

Death and Resurrection

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[0 : 00] This morning, please turn your Bible to the Gospel of John.!

This past week, someone posted in one of my WhatsApp groups a video, a short video, of a very powerful Easter message from the United States President Donald Trump.

Some of you may have seen it. For those of you who have not seen it, though, I want to read the message that he shared.

It's quite short. My fellow Americans, at this holy time of the year, families across our nation gather in homes, churches, and synagogues to light candles and to praise God.

During the sacred holiday of Passover, Jewish families around the world give thanks to God for liberating the Jewish people from bondage in Egypt and for delivering them to the promised land of Israel.

[1 : 38] For Christians, we remember the suffering and death of Jesus, of God's only Son, and his glorious resurrection on the third day.

On Easter Sunday, we proclaim with joy, Christ is risen. Both of these sacred celebrations remind us that God's love redeems the world.

Almost 3,000 years ago, the prophet Isaiah wrote, Darkness covers the earth. But the Lord rises upon you, and his glory appears over you.

For the Lord will be your everlasting light. In America, we look to the light of God to guide our steps. We trust in the power of the Almighty for wisdom and strength.

And we praise our Heavenly Father for the blessings of freedom and the gift of eternal life. Happy Passover. Happy Easter.

[2 : 42] Thank you. God bless you. And God bless America. If you haven't seen the video, I encourage you to try to find it on YouTube and watch it. It's a very moving video.

And for me, what struck me about it was to, you almost have to pinch yourself that you're hearing the President of the United States, at any point in history, bringing such an address to his nation. But in particular, in this time in which we live, where there is increasing political correctness, and an increasing denial of God, and the design that he has given to us as human beings, in particular in the area of human sexuality, and to see the President of the United States openly and unashamedly proclaiming truths, unchanging truths of the Judeo-Christian faith.

That's the first thing that struck me by the video. The second thing that struck me by the video was the picture that was shown when President Trump talked about Easter.

When he said these words, he said, On Easter Sunday, we proclaim with joy Christ is risen. So the way the video is, as he is talking, they are interfacing different images.

[4 : 13] So when he talks about Passover, and when he mentions Passover, you see this picture of men in particular who are praying at a Passover celebration.

When he talks about the children of Israel being delivered out of Egyptian bondage into the Promised Land, there's a picture of men standing, holding an oversized replica of the two scrolls of the Ten Commandments which God gave to the children of Israel when they entered the Promised Land.

And then when he talks about the crucifixion, you see this cross scene. But what was interesting to me, what struck me, was when he mentioned, on Easter Sunday, we proclaim with joy Christ is risen, the picture that was shown was a picture of Easter eggs.

It just struck me. Christ is risen, and you see this picture of Easter eggs, chocolate Easter eggs, nicely wrapped. And I'm thinking, who put the video together?

That when it comes to this, as someone has said, the hinge on which the Christian faith swings, the resurrection of Jesus, because if Jesus was not raised from the dead, we're wasting our time this

morning.

[5 : 50] If Jesus were not raised from the dead, all of this is in vain, because it means he is still dead. And if he is still dead, we should have no hope beyond our own death.

And so I was struck by the fact that the significance of the resurrection was obviously missed on the person who put that video together.

And the impression that you could get is that, yes, the children of Israel were delivered out of Egypt, and they celebrated, and continue to celebrate Passover, and they have the Ten Commandments, and yes, Christ was crucified on a cross.

No one who halfway knows history will try to deny that fact, that there was a man named Jesus Christ who was crucified by the Romans.

No one denies that. He lived and died. But where it gets tricky, or where it gets tense, is on this issue of the resurrection.

[7 : 05] And when you have a depiction of the resurrection as Easter eggs, it gives the impression it's fairy tale. It gives the impression it's fiction.

It gives the impression that it is not real. But as we sang this morning, the good news is it is real. The good news is Christ died and he rose again. And we can say with deep conviction of our souls, he's risen indeed.

And this morning, on this resurrection Sunday morning, I want us to look to God's word to be reminded of this great promise from Jesus to his people who live in the midst of death.

Though we live, there's death all around us. There's the death of our loved ones, the death of coworkers, and indeed, we face the reality of our own death.

[8 : 11] And so I want us this morning to consider the precious promise that Jesus makes in the face of death.

So here in John chapter 11, on the occasion of the death of Lazarus, we read these words recorded by John, beginning in verse 17.

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.

