

# The Resurrection and The Life

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, here's a surefire question to kill a conversation among your friends and neighbors. What do you think of dying then?

It would be uncomfortable, wouldn't it? Maybe one or two would fish for a nice thing to say. Those we love never really leave us. Dying is really just another part of life.

And then, for most people, the conversation would end. Because for many of us, we cannot think for too long about our end. In our culture, it feels sometimes we can talk about anything.

Anything apart from death. And I don't know even if the last couple of years have changed that. Two years ago, we watched, didn't we, as the death rate climbed and climbed.

And we could not do anything about it, however hard we tried. We were helpless. And lots of Christian friends said at that time, Well, we won't be able to ignore death anymore.

[ 1 : 09 ] But I can't help feeling those friends perhaps underestimated how desperate our culture is not to think about the fact of death.

Because admitting that we will all die will pull the rug out from our whole system of values, send everything our society holds dear tumbling to the ground.

If we are all going to die, then whatever it is we live for is going to end too. Health. Wealth. Family. Happiness. Even if we live for the future, for the next generation. All will die. Which opens up the question of questions for us as we live in this world.

If death is where everything ends, then what is the point? It's far easier in the face of death to distract ourselves with anything. Anything.

[ 2 : 12 ] Rather than to think that people have died, are dying. And one day, it will be us too. But friends, Jesus doesn't let us distract ourselves this evening.

He wants us to look into the darkness of the grave. And to stare death in the eyes. And he does that not to torment us.

But so that we can really hear him when he says these words. That have changed countless lives through the generations. I am the resurrection and the life.

The one who believes in me will live even though they die. And whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Death is the big problem for humanity.

But tonight, John shows us there is an answer to the problem of death. And it is Jesus Christ. And he shows us that answer first with an awkward wait.

[ 3 : 19 ] Our first point, an awkward wait. So where John picks up the story in verse 1, a man named Lazarus is ill. We don't know what the illness was. But clearly, it was serious enough for this family to get a message to Jesus.

Who by now is two days journey away. And this is because the family was close to Jesus. We're told, verse 5, Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

It's just a lovely insight into our Lord's humanity, isn't it? But he had friends. There were people he was close to and fond of on earth. But what Jesus does with that news reminds us he's not only truly human, but also truly God.

Because on getting that phone call, verse 3, Lord, the one you love is ill. Jesus does, at first, nothing. Have a look down with me at verse 5.

Now, Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed where he was two more days.

[ 4 : 30 ] Now, you might need to read that again. It's not a misprint. There's nothing wrong with the translation. In fact, in Greek, it's even crunchier. The first word in verse 6 is literally, therefore.

If someone was telling you this, you might say, Sorry, I'm not sure I caught that rightly. Because it doesn't quite follow, does it? He loved this family. Therefore, when he heard their brother was ill, he

didn't go and see them.

The doctor tells you the condition is getting critical. Therefore, he's discharging ye. Now, the teacher knows that there are exams coming up.

Therefore, she goes on holiday. And the doctor, it's crunch time, isn't it? And the one in charge seems to be doing nothing.

It's a strange choice. If it was any of us, we would want to get there straight away, wouldn't we? We'd leave on the next train. Imagine how awkward that reply would be. Thanks for letting me know.

[ 5 : 34 ] I'll come when I'm ready. Why? Jesus. If you were Mary or Martha or Lazarus, you would be pretty upset, wouldn't you? And they are.

We see that they are later. What are you playing at, Jesus? But it becomes less strange when we understand why he waited. Because it becomes clear that if Jesus had left straight away, he would not have got there on time, but too soon.

See, Jesus knows what needs to happen. Have a glance down at verse 11. Jesus knows this. He went on to tell them, Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going to wake him up.

The disciples that don't know what Jesus knows wonder why Lazarus doesn't just get an alarm clock until Jesus tells them plainly, No, Lazarus is dead. And the biggest twist of all is that that's what Jesus was waiting for.

