

I am the Resurrection & the Life

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[0:00] Good morning, everyone. Excuse me. Well, if you Google death jokes, there aren't many funny ones.

Although, on Wednesday the 3rd of April 1996, 83-year-old Larry LaPrize, the producer of the Hokey Pokey, died.

That's actually true, which is actually sad, so we shouldn't laugh at that. But it turned very traumatic when they tried to put him in his casket. Because you see, when they put his left leg in...

Left leg in, left leg out. Anyway, you've got to explain. We don't laugh at death, though. We weep when we lose someone.

It's separation. There's sorrow, pain. There's fear. It's all so final. Death is the reality we all face.

[0:57] We don't like to talk about it, so we don't. We don't like to think about it, so we don't. We try to hold back time with cosmetics, surgery, modern medicine, the latest wellbeing Pilates course or something.

And when we do talk about death, we try to make light of the situation, as I've just done doing the Hokey Pokey. But we all agree it's a pretty awkward subject. I remember hearing the evangelist, John Chapman, sharing a story before he died.

As he was getting older, he had a lot of health issues. He said his books were getting shorter, and he was writing them in the GP's waiting room. But he went to a funeral, and he noticed that he was going to more and more funerals as he was getting older.

And he approached an old acquaintance at one such service, and he nodded at the casket, and he said, makes you think, doesn't it? And his old friend replied, oh, I don't like to think about it.

To which John said, well, you need to. How much time do you think you've got left? Our passage today is found in John 11. And I'd like to encourage you to open this in front of you and follow along on the St. Paul's app.

[2:13] We're confronted with death, and we receive an answer to the age-old question, what happens next? Well, there's no more speculating. We don't reincarnate or cease to exist.

We don't become tormented ghosts wandering the earth. It may appear that we rot and become food for worms. But Jesus, God with us, steps into human history after walking across the pages of time and gives us clarity.

And he says, I am the resurrection and the life. And then he proves it. And the resurrection, it's the key to unlocking an abundant life.

Join with me in John 11, verse 1. 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 word to Jesus saying, Lord, he whom you love is ill. But when Jesus heard it, he said, this illness does not lead to death.

[3:26] No, 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.

So Jesus hears this good friend Lazarus is sick, and this is the serious kind of sickness that will kill you. As Jesus hears about it, of course, because he loves Lazarus, he immediately drops everything, everything he's doing, and he runs to the place so he can heal him.

And it's actually only about 20 minutes away. But he doesn't. It says he loved them, loved him in verse 5. So when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

That doesn't seem to make sense. That's not what you do if someone that you love is hurt or sick. You want to take care of them. And you don't have to be a helicopter parent. If a child is sick or crying out in pain because you love them, you'll drop everything and go right to them and do anything you can to alleviate the suffering. We've even got in Australia a law, the Good Samaritan law.

[4:43] So if you go to help someone who's crying out for help to offer first aid, you actually can't be prosecuted. So here's Jesus. He loves Lazarus, and he loved the sisters.

And because he loved them so much, on hearing that Lazarus was sick, he stayed right where he was for a couple of days. This is a weird kind of love. It actually sheds light on what Jesus is doing in this passage.

So hold on to that question. How is that love? Verse 7. Then after this, he said to his disciples, let us go to Judea again.

The disciples said to him, Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and you're going to go there? Are you going there again? Jesus answered, are there not 12 hours in the day?

If anyone walks in the day, they do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, they stumble because the light is not in them. After saying these things, he said to them, our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.

[5:49] The disciples said to him, Lord, if he's fallen asleep, he will recover. Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, Lazarus has died, and for your sake I'm glad that I was not there, so that you may believe.

But let us go to him. So Thomas, called the twin, said to his fellow disciples, let us go also. Let us also go, that we may die with him.

Well, there's a lot going on here. The disciples are clueless. So Jesus spells it out, Lazarus is dead, and I'm glad I wasn't there, because if I was there, I could have gone and healed him.

So this strange kind of love continues here, where Jesus is going to teach us through his weird love, something that we desperately need when we're going through sorrow and pain.

Verse 17, Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Jesus shows up, and Lazarus has already been buried for four days.

