just mention some of those for you. Why the Lord, Lazarus, who is the sister of Mary and Martha, in verse 2, we read, It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill.

Why is John telling us that right now? Why has he got this parenthesis and these brackets there? Because it actually tells us about this anointing in chapter 12.

Why is he doing that? I believe that he's doing that because he's showing us the irony and the paradoxical nature of what's going on.

[18 : 42] Although Jesus is journeying towards Lazarus to raise him from the dead, and because he has heard he's ill, there's actually a higher pathway, a more momentous pathway, even than the raising of Lazarus, that he's proceeding towards.

That is Golgotha for the redemption of men and women. If you look at verse 4 of chapter 11, But when Jesus heard it, he said, This illness does not lead to death.

Speaking of Lazarus' illness, It's for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it. Now, just as an aside, but a very important one, I want you to notice the association of glory with the death of Christ that John states several times in his gospel.

When we think of the, you know, we've seen his glory, we might think of the transfiguration. I want to suggest to you that when John has the glory of Jesus in mind, he most certainly has the cross of Christ in mind.

And the reason I've mentioned verse 4, I know it's not explicit, but one wonders, is there an implicit, tacit reference there to the cross?

[20 : 30] And also, I want you to notice verse 16. Verse 16 of chapter 11.

So Thomas, called the twin, said to his fellow disciples, Let us also go that we may die with him. Now, I'm all for helping people that I've got, in the scripture that is, that I've maybe got not a very good reputation, like I did with Martha, in seeking to show that Martha excelled.

And here Thomas excels. The context is this. In verse 7, Jesus says, Let's go to Judea again. And the disciple said to him, Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?

And it's in that context, I think, and after Jesus says to them, Yeah, I am going there again. And Jesus turns around and says to them, He offers an invitation to them, Let us go to Judea.

And Thomas called the twin and said, Let us also go that we may die with him. That's amazing, isn't it? I said earlier on, that faith is a whole of life commitment.

[22 : 07] We read in Jesus, in chapter 12 of John's gospel, that Jesus said, The person that loves their life will lose it. And the person that hates their life will find it.

So, Jesus is moving inexorably towards that hour, towards that cross, towards Golgotha.

And Thomas has got this epiphany, that we should go with him, and die with him. In other words, we should follow Christ, and we should take up our cross.

Is that the kind of Christianity, that we have today? That's the question I'm asking. Is that the kind of Christianity, that I have? Because I'm convinced of this.

There isn't such a thing, in the New Testament, as crossless Christianity. The only authentic, biblical Christianity, that I find, in the New Testament, is Christianity, that is cross-shaped.

[23 : 19] So, we have the context. And then, if we can go on to, the second part of this sermon, the resurrection, and the life.

It's a fascinating conversation, that Jesus has, with Martha. This is what we were looking at, the last time I spoke in this text.

And Jesus gently corrects, Martha's lack of understanding, and limiting of Jesus. Or, if you like, her inadequate theology of Jesus. Jesus is always, and this applies, I believe, to every single one of us here.

Jesus is always much more, than we understand of him. In verse 21, Martha went out, to meet Jesus, when she heard, that, he was coming, to where Lazarus was.

And when she met him, we read in verse 21, that Martha said, if you had been here, my brother, would not have died.

[24 : 42] I've used the word, limiting. What makes her think, simply because Jesus, wasn't there, physically, that he couldn't have done, that miracle, remotely?

And then, if we go to, verse 23, Jesus says to her, because she's more or less saying, had you been here, he wouldn't have died, but he is dead now, and there's nothing, really can be done about that, is there not?

And Jesus responds to her, by saying, your brother, will rise again. And she responds, to Jesus, by saying, I know, that he will rise again, in the resurrection, at, the last day.

I know that he will rise again, in the resurrection, at the last day. What was she talking about? You can see two things there, about Martha, can't you?

One is, she believes, in the resurrection, of human beings. I know he will rise again.

[26 : 07] Two, she believes, it's somewhere, in the future, in the last day. That last day, is a theme, that runs, throughout the entire Bible, often described, as the day of the Lord.

But, eventually, it, coalesces, and focuses, entirely, on Jesus Christ. Jesus, turns round then, and says to her, I am the resurrection, and the life.

As we close, let me quickly, just state, what I believe, Jesus, is saying, to Martha. He's saying, the last day, the last day, is here, right now, with me.

The situation, that you're referring to, the winding up, of the world, the breaking in, of God's absolute reign, into history, is here.

Your brother, won't need to wait, until the future. the future, has begun, with my coming. I am the messianic king, that you're referring to, and the ruler, associated, with the last day.

[27 : 28] The last day, or day of the Lord, and the resurrection, which it brings, is inseparable, from me. But Jesus, not only said, I am the resurrection, he said, I am the life.

John, uses this word, life, 38 times, in his gospel, and he uses it, if you like, as a, what would you say, an alternative word, for the idea, of the kingdom, of God.

Jesus, is offering, each one of us, life, more abundantly, that's how he puts it, which is, a word that means, overflowing, it means, excess.

It's what Jesus, calls, as I say, life, more abundantly, and the, the corollary of that, is that he says, don't labor, for the meat, that perishes. Again, each of us, are where we are, in our pilgrimage, and we could pause, maybe, it's good to put a wee pause, in your life, at times, and ask, what's my life about?

What's driving me? Where am I going? What's happening? That's what the book of Ecclesiastes, was doing. That person, was trying to pause, and figure out, what's going on, with my life?

[29 : 08] Is it along, the correct path? Jesus is saying, to Martha, I am the resurrection, and the life. All that you hope for, all that you dream about, all that you long for, that salvation, that final day, of resurrection, it is, here, in me.

But for Martha, and you and I, to participate, in this life, which Jesus offers us, we need to believe. We're back to that again.

Notice, in verse 26, Jesus said, to Martha, after he had spoken, about him being the resurrection, and the life, he said, do you believe this?

And that's what, impressed me so much, Martha's response, yes Lord, I believe that you're the Messiah, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.

Amazing. And so, he asked Martha, do you believe this? And he asks you and I, today as well.

[30 : 24] There's a sense in which, I want to use this phrase, it's not a phrase, that I read anywhere, it's a phrase, that came into my head, but, before life, is death.

Before life, is death. That's the principle, of the kingdom, of God. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, used to say, when God calls, someone to him, when Christ, calls someone, to them, he bids them, come and die.

That's what Jesus, means when he says, he that loses his life, this life, we have, that's not the life, of God, that's simply, a biological life, if we love that life, we'll end up losing it.

And that's why Jesus said, but if you, hate your life, in this world, you'll find it. Jesus, could only be, our resurrection, and life, by facing, that hour, that I was speaking about, for which he came.

Can I ask, as I do now close, have you come, to the hour, of believing, in him?

[31 : 53] Have you come, to the hour, of committing, your whole life, to him? Have you come, to the hour, of losing your life, for the sake, of Christ?

Or, are you still, putting off, that hour? Amen. May the Lord, himself, bless these words, to us, for his glory.