Look there, verse 14. And for your sake, I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. Now, perhaps you're wondering if it was a bit heartless of Jesus, or cruel, to let a man die in order to prove a point.

[ 6 : 53 ] But two things tell us that Jesus isn't either of those things. Firstly, Lazarus is one of the last people on earth, humanly speaking, that Jesus wanted to see die.

This family were his best friends. The sort of people in your life that you would do anything for. So of all the people for Jesus to do nothing for, this was the costliest and the hardest for him.

This man's life, it's not a bargaining chip to Jesus. This is Lazarus, who he loved. It's not just Jesus being awkward and uncomfortable. It's Jesus choosing to wait for the friend he loved to die in order to serve us.

Not himself, but us, by showing us his glory. And that choice to wait, it personally hurt him. We see that later in verse 35.

But secondly, we know that Jesus isn't being heartless or cruel here, because he knows something that we don't, doesn't he? Glance down at verse 4, Jesus, when he heard about the news about Lazarus, says, this illness won't end in death.

[ 8 : 07 ] No, it's for God's glory, so that God's son might be glorified through it. And we think, well, hasn't it already ended in death? But Jesus knows differently.

He's not playing by the same rules as us. For us, that's too late. The window of opportunity has closed to do anything. But not for Jesus. Not for Jesus.

He's not lost control of the situation for a second. He's not miscalculated the risk. He's not mistimed his intervention. And there's no getting around it, is there?

That this is an awkward wait. It's jarring. But it's not wrong. Because this is so important for us to see here, that Jesus is never late.

He is never late. Boy, did it feel like it. But if only we knew what he knows, we would see that he waits until the right time, every time.

[ 9 : 15 ] Waiting is one of the hardest things for us, isn't it? Especially when it's our health, or the health of someone who we love. And especially when we are praying, and asking Jesus to do something about it, please.

But sometimes Jesus waits, and waits, and waits, until we start to think he's not maybe doing anything. And then he waits until we start to think, it's too late.

And perhaps you've been there, and perhaps where you are this evening. But brothers and sisters, what is too late for us, is not too late for him.

He knows exactly what he's doing. And he times all that he does, goes to perfection. And sometimes the waiting helps us to see that what he is working for is not perhaps the same as what we are hoping for.

Why does Jesus wait here? He says it's for God's glory, and so that God's Son might be glorified through it. See, if he had gone straight away and not waited, the story would have ended the same.

[10:28] Lazarus would still have lived. But if Jesus had simply healed him, then Jesus would not have shown us his supreme glory in reversing death itself.

He waited on this occasion so that you would get to see this sign, and so that seeing it, you might believe him as the one who has power even over the very last enemy, death itself.

He waited so that we would see his glory and believe in him. But even when we see that and know that, it's still painful, isn't it?

And next, John gets us to kind of lean into that painful gap between our belief, what we know to be true from the mouth of Jesus, and our experience, and what we feel in the face of death.

So secondly then, we see a painful gap. Because by the time Jesus finally arrives at his friend's house, Lazarus has already been dead for four days. You get a sense of the scale of the funeral.

[11:34] Many Jews have come to grieve with Mary and Martha. And the sense of their pain too, one at a time, these sisters come to Jesus with the same complaint.

You notice that as we read in verse 21 and verse 32. Both of them, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

Heartbreaking words, aren't they? And the question that they're thinking but that they don't ask is there too. In verse 37, some of the crowd said, could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?

You know, I was speaking to somebody earlier in the week who's wrestling with this just now. I know God's powerful enough to do it. And I know he loves me enough to do it. And I'm praying that he will do it, but he's not doing it.

Why? Why is he not doing it? Friends, that is one of the hardest questions that we can ask as Christians. It's one of the hardest questions that unbelieving friends of ours can ask us too.

[12:44] If God is good and powerful, why do these bad things happen? It's worth remembering when people ask us that, but often that question comes because a bad thing has happened to them and has hurt them deeply.

