

Life in the Face of Death

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 August 2024

Preacher: Ricky Njoto

[0 : 00] Good morning. Good morning. Well, if you could turn your Bible back to John 11, and we'll read.

Because it's a big passage, a long passage, we'll just cover a few verses. William Breitbart is a medical doctor in the U.S.

And he's also a professor at Cornell University, which is a prestigious university in America, and he wrote an article called On the Inevitability of Death, in which he says, the postmodern world presents two choices to postmodern people.

One is the promotion of a death-denying culture, where mortal beings neglect or deny death with a veil of ignorance and a focus on youth and material goods and all that entails.

The second choice is to control death through legalization of practices aimed at self-determination and autonomy through euthanasia. But does this erase the terror of death?

[1 : 20] So William Breitbart, in that article, offers another solution. He says, we should instead accept that death is inevitable, it's natural, and we should not be scared of it.

Easier said than done. Because this is the problem with that solution. We know that deep inside our hearts, that death is not normal.

It's a tragedy. For thousands of years, human beings have seen deaths, and yet every time there is another death, our hearts ache.

We still can't accept that it's natural. Death is always a tragedy. And so denying death doesn't solve the problem. Controlling death doesn't solve the problem.

Normalizing death doesn't work either. So what should we do? Well, let me tell you what the Christian Bible offers in answer to this problem called death.

[2 : 28] And at the end of the sermon, you may decide for yourself whether you want to take that answer as your answer or not. In our Bible reading today, in John 11, we read the story of Jesus, whom Christians worship as God, because the Bible depicts Jesus and God as one.

And the first thing that we can see in the story is that God and Jesus loves his people. In verse 3, Jesus is told that Lazarus, the one he loves, is sick or dying.

And then in verse 5, again the text highlights that Jesus loves not only Lazarus, but also his sisters, Mary and Martha. In fact, God doesn't just love Lazarus, Mary and Martha.

If we go back to John 3, which is the text, our Bible reading last week, we encounter the most famous passage in John 3, 16.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, who is Jesus, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

[3 : 44] God loves his people. Now, a natural reaction that flows from this is to think, well, if God loves people, then he would just save them from death and suffering, right?

And this is relevant to the story too, because here is Jesus who loves Lazarus. Surely he's going to save Lazarus from dying now, right? But then verse 6 quickly tells us that our natural reaction is wrong.

In verse 5 to 6, we read, Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, therefore, when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he straight away went there and healed Lazarus.

Nope. He stayed where he was two more days. What are you doing, Jesus? This is what we often ask when it comes to the problem of suffering and death, right?

If God is powerful and he loves us, why doesn't he just save us? Why doesn't he act straight away? What is he doing?

[5 : 08] Well, verse 4 gives us the answer because Jesus said, it's for God's glory so that God's Son, Jesus, may be glorified through it.

Now, the word glory in the book of John doesn't only mean praise so that we might praise him. It primarily refers to God's self-revelation in Jesus so that we might know God through Jesus.

In other words, God allows suffering and death so that we may see who he is in Jesus so that when we face the tragedy of death, we might turn to him and get to know him personally and see his glory and power and beauty.

Now, this might sound like a selfish thing for God to do, to let us suffer and face death so that we might know him. It makes it sound like God is selfish until we realize who he is.

And we do need to know who God is in order to be saved from the problem of death. And the story continues to reveal who Jesus is.

[6 : 27] In verse 17, Jesus arrives in Bethany and meets Martha. And then this dialogue happens in verse 23. Jesus said to Martha, your brother will rise again.

Martha answered, I know. I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life.

The one who believes in me will live even though they die. And whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?

So who is Jesus? Jesus is the resurrection and the life. And in verse 43 to 44, we see Jesus powerfully commands Lazarus to come out of the tomb.

Even though his body is already starting to decay, starting to stink. And Lazarus does come back to life. And at the end of the book of John, if we read in chapter 20, we even see Jesus himself coming back from the dead, being resurrected on the third day.

[7 : 47] And this is not a myth either. It's a historical fact that Jesus died on the cross. It's a historical fact that on the third day his tomb was found empty.

It's a historical fact that more than 5,000 people saw him alive after that. Jesus came back to life and he was able to resurrect people, to call dead people to come back to life because he is the resurrection and the life.

Jesus is life. He cannot be defeated by death and when he speaks, death gives up the dead. so he's not being selfish when he lets those he loves to suffer death so that they might know him.

In fact, people suffer death because they don't know him who is the resurrection and the life. You see, at the start of the Bible, humans, us, we were created to live with God, to enjoy life with him.

But we sin. And sin is when we want to be like God. We want to be the gods in our own lives. Sin is not just disobeying God's rules.

