

# The Resurrection

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Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, turn to the two readings, but first of all to John chapter 11, and really John chapter 11, the verse 38.

Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, take away the stone. And then we find in Matthew chapter 28, it tells us, and behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.

Now, I know we had just, last week, had started looking at 1 Thessalonians, but I somehow had overlooked or hadn't realized that this weekend was the weekend of Easter.

As we know, it's a time when the church remembers the rising from the dead of the Lord Jesus Christ. I think it's very appropriate that we reflect for a little upon which is something that is at the very, very heartbeat, which is central to the Christian faith, the rising of Jesus from the dead.

[ 1 : 32 ] And in the first episode, we have here the narrative of the death of Lazarus and his resurrection. We see something of what Jesus is going to do for all people, but also we see in Jesus' own resurrection something of what Jesus is going to do for us as well.

And although there are differences, there are, I suppose, to a certain extent similarities, and there are things for us to learn along the way. Now, Jesus' ministry was an exceptional ministry, a ministry of teaching and a ministry of miracles.

I suppose if people are to ask what was the greatest miracle that Jesus ever performed, very hard to work out which one. Because sometimes you may say to Israel, well, what is more miraculous? Sometimes what could be a very, what we might term almost a simple miracle, but it's still a miracle. For instance, healing instantly somebody who is incredibly ill with a raging fever.

And just like that, made completely well. Or healing somebody who has been paralyzed for 38 years. On the one hand, you will say definitely the person who has been paralyzed for 38 years.

[ 2 : 58 ] But at the end of the day, to heal somebody instantly, it's like the calming of the storm. Because you and I know that fever is something that it will gradually subside.

And after fever, there is always weakness. And when Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law, she got up straight away and served them. Indicating that there was no weakness.

It was an instant, remarkable recovery. And you could go through all the different miracles, and you could compare, and you could contrast, and weigh this one with that one, and so on. But while people may not argue, but they might sort of talk about which is the greatest, there's no question whatever, when we come to something like this, it makes us stop and think, now, here is something absolutely extraordinary.

Somebody who has been dead for four days being raised to a life. Now, as we know, Jesus never performed miracles as a showman, or for effect, or to get an audience, or in any way to show off. Never. These sort of things were abhorrent to him. His ministry of healing, his ministry of miracles, was indeed proof of who he was. As Isaiah had prophesied this very thing, it was to be one of the evidences of the Messiah when he came, and Jesus, of course, was fulfilling all that.

[ 4 : 31 ] Now, of course, we know, and we'll just run through this very, very quickly, because probably this is one of the most familiar passages in Scripture to us, and it's just to reinforce maybe one or two truths that we already know, but which is part, again, of gospel ministry.

But we know that Jesus loved this home in Bethany, and he loved Mary, and he loved Martha, and he loved Lazarus. It tells us that. And sometimes people think that when tragedy, or sorrows, or pains, or things like that come into their home and into their lives, it's an evidence that God doesn't love them.

Well, the Bible dispels that kind of argument straight away. We can see, for instance, in the book of Job, did anybody suffer like Job? And yet it tells us that God loved Job.

Here is a home where death came. And it's amazing how Jesus, how the gospel writers highlight how special this home was to Jesus.

How special the inhabitants of that home. How special Mary and Martha and Lazarus were to Jesus. And yet that did not immunize them, as it were, against sorrow and pain and tragedy.

[ 5 : 47 ] So we've always got to remember these things. And then we find here that as death comes into this family, we find this strange thing of how Jesus delayed coming.

When Mary and Martha sent for Jesus, he didn't come right away. He allowed Lazarus to die. Now again, there are many things that we do not know, we don't understand, and it would be wrong for us to even to try to make our own suggestion about anything.

But here, because scripture shows us, then we can on this occasion make these points. And Jesus is showing that the death of Lazarus had particular reasons about it.

One was that it was for the glory of God. And you say to yourself, how can death be for the glory and to the glory of God? Well, often we don't understand it, but that's what it says here.

It tells us very clearly that all these things were to be for the glory of God. Jesus said, verse 40, said to her, did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?

[ 7 : 03 ] And that was in connection with this. And I would say that often in life, as we all of us journey through life, often our unbelief will prevent us seeing the glory of God, often in the little things in life.