[9 : 19] 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 you will rise again in the resurrection on the last day. Jesus said to her, 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? She said to him, yes, Lord. I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.

Would you pray with me? Father, we are grateful this morning that we can gather in this place. We thank you for the reality of the resurrection.

[10 : 24] And Lord, I pray this morning that as we consider these words of the Lord Jesus to Martha in the face of the death of her brother, you would cause us to hear them in the face of death that is all around us.

we pray, Lord, that you would cause us to believe the truth of the resurrection.

We pray that you would give us all hearts to believe and to believe to the depths of our soul. We ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. The two verses that we are considering this morning, as you've already seen, were spoken by Jesus on the occasion of the death of his friend Lazarus.

And as I said earlier, I really believe that it is fitting that on the occasion of the resurrection that we consider these words of the Lord, the truth is, the best time to hear a sermon about death is away from death, just as it is to hear sermons on sickness and suffering when we're not sick and suffering, because the Bible does speak to us to give us perspective for all of these things that we face on this side of eternity.

[12:06] Briefly this morning, the three aspects of these two verses that we are focusing on, verses 25 and 26, that I want us to consider this morning. And the first one is this, the claim Jesus makes.

In these two verses, Jesus makes a startling claim about himself. He says, I am the resurrection and the life.

Jesus makes this startling claim some four days after the death of Lazarus. Lazarus is in the grave, he's in the tomb, and by this time his body will be decaying.

And Jesus says to his sister, Martha, I am the resurrection and the life. But in this account what we see is Martha is the one who begins the conversation with Jesus.

She begins in verse 21 and she says to him, apparently even without greeting him, if you were here, my brother would not have died.

[13:20] And verse 22 she said, but even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you. When you really think about that, what Martha is saying is not very obvious.

Part of it is, but another part is not. She says to Jesus, essentially this is what she's saying to him, Lord, I know if you were here my brother would not have died.

In other words, you have the power to heal him when he was sick. When he was sick, if you were here, he wouldn't have died.

You would have healed him the way you healed everybody else. But then she says, essentially, but now that he is dead, there's really nothing you could do, but I know if you ask God, God will give you whatever you ask for.

So it's a very interesting statement that she makes to Jesus. I know you could have healed him when he was sick, but now that he's dead, four days in the tomb, really only God could do anything about that, but I know that whatever you ask God, he will do it for you.

[14:41] based on what Martha says in verse 24, when Jesus says to her on the resurrection and the life and she then says to him, I know my brother is going to, well before Jesus said that to her, she said to him, Jesus said to her, your brother's going to rise again, he will rise.

And she said, I know he's going to rise in the resurrection at the last day. So, Martha was not expecting a resurrection because she only expected that to happen on the last day, but she seemed to think that something could still be done for Lazarus even though he was dead in the tomb because she said to Jesus, I know whatever you ask the Father, he'll give to you.

But she didn't have that resurrection in view. She didn't think it was that because when Jesus said he's going to rise, she said, yeah, I know, at the last day. But she wanted something else. And here's what I think.

I think Martha was thinking about, well since Jesus couldn't do this, anything for Lazarus right now because he's dead, she's kind of thinking about God probably could just heal him from death and just cause him to recover from death.

But she wasn't thinking about the resurrection. She was thinking about something interim, something else, some kind of performance to bring him back to life, but not the resurrection because she knew the resurrection was not just something for Lazarus, the resurrection is for all of the people of God.

[16:36] And so when she says to Jesus in verse 22, but even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give to you.

And Jesus says to her in verse 23, your brother will rise again. And Martha says to him, I know you'll rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus then says to her.

Essentially he's really saying to her, she doesn't understand who he is. He says to her, Martha, I am the resurrection and the life.

Even though you think that Lazarus could only be raised in the future, and even though you only think that only God can do something for him right now, only God the Father can do something for him right now, and the resurrection and the life.

I am present here with you. I am the resurrection and the life. There's a striking claim that Jesus makes to Martha with her brother in a tomb, his body beginning to decay.

[17:57] He says, I am the resurrection resurrection and the life. And this morning, this striking claim comes to us.

On this resurrection Sunday morning, I pray that we could hear afresh the words of Jesus, I am the resurrection and the life. But let's hear them differently from the way Martha heard them, because

when Martha heard them, Jesus had not yet died, had not yet resurrected, but now he is. He has died, and he is resurrected. So we can hear these words as the words of the living Christ, I am the resurrection, and I am the life.

