

I AM the Resurrection and Life

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[0 : 00] Okay, we'll have the Bible reading for today. It's from John's Gospel, chapter 11, verses 1 to 6. And then we'll continue from verse 17 to the end, to verse 53.

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 sisters sent to him, saying, Lord, he whom you love is ill. But when Jesus heard it, he said, this illness does not lead to death.

It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified 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. And then we'll continue from verse 17.

[1 : 12] Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off. And many of the Jews had come to meet 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.

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

[2 : 20] 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.

When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, the teacher is here and is calling for you. And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him.

Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him.

When the Jews who were with her in the house consoling her saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.

[3 : 35] And he said, where have you laid him? They said to him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. So they said, see how he loved him.

But some of them said, could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man has also kept this man from dying? Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb.

It was a cave and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, take away the stone. Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, Lord, by this time there will be an odour, for he has been dead four days.

Jesus said to her, did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God? So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, Father, I thank you that you have heard me.

I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me. When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, Lazarus, come out.

[5 : 00] The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, unbind him and let him go.

Many of the Jews, therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, what are we to do? For this man performs many signs. 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. But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, you know nothing at all.

Nor do you understand that it is better for one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish. He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation.

[6 : 07] And not for the nation only, but to gather into the children of God who are scattered abroad. So from that day on, they made plans to put him to death. Jesus, therefore, no longer openly, walked openly among the Jews, but went from there to the region near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim.

And there he stayed with the disciples. This is God's word. Let us learn from it today. Amen. Well, good morning, everyone.

Will you please pray with me as you come to God's word? Father, whatever expectations we have coming to your word, I pray that you would either meet them or confront them, and I know you'll surpass them.

So I pray that you would give each of us ready minds and hearts to receive your word. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I wonder how you have been trying to measure the love of God for you this past week.

One measure I'm trying to use at the moment, I think, is how much sleep or lack thereof I'm getting. Maybe you're measuring it some other way, the gain or loss of health, of success, of money, reputation, with your friends and at work, of pleasure.

[7 : 49] There's all sorts of measures we use. But if any of these things are the primary measure of the love of God, then looking at the first Christians, the apostles, John who wrote this himself, God must have hated them if they are the measures of his love.

In the story of Lazarus, I think we have one of the most heartbreaking measures of his love, the grief of a loved one.

When the sisters send a message pleading for help, notice the connecting word between verse 5 and 6.

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus so. When he heard Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

It's not but. He loved them but. He was busy. He loved them but. There's just nothing he could do. He loved them so he delayed.

[9 : 08] How can it possibly be loving to let his friend die? I think this event gets at the essence of the kind of abundant life that Jesus gives.

If we understand what the abundant life is, then we'll know how to properly measure God's love for us. So first we see who Jesus is in his interactions with Martha and Mary.

When Jesus finally arrived, Lazarus had been dead for four days. Now he's delayed two days. It probably took one day for the messenger to reach him and another day for Jesus to get there.

So it's possible that Martha already knows that her brother probably died before the messenger even reached him. Probably. Probably. So when she says, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

It's probably more an expression of faith than it is a rebuke. It could be doubt. I'm not denying that. But it's an expression of faith. I think she's saying, Lord, I still trust you.

[10 : 23] You would have saved him if you'd been here. And Mary says the same thing. But her faith seems to be way more shaken. I think we should hear her words, the exact same words, but we should be hearing them with just heartbreaking sobs.

Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. She's shaken to the core. Same words for Martha and Mary.

And look at Jesus' opposite response. It's almost complete opposite. To Martha, he confronts her. He confronts her grief with truth.

He calls for her to hope in a deeper hope than she currently expresses. But to Mary, he enters her sorrow. And he himself weeps with her.

It's one of the most profound verses in the Bible, isn't it? He loves each of them. And he's showing each of them who he is, exactly what each of them needs to see in that moment.

