

The Resurrection and The Life

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[0 : 00] This morning, we're coming to the end of our short series on Jesus. I am sayings in John's gospel and Edward law will be preaching to us once again. And this morning we're going to be reading together in John 11, John chapter 11 from verse one through to verse 53. If you're a visitor and don't have a Bible, we've got some just outside. The welcome team can help you to one of those.

But do have a Bible in front of you and follow along as we read. John chapter 11, beginning verse one. 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. His brother Lazarus was ill. So the sister sent to him saying, Lord, he whom you love is ill.

But when Jesus heard it, he said, this illness does not lead to death. 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. Then after this, he said to the disciples, let us go to Judea again.

[1 : 38] The disciples said to him, Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you. And are you going there again? Jesus answered, are there not 12 hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble because he sees the light of this world.

But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles because the light is not in him. After saying these things, he said to them, our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.

The disciples said to him, Lord, if he's fallen asleep, he'll recover. Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought he meant taking rest and sleep.

Then Jesus told them plainly, Lazarus has died. And for your sake, I am 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 also go that we may die with him. Now, when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.

[2 : 55] 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. 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 that he 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.

[4 : 00] When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, the teacher is here and is calling for you. And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him.

Now, Jesus had yet come, had not yet come into the village, but 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 had been here, my brother would not have died.

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. Jesus wept. So the Jews said, see how he loved him. But some of them said, could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?

[5 : 14] Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. There was a cave and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, take away the stone. Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, Lord, by this time there will be an ooter, for he has been dead four days.

Jesus said to her, did I not tell you that if you believed you would 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 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, his hands and feet bound with linen strips and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, unbind him and let him go.

Many of the Jews, therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

[6 : 26] So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, what are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.

But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, you know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.

He did not say this of his own accord. But being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation. And not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

So from that day on, they made plans to put him to death. Amen. This is God's word.

Well, good morning, friends. Good to see you all. And welcome to those who are listening in from Kelvin Grove and Queens Park. Well, let's turn together, if we may, to John's Gospel, chapter 11.

[7 : 46] And we're continuing today in this study of the I Am sayings of Jesus recorded in John's Gospel. And in this chapter, chapter 11, the I Am saying comes, and you'll have spotted it during the reading, but it comes at verse 25, where Jesus says to his friend Martha, I am the resurrection and the life.

Whoever believes in me, even though he die, yet shall he live. And then Jesus immediately demonstrates the truth of what he's saying by raising Lazarus, Martha's brother, from the dead. Verse 43, Lazarus, come out. And the man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips and his face wrapped with a cloth.

Jesus said to them, unbind him. And let him go. It is one of the most dramatic and glorious moments in the whole Gospel story.

When Jesus says, Lazarus, come out, we're listening to the voice that wakes the dead. Now, this great miracle, just to set it in a slightly wider context, this great miracle is one of seven miracles recorded in John's Gospel.

[9 : 01] John the Evangelist, the author of this book, doesn't actually use the word miracle. He sometimes speaks of these events as the works of Jesus, but more often he refers to them as signs.

And in calling them signs, John means that these miracles are signposting or indicating the identity of Jesus. John actually makes this very clear at the end of chapter 20, where he says, Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.

But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. That's John's purpose.

John has not recorded these wonderful miracles to entertain us or to tickle our intellectual fancy. He's recorded them to open our eyes to see who Jesus is, that he is the Christ and the Son of God, so that we should then come to believe in him, to rest the full weight of our confidence on him, and that through believing in him, we might have life.

That means eternal life in his name. Now I think we can say that these miracles or signs are doing three things to instruct us.

[10:23] Three things. First of all, they are disclosing the identity of Jesus, that he is the Christ. That means that he is the final king of David's line. And that he is the Son of God, which means that although he is distinct from God the Father, he is fully God, God in human form and flesh, God incarnate.

