

Resurrection Life

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[0 : 00] It's a privilege to be here with you again today. I had a really lovely time getting to be with you last time and I'm excited to be here again. Last time I was here I told a story about how when I was a teenager I got this rare illness called Guillain-Barre syndrome and I was paralyzed.

And at the worst moment when I had lost the ability to move most of my body below my neck I was really frightened and I wasn't sure how this was going to turn out.

I didn't know what I was sick with and I thought to myself what if this is it? I don't know if I'm ever going to be able to move again. I don't know if I'm going to possibly die.

And I was very frightened and God healed me. Over the next four days I slowly began to get movement back after they'd identified what I was sick with and they had started to give me medicine.

To stop it from getting worse God began to heal me rapidly. And on my last night in hospital before I was set to go home I remember lying in bed. The lights are off.

[1 : 07] The window is right next to my hospital bed. And I look out at the night sky and I have this thought. And I had this sort of clarity as if I hadn't ever really been awake.

I realized, ah, I haven't been living the life I wish I had. I need to be living life to the full. I am going to go on dates.

I am going to exercise my body and become the most amazing looking person around. I'm going to seize every opportunity before me. I'm going to learn everything I could. I am going to live like I am dying because I have this renewed sense of all the things I want to experience in life.

And I don't know if you've ever been through an experience where you thought, well, maybe I don't have much more time left. Maybe you're in that season of life right now. I remember being so afraid. And when I had the opportunity to go and live life again and to move and to live and breathe, I wanted to experience all these things because I was going to live like I was dying.

[2 : 14] And maybe you've had that advice. You will get the most out of life if you live like you're dying. In America, there's this really famous country song called Live Like You Were Dying where he talks about how when he thought he was dying with this sickness, he went skydiving.

He went rocky mountain climbing. He loved deeper. He spoke sweeter. And he hopes that you too can live like you're dying. And it's everywhere in our culture.

Death. It's very close to this community right now. It's all around us. And when we live in light of death, we try and do all the things we can to make sure that we get the most out of life while we have the time.

There's a famous American TV show called The Good Place. And I'm going to spoil the ending. So if you don't want to know that, that's great. Close your ears. The show is about the afterlife.

And at the very end of the show, the last episode, they all get to heaven. They're all happy. They have this eternity before them. And they all choose to actually end their existence because they believe that life only has meaning because it ends.

[3 : 30] And I don't know if you've heard this too before, that your life is short and the fact that when things are over, that's it. And that's what gives your life meaning.

That's a very atheistic way of looking at the world. And if that's you right now, I get it. I've been there. I've thought that. But the Bible actually has something very different to say.

Instead of death giving life meaning, our meaning comes from somewhere else because death is not the final word. Our final word is resurrection.

It's Jesus. And so as we turn to this passage today, I'm going to try and fly through it because there's a lot to go over. And I'm not going to highlight all the parts of this really wonderful text.

We would be here for four or more hours. But I'm going to try and hone in what I think God might be speaking to us today. That instead of being a people that live as though we are dying, we are a people to live as though we have been resurrected.

[4 : 34] So if you have your Bibles, please turn to John chapter 11 verse 1. It says, 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. This is really funny. John is a little bit like a Christopher Nolan where he does these bits and snippets out of order sometimes.

This story hasn't actually happened yet. It's going to happen in chapter 12. Why does he give us that context? We'll see in a second. Mary, Martha and Lazarus are important to Jesus.

And so the sisters sent word to Jesus, Lord, the one you love is sick. They're asking him to help. When he heard this, Jesus says, This sickness will not end in death.

No, it's for God's glory so that God's son may be glorified through it. This sickness will not end in death. Jesus loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus.

[5 : 36] So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was for two more days. If that sounds a bit weird to you, it sounded a bit weird to me. If you have the ability to help someone, intuition tells us that we should help them.

But God's going to do something a little bit different this time. Oftentimes people come to Jesus and ask for healing. And sometimes he heals them from a distance. He doesn't do that here.

And he says to his disciples, after a couple of days, Let's go back to Judea. Rabbi, they said, a short while ago, they were trying to kill you over there. Why are you going to go back?

And Jesus answered, Are there not 12 hours or more of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. It's when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light.

Jesus often answers things in a way that, first we go, what? This is an old Roman Jewish way of looking at time. 12 hours in the day, 12 hours at night.

[6 : 44] While it's daytime, Jesus is saying, I'm going to do the things I came here to do before it's nighttime. After he 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. Sleep is good for us. They know this. Jesus had been speaking of his death. So he says to them plainly, Lazarus is dead.

And for your sake, I was glad I was not there, so that you may believe, but let's go to him. Now, I want you to focus on something here. The disciples rightly point out that if Jesus goes down to Bethany in Judea, it's about two miles from Jerusalem, he could get in trouble.