[6:59] The sisters had been grieving, they'd been in pain and anguish, and they've lost their brother, and they're wondering, why didn't you come, Jesus? Verse 18, Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, like it's a 20 minute walk, 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'd 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, your brother will rise again. Martha said to him, I know that he'll 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 they die, yet shall they 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. Martha comes and says, Jesus, if you'd been here, you could have done something.

[8:16] She's pretty accusatory in her tone. She's basically saying, I sent for you. You heard he was sick. You love him. You love us. Of all the people we know, you heal people, and you could have done something.

If you'd been here, he'd be alive today. We wouldn't be at a tomb. We'd be having a party celebrating Lazarus as well again. But because you delayed, he's dead. She's asking him the hard questions of Jesus.

And to be honest, this is the same tone we can have with God sometimes. We go through sorrow, loneliness, pain, hurt, betrayal, sickness, loss.

People we love are suffering. We grieve and cry, and we pray and beg, God, do something about this. Because we know he can do something.

Because he's God. He could intervene at any time, and end this trial and suffering. But he doesn't. It's a question we all find ourselves asking at different times.

[9:24] God, why do you allow so much loss and sorrow and pain? Why don't you come back and fix these problems? If only you came back, I wouldn't have lost that job, that relationship.

I wouldn't have gone through what I'm going through if only you'd been here. Why doesn't God show up when we need him? Why does he seem to not answer our prayers?

Why does he allow the sorrow and pain? The first reason we can see in this passage is so that God can teach us something about himself. When Martha says, I know my brother will rise again, it's sort of like people at funerals when they say, I think he's gone to a better place, or she's gone to a better place.

Jesus says, wait a second, I am the resurrection, and if you believe in me, you won't die, and if you die, and you believe in me, you're going to rise again anyway.

I am the resurrection and the life. Jesus teaches something about himself in that moment of sorrow, and while that might just look like he's throwing out cold hard facts, it's actually the most loving thing he can do for us.

[10:41] The love that God gives to us is the showing of himself to us. The greatest thing that God can give us is God, and the greatest thing we need when we're going through sorrow and despair or trial and pain when we're mourning someone, the biggest thing we need right then is not resolution, even though we want it in the end, the biggest thing we need is God.

Take Job. He doesn't know what's going on, but he's lost everything. His children have died, he's lost his health, his wealth, his good name, his friends accuse him, he's mourning in dust and scraping his wounds with pottery, and when God speaks, you might expect him to say, I'll fix it, I'll take care of it.

When God speaks to Job, the first thing he teaches Job is about God. Job 38 verse 4, God questions Job, tell me how I made the world, tell me how it works.

God has the big picture, God has a plan. What Job needed was God. God really loves us. We might not know what's going on at the moment, but he has a plan.

The greatest thing we need when we go through sorrow and pain is God. It doesn't always seem like that, because when we're sick, the greatest thing is healing. When we're broke, the greatest thing is money.

[12:16] But the greatest thing God can give us is himself. One of the reasons God allows the pain and sorrow to continue and doesn't answer right away and doesn't seem like he's showing up is to teach us something about God himself.

C.S. Lewis says this, God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pains. It's God's megaphone to raise a deaf world.

Pandemics, natural disasters, a terminal prognosis, God's megaphone. Wake up world, you need God. God delays and allows suffering so he can show us himself and show us his glory.

But honestly, isn't that a bit extreme? All of human suffering is to teach us a lesson and show us God's glory. Seems like a really big object lesson to teach us something.

Couldn't God have just done a skit or a little flanagraph or something? We look at human history and say, all of that to teach us who you are and reveal your glory.

[13:29] The truth is, we're actually often willing to go through suffering to get good things in life. Working hard to pay off a 30-year mortgage. Serving a gruelling hospital residency to become a medical practitioner.

Enduring a painful childbirth to be a mum. Sacrificing everything to be a missionary. Training like crazy to run a marathon. We're willing to accept a great degree of suffering for a great reward. When the glory of God fills the earth, what joy, what reward. In a billion years' time, when we look back, it'll be worth going through the sorrow for what we will know and have in God's presence. It doesn't mean what we're enduring now isn't real, deep and painful. It's that the glory of God is going to be so much better. It's easy to say, but it doesn't necessarily alleviate our current situation or give the answers.