[11 : 35] And together we see who he is. He's unlike anyone we've ever met. He's fully God and fully human. He is incredibly high, absolute truth, and he's incredibly low.

To Martha, who believes that each person is appointed to die once and then face God in judgment, she believes in the resurrection.

He confronts her with truth. He calls her to greater truth. I am the resurrection and life. You're staring at him, Martha.

That future you believe in is here, in me. He's already said in chapter 5, the father has entrusted all judgment to his son.

The son has life in himself and chooses whom to bring in to share his life. And so he confronts Martha with truth. That's what she needed. That's what we need.

[12 : 41] I heard the story of a family who had lost a child.

And many in the church came to visit them, to comfort them. And the parents later said that they were helped the most by this older man who came and just sat in their lounge room and cried.

And after a while, he left. They found that the most encouraging. I think we see that here in Mary.

Whatever doubts or anger Mary has. Jesus is deeply stirred and he weeps. He shows his glory in a way that no words would have shown.

We need a God who calls us to greater hope in absolute truth, but we also need a God who shares our weakness and our pain and weeps.

[13 : 50] And in this one person, we have both. That's why he's so compelling. You read the stories of the Gospels and there's no one like him.

You meet great people in life and you meet humble people in life. There's things that combine in Jesus that you don't meet in anyone else. I'm going to quote a minister from a couple of centuries ago, John Watson.

I don't think the Watson from Sherlock Holmes for anyone. Despite his high claims, he is never pompous.

You never see him standing on his own dignity. He is tenderness without weakness. He is strength without harshness. Humility without the slightest lack of confidence.

Unhesitating authority with a complete lack of self-absorption. Unbending convictions without the slightest lack of approachability. He is power without insensitivity.

[14 : 59] Nothing he does falls short. In fact, he is always surprising you and taking your breath away because he's incomparably better than you could have imagined. These are the surprises of perfection.

We see who he is. The surprises of perfection. Incredibly high and incredibly low. But then we go to the tomb and we see what he came to do.

The emotion of Jesus is, it seems to be stronger than the English translations want to say for some reason.

In verse 33, he's deeply moved in his spirit. Now, when this word is used elsewhere, it's usually he's bellowing with rage.

It's used of horses snorting in anger. Something is deeply stirred here. He's trembling with rage as he's weeping.

[16 : 12] And we see in verse 38, it is this strong emotion that takes him to the tomb.

Who's he angry at? What's stirring him so deeply? Like this is, yes, there's sympathy with Mary.

This is, I think it's something more than that. There's no evidence that he's angry at the family.

He's not angry at himself or his father. He knows what he's about to do. As a whole human race, we deserve, we deserve the agony of death for turning away from the source of life.

It's not some sense of injustice. There's two main options I've come across. And see what you think. I'm going to tell you what I think, but these two are pretty close. Maybe he's angry at the questioning of his love. The mourners who were there saying, could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?

[17 : 25] They're questioning his love. Now that's possible. Because when we question his motives, it blinds us to see the eternal life he's giving us.

So that's one option. I lean more towards the second option, which is he's angry at death. Now evolution says death is natural.

It's meaningless. You shouldn't get worked up. If you hold to the evolution, death is natural.

There's some people who believe in fate and we hear language of, oh, it's just their time. There's some vague notion of it's their time.

Jesus, he's stirred to the core. He is angry at death, I think. One whom he loves, one of his sheep, a human being who displays the light of the glory of God, his light has been extinguished.

[18 : 40] I think his anger at death fits with him weeping with Mary more. I think it fits with the emphasis in verse 39.

If you have a look at verse 39, he says, move the stone away, Martha, the sister of the dead man. We know that, right? Thanks for pointing that out, John.

He's emphasizing here the dead man. The stench has defiled the sanctity of this human life. He's been dead four days.

There is this permanence of death. So I like how B.B. Warfield puts it, Jesus advances to the tomb, not weak and snivelling, but as a champion preparing for conflict.