But God, God is in everything. And his glory is involved in everything. Often we don't see it because of unbelief.

We need to ask the Lord for the belief in order to be able to see. Another thing that we're told, and it's very evident here, is that this whole episode was for the development of Mary and Martha's faith. Their faith was going to be strengthened. At first, it would appear it was being weakened. Their faith was being shaken. Now, as we know, faith is like a muscle.

A muscle grows through resistance. It grows through pressure. It doesn't grow by laziness or lying about. It grows through activity.

[ 8 : 12 ] And God will test our faith. Sometimes it's difficult. Sometimes it's hard. But it's through these things that our faith grows.

But we're also told that this was also for the salvation of many. Because we're told that in verse 45, I, many of the Jews, therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him. So, on this occasion, we're given something into the background, something into the behind the scenes, as it were. Now, of course, when we find Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, we often see that as a, not only as an actual story that took place, a narrative that took place, we also see it spiritually.

And we see it in the way that it's only Jesus who can bring life. Now, the thing is this, Mary and Martha, this is what I love, Mary and Martha sent for Jesus.

Lazarus didn't send for Jesus, but Mary and Martha did. And you and I are able to do that for people as well. We are able to send for Jesus.

[ 9 : 31 ] In other words, we pray for people. And I think it's one of the most wonderful privileges that we have. We don't only pray for ourselves, but we pray for others. We pray for those we know, those we love.

We pray for our family. We pray for our friends. We even pray for people we don't know. And we're encouraged in the word of God. Imagine if God gave us no encouragement.

But the word of God is full of encouragement, asking us to pray. Well, that's what Mary and Martha did. They prayed. They sent for Jesus.

And it was Jesus who was able to bring life. And it is only Jesus who can bring life. And may I say to anybody here who is spiritually dead, and if you're spiritually dead, it means you cannot respond, you won't respond to the gospel.

You might say to yourself, oh, well, that's all very well. Yeah, there's this and there's that about it. And there's some of it. It's very good. But my heart is still cold to it. I can't see. I don't get it.

[ 10 : 41 ] Well, it's for someone like you that Jesus has come. And he says, look, I'll give you life. Right now, you're not able to see. And all the believers in here, there was a day when they couldn't see either.

And it was Jesus who enabled them to see. It was Jesus who enabled them to believe. And he's able to make you believe as well, so that your eyes will be opened to see, to understand, and say, ah, that's it.

As John Newton said, I once was blind, but now I see. And that's how it is. Anyway, we find that Jesus makes his way here to Lazarus' burying place.

And there's a lot of weeping there, as one would expect. Mary is weeping, and Martha is weeping, and the Jews are weeping. And Jesus himself wept. I love that.

And he will highlight that that's the shortest version of the Bible, Jesus wept. It might be a small version, but it is so, so rich and full of meaning.

[ 11 : 53 ] Today, Jesus, as our Savior, he understands. We're told in the Bible that we have a high priest who has been touched with a feeling of our weaknesses.

I love that. Been touched with our pains. And you ask him even today to come in and help you in your pain, in your sorrow.

Because this is what he promises. Now, when Jesus came to the tomb, and as we realized, the tomb was different to our burial place. It was a rock like a cave, and there would be a huge stone would be put over the mouth of the cave.

And when Jesus gave the command, take away the stone, some people would say, well, why did Jesus ask for the stone to be taken away?

Here is Jesus, and he's just about to raise Lazarus from the dead. Surely his power could have taken away the stone. Of course it could. But I don't think that Jesus is going to ask us to do the things that we can do ourselves.

[ 12 : 59 ] And there are a lot of things that we can do ourselves, but there are a lot of things we can't do ourselves. And I believe part of our responsibility in life is to take away the stones that are in the way of other people.

Stones that are keeping people back from coming to trust in Jesus. And the Lord, I believe, was saying that there might be people here today, and you're, the fact that you are keeping, as it were, Jesus away, part of the reason why you haven't come to faith in Jesus is that you're looking at things, and there are things in your way.

You have issues, and you have problems. And there are things maybe about Christians and about the church, and there's all kinds of obstacles. And sometimes Christians will have to hold up their hands, we have to hold up our hands, and say, sometimes, by what we do and what we say, we are putting stones and obstacles in the way.