It's a question that comes from a place of confusion and pain. So what does Jesus answer? Well, Jesus says, doesn't he, verse 23, your brother will rise again? And perhaps like you, Martha, thinks those are nice words, but empty.

Really, really, Jesus, I know, she says, he will rise again at the resurrection in the last day. So if Martha is kind of thinking, Jesus is just telling her, you know, your brother's in a better place.

It doesn't help. I thought, Jesus, you were more than a good man with nice words. I thought you were more than a prophet speaking the truth from God. We know, don't we, in the end, God will raise everyone, but what about my brother here and now?

No, no, says Jesus, you don't understand. And here is his big answer to that question. In verse 25, Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life.

[13:56] See, the resurrection of the dead is not simply an event in the calendar. Resurrection is a living, breathing, flesh and blood person. Life is not just a collection of cells or an abstract idea.

Life is a man's man. Jesus is saying he is those things. He is resurrection. He is life. And so to be with him and to believe in him is to be death proof.

The one who believes in me will live even though they die. Whoever lives by believing in me will never die. See, to us, death is the ultimate loss.

And in this life, that's true. Jesus shows us that in a moment. But with Jesus, death does not get the last word. And so here is Jesus lifting our eyes from the open grave, from that great big problem in front of all of us to who he is, his own glorious person.

and the other people are the most who he is. He is the most who he is. Sometimes we can be so invested in getting Jesus to take our problems away that we look past him as the answer to those very problems.

[15:13] We can be so focused on stopping ourselves or others from dying that we don't hear Jesus properly when he says that with him the grave does not win. And death is not the end.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus would remind us this evening that he came to give us something better than a few more years on earth. If Jesus' work was to stop us from dying, well, he would have a 100% rate of failure, wouldn't he?

Because everyone who has ever lived has died. And friends, short of his return, that will be us too. So it is good news indeed that Jesus' great work here and now is in fact showing us his glory so that we will put our trust in him.

Because we are going to die. But he is our only hope in life and in death. And so the real question becomes not why does Jesus let us die, but rather do we believe him when he tells us that because of who he is, death need not be the end for us.

I am the resurrection and the life, says Jesus. Do you believe this? Our lives depend on it. Tonight, would you say with Martha in verse 27, yes, Lord, I do believe that you are the Messiah and the Son of God who is to come into the world.

[16:42] Because that's what Jesus wants us to see and to believe when we come up against illness or death, our owner of those that we love. He is able and he is willing to keep our lives even through death.

He is so glorious, he does not need to keep us from dying to give us eternal life. But here and now, that belief, that truth, it still leaves a painful gap, doesn't it?

Because when we do face sickness and death, we feel pain and loss. And that is real. But as if to cement this truth into our lived experience, Jesus enters into that painful gap really personally, doesn't he?

Mary comes to him and repeats the same accusation as her sister. Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. Now think about this, Jesus, knowing what he knows, being who he is, still finds the experience of death devastating.

Just glance down at verse 35. It's the shortest verse in the Bible, but possibly, possibly the most profound. Okay, Jesus has just said he is the resurrection, and he is just about to raise his friend to life again, and yet we read in our Bibles that at the graveside, Jesus wept.

[18:15] Does death still hurt when we believe in Jesus? Well, it did for Jesus, and so it will for us. You hear now there is still a painful gap, isn't there, between what we know to be true in Jesus and the raw felt experience of death and dying.

And what is incredible in this chapter is that Jesus himself stood in that gap. knowing what Jesus knows, it doesn't or shouldn't turn us into robots.

And there's a guy called B.B. Warfield who wrote an essay called The Emotional Life of Our Lord, and he points out that the way that Jesus' emotional state is described in verses 33 and 38, that he's being deeply moved or troubled, it suggests to us that what Jesus mainly felt was angry, because death is an intruder.

It had no place in God's world in the beginning. Death came into the world with human sin, and so it is not the way that God designed life in this world to be. And friends, we know it's not a natural part of life because we cry when it happens.