But when we go through those trials, look for Jesus there. Seek him out. Look for what God is trying to teach us. It's his megaphone to rouse the world.

[14:40] Then Jesus goes on and we see another side of him that helps balance the first part of this passage from verse 28. When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, the teacher is here, he's 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 he 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'd been here, my brother would not have died. First, Martha comes to Jesus and says, if you'd been here, my brother would not have died.

And Jesus says, I'm the resurrection and the life. And he teaches her something. Now Mary comes to Jesus and accuses him of the exact same thing. If you'd been here, my brother would not have died.

You might expect here second verse, same as the first. You might expect Jesus to say, well, if you'd been here, I wouldn't have to say all this again.

[15:53] I'm the resurrection and the life. You'd expect the same sermon or same speech. But the way Jesus reacts here is completely different. 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.

And he said, where have you laid him? They said to him, Lord, come and see. And Jesus wept. In the first instance, Jesus teaches the truth about himself.

But now, almost the same conversation, Jesus weeps. This is strange. Why does he weep?

Because, spoiler alert, he's going to raise Lazarus from the dead.

This is bad, but it's actually not that bad. If I heard one of my friends had died, but they're going to be alive again in a couple of minutes, I'm not sure I'd necessarily tear up. When we attend funerals, we weep because it's permanent, it's over.

Unless they're believers and we get to see them again one day in glory, but we still weep. Even with the knowledge of this truth, the pain remains. Here Jesus is about to give Lazarus life, so why does he weep?

[17:13] Jesus saw Mary weeping and the Jews who came up also weeping, so he weeps because of their weeping. He enters their suffering and feels it himself.

We really don't know why God allows suffering to drag on as long as it does, or why it takes so long for us to learn the lessons God wants to teach us. But we know the only true and living God who stepped into creation and endured the same sorrows that we endure.

He doesn't just teach us about himself and our sorrows, he experienced our sorrows. We don't understand his ways, but he's experienced it all for us and with us.

Jesus got hungry and tired and thirsty just like everybody else. Relationship struggles, Jesus had those.

Fast forward a week or so to the cross, betrayed by a close friend, misunderstood, rejected, slandered, opposed, beaten, falsely tried.

[18:21] We see Jesus crying our tears. We see Jesus praying our lament. We see Jesus enduring sorrow. And we see Jesus, like Lazarus, dead, punished in our place for our sin.

As he hung on the cross, he prayed, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? That should be our prayer, not Jesus'. We're the ones who have sinned and fallen short of God's glory, not Jesus. But Jesus was forsaken by God, so we don't have to be. Jesus bore all our pain, all our sorrow, all our sin, and took it to the cross and died so we can have life.

So we will go through trials and pain. We may pray, end this. Or we may wonder where God is in the midst of all this. Or feel God doesn't love us.

We might not understand it and we don't know the reasons. But the reason is never that he doesn't understand. Because Jesus has been there and he gets our situation.

[19:28] Even though he's about to raise Lazarus, he sees the tragedy of sin and death and he weeps. Not just tears through the sisters and the crowd, Jesus weeps for a broken world, a world that's turned its back on God's love.

Jesus enters into our suffering. Verse 36, so the Jews said, see how he loved him. There's no one like Jesus.

He is unique. He's the perfect balance of grace and truth. Tim Keller points this out. With Martha, he speaks.

With Mary, he's speechless. With Martha, he teaches about his triumph. With Mary, he's weak and he's troubled. With Martha, he confronts the flow of her heart.

With Mary, she's weeping. With Martha, he confronts the flow of her heart and she's weeping and he says, no, I'm the resurrection and the life. With Mary, he enters the flow of her heart and he weeps with those who weep.

[20:34] He's the God totally in control with the answers but also the God who is undone by the things that undo us. But some of them said, could not hear you open the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?

That's in verse 37. This is the third accusation aimed at Jesus. Verse 38, then Jesus deeply moved again came to the tomb. It was a cave and a stone lay against it.

Now, deeply moved here is actually different. It's not like a deep sadness. this word *embrimomai* in the Greek means something closer to enraged or like a wild bull snorting.

It doesn't seem like an appropriate funeral emotion. If Lazarus died at the hands of injustice, you may expect rage but he got sick and died. There's grief and there's sorrow but here Jesus is getting mad.