But we need to be careful. And I think it's part of our prayer, should we, Lord, help us by what we say and by what we do to take the obstacles and the stones away that are keeping people back, that are hindering people.

And so, I believe here that Jesus is showing us that he will use his power, his miraculous power, but not when there are things that we can do ourselves.

[ 14 : 36 ] So he says, take away the stone. The people had the power to take away the stone, but they didn't have power to bring back life. And so we find that Jesus calls upon Lazarus to, Lazarus, come out.

And Lazarus came out, it must have been a remarkable scene, and he was still bound in the grave clothes. And of course, they had to tear the grave clothes off. Now, here's one of the big differences between Jesus, we'll see in a moment, and Lazarus.

When Jesus rose from the dead, he rose without the grave clothes. When Lazarus rose from the dead, he rose with them. Because Lazarus was going to need the grave clothes again, he wasn't finished with death.

It's an extraordinary, he was a man who was going to die twice, go through the process of death twice. Quite a remarkable thing. And it was symbolic that their grave clothes were there.

Again, they had to release Lazarus. Although he could come out of the grave, he couldn't rip open, as it were, the grave clothes himself, because of the way they were tied round.

[ 15 : 50 ] For Jesus, there was no struggle. He rose. The Father rose him, or caused him to rise, and he himself rose by his own power.

We are told that all Father, Son, and Spirit were involved in the resurrection of Jesus, that he rose from the dead himself, and yet we're told that God raised him from the dead.

But that's another thing. Here is Lazarus, and he is brought forth. And I'm quite sure that as Jesus wept by the grave, there was this extraordinary dilemma that Jesus was in. he was seeing the pain, and he was feeling the pain of this family that he loved. But he was also seeing that by bringing Lazarus back, he was bringing Lazarus back into our world. Yes, there's great things, there's a lot of joy and happiness, but there's also a lot of pain, a lot of suffering. He was bringing Lazarus back into that, bringing back into this world with all its pain and all its sorrows.

[17:04] And there might have been an element of this in Jesus' weeping, as he reflected on all these things. But then we move very quickly from Lazarus, and as I say, we're just looking at this so briefly because we're looking by way of maybe comparing and contrasting, and we come to the scene of the resurrection.

And we find there that these women are making their way very early in the morning to the tomb. Now we're told in John's Gospel that they went there to anoint the body of Jesus. They were going to put spices upon the body, and that's why they were making their way there very, very early in the morning.

Now, there's no question whatever, but that faith and love were propelling these women forward because they loved Jesus.

And it was love and faith that was bringing them to anoint the body of Jesus. But there was a huge problem because when Jesus' body was taken down from the cross and Jesus' body was buried, the authorities put a huge stone over the mouth of the tomb.

They sealed it and they set a guard around it. There was an armed guard of soldiers around the tomb to make sure that the disciples of Jesus didn't come and try and steal away the body.

[18:30] And so as these women made their way, they were thinking to themselves, now we have a huge problem. There's an armed guard and there's a sealed stone and it's a monster of a stone and who is going to roll away the stone for us?

But you know, the great thing is they still kept going. They didn't say, oh well, there's not, we know what we want to do but we can't do anything about it.

No, love and faith were so involved that they had, that they just, they had to go on and on and on and they went. And so, we find this wonderful moment that when they arrived at the tomb, what they feared had been taken care of.

Now we often say, well I won't use this as an instance for the importance of going forward by faith. Lots of us say, oh, don't think I can do that.

There might be quite a lot of people in here like that and you're saying, I can't. You know what you should do. The word of God makes it clear what you ought to do but there's a part of you saying, I can't.

[19:37] You go forward my friend in faith. And one of the things you'll find is that the Lord is ahead of you. And so often we have found it out that the very thing we feared, the very thing we didn't know how to deal with has already been dealt with.

That's what happened for these women. And anyway, when they got there, they were met by this remarkable scene. The stone had been rolled away and sitting on the stone there was a, here was this angel.

And, of course, what had happened was there was an earthquake, a great earthquake and again, that is often highlighting the appearance of God. God, in his dealings in this world, often by ways of judgment and often in the ways of redemption comes by way of an earthquake.

We find that in Sinai as God was dealing with Israel in giving of the law, there was the earthquake. In God's judgment against Dothan, Nathan, Dothan, and Abiram in the wilderness as the earth swallowed them up.