So he is the great I am in human form. That's his identity. Then secondly, the miracles show that in the person of Jesus, the powers of the world to come have broken into the domain of Satan, which is this world.

The powers of the new creation have begun to penetrate the old creation. And this means that Satan and his minions tremble because they recognize who Jesus is.

His first coming has given the old world a foretaste of the new world, the kingdom of God. And then thirdly, these miraculous signs give us a glimpse of what the new creation will actually be like, what it will look like.

Blindness, deafness, lameness, every kind of physical infirmity will be gone. Hunger and poverty, every kind of human wretchedness will be banished.

[11:41] Now this present world, as we know only too well, is dominated by death. In fact, to use Paul's phrase from Romans chapter eight, the old creation is in bondage to decay.

And that bondage to decay in the new world will be gone. The new world will pulsate with exuberant life and joy. Sorrow, sadness, and frustration will all be gone.

As it's put in the book of Revelation chapter 21, God will wipe away every tear from his people's eyes and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.

So these miracles or signs give us a glimpse of that new world, just a foretaste so as to whet our appetites. And in moments in this life, when we feel most bowed down with weariness and weakness, it means we can look up with joy and we can say to the Lord, Lord, bring it on.

Or to use rather more conventional language, thy kingdom come. Now this great sign that we're reading about here in John chapter 11 is a climactic moment when the power of the world to come breaks in upon the present world.

[12:59] Death has to give way to life. And the power of life is located in Jesus and in his words. So let's turn now to this story of the death and raising of Lazarus.

Now, as with most of these chapters in John's gospel, it's a long chapter. It's full of detail, and we won't be able to look at everything that's going on here. But I want to try and highlight the main things that John is showing us.

The bare bones of the story can be laid out pretty quickly. We have three siblings, Martha, Mary, and Lazarus who live at the village of Bethany. Bethany was about two miles to the east of the old city of Jerusalem.

And Jesus clearly knew this family well. And as verse five tells us, he loved them. Now, Lazarus was taken seriously ill.

And at the time of his illness, Jesus was about two days journey away on foot from Jerusalem. So the sisters, knowing Jesus's power over illness, send a message to him saying, he whom you love is ill.

[14:07] They don't say, please come though. I think that's implied, but simply he whom you love is ill. But Jesus, for reasons which later emerge, doesn't set off straight away for Bethany.

He and his disciples stay where they are for two days. And then he says to them, let's go down to Judea again. And this leads to some discussion between Jesus and his disciples.

And Jesus says in verse 11, our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him. I just noticed that it's a small detail, but it's interesting.

We have a plural followed by a singular in that verse 11. Our friend Lazarus, that's we plural. He's our friend has fallen asleep, but I singular go to awaken him.

So collectively, he's our friend, but only one has the power to wake him up. Now the disciples misunderstand Jesus. They think he's saying that Lazarus is simply asleep in the way that you and I were three or four hours ago, maybe an hour ago, looking at some of the younger ones of you.

[15:20] I'm teasing. Of course, I don't mean that. So Jesus then, then tells them plainly, Lazarus has died. Verse 15. And for your sake, I'm glad I was not there so that you may believe.

I just noticed that John's purpose in recording these signs is to help us to believe in Jesus. So they reach Bethany. And then they discover that Lazarus has been dead and buried for four days. Martha hears that Jesus is on his way. It's just outside the village. So she goes straight out to meet him. And she says in verse 21, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. Now that's not, I think, a reprimand. She respected Jesus too much to reprimand him. It's just a statement of fact. If you'd been here, my brother would not have died. But she goes on. Even now, I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you. Jesus then says, your brother will rise again.

[16:22] She replies in verse 24. I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day. Now that was a statement of conventional Jewish theology.

A belief in the resurrection at the last day. But Jesus then says to her, not I will be, but 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. And then he lovingly challenges her by saying, do you believe this?

And she says, yes, Lord. And then she adds what you might call Martha's great confession. Yes, Lord. She says, I believe that you are the Christ, the son of God who is coming into the world.