Jesus spoke these words to Martha to comfort her. And these words for us this morning can be a comforting perspective in the face of death, in the face of the death of others in general, and in the face of our own death.

We don't know when, but we do know that we will all die one day. And the truth is, for most of us, I believe, it's sooner than we think.

[19 : 15] And so these words are comforting. Jesus says, I am the resurrection and the life.

What's interesting about the words of Jesus is, have you ever been in a situation where someone you needed to get to, there was a particular person you needed to get to, but the closest you could get is to someone who really knew that person up close, had their number, could go to their house, but you didn't know that person.

You didn't know them directly, somebody else did. That's not what Jesus is saying this morning. Jesus is not saying, I know someone who is the resurrection.

I know someone who is the life. No, he says, Martha, I am the resurrection. I am the life. I think it's important to know that Jesus does not make an empty claim.

He doesn't make an empty claim about himself because scripture records that a little later in the same chapter, Jesus goes and he calls Lazarus forth from the grave after he had been dead for some four days, proving that this was not just some person who was in a coma or something, but a true raising up from death.

[20 : 51] John tells us in verse 43, which we didn't read, but John tells us that Jesus went to the tomb of Lazarus and cried out with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And Lazarus came out with his hands and his feet bound with linen strips, his face wrapped with a cloth.

Think about that. as I thought about this, I thought, how did he get out? And if you see how they prepare the bodies, you're wrapped up.

Those linen strips wrap you tight into like one piece. How did he get out? He got out because the master called him out. He didn't just walk out of there.

The master called him out of the tomb. I heard someone say, if Jesus had gone to the tomb and simply said, come out, the whole grave would have come out.

But he said, Lazarus, come out. And the reason the whole grave would have come out is because he's the resurrection and he is the life.

[22 : 01] In addition to seeing this claim that Jesus makes in the face of death, death, in these two verses we also see the comfort that Jesus offers in the face of death.

Jesus offers an enduring comfort in these few words. Here's the comfort that he offers. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.

Now, these words may seem contradictory on the face of it. And you may ask, how can Jesus first acknowledge that people who live, people who believe in him die, and then go on to say, everyone who lives and believes in him will never die.

I mean, in particular, to Martha, whose brother has died, whose brother did believe in Jesus, it's almost as if Martha could have objected and said, well, Lord, Lazarus believed in you, and he's dead.

But Martha doesn't object because she's not hearing Jesus just on a surface level, she understands what Jesus is saying to her. And so here's the comfort that Jesus offers, which I'll paraphrase.

[23 : 38] Those who believe in me, even though they die physically and their bodies return to the dust, they themselves never die because I gave them eternal life and they believed in me.

I am the resurrection and the life, and in the end, I will raise their dead bodies to the newness of life. So Jesus is making this distinction obviously between the physical body that we live in and the persons, the spirits that we are who live in them.

And he's saying to us, though your physical body will die, you will not die because I've given you eternal life.

He says all those who live, everyone, this is a universal statement, everyone, it matters not who you are, it matters not what you've done, everyone who believes in Jesus will be given eternal life.

And they will not surely die. They will not eternally perish. perish. And these would be comforting words.

[25 : 01] And here again, we have to hear them away from death because in death we tend not to hear as we should. In death things go through one ear and out of the next. Jesus offers this comfort to us that death is not ultimate reality.

Death is a reality. And death is hard and death is painful, but it's not ultimate reality. Ultimate reality is this. those who believe in Jesus will never die in an ultimate sense.

Why? Because God has given them eternal life. And eternal life is just that, it is eternal. And so these are to be comforting words.

But the truth is they're also disturbing words. They're comforting words to those who have put their trust in Jesus, but they're also disturbing words to those who have not yet put their trust in Jesus because what is clear, Jesus offers the comfort to one group of people.

Those who believe in him. Those are the only ones who can draw comfort from these verses. And this is why in the face of death, when you go to funerals, death, and this comfort and the other comforts that we find in scripture concerning death is offered to those who have not believed in Jesus.

[26 : 31] It's a forgery. It's a fake. It's a false hope. It is not something that will truly be realized. And so though these words are comforting to the believer, they are very disturbing to the one who doesn't believe.

Jesus doesn't offer to those on every single road where people say, well, all roads lead to Jesus. No, that's not true. There's only one road. There's only one way. Jesus doesn't offer it to those who believe in whatever.

He says, those who believe in me. Jesus offers this comfort not to those who are into religion, those who are attending church, those who are doing good works believing that those things will make them accepted before God.