There was an earthquake at Calvary, there's going to be an earthquake at the return of Jesus, and here is an earthquake at the resurrection of Jesus. And so we find here that there's this amazing picture where the angel is claiming the victory.

[21:02] No sign of the soldiers, they've run for it. But you see, Jesus is showing that he's the ultimate victor over death. And, we have to ask the question, was it the angel who came to roll away the stone in order for Jesus to come out of the tomb?

No. The stone has been rolled away to show that the tomb is empty. The stone is away and the angel is sitting on that stone to show, look, come, see the place where the Lord lay.

No stone could hold Jesus because even death couldn't hold him. His body didn't see corruption. It was like the exaltation of Christ couldn't wait for it to happen.

His body didn't see any corruption and he rose. It would appear that as the grave clothes were lying on the shelf where Jesus would have been laid, it would appear that Jesus rose through the clothes.

He had no need of them again. Lazarus had need of them. And you know, the wonderful thing is that when it comes time for us, unless the Lord comes first, we will all die.

[ 22 : 21 ] And I think one of the most painful places that I, and I spend a lot of my time there, one of the most difficult places I can ever go to is to the grave.

I don't want to upset anybody and I'm not going to say anything really. The grave is difficult. But you know, the grave isn't final. We often tend to think it is. I've heard people talk about the finality of the grave.

It's not. It's only temporary. And this is one of the things that Jesus teaches us, is that how temporary it all is.

Because Jesus is saying, it's not as Lazarus rose, but as I rose. That's what's going to happen. And we will resemble Jesus, our Savior, resemble him in all his mediatorial glory.

And there won't be when the resurrection comes, and the dust will be renewed and brought again into the fullness of body to be reunited with the soul, not to be bound by any limitations again.

[ 23 : 31 ] It is then that we will fully and finally discover the fullness of the salvation that has been won for us in Jesus Christ. You know, when we die and go to glory, there is still more to happen.

That's not the fullness of the salvation. The souls in glory today are waiting, waiting for the, as it were, the clothing again of the soul with the body.

This is still part of what was won for us in Jesus. and the angel sitting on the tomb is claiming that victory, saying, look, he's risen. He's swallowed up death with life.

And my friend, what else, what, no wonder they say the gospel, no wonder gospel is good news. Is there any better news in the world today than that? The meeting on Thursday night is looking at Psalm 16, the end of Psalm 16, and we have these words, you have made known to me the path of life.

In your presence there is fullness of joy. At your right hand there are pleasures forevermore. You've made known to me the path of life, not just made known to me in the hearing of the ear.

[ 24 : 47 ] You've begun to make known to me through experience. I already know something of it. And the life that I begin to enjoy now, it's just a little taste of the joy that will be forever and ever, where we will enter into the joy of the Lord.

Imagine an environment of joy, where we are filled, as it were, with the exuberance and the thrill of joy all the time.

It's like perpetually bubbling up within us, an environment of joy, because Jesus says on that great day, that's the command, enter into the joy of the Lord.

Thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore. It's like, it's as if the king is dispensing all the time the great blessings, great blessings, great riches, forevermore, fullness of joy.

That word fullness, as I was saying this on Thursday, has the same root meaning as satisfying. So it is a perpetual satisfaction.

[ 26 : 02 ] No satisfaction in this world. How many people? People crave happiness, they crave satisfaction, they crave joy. That's what people want.

And Jesus says, I'll give it to you. Not only for a few years here, but forever. Because you see, whatever joy we have in Jesus here, and we do, there are always the clouds of sorrow and the difficulties around.

But in glory, there's no clouds. The joy is forever. Anything to hamper or to spoil it has been removed.

Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life. Will you today believe in this Jesus? Let us pray. Lord, our God, we give thanks for every good thing that we receive.

We give thanks for this great gospel that touches hearts, that affects hearts. We pray, Lord, that any souls in here today who are maybe struggling with regard to where they are, may come to know the joy that is found in Jesus.

[ 27 : 17 ] Break down whatever barriers are there, Lord, and we ask to deal gently, to deal graciously, to deal lovingly. Lord, take us all home safely, we pray.

Bless everybody here today and forgive us in Jesus' name. Amen.