His life might be in a tough spot because the people there were not friendly with Jesus, the religious leaders. And he says, we're going to go anyway.

Thomas says to the rest of the disciples, well, let's also go that we may die with him. This is very macho man. Love it. Behavior. Let's go. Let's go die with our Lord.

[7 : 55] And so we're seeing that death is a huge feature of what's going on here. Lazarus has died. Jesus is in danger of dying. And the disciples know that they might die too. On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days.

There's a superstition that the soul leaves the body after three days of being dead. So just so you know, while that may not be true at the time, they have given up any hope of anything else happening.

Lazarus is dead and gone. Now, 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 hears that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him. But Mary stayed at home. Custom wise, at the time, what you would do in the seven days after someone you love has died, you stay home and you go to the tomb and that's it.

So Martha's kind of breaking tradition. She probably does this in secret to go and meet Jesus before he gets there. And she kind of intercepts him and says, Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died.

[9 : 00] But I know even now that God will give you whatever you ask. Okay, so we know how this story ends. And it's really easy for us to jump in and go, aha, she's on the same page as us.

She knows what Jesus can do. And let's not get ahead of ourselves here because it doesn't seem to be that she actually thinks that Jesus is going to resurrect Lazarus. She's actually probably saying, I don't know what you're going to do, but I trust you.

And it's really important that in times of grief and suffering, we can't know how things are going to end up in this life. But we do know the one who does.

And we can trust him to act. May he be not the way we hope he will, but he will act in our best interests. Jesus says to her in response to this, your brother will rise again.

Theologically, this is not news to Martha because she goes, I know he'll rise again in the resurrection on the last day. So again, she's not thinking that he's going to raise Lazarus now.

[10:08] I know you'll do this at the end of time. God will raise everybody up at the last day at the end of this time when everything has happened and judgment happens. And Jesus says to her, I am the resurrection and the life.

The one who believes in me will live even though they die. So Martha's here and thinking that Jesus came to offer comfort and he could have healed Lazarus and he didn't.

And Jesus says this thing, he'll be raised. Okay, great. Thanks. I know my brother will rise on the last day. But Jesus says, no, no, no, no.

He takes this idea of resurrection and turns it from an event into a person himself. It's not a future event, but Jesus right here, right now.

And Jesus then says, and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Look at this. It's both now and future. In verse 25, we have, I'm the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live.

[11:11] Believes in me will live. That's not at the end of time. That's right now. Even though they die. And whoever lives by believing in me will never die.

Do you believe in this? We often just assume that resurrection is a physical thing that happens at the end of time when God makes a new heaven, a new earth, and he brings us all back.

And that's true. That is a good, hopeful thing that we have. But Jesus is saying that resurrection is something more than that. It's that and something.

It's something that can happen now. Yes, Lord, she replied. I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world. Throughout the whole Old Testament, and this is a Jewish community of people, what we call the Old Testament, the Torah, the Tanakh, from Genesis to Malachi, we have a story of God's people, the chosen people, Israel.

And they go from being chosen in Abraham to becoming a nation that are made slaves, that God delivers into freedom, into the land of Israel.

[12:28] And they don't follow God's ways. And they end up following their own ways and trying to accumulate all of these different living life to the full. And they end up dispersed and slaves again and captured and in a poor way.

And they have this promise of a coming Messiah who's going to show up and is going to overthrow the world rulers and is going to conquer all the things and then bring everybody back.

And everybody will be free again. And Israel will be the way it's supposed to be. And that Messiah, Martha correctly identifies as Jesus. But what they interpret Messiah to be is a little bit more than that.

Because what Jesus is going to do is he's going to show this goes beyond world rulers, though it may include them. This is going to go over death. After she said this, she went back and called her sister Mary.

The teacher's here. He's asking for you. When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. Now, Jesus had not entered the village yet, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. So this is all happening very fast.

[13:40] Now, 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. So this isn't just a personal thing.

There's a crowd coming. And Jesus has this way of interacting with crowds where crowds just can't seem to stay away from him. And it's interesting that we have Bethany being less than two miles from Jerusalem.

And many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them. Many Jews. So this isn't just a small little funeral procession. This is a large crowd of people that have shown up.

And it says that when they come, Mary reaches the place where Jesus was and saw him. And she falls at his feet and says, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. She says the same thing Martha did. It's heartbreaking. Sickness and death are inherently heartbreaking. When Jesus sees her weeping and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.

[14 : 51] Deeply moved is probably not the best way to translate that. It's probably better translated as deeply angered. Why is he angry?

It doesn't seem very pastoral to be angry at these people who are grieving. Well, who is he angry at? What is he angry at? A theologian called Jürgen Moltmann talks about how we often think of Jesus' miracles as this profound intrusion on reality, the way things are.