His anger reveals how he loves us and who his enemy is. Jesus looks at the sisters, the Jews, they're weeping and it makes him angry that Satan, sin and death have done this.

[21:51] His anger here reveals he's about to go into battle with his enemy and it's not the Romans who are occupying Jerusalem. Jesus walks up to the tomb and he looks his enemy in the eye.

Verse 39, Jesus said, take away the stone. Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, Lord, by this time there'll be an odour. He's been in there four days.

Jesus said to her, did I tell you that if you believed you'd 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, 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.

The man who had died came out so he would have been shuffling his hands and his feet bound with linen strips and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, unbind him and let him go.

[23:04] Lazarus walks out alive. God's glory is revealed. The dead are raised. Jesus faces his enemy and Lazarus rises.

This shows us just some of what Jesus came to do. He's the liberator, the Messiah that people were waiting for. He's the next Moses, the rescuer but from the slavery of sin.

and as Jesus comes to the grave and Lazarus comes out, Jesus is essentially saying to the stranglehold of death, let my people go. The oppressor, the enemy is death and Jesus is victorious. He has authority over death itself. The stone from the grave has been moved away, giving us a taste of what we can look forward to in our own future. Whatever sorrow we're going through, if we're Christians, there's an end to that.

It doesn't last forever even though it feels like it will. There is hope, there is a future. There are some sorrows that may last a whole lifetime.

[24:13] There are sicknesses that don't go away. There are relationships that don't heal. We can find ourselves limping through life but Jesus promises there is one day coming when we'll be like Lazarus and rise with Jesus victorious over death in glory, experiencing new life that lasts forever and we'll be reunited with those who have died, who have trusted in Jesus.

We'll see them again physically, permanently, eternally. Such great news. Revelation 21.

There'll be no more death or pain or crying. God himself will wipe every tear from our eyes. We eat, we feast, we banquet, we embrace loved ones, the old has gone, the new has arrived.

In one hand we have the truth just as Jesus spoke words of truth to Martha and in the other hand we have grace as Jesus wept with Mary.

Jesus meets them where they're at. He reassures them we can have confidence in Jesus. truth and grace.

[25:30] We need to balance these in our walk with God and each other. The lyrics from the servant song come to mind. I will hold the Christ light for you in the night time of your fear.

I will hand my hand out to you. Speak the peace you long to hear. I will weep when you are weeping. When you laugh I'll laugh with you. I will share your joys and sorrows till we see this journey through.

Speak truth show grace. Whatever we go through and whatever you're enduring at this moment we all need God who knows personally what we're going through who has walked in our shoes and who rose victorious from the tomb conquering sin and overcoming death.

God really loves us and he's demonstrated his glory in the resurrection. Do you get the resurrection? Do you get it?

Do you see how it offers an abundant life? Resurrection is the game changer. It means everything we do now counts and I mean everything. The way we spend our time, the way we spend our money, the things we say, the things we see, the way we treat others, our friendships and our relationships, what we think, how we act, what we do, our leisure time, our occupation, everything is revealed at the resurrection, we have to give an account.

[27:03] Truth is, judgment is coming and you either resurrect to the second death or you resurrect to eternal life. But grace, we need to show God's love and compassion.

how crucial is it to share the resurrection hope with others? Everything will be revealed. Remember the purpose of Jesus' signs, John 20 verse 31.

Jesus performs signs that we may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by believing that we may have life in his name. The resurrection is the sign that unlocks an abundant life.

And a quick side note here, very next chapter, Jesus is eating with Lazarus, who having been dead four days is very much alive. And in chapter 12 verse 10 we read, the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well as Jesus.

For an account of Lazarus, many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him.

Resurrection is the game changer, but it's also really threatening. Unlock a resurrection, abundant life.

[28:16] Are you hurting and broken within? Overwhelmed by the weight of your sin? Jesus is calling. Have you come to the end of yourself?

Do you drink and thirst? You thirst from a drink from the well? Jesus is calling. Come to Jesus, the resurrection and the life. Find rest for your souls.

Live an abundant life. For where else are we to go? Jesus alone has the words of eternal life. Amen. Amen. Thank you.