And so in the face of death, Jesus is outraged, not because he can't do anything about it, but because in a fallen world, death is his enemy and ours.

[19:41] And so he stands with us, doesn't he, and says that for as long as people die, it will still hurt. And it's really important for us to know that because Jesus' promise is easy to believe when we're not sick or we're not dying or grieving.

But when we do face death, do we still believe Jesus' words? Not even Jesus could hold back his tears in the face of death.

And yet what he says and promises is still 100% true, isn't it? I think people in the past perhaps found that tension easier to live with in a way because they faced that tension far more often.

Last year I read the autobiography of J.C. Ryle, who was the first bishop of Liverpool back in the 1800s. And he writes that at the age of 57 he lost, among others, both his parents, a brother, a sister, his first and second wives, and most of his childhood friends.

people throughout history and still in our world today, that is normal. Some of you have grieved hard losses, but generally, generally, we are more sheltered than humanity has ever been from death in the day that we live in, which makes it easy to forget that in the year 2022, the rate of mortality is still 100%.

[21:18] We will all face death, someone we love, ourselves. When we do, let me encourage you to cling to Jesus' words.

In the pain, cry in the face of death, but hold on to the resurrection and the life, because he has stood there to you. And his words are the same, true, as they were on that very day when he spoke them.

But thankfully, that tension is not where John leaves us, is it? Because Jesus doesn't only say he is the resurrection, he does the resurrection. And that's where we're going next.

Thirdly, John shows us a glorious sign. Now, we've been keeping count of Jesus' signs in this gospel, haven't we? And this is seven out of seven. And if you know the Hebrew Bible, seven is an important number, the number of perfection, so we should be expecting something really special, and Jesus does not disappoint.

Having just told Martha he is the resurrection and the life, he now goes to prove it once for all time. That's why this sign is here.

[ 22 : 33 ] And even though Martha at the time said that she believed in him, her reaction still shows that her faith needs to stretch to fit around the whole Jesus. Take away the stone, says Jesus.

Martha says, Lord, by this time there will be a bad odor for he's been in there four days. It's a reminder to us that those who were there weren't quick to believe the impossible. They knew as we do, that dead people do not rise and walk out of their graves.

Jesus reminds her, did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God? You remember what this was all about from the beginning, why he waited. This has to happen so that God's son might be glorified through it.

The spotlight might be on him. So Jesus prays to confirm his identity as the son of God, then says, Lazarus, come out. And we read the dead man came out.

It's an incredible moment, isn't it? We just pause on the fact, the historical fact that that happened. It's earth shattering. Who has ever raised a man from the dead?

[ 23 : 49 ] Only one man. He sometimes said that if Jesus hadn't called Lazarus by name, then all the tombs would have been emptied at his command. He's already said back in chapter 5, didn't he, when the dead hear the voice of the son of God, they will all come out.

And here he proves that that is true. All of it, who he is, what he promises, what he says he can do and will do, because Lazarus, who was well and truly dead, at Jesus' word, walks out of the tomb alive.

life. And that fact, this sign, should give us such confidence in Jesus. With all the signs we've seen in this gospel, it's a unique sign.

This isn't a promise that if he did it, then he will do it for us if we ask him on request. Rather, this is a one-time sign recorded for us that underlines and highlights and puts in bold and confirms the eternal truth that Jesus told us back in verse 25, that he is indeed the resurrection and the life.

And that therefore, if we believe in him, death cannot hold us and will not have the last word. The sign tells us we will live forever with God when we die, if we trust in him.

[ 25 : 11 ] But more gloriously still, it tells us if we believe in him, he will raise us bodily from the dead on the day when he comes back. You were reading earlier, the callum read for us touched on this promise that if Christ is raised from the dead as he is and our trust is in him, there is a resurrection coming for us too.

If you're still envious of Lazarus, remember that even Lazarus went on to die again. And so we wait with Lazarus, don't we, for the true resurrection and the coming again of the Lord in glory to raise us all forever?