Now, after this, there's quite a bit of physical movement back and forth. Jesus stays put at the roadside. Martha hurries home to fetch her sister, Mary.

[17:28] Mary quickly comes out to where Jesus is, followed by a number of Jewish people who had visited the sisters to console them. Mary then reaches Jesus in verse 32.

She falls at his feet and says exactly what Martha had said a few minutes earlier. At which point Jesus is overcome with emotion.

He weeps and everybody else is weeping. Now we'll think about the meaning of his tears a little bit later. They then all come to the tomb, which was a cave sealed by a large stone.

It was the same kind of arrangement that Jesus himself later was to be buried in. And then Jesus says, take away the stone.

Now that shocks Martha. She is not expecting this. And in verse 39, she says, but Lord, there'll be a terrible smell. If we do this, he's been dead for four days.

[18:28] Jesus replies, did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God? So the stone is duly removed.

Jesus then prays to God, the father, and then cries out with a loud voice, Lazarus, come out. And out he comes wrapped up in linen cloths from head to foot.

Unbind him, says Jesus, and let him go. Friends, incidentally, this is what the gospel is all about. The triumph of life over death.

But we'll come back to that in a few minutes time. Now look at what happens next. Verse 45. Some of the Jews, many of the Jews who had witnessed the miracle, believed in Jesus.

But others went straight off to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. So the chief priests, who were mainly Sadducees, along with the Pharisees, called together the Sanhedrin, that's the high council of Judaism.

[19:30] And their discussion led, in verse 52, to them making plans to put Jesus to death. Well, that's the story, briefly retold.

But I want to ask this question. What is John wanting to teach us about Jesus from this story? We know from the verses I quoted earlier, from chapter 20, we know that John wants us to believe in Jesus so that we may have life in his name.

He wants us specifically to believe that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God, which incidentally, is what Martha clearly expresses here in verse 27. But the details here, in chapter 11, help to fill out our understanding and to make our faith in Jesus stronger and more secure.

So I want us to notice four things about Jesus from the story. First, Jesus is concerned that we should grasp that he is glorious.

We pick up this trail initially in verse 4. Verse 4. Jesus has just got the message in verse 3 that Lazarus is ill. And he immediately says, this illness does not lead to death.

[20:50] It is for the glory of God so that the Son of God may be glorified through it. So the story of the raising of Lazarus reveals something of the glory of both God the Father and the Lord Jesus.

Then look on to verse 40 and to the words that Jesus says to Martha there. He says, did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?

Now, we know that she already believed because we have her clear declaration of faith in verse 27. So Jesus is saying to her in verse 40, you are about to see something of the glory of God. And that's what she sees moments later when Jesus cries, Lazarus come out and the dead man is raised. She is seeing there a foretaste of the glorious resurrection of God's people from their graves.

What she is seeing when her brother steps out into the sunlight is something of the true nature of Jesus, his glorious nature, who he really is.

[21 : 59] Now think of it, she and her siblings, they knew Jesus as a man very well, as a man. He loved them, no doubt he'd shared meals with them, and he was about to share another meal with them, which is recorded in the first couple of verses of chapter 12.

So Martha had often seen him as a man, and Jesus would have looked just like any other young Jewish man of about 30 years of age. But in seeing him raise Lazarus from the grave, she was seeing something of his divine glory, something she had not seen before.

Now John is concerned that we who read his gospel should ourselves perceive something of the glory of Jesus. John had seen it.

In fact, he writes in chapter 1, verse 14, the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only son from the father.

John had seen his glory. He and his brother James and Simon Peter, they were the three apostles whom Jesus chose and took up a mountainside with him one day precisely so that they should see his glory.

[23 : 11] And he was transfigured in front of them. His face shone and his clothes became dazzlingly white. And Luke says in his account of the transfiguration, Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory.