John uncovers the heart of Jesus as he wins our salvation, not in cold unconcerned, but with fiery wrath against our enemy. And he prays publicly so that we all know that what's about to happen is the Father and the Son working together.

[20 : 05] And he says in a loud voice, so I think no one can go, oh, that was magic. No, it came from Jesus' lips. Lazarus, come out.

Come out. Do you see what we're seeing here? We're watching a preview of what will happen at the close of history.

Emma and I went for a walk in Sandgate Cemetery the other day, as you do. It was quite a lovely day. But just to see all those tombstones.

And Jesus says in chapter 5, don't be surprised at this. A time is coming when all who are in their tombs will hear his voice and come out. Those who have done good to the resurrection of life and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

We're seeing a preview of that final day. We see who he is.

[21 : 22] We see what he came to do. But I don't think we quite see the full extent of his love just yet. Because imagine Jesus turned up at a funeral.

The slideshow is playing and people were weeping and he walks down to that casket and restores the loved one. You'd be in awe of his greatness, wouldn't you?

You would feel indebted to him forever. But is it just a matter of him using his power? Is it just a matter of power? It's definitely power. But is that all it is?

If you arrived home and a friend greeted you saying, I saw this fine on the fridge and I decided to pay it for you in full, how should you respond?

Depends, right? You don't know yet. Was it just a \$10 overdue bill? Like, was it \$10? Maybe you respond, ah, thank you.

[22 : 36] A smile, thank you. What if it was a court letter saying, you've got to pay the prosecution legal fees and all these infringements that was like over \$2 million.

You had no way of paying it. You're going to have to declare bankruptcy. There goes your retirement savings. Your job prospects are people going to look twice at you for the rest of your life. A smile is not going to cut it, is it, if they've paid that? It depends. How much did it cost Jesus to raise Lazarus?

It wasn't just about power. This story is not just about Lazarus from death to life. This is a story about Jesus' life to death. We see here that this event triggered desperation from his enemies.

Verse 53 says, From that day on, they made plans to put Jesus to death. This is the last of Jesus' public signs, and it's the climax.

[23 : 47] From here on in the gospel, we're in the final days before the cross. Not only have they made plans to kill Jesus, chapter 12, verse 10 says, So the chief priest made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, the poor guy.

Because on account of him, many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus. Jesus, this triggered something. And Jesus, knowing it's going to trigger this, we look back on his delay when the sisters asked him for help.

I think we can look back on his delay. He could have just healed Lazarus with a word from a distance and kept safe. But he didn't. He chose the most costly path. He loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus and the crowd and us today. So he chose the most costly path to show us who he is, to show us what he came to do for us. Knowing full well he's going to have to trade places with Lazarus in the tomb. I heard the story of a man's wife died and on the way to the funeral, the kids in the car, they were stopped at a set of traffic lights.

[25 : 19] And a truck turned in front of them and the shadow of the truck went over their car. And he said to the kids, would you rather be hit by the truck or hit by the shadow of the truck?

And his kids said the shadow. And he's saying, Jesus was hit by the truck so that mummy only went through the shadow. That's the cost.

Do you see how much he loves you? The amount of sleep I get? What a poor measure.

Any circumstances are not a reliable measure of God's love for you. He is the measure. How much you see the glory of God in his son. I am the resurrection and the life.

Do you see who he is? Do you see what he came to do? Do you see what he came to do? Do you see what he came to do?

[26 : 32] I don't think this resurrection and life is just about extending physical life. Lazarus died again. The poor guy got in hot water as soon as he woke up.

The life he enjoyed was being connected to this Jesus. To know that your eternity judgment is settled.

When you face God, it's already settled. I'm going to be raised to life because I belong to you.

To know that peace. Your eternity can be changed on the 1st of September 2024. The moment you come and believe.

Judgment's settled. Your eternity. Not only is sure. I think he's saying more than this. He's saying, yes, I'm the one who resurrects.