He offers no comfort for them, no hope in that. He says it's for those who believe. in him.

And the reality is that although Jesus does not delve into the future of those who do not believe in him, the witness of scripture elsewhere makes it very clear that instead of enjoying eternal life with God in the new heavens and in the new earth, those who do not believe in Jesus will suffer eternal damnation and separation from God in hell.

[28 : 10] They will be raised, but it's not a resurrection of life. What the Bible says is they are raised to the resurrection of damnation. They're raised to the resurrection of condemnation, separation from God and eternal punishment and torment in hell.

God. And so to those of us who believe in Jesus this morning, those of us who belong to him, this is our comforting assurance. We have a comforting assurance that whenever death comes, however death comes, that's not the end for us.

There's a more glorious hope that awaits us than anything we could ever have experienced or imagined in this life. And again, to everybody else, these words should be disturbing.

And third and finally, in these two verses, we find the challenge that Jesus issues. Jesus concludes his words to Martha with a compelling challenge.

It's in the form of a question, and he simply says to her, do you believe this? Do you believe it? Now, do you understand it?

[29 : 40] Do you believe it? In the face of death, her brother laying in a tomb, decaying, Jesus is asking Martha, do you believe the claim I make, that I'm the resurrection and the life?

Do you believe the comfort that I offer that those who believe in me, they will not eternally die? And Martha responds to Jesus, and she says, yes, Lord, verse 27, yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the son of the living God, who is coming into the world.

Martha believed. She believed. And brothers and sisters, this is our challenge. This is our challenge as well.

Our challenge is in the face of death to believe that Jesus is indeed the son of God who has come into the world, God. And his claim that he is the resurrection and he is the life is a true claim.

And his comfort that those who believe in him will never die is a real comfort. It's not a false hope that he holds out.

[31 : 04] It is a real comfort that we can have. That comfort should be solidified for us this morning as we contemplate the reality that Christ himself experienced death and then was raised again with

a new body, with a resurrected body, a body that was different from the one that went in the ground. The one that went in the ground you could kill. You could exterminate that body, but not the one that came out of the grave. He said, I am he who is dead and now I am alive and behold, I'm alive forevermore.

That's what Jesus promises to us. Scripture says that Jesus is the first born among many brothers and so the hope that we have for future resurrection, those of us who have put our trust in Jesus, is the same experience that Jesus has had.

And so the question this morning is, do you believe the claim that Jesus makes, that he's the resurrection and the life? Do you believe the comfort that he offers that we who believe in him, though we die physically, we ourselves will never die because we put our faith in him and we have received eternal life.

and at the end of this life, on the last day, there will be a resurrection and we will be raised in the resurrection of life.

[32 : 53] In your heart of hearts, I just want you to believe this. Let's believe it, brothers and sisters. let this not be an unsettled issue.

Should death come to us and we have time to see it coming on a deathbed, let us not on our deathbed be trying to settle the issue about what's going to happen to us. By the grace of God, may we settle this now that we have eternal life.

Death is not the end for us who have trusted in Christ, it is really the beginning. this question from Jesus, although it's a challenging question, it really is not a complex question.

All of us can answer this question. Indeed, I think all of us are answering this question. Somewhere in our hearts, we're answering this question. When Jesus says, do you believe this? I think the first and obvious way for those of us who have trusted in Christ is, yes, Lord, I believe that.

Like Martha, I believe that. But an option also is to say, I don't believe that. Or maybe it could be, I'm really not sure.

[34 : 24] It may even be, and I really would want to believe that, but I'm not sure. I have no doubt that there would probably be some this morning who would say, I believe that, but you don't truly believe that.

You don't truly believe that. You believe it in a kind of mental sense. You believe it in kind of a way where, yeah, you've read it, you've heard it, you've probably studied it in religious knowledge, but you don't believe it to the depths of your soul.

And the reason I can say this morning that there would be some who fall in this category is that what we believe as a matter of conviction, we stake our lives upon.

it's evident in our lives if we believe it. And really, to believe the words of Jesus, we have to believe in Jesus.

And that's why Martha did not answer Jesus' question by only saying, yes, Lord. She goes on to say, I believe that you're the Christ, the Son of the living God, who is coming into the world.

[35 : 54] Martha believed Jesus. And the same must be true for us this morning. In order for us to truly believe the words of Jesus, that he is the resurrection, and that he is the life, and that all those who believe in him, they will never die.

For us to believe those words of Jesus, we have to believe in Jesus. But don't fool yourself this morning in saying, I believe that.