Now, they were very familiar with his humanity. These three men had been with Jesus as close companions for quite a long time. They'd seen him eating, drinking, sleeping, doing everything else that human beings do.

But on the mountain, they saw his glory, glory as of the only son from the father. Deity is dazzlingly glorious. Humanity, by contrast, is not glorious.

I know we try to put on a bit of a show of glory occasionally. For example, somebody says, that was a glorious try that that wing three-quarter scored at Murrayfield the other day, wasn't it?

Or somebody else says, that was a glorious performance of Beethoven's fifth that we heard at the proms. Or do you remember the king's coronation? It was only a couple of months ago, but I'm sure you remember it.

[24 : 25] There he was, robed in splendid garments. And the whole occasion was one of high pageantry. There was the soaring great Gothic cathedral, Westminster Abbey, beautifully put on choral music.

Everybody turned out in their most impressive clothes, men and women packed into smart dresses and suits. But what I particularly remember is the king's face peering out from underneath that enormous, great heavy crown and looking, frankly, anxious and weary as if he'd rather be doing something else.

Now, I don't blame him at all. I mean, imagine having to become monarch at an age when all your contemporaries have been retired for several years. It's a pretty tall order. I respect the king and we must pray for him, especially that he will come to be convinced that Jesus is the only way to God the Father.

That, I think, needs to be our chief prayer for him. But human royalty is not glorious. It's enormously fragile. We pray in the national anthem, send him victorious, happy and glorious.

But the only real glory is the glory of God the Father and the Lord Jesus. And the raising of Lazarus is a demonstration of the glory of Jesus.

[25 : 44] Later in John's gospel, we find that the supreme revelation of his glory is given at the cross. In chapter 12, verse 23, Jesus says, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

How? Well, he goes on by falling into the ground like a grain of wheat, dying, and then bearing much fruit. But Jesus also knew that after his death, he would be returning to the glory of heaven. And he prays in chapter 17, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. He came from the glory and he has returned now to the glory.

And when he was on earth, he manifested his glory by dying on the cross and through his mighty miracles. So he manifested his glory by revealing his divine nature.

And when Martha and Mary saw their four days dead brother step forth into the sunlight alive and well, they were seeing the glory of Jesus. And we, in reading this story, also can perceive something of his glory.

[27 : 02] So as Christian people look forward to living in the new creation, let's not only look forward to being in a world where death and tears and pain are no more.

Let's also look forward to seeing Jesus in all his true glory enthroned beside his glorious Father. Now secondly, John wants us to see how the power of new life, resurrection life, is fiercely opposed.

Now we know how Jesus' ministry and life was constantly dogged by opposition. So for example, he would heal somebody on the Sabbath day and senior Jewish people would accuse him of breaking the Sabbath.

Or he'd be having dinner with dishonest tax collectors and prostitutes and people would accuse him of consorting with lowdowns, lowlifers. He's a glutton, he's a drunkard, he's a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

As they say in the north of England, he couldn't do right for doing wrong. Everything he did attracted vehement hostility. And it's just the same here in John chapter 11.

[28 : 15] And it is so strange. You would think, wouldn't you, that a man who had been dead four days and is then raised to new life, you would think that everybody would clap their hands, throw their caps in the air, and turn cartwheels of joy.

And we see from verse 45 that many of the Jewish people who witnessed the raising of Lazarus did come to believe in Jesus. But some of them went straight off and reported the event to the senior Jews in Jerusalem who immediately called a meeting of the high council.

And just look at what the council say in verse 47 here. At the end of verse 47, they say, what are we to do? For this man performs many signs.

If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him. And the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation. Now, do you see the fear that they're expressing there?

They can't deny that Jesus is performing many amazing miracles. They're undeniable. Everybody knows about his miracles. But in verse 48, the council members reveal what their real fear is.

[29 : 29] They're worried that their position of power and prestige is going to be taken away from them by the Romans. Now, the Romans were in charge. The governor of Judea was Pontius Pilate.