Miracles come and they disrupt how things are supposed to be. And they're really cool for that. And Moltmann says, no, no, no. The intrusion, the intruder is death.

Death is the thing that is not the way it's supposed to be. If you go about your life thinking that death is right and good and it just is real. This is as good as it gets.

This is what reality is like. Then you walk away with a distorted view on how things are supposed to be. Jesus is angry because death is not the way it's supposed to be.

[15 : 54] If you are encountering death and you are finding it difficult to accept it, the reason is, is because you're not supposed to. Death is a sickness on this world and it is not the way it's supposed to be.

So if death is the intrusion, miracles, Jesus is working, are the way God is restoring the world. And so Jesus is restoring the world to be the way it is supposed to be.

Where have you laid him, he asked. Come and see, Lord, they replied. And then we get one of the most famous verses in the Bible, Jesus wept. If you've ever needed proof that God is not a Victorian stiff upper lip thing that exists out there that created stuff, this is it.

He didn't just create things and fold his arms and go, see, you can't do anything right, guys. No. This tells us. Why does Jesus weep?

Some people say, well, he's really sad that he's going to bring Lazarus from such a great place, heaven. No. Jesus weeps because death is wrong. And there is something, when you've encountered death, you know that there's this feeling, this gut feeling that something is very wrong.

[17 : 11] When you encounter someone who is sick with an illness like cancer, something is wrong here. This is not right. And it's upsetting. Jesus is sitting with us in our grief about the horribleness that death is on this world.

Because death and its consequences grieve the heart of God. God is not an apathetic creation maker. He is actively involved in our lives.

He hates sin because it results in death. And he hates death. God is the God of life. And Jesus is Lord over death. And we're going to see that in just a second. The Jews see Jesus weeping.

They say, see how he loved him. Some others say, could he who not open the eyes of the blind to have kept him from dying? And this is one of the hardest things we have to deal with as Christians. That we don't get a confirmation sentence that we can just stick up in our home and say, this is the thing.

Because if God is all powerful, if he is all loving, then why do we have to deal with things that are not the way they're supposed to be? And we don't necessarily always get a sticker that we can stick on our car answer to that.

[18 : 24] But instead of it being a dichotomy of either God is not quite all loving or he's not quite all powerful, we get this third thing that we often don't know what to do with, which is that God acts.

And he may have a reason for working through things in a way that we don't understand right now. Allowing Jesus to die for the glory of God.

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 says. But Lord, by this time there's a bad odor.

He's been dead for four days. If you've been to a crematorium and know how these things work, bodies are not supposed to die. Things start to decay and happen. And Jesus said, did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?

Allowing Lazarus to die for glory and to help his people. It's not to prop up God and make him something more than what he is.

[19 : 29] God's glory is a fact. It's reality. And so when Jesus is showing them the glory of God in this moment, he's actually helping them understand how reality is supposed to be.

For those who despair, Jesus has hope to give. Despairing is faith that you know the outcome of what's going to happen. And despair only makes sense if death gets the final word, but it doesn't. So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, Father, I thank you that you've 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.

Okay. Just really quickly, because we don't have a lot of time. But when we go back to Torah, okay, again, Torah is essential for understanding how the Jews encountered the world and how they believed and interpreted reality.

Believe that you sent me. That's language that we get with Moses. So when Moses gets anointed by God to go out to deliver news about what God's going to do for the people of Israel who are slaves, he gives them signs so that they may know that he's been sent from God to go and talk on their behalf.

[20 : 48] So one of those signs is his staff turns into a snake. Another of those signs is turning water into blood. Jesus, by the way, has reflected a few of these signs.

The first thing he does in the book of John is there's water and it turns into something else. It turns into wine. So instead of blood, death, it turns into wine, goodness.

And each of the signs throughout John, there's seven of them. And this is the last one before Jesus dies and is resurrected. This is the last one.

And it really closely mirrors the last sign in Exodus, which is that the people of Israel are passed over. They're delivered from death that the Egyptians encounter.

And here we're going to see Jesus is going to deliver Lazarus from death as well. Death isn't the final word. God, Jesus, is Lord over death.

[21 : 51] Jesus says, 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.

So, just sit with that for a second. Take off the grave clothes and let him go.

Lazarus has been brought back to life. Jesus is Lord over death. Jesus is the resurrection. And this is one of the ways he demonstrates that.

Now, this story ends here briefly, but it transitions immediately into something else. And when we read our Bibles and there are subheadings and different things, we often don't see it all as the one text that it is.

So, therefore, this is the next section. So, many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary and had seen what Jesus did believed in him. And some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what happened. The chief priests and Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin.

[22 : 55] They don't just do this for kicks. This is a big deal. There's something wrong for them. What are we accomplishing? They say. Here is the man performing many signs.

