

The problem of bereavement

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- [0 : 00] Ministers often fall into the trap of talking about the horrors of war, but I'm not going that way this morning. Instead of which, I'm thinking about another cost.
- The cost of many, many, many lives being bereaved because their son, brother, husband, whatever, never came back.
- In World War I, the total amount of people who had died was 19 million, only to be exceeded in World War II, where the figure was 85 million.
- And some of the families were only informed because of a letter that they had sent to their loved one, came back with a stamp on it which said, found dead.
- So I'm talking about this problem of bereavement. And as we do so, we look at the resurrection of Lazarus, contained in John chapter 11.
- [1 : 13] And what we are given in that chapter is not just a literal prophecy about the resurrection of Jesus, but also of everyone who believes in him.
- So let's look at the sorrow of Martha and Mary. In verse 21 we read, Martha said to Jesus, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.
- And even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you. Jesus said to her, Your brother will rise again.
- Now the context of this chapter is that Jesus is returning to Jerusalem to take part in the feast of the Passover. As far as the Gospel of John is concerned, this is the third Passover so mentioned.
- The other two are in John 2 and John 6. And that's an important little detail because it's from that detail we come to learn that the ministry of Jesus took part over three years.
- [2 : 27] On his journey, our Lord was coming close to Bethany, a village slightly less than two miles from Jerusalem. And in this village lived Lazarus with his two sisters, Martha and Mary.
- So the chapter began as we read. The sisters sent to Jesus saying, Lord, he whom you love is ill.
- Why did they send? Because they believed that he could do something about it. But when Jesus heard it, he said, This illness is not unto death.
- It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it. So right at the beginning, Jesus is saying that behind this, there is a divine purpose.
- And that purpose is that the Son of God will be glorified as a result of all this. And later in the chapter, in verse 11, he expands on what the condition of Lazarus is.
- [3 : 37] Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep. But I go to wake him out of sleep.
- You'll find in the New Testament, this idea of people falling asleep is another way of saying they have died.
- So then Jesus, in verse 14, 15, tells them plainly, Lazarus is dead. And for your sake, I was glad I was not there, so that you may believe.

But let us go to him. So when they arrive in Bethany, they are greeted with the news that Lazarus had been dead four days.

Not only was he dead four days, there was a mourning party consisting possibly of their neighbours who were there to comfort them about this death.

[4 : 46] So the scripture says they were there to console Martha and Mary concerning their brother. What have they got to say? Well, nothing about what they said, if they said anything, is actually recorded.

And you see, there's a great difference these days between what are called humanist funerals and Christian funerals.

My wife and I have been to a number of these in recent times. I mean, humanist funerals. And what they consist of is a celebration of the life based on memory and nothing more.

But what we find in the Christian gospel is that the Christian funeral has got more to offer. Not just a celebration of the life.

not just memories of the dear one who has passed, but the conviction that in Christ that person will rise again.

[6 : 03] Even now I know that whatever you ask from God he will give it you. Jesus said, your brother will rise again.

her words give her her absolute faith in Jesus as the one who will guarantee the future of Lazarus.

she says, I believe. When Jesus is taken to the tomb you have the shortest verse in the Bible John 11 35 Jesus wept.

And it is reported that when Jesus saw the state of absolute sorrow and the Jews who were with her when Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her also weeping he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.

And what about us? When we are in this state of bereavement Jesus Christ is also deeply troubled for you.

[7 : 24] and so deeply moved again he came to the tomb and it was a cave and a stone lay upon it.

This tomb was in the form of a cavern or chamber hewing into the rock. The rock can be pictured as rising from the ground perhaps slanting backwards and in order to ward off wild animals a slab of stone is lying against it.

So we see something of the sorrow the absolute sorrow of Martha and Mary. Now we come secondly to the comfort.

Martha said to Jesus Lord if you had been here my brother would not have died. Jesus said to her your brother will rise again.

So in other words the great lesson that comes to you and me through this chapter is that the comfort that we get comes to us from the risen Christ.

[8 : 39] Now remember what he said when he was teaching in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5. Blessed are those who mourn they shall be comforted.

That is the promise of God. It comes direct from the person of Jesus himself. So when Jesus says to her your brother will rise again Martha responds by saying I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.

In other words what she's saying is she's saying something that is in absolute conformity with the teaching of the Jewish rabbis at that time.

He will rise again at the resurrection of the last day. But Jesus now personalizes this doctrine and says this I am the resurrection and the life.