They were very much in charge in Jerusalem and throughout the province of Judea. Judea had been a Roman province now for nearly a century. And yet the Jewish leaders had managed to negotiate a certain position for themselves in Jerusalem and Judea, which gave them a certain hold on their institutions and their way of life.

So under these arrangements, they were allowed to run their synagogues. The temple worship was kept going. The Jewish royal family, the Herods, were allowed to retain a certain level of power and influence.

The Herods, of course, were puppet kings. The Romans were very much in charge. The Romans had battalions of soldiers stationed in many places. And the Jewish leaders, the Sanhedrin, they knew that any kind of Jewish insurrection would be stamped on without mercy.

And in our verse 48, this is what the council are afraid of. They're saying, if we let Jesus go on like this, performing these mighty miracles and attracting a huge following of supporters who probably want to proclaim him king, the Romans will squash us without mercy and will bring to an end everything that we have negotiated to maintain.

[30 : 59] You see, these council members were not interested in the possibility that Jesus might truly be the Christ. They only wanted to keep their little empire intact.

They were frightened of losing their hard-won position. Now, the high priest Caiaphas then speaks up and he is callous and dismissive.

Look at his words in verses 49 and 50. He says to them, you know nothing at all. He's speaking to his fellow counsellors here. He's saying to them, you're a bunch of ignoramuses.

And he says, the particular thing that has never crossed your little minds is the thought that it's better for you that one man should die for the people than for the whole nation to be obliterated.

A very interesting thing for him to say. That is actually a cack-handed declaration of the gospel, isn't it? One man to die for the life of the people. And then John ironically comments in verse 51 that these words of Caiaphas were actually an unwitting prophecy of the great truth that Jesus would indeed die, not only for the Jews, but for Gentiles who were scattered abroad across the world.

[32 : 11] So Caiaphas was speaking caustically, dismissively, but prophetically. And because of his words, the council in verse 52 begin to lay plans.

Sorry, 53, they lay plans to put Jesus to death. So the glorious miracle that shows life triumphing over death is countered by men who want death to triumph over life.

That is the perversity of the unregenerate human heart. And it reminds us of the fact that the glorious truth about Jesus will always attract fierce hostility.

Jesus would go on to say in chapter 15, if the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. So friends, if we are Christians, we're in the frying pan and the heat will be turned up sooner or later.

The power of new life is fiercely opposed. Here is Jesus, the most wonderful human being the world has ever seen. And yet, murderous hostility will always be snapping at his heels.

[33 : 23] I think it's worth asking the question, why do groups of powerful men tend to hate Jesus and his followers? Think, for example, of the powerful Marxist regimes of the 20th century in the Soviet Union and in China.

Think of the regime in North Korea today. Think of Hitler's right-wing regime in Germany in the 1930s and 40s. These powerful regimes have all hated the church.

At the same time, of course, they've hated their own people, unscrupulously putting to death millions of their own citizens and reducing many more to starvation. But why this hatred of Jesus? It's exactly as Psalm 2 prophesies. The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed.

But why? Why not welcome the church, especially when you remember how it has so often taken the lead in setting up hospitals and schools and universities and social reform?

[34 : 29] The answer must be that centers of human power fear lest they lose their influence over the people. Or in the words of our verse 48, lest they lose their place, their grip on society.

Human leaders want their people to look to them, not to some other king far away. They fear that they'll lose control of their society if they allow the people of King Jesus to flourish.

And especially if they allow the people of Jesus to live by a different set of principles. The nation's leaders, this is true of us today, the leaders are very happy for the church to do its own thing as long as the church conforms to all the current mantras and says all the right shibboleths.

But when the church insists on sticking to the Bible's teaching and especially to the Bible's ethics, the heat gets turned up under our frying pan.

And brothers and sisters, we risk being fried. But there are worse smells than the smell of sizzling bacon. Better for us to be fried to charcoal than to kowtow to the godless world.