- [9 : 14] Sin is overthrowing God's rule. And that's all of us, isn't it? That's certainly me. I want control over my own life, having my own rules, living life my own way.
- and sometimes I even want control over other people's lives. And that's when broken relationships happen. And that's when broken relationship between us and God happens.
- Our relationships with others and with God are broken because all of us want to be gods. But when everyone wants to be a god, no one gets to.
- And what happens when our relationship with a God who is life is broken? What happens when we run away from the source of our lives? We get death.
- So again, God is not being selfish when He lets the people that He loves face death so that they might turn to Him and get to know Him. In fact, to get to know Him is the only solution to the problem of death.
- [10 : 29] The God, knowing the God of life is the only solution. And that's why we see Jesus weeping in verse 33 to 35.
- When Jesus saw Mary weeping and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. Where have you laid Him?
- He asked. Come and see, Lord, they replied. Jesus wept. Why would Jesus be troubled and even weep if, first, it was His intention that He came late and, second, He knows that He's going to bring Lazarus back to life?
- Why would He weep? Well, because it breaks His heart when He sees people that He loves face death rather than life with Him.
- It breaks His heart when He sees death causing grief, depression, loneliness. Last Friday, I took Kai, my three-year-old son, to the Jurassic World exhibition in Brunswick.
- [11 : 46] It was just me and him. And at one point, he ran off from me, just as he does always, and I said, Kai, stop.
- Come back here. Now. But he did not listen. And so he ran near the raptor cage. Raptor is a scary dinosaur.
- Ran towards the raptor cage, and he heard the raptor robot shrieking. Straight away, he turned around, ran towards me, and hugged me.
- I felt bad that he was scared, but also inside I was thinking, I told you. We are like Kai towards God.
- We disobey him. We think we can do life without him. We run away from him. We think we can do life contrary to what he says. But the consequence of running away from God, who is life, is we fall into death.
- [12 : 53] But God doesn't say, I told you. Jesus weeps. He's angry and deeply saddened that we experience death.
- He wants us to do what Kai did. Kai stopped, turned around, ran back to me, and hugged me, trusting that I could protect him from the raptor, even though if that were a real raptor, I would have been scared too.
- But God wants us to do the same, to stop, turn around, run towards him, and hug him, and trust that he who has defeated death will protect us from it.
- And he's not afraid of death, he defeated it. That's faith. Faith is not just a belief in an abstract set of religious doctrines.
- a theologian called Jonathan Edwards says, faith is the harmonizing of the whole soul with Jesus Christ.

[14 : 06] Faith is a spiritual embrace. Faith is not just a belief on a set of doctrines. Faith is a belief in a person. That's why when Martha said, I believe that he's going to be resurrected again, on the last day, Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life.

It's a belief in a person. That's why Jesus comes late. That's why he lets the people that he loves to experience this tragedy, so that they might turn around, and they might see who Jesus is, and to return to him, and to embrace him spiritually.

this is what Jesus wants for the people that he loves. And so if this is your first time listening, hearing about Jesus, and you have been listening, and you start to see who Jesus is, and you start to understand who Jesus is, it's because Jesus loves you, and he's revealing himself to you.

so don't harden your hearts. Get to know him, see more of his beauty, and then have faith, embrace him as your savior, as your king, as your God.

And then you will get what Jesus promises in verse 25 when he says, I am the resurrection and the life, the one who believes in me will live even though they die, and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.

[15 : 53] Those who believe in Jesus will never die. Because even after their physical bodies die and even decay, like Lazarus is here, Jesus will come again, and he will do the same thing that he did in verse 43.

he will shout with a loud voice, my beloved, come out, and your body and my body and the bodies of the people that we love, who love Jesus, will come out and be renewed, no longer decaying, and we will see each other again.

when my grandma passed away several years ago, I went home to Indonesia and joined the mourning period.

In Indonesia, when someone dies, the family holds a memorial gathering in a place called the House of Lament for two to three full days, morning, evening, morning, evening, sort of like what's depicted here in this passage.

So that's what we did after my grandma died, and all members of my family came and mourned with us, and then there was a relative who came and said, it doesn't feel like a house of lament, it feels too joyful.

[17 : 26] And my sister and I were pondering about that comment, and we said, yeah, it's different here. There is joy in this family.

And then my dad, who's the son of my grandma who died, said, well, we know where she is now, and we know who's taking care of her.

She's with Jesus, and we will see her again. That's the hope that Jesus, the resurrection, and the life gives us.

Do you want that hope? Do you want Jesus? Do you want to believe in him and embrace him as your savior, your king, and your God?

God of life, God of life, I confess that I've sinned by turning away from you, but you have loved me and given me Jesus.

[18 : 53] I believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. I believe that he died on the cross and rose again. I turn away from my sin and embrace Jesus as my king and savior.

I put my trust and hope in Jesus, in life and death. In Jesus' name, amen. So if you would like to pray that prayer for the first time, I'm going to say that prayer one line by line and then please repeat after me in your head and heart.

Please close your eyes, everyone. God of life, I confess that I've sinned by turning away from you, but you have loved me and given me Jesus.

I believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. I believe that he died on the cross and rose again.

I turn away from my sin and embrace Jesus as my king and savior. I put my trust and hope in Jesus, in life and death.

[20 : 15] In Jesus' name, amen. Well, if you have prayed this prayer for the first time, welcome to God's family.

And now you can have the certainty of life after death. and to help you in your new faith, it will be good for us to get to know you better and for us to know how to help you.

And we're going to tell you how to do that soon, but for now, let's rise as we sing our next song. And we're going to hit our next month.