So, again, we have this sign that's confirming that Jesus is who he says he is, that God has sent him. And this is a problem for them. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him.

Then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation, our stuff. Our way of doing things will be taken away from us. Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest over that year, spoke up.

He says, you know nothing at all. You don't realize that it's better for you that one man die for the people, that the whole nation perish. He did not say this on his own.

But as the 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.

[23 : 54] This is so ironic because it's absolutely true. It's just that what he means for evil, God means for good. God is going to do that through Jesus, but not in the way that Caiaphas thinks it will.

And then verse 53, so from that day on, they plotted to take his life. See how this connects. At the beginning of this story, the disciples say, if you go down there, they're going to kill you.

And this story ends with a moment where it is confirmed. This is the point from which they have decided they are going to kill Jesus. Do you see what has happened? The one who is the

resurrection chooses to walk into death to give life to the one he loves.

And he does that for you and me too. This is what it means to be the resurrection. It is to give up your life because you don't have resurrection if you don't have death.

But resurrection says that death is not the final word. Where the rest of our world is geared towards death and dying. To giving you high fat food that slowly chips away at your body.

[25 : 05] To give you experiences where you can go and gamble and give up your money. To hopefully get something of hope. To get an experience. Where the world says live like you're dying so you can accumulate all of these different experiences before you die.

So that you can make your life mean something because you got to do something that other people maybe didn't. Life in the world's eyes is about trying to grab as much as you can because your time is scarce.

You are struck for time. You do not have all of it. And therefore you have to do as much as you can right now before you die. Because that's it. Jesus says no.

Jesus lays down his life and gives up his time for other people. Instead of being someone that has to grab as many opportunities and experiences as they can to try and make your life mean something.

Jesus shows us that actually when we follow after him. When we live the resurrection. We may end up giving up our lives. But that's good because we have eternity.

[26 : 09] There is nothing that this world can offer you. That God cannot give to you in the riches of his beautiful splendor. Ten thousandfold.

This world is not a friend of life. But the one who is life is our friend and lays down his life for us. Experiences aren't the highlights of your life. Security, instead of being something that you need to extend your finite time for as long as you can. To be able to make yourself as comfortable as possible for as long as you can.

You get to live not like you're dying but like you're eternal. Dallas Willard says that we are ceaseless eternal beings. You don't have to cling to time because it's infinite.

It is a resource that you have in abundance in Jesus. So, what does it look like for you to go about your life? Today, as someone who is living as though they're resurrected.

[27 : 12] You have been resurrected and you will be resurrected at the end time. But what does that do for you in your workplace? What does it do in your marriage? If your marriage feels like it's on the rocks.

Instead of trying to scramble about for experiences with your spouse. To try and make yourself feel like you got something out of this life. What would it look like if you lived the resurrection in your relationships?

What would it look like if you lived the resurrection in your workplace? Where you're asked to compromise your values. So that you can get ahead. So you can make money. So you can go on holiday. And at the end of the day, look back and say, Well, I got to do a lot of fun stuff.

What would it look like instead if you are living the resurrection here and now today? Are you on the outs with your job?

Are you falling further and further out of favor? Do you feel like you're behind all the time and not productive enough? Not doing enough? Satan wants to tell you that life is worthwhile.

[28 : 12] Because you get to do things that make you happy. Jesus wants to tell us that life is worthwhile because God who makes life says it is. He resurrects us.

What would it look like for you to live a resurrected life in the spaces that God has put you here and now? Instead of being someone that is scrambling to try and make sense of the world around you, what if you can give that up and follow the one who makes life, the one who is life, and who offers you life to the full?

What's the first thing that comes to mind when you think of death in your life, in your spaces right now? It might be an actual death. It might be something that is a relationship or a job or a child-parent relationship.

What are the things in your world that are wrong, that are not the way they're supposed to be? And what would it look like for you to trust Jesus with those places and to, instead of trying to get something out of them, to lay down your life the way that Jesus does and to trust that he has the power to take the tough things in this life and make something beautiful out of them?

Lay it before Jesus who gives wisdom, love, and resurrection freely. Lay it before Jesus.

[29 : 59] Lay it before Jesus. As we read this story about Lazarus, as we look at how you bring life, Jesus, we pray that you would bring life to us today, that you would help us live in light of the resurrection, that death would not get the final word as we go out today.

I'm going to do something, if it's all right with the rest of you, as we wrap up the prayer. I'd like you to stand. And we don't always do this, but it's something I'd like to pray a blessing over you.

So if you could please stand, if you're able, if you can't, that's fine. Thank you. May the God who is life show you that Jesus is the resurrection.

And may you be a people that go out and live as though you have been resurrected. May you be a people that the world sees as counter to death, that are characterized by life, life lived to the full in Jesus.

We pray this all in Jesus's name. Amen.