[35 : 45] This life-giving power of Jesus will always be opposed as it was by Caiaphas and the high council. Death will always try to extinguish life. But as John writes at the very beginning of his gospel, chapter 1, verse 5, the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it, nor can it ever.

Well, we've seen so far that John wants us to grasp that Jesus is glorious and that his power to transform death into life will be fiercely opposed. Let's see thirdly how Jesus expresses his outrage at the fact of death.

Excuse me, let's just take a glass of this delicious river Clyde water. Thank you, Clyde. So the outrage that Jesus expresses at the fact of death.

Let's return to the story at verse 32. Mary comes along the road where Jesus is standing and she falls down at his feet. Falls at his feet.

That is a powerfully emotive thing to do. Then she says to him, Lord, if you'd been here, my brother would not have died. And she's weeping. She's breaking her heart.

[37 : 03] Now look at verse 33. Jesus sees her weeping and he looks around at the little crowd of Jewish friends and sees that they too are sobbing.

Well, it's hardly surprising to read next that he too was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. Now John's Greek words there are very strong words and they suggest that he was outraged, that he was angry.

The Greek verb used there was a verb used to describe the snorting of horses. I won't try and imitate it, but you know that kind of snorting noise a horse makes when its emotions are very raw. Jesus was both angry and grief-stricken. And that brief verse 35 says it all in two words. Jesus wept. But why? Why did Jesus weep?

He couldn't have been weeping for Lazarus because he knew what he was just about to do for Lazarus. His tears and his anger surely stem from his profound understanding of why human beings die.

[38 : 14] Jesus understands the reasons for human death far better than anybody. Jesus knows, contrary to what most people think, Jesus knows that death is not a natural process but a supernatural judgment.

It's the terrible burden laid upon men and women because of our rebellion against God. As God said to Adam long ago, dust you are and to dust you will return.

Death is the pulverization of human beings under God's righteous anger. And Jesus hates it because it speaks of the intransigence of the human will and of man's defiance of God's loving authority.

About 20 years ago I was taking the funeral of a friend of mine, a lovely Christian man who'd been a very effective worker, gospel worker, in our church at Burton-on-Trent.

He'd been one of those people who gives massive support to many other people in the congregation. Anyway, this man was taken ill one September and he died the following February at the age of 70, which seemed rather young to us.

[39 : 22] We all wish that he'd been with us for a lot longer. Anyway, just after the funeral service was over, I got talking to a close friend of his, another Christian man who was also a long-standing friend of mine.

And this friend who knew the Bible very well suddenly burst into tears. He put his handkerchief up to his eyes and he said, death is obscene.

Now, I'd never heard the word obscene used of death, but I thought to myself, yes, that's a good word to use. There is something horrible about death. We sense somehow that death ought not to be, that somehow it's an intruder.

We all sense that life ought not to be cut off, that it ought to go on forever. Now, surely that is a feeling inside us which has been put there by God himself.

As the book of Ecclesiastes puts it, God has put eternity into man's heart. In other words, there is something in the depths of all of us that corresponds to eternity, something which can never agree that death is acceptable.

[40 : 32] There's a cemetery in Fife where there's a gravestone standing and this gravestone gives the details of the deceased, the name and then dates of birth and death and so on.

And at the bottom, an extra line has been added which says, O Adam, what hast thou done? Jesus hates, hated the sin and the unbelief and the defiance of God which had sent so many people from Adam onwards to the grave.

It was rather as though Jesus, looking at the tomb of Lazarus, allowed his eyes to travel all over the world and he saw all the cemeteries and graveyards and every necropolis filled with the dusty remains of all those who had turned their backs on God.

Now he knew what he was about to do for Lazarus but to think about the power of death filled him with grief and anger. We cannot afford to think that death is a light thing if it troubles Jesus as deeply as that.