Your lips are saying that, but your life is saying something differently. With your lips, you believe. With your life, you say, I don't believe.

Because again, what we believe, we act upon. It's a conviction of our soul. We stake our lives upon it. We do this all the time. Sometimes we get things passed to us on social media, and we don't believe it.

Other things we believe, and the things we believe, we tend to maybe forward, share with someone, because we really believe it. Things we don't believe, we don't really act upon.

[37 : 09] And the same is true with our lives this morning. I think one of the things that we really all need to do is we need to really think about the fragility of life, the brevity of life.

There's no one who could walk around thinking that somehow they're kind of exempt or death doesn't really affect them so much.

I don't look at the obituaries in any regular kind of way, but here's what I know. Pick any week you want, last week, this week, I guarantee you, pick up the newspaper of any of those weeks of your

choice, and all of us would find someone either our exact age or close to our age who has passed away.

And brothers and sisters, this life has one ultimate purpose, to prepare for the life to come. And if we miss that, we've missed the whole reason for life.

And so this issue of death and what is going to happen to us beyond death is something that really merits our deep consideration.

[38 : 33] We need to give time to it, we need to give attention to it, because we will all die unless the Lord returns sooner. And so we need to answer this question from Jesus, this challenge from Jesus, do you believe this?

If your response again is, I don't believe or I'm not sure, I want to encourage you, investigate it, it will be the most important thing you give your life to, you give yourself to.

Because this morning, every one of us is in one of three categories. We accept it, we reject it, or we doubt it. If you are in the rejecting group or the doubting group, I urge you, pick up a Bible.

I urge you, start with the same Gospel of John, where Jesus makes eight I am statements. This is not the only I am he makes. he says he's some other things.

Investigate it, are those things true? If they are true, if they are true, then they compel a response from us.

[39 : 56] They compel a response from us. And so I just encourage us this morning to take very soberly, very seriously see this reality of death in the midst of life.

I often say at funerals that if we were to, if there was a way to go into the graveyard and interview dead people, most of them would tell us that they died before they expected to die.

A few will say, you know, I have terminal illness and I lived longer than the doctor said I would. A few would say that. Most, most would say they didn't expect to die when they did.

And so I want to encourage you this morning, if you are in those two categories, either rejecting this truth about future resurrection, two classes of people, resurrection of life, resurrection of damnation, or doubting that, I urge you, let this resurrection Sunday morning be an impetus to you to say, I need to study this, I need to consider this.

Because in the face of whatever you're giving yourself to right now, it's nothing, it goes, when this life goes. So let us be wise, and let us apply our hearts to wisdom, and let us make the most of these days that we have.

[41 : 30] Let us not be distracted by all the transient things. The purpose of this life is to prepare for the life to come. And no better time can we give ourselves to this than when we hear the words of Jesus, that he's the resurrection, and he's alive.

The good news of the gospel that we have come to believe is that Jesus indeed lived, and he lived the perfect life, and he pleased God in every single way.

And then he ran to the cross. He died the death of a criminal. Obviously, if he lived the perfect life, he was going to the cross not for his own sins.

He was going to the cross for the sins of sinners. And there he became a substitute for all those who would put their faith and their trust in him.

And on the cross, Jesus bore every single sin for his people so that they may be forgiven. And friends, because God is a just God, sin is going to be punished in one of two places.

[42 : 51] Sin will be punished on the back of Jesus on the cross, or it will be punished on our own backs in hell, but it will be punished. Those who put their trust in Jesus essentially take the sin off of their backs and they put it on Jesus.

And God takes the righteousness of Jesus and he puts it on them. And those still within ourselves, in and of ourselves, we are unholy and unrighteous in God's sight.

God considers us righteous because of the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. And all those who believe that have eternal life.

Have eternal life. You believe that? It connects with when we believe that we also believe some other things. We begin to see sin as it is.

We turn away from it. We repent of it. We put our faith in Jesus. And so this morning I encourage us as we consider these words of Jesus, those of us who have trusted Christ, let us rejoice in this.

[44 : 04] Let us be comforted in this. Let us sing, oh, happy day, because it is a happy day, that our sins have been washed away, and whether we live or we die, we are the Lord's.

And for the rest of us who have not yet put that to rest and put our trust in Jesus, I encourage you, hear the gospel, obey the gospel, repent, turn from sin, trust in Christ. He promises that He will not turn away anyone who trusts in Him. Let's pray.