And that is the best news of all. And so seeing this sign gives us boldness to say, even now, if our hope is in Jesus, oh death, where is your victory?

Oh death, where is your sting? And if your trust is not in Jesus, doesn't this swing it for you? He has ever promised trust that he can stop you from dying.

And who has ever proved it by bringing someone back from the dead? You know, this might all feel a little bit distant. Death might feel far off to you.

[ 26 : 31 ] But none of us know that. We cannot guarantee tomorrow. And so if you hear Jesus' words this evening and you do not believe them, let me encourage you to settle your trust in him now, tonight.

For when that day comes, whenever it comes, you will not need to fear what death holds because you will be holding on to the resurrection and the life. But finally, as we close this section of the gospel, this last sign brings the ultimate sentence down upon Jesus, doesn't it?

So we finish with a chilling conclusion. A chilling conclusion. No one could deny the incredible sign Jesus has just done. Even his enemies acknowledge it as being true. The difference is how they respond.

Some believed in him, others reported him to the authorities. You've seen again and again in this section, Jesus always divides opinion. But John leaves us with this scene in the court of the Jewish

ruling council, the Sanhedrin.

What are we accomplishing, they ask. Here is this man performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him. And then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation.

[ 27 : 48 ] What a terrible thing, they think, if everyone believed in a man who could raise people from the dead. Ultimately, we see these religious leaders are really worried about political ends, holding on to power.

They saw Jesus as a risk to their position, and he was, wasn't he? Just not in the way that they thought. See, if they had seen the signs and believed in him, they would have stepped down from their self-made thrones, positions of authority, and worshipped him as the Messiah and resurrection and life.

But their power-hungriness blinded them to the signs and kept them from coming to the Lord Jesus. And so what else could they do in the face of Jesus' undeniable signs?

Well, from that day on, we read, they plotted to take his life. See, the irony of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead is that it cost him his own life.

In chapter 10, he explained the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Well, here it is happening. He who laid down his life for the life of others, but not just for one man, not just to raise Lazarus from the dead.

[ 29 : 05 ] The sign points as the high priest unwittingly prophesies to his death for the whole nation and, adds John, not only for that nation, but for the scattered children of God to bring them together and make them one.

And so here it is happening, friends. There will be one flock brought together from every tribe and language and people and nation through the death of the one shepherd, Jesus Christ, in place of his people, in place of me and you to give us eternal life, which we have never earned or deserved. See, Jesus would not only face the pain of grief, but go through death himself to secure for us the eternal life and the resurrection that he promises us. He died so that we might have life and have it to the full.

So just to help us reflect on that, there's an old theologian called Thomas Akempis who wrote a poem reflecting on this truth. I just want to read a few lines of this poem to help us digest this.

Jesus says, the price of life is fully paid. I fought with death and black despair, for I'm the drink of life. The resurrection mourns the link between my death and endless life long sought.

[ 30 : 30 ] Religion's page which with empty boasts is rife, but I'm the resurrection and the life. Let's pray together.

Lord Jesus, how we thank you for who you are. That being God, you stepped down and took on a human nature to become our sympathetic high priest.

Lord Jesus, how we thank you that you wept on earth over the death of your friend. And yet, Lord Jesus, how we thank you that you went on to die yourself in our place, taking our sins and to be raised again so that we might never die and live with you forever.

Our Lord, we struggle to get our minds around this fact and get our hearts around this truth. But Lord, we pray that you might draw us near to you when we are grieving, when we are sick, Lord, when we are dying, Lord, when we face the death of those whom we love, and that you might point us to a hope that extends far beyond death.

Lord, we thank you for the promise that when you return, the last enemy death will be no more. And when we are raised with you, you will wipe away every tear from our eyes and there will be no more suffering or sickness or crying or pain or death anymore, for the former things will have passed away.

[ 32 : 36 ] So we pray, come, Lord Jesus, come soon, for we long for that day. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.