Well now, fourth, let's look now with wonder, with joy at the almighty power of Jesus. Look back to verse 23. Jesus knows that Lazarus has been in the tomb for four days and he says to Martha in verse 23, your brother will rise again and she gives this theologically correct answer, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day but then Jesus says to her, I am the resurrection.

[42 : 18] Not I will bring about the resurrection of many people but I am the resurrection and the life. The power and the reality of the resurrection he is saying is me.

Now you're looking at me. Look at me and you're looking at the resurrection. And there's something about this present tense that we need to take notice of. Jesus is not saying I will be the resurrection on the last day though of course that's true as well.

He is saying I am the resurrection now in the present tense. And what Jesus is about to do is to bring the glorious reality of the world to come into Martha's life and Mary's life and Lazarus' life now

in the present.

He wants Martha to see that the power and the glory are not confined to some far off future in just a few minutes time she is going to taste the power of the resurrection.

She will taste the power of the world to come. Now Jesus has already given us a taste of this teaching back in chapter 5. I don't know whether you'd like to turn with me if you're quick-fingered to chapter 5 and verse 24.

[43 : 32] 5, 24. He's been flagging this up if you like in advance. But in verse 24 there in chapter 5 he says, Truly, truly I say to you whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life.

He does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life. And just notice the present tense there. Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life.

Now, not just in the future but now in the present. So this means, friends, that if we're Christians we have eternal life now. Yes, we also will have eternal life.

That is the great future reality for you and for me by the death and resurrection of Jesus. But we have it today if we're Christians. Today, July the 23rd, 2023, eternal life is already yours and mine if we're Christians.

Yes, we will still have to go through physical death unless, of course, the Lord Jesus returns in the meantime. But the life of heaven is our present possession, not just a future possession.

[44 : 45] It means that our personal transformation from membership of the old world to membership of the new world has begun already. And in this final sentence of verse 24, Jesus assures us that although we shall be there at the day of judgment, we shall not be condemned on that day.

Jesus has already taken condemnation on behalf of all his people. That judgment from God was carried out at the cross so we have already passed from death into life if we're Christians.

Then look at the next verse, verse 25. Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming in the future and is now here in the present when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.

And the truth of that verse is demonstrated at the moment when Lazarus in the tomb hears Jesus cry, Lazarus, come out. That's the dead man hearing the voice of the Son of God and living.

When he heard that voice, he had no option. Death could not hold him. John the evangelist wants all of us to know that although Jesus hates death and weeps over its destructive power, he is its absolute master.

[46 : 08] He holds the keys of death and Hades as it's put in Revelation chapter 1. Jesus has forcefully procured, in the words of the old hymn, the death of death and hell's destruction.

Well, I want to end by returning to verses 25 and 26 in John chapter 11. 25 and 26. Jesus says to Martha, 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. And he then says to her, do you believe this?

And she says, yes, Lord. Now, it's very striking that Jesus should ask that question at the end of verse 26. It's not enough for him just to make his great I am statement and to leave it hanging in the air.

He then lovingly pins Martha down. That's what he's like. In the end, he pins us all down. Do you believe this? He's saying.

[47 : 19] Well, friends, you're all here bright and shiny here on a Sunday morning in church, but this question comes to all of us. Do you believe this? Do you believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life and that whoever believes in him, even though he die physically, will live eternally in the glorious world to come?

Do you believe it? It is the most important question that any of us could ever be asked because our eternal future hangs upon the answer to it.

let's bow our heads and we'll pray together. Our dear Lord Jesus, we praise you today that you came to a world dominated by death and gripped by the power of Satan, but you came to destroy the works of the devil and to open the gateway of the kingdom of heaven to all who put their trust in you.

Have mercy. Have mercy upon us all. To those who hesitate or doubt, give courage to cast caution to the wind and stake everything on you.

We believe that you are the resurrection and the life and we long to be fully united with you in your glorious kingdom. hear our prayer for your dear name's sake.
[48 : 50] Amen.