He who believes in me though he die yet shall he live and whosoever lives and believes in me shall never die. One of the things you find in the gospel of John is there are lots of I am sayings such as I am the bread of life that has come down from heaven to give life to the world.

[10:10] Here's another one. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the way the truth and the life. So there's lots of them.

So how are we to understand these I am sayings? We have to understand something that's happening in the Old Testament and that is God's reply to Moses in the book of Exodus.

God said to Moses I am who I am. Say this to the people of Israel I am has sent me to you.

So when you take that revelation which speaks about the ever continuance of the great and wonderful God and you apply them to Jesus it proves that he is who he claims to be the incarnate son of the eternal God and when you go on in this chapter to the arrest of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane and the soldiers come and they say he says to them who are you looking for and they say Jesus of Nazareth and he says I am he and at that moment the soldiers fell to the ground why because of the great power is in the name of God he is the resurrection and the life so this is the power which

Jesus gives to Martha and Mary I am the resurrection and the life he who believes in me though he die yet shall he live and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die so what does that mean to us today for them it meant that they will see their brother again which they would have understood to mean the resurrection of the last day and for us it means exactly the same thing that all of those loved ones who have parted from us who have died in the faith we will see them again not in this life but in the life that is to come now in the case of Martha and Mary there was going to be a more immediate application of this so Jesus asked them the question do you believe this yes says

[13:05] Martha I believe you are the Christ the son of God who is coming into the world so what makes the difference to Martha and Mary is the word that she says I believe because when you say that it transports you out of the realm of the natural out of the realm of sorrow out of the realm of grief and it transports you into the world of Jesus Christ I am the resurrection and the life I believe is a hope that is radiant that transforms our sorrow simply by believing in the words of

Jesus such faith is the guarantee of hope and certainty finally the hope of Martha and Mary Martha said to Jesus that you had been here my brother would not have died and even now I know that whatever you ask from God God will give you Jesus said to her your brother will rise again so when she comes to this business and this is something that happens with this personal contact with the Lord Jesus Christ for us today you get the faith to believe I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day in other words by saying

I believe her faith is stating her brother has a future she didn't realize it was going to happen very soon so after this she sent and called for her sister in the words the teacher is here and is calling for you this invitation Mary who was sitting in the house rose quickly and went out to meet Jesus he had not come into the village at this point but was still in the place where Martha had met him now we have this sorrow when Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her also weeping he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled where have you laid him said

Jesus Jesus deeply moved came to the tomb it was a cave and a stone lay upon it now this idea of burying people in caves is a Middle Eastern custom in Genesis 23 we find that Abraham buried Sarah his wife in such a cave and into this cave the body was let down either through horizontal opening or placed in the tomb cut in the face of the rock in either case it was closed by a stone which had to be a heavy one to keep wild animals out now when you take all these facts into being what we are actually saying this is the greatness of the miracle that Jesus performed there is no way that

Lazarus is going to come walking out of there by himself but there is when Jesus is in charge of the situation so he orders that the stone should be removed the sister of the dead man said to him by Lord this time there will be an odor for he's been dead four years did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God this statement causing her to believe causing her eyes above the situation in which she was surrounded with sorrow and grief is followed by a prayer that Jesus has and he says this father I thank you you have heard me I know you hear me always but I have said this on account of the people standing by they may believe that you have sent me having prayed he then said he cried with a loud voice

[18 : 30] Lazarus come out and the miracle took place the dead man came out his hands and his feet bound with bandages and his face face wrapped with a cloth and Jesus said unbind him and let him go now if you go into the scripture to find out when the previous person was raised from the dead you have to go back in the land of Israel to the days of Elijah in first king 17 following and of his colleague Elisha under their ministry one person was raised from the dead but here is something practical because this only serves to deal with the sorrow of

Mary and Martha your brother will rise again but it proves what's going to happen in Jerusalem not many days down the line there would be a resurrection of the dead of our Lord himself so when we look at this chapter we find it's got a lot to say about the problem of bereavement it encourages us to face it square on and to say in light of it I believe it gives you hope to face the future with courage it gives you faith so what Jesus said to Martha and Mary is now true for all of us I am the resurrection and the life he who believes in me though he die yet shall he live and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die faith in that statement has the power to transform whatever circumstances you may be in and it is accompanied by the peace of

God which is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit Amen God God God God God God.
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