[27 : 48] I think he's saying that resurrection is sharing in my life. Notice he adds, I'm the resurrection and the life. Whoever lives in me, whoever lives in me and believes in me will never die.

I can't be about physical death. I said at a Crusaders camp once when I got the opportunity to speak, for the Christian, heaven has already begun.

And you could just see in the head's gun, it just didn't comprehend. Whoever lives in Jesus, our heaven has begun.

I know we're looking for, aren't you looking forward to the full thing? But the life we have in knowing the one true God and Jesus Christ whom he sent, it's begun.

And do you see the price he paid? Not just using his power, but trading places with us in the tomb. That's how we should measure his love.

[29 : 10] So I just want to finish by asking, what's a proper response? What's a proper response to such glorious love? Many came to mourn with Martha and Mary.

So this is very public, what happened here. Many saw this miracle. Many more heard the eyewitness testimony as we are today. But Jesus divides people.

Only some saw the glory of God. Verse 40, did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God? Everyone saw the miracle.

Only those who believe see the glory of God. It's not. If you're still exploring Christianity, that's great.

Keep exploring. Could I suggest it's not for lack of evidence? I think really the question is, do you want it to be true?

[30 : 23] Do you want it to be true? I believe we see in Lazarus spiritually what we're all like. We are as dead as Lazarus towards God.

We don't respond to him unless Jesus calls us. If you're his sheep, you hear his voice, you'll come out.

You'll come. You'll come. So to respond, we need him to help us respond.

And if you can see him, praise him, not ourselves. I think we also see in Mary and Martha what we get a picture of what a proper response looks like.

In Martha, we see what belief is. Well, for all of them, we see what belief is. For Martha, it's got content. It's not vague.

[31 : 31] Verse 27 is a really profound expression of faith. I is emphasised. I, whatever anyone else does, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one scripture promise would come and save us.

It's got content. In Mary, I think we see that sometimes it just looks like coming to him and weeping. I'm guessing there will be people in this room today, when we're singing, you believe. You just, you're hurting so much. You just can't. You can't sing at the moment.

You can't pray. I think Mary shows us just you come to him. You don't look for comfort somewhere else. You might be angry at him. You might be doubting his love.

But you still come to him. She didn't go to the tomb to weep. She went to him. And we didn't read this bit, but the very next story, we see what a proper response looks like in Mary as well.

[32 : 50] A smile and a thank you towards Jesus. If he is your resurrection and your life, a smile's not going to cut it, is it?

You can't just be nice to this Jesus. You can't just be on friendly terms. You can't just treat him as a personal assistant. You can't treat him as just a counsellor.

He deserves more than if it's convenient for you to come to church or whatever it is. He deserves more than that.

If he is who he says he is and he's done what he has and at great cost to himself, our allegiance to him, the limits just have to be taken off. He's got to be our centre.

He's got to be our everything. He deserves worship. And that's what we see with Mary in the next story. They're having a dinner for Jesus and Lazarus is sitting there at the table.

[33 : 58] What an incredible meal that would have been. And she is at his feet again and she takes the most expensive thing she owns, this jar of ointment that would have cost a year's wages, a year's wages.

I wonder what you would spend a year's wages on. And she just wastes it on his feet. What's she doing?

She's saying, with all that I am and all that I have, I honour you. That's a proper response. I am the resurrection and the life.

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?

Do you see the measure of his love? If we do, then let's just waste all of our life poured at his feet.

[35 : 15] Will you pray with me? Let's pray. Father, like Martha and Mary, I pray that you would meet each one where we are at and help us grasp more just how great you are and that our life is hidden in you and that when you come back, then we will have life to the full.

Thank you that that life has begun. I pray that you would help us as your people to act like that.

Lord, I pray that you comfort those who are hurting and that you would cause us to spend all that we are and all that we have in service of you, in love of you.

And I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.