

I am the Resurrection and the Life

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[0 : 0 0] can be together this morning, especially if you're here to find out what your kids have been up to this week. It's brilliant to be able to welcome you here, and it's great to see and to have heard what you guys have been learning about in the Restoration Station.

You all awake? In the Restoration Station, okay? You guys have been learning, haven't you, about just by speaking, and how Jesus restored someone's legs so they could walk again, and Jesus restored someone's eyes so they could see, and he restored someone's heart so that they could love and serve him again. But this morning, I get to tell you ever so briefly about the biggest restoration of all. Restoration Station. In the Restoration Station, we've had, haven't we, the potters and the silversmiths and the tailors and the joiners, and it reminded me a lot, have you guys seen the repair shop? Have you seen that program, the repair shop? People bring their old stuff, don't they, their family treasures that are basically ruined? And it's so broken and rusty and torn. You think, what are they going to be able to do with this? But then, when they do it, and it's incredible, isn't it? People get their old stuff back that they never thought that they would see in its original condition, and they say, it's like new again. How did you do it? How did you restore this? But there was one episode of the repair shop where someone brought something that the team couldn't restore. Wendy and Hayley, mom and daughter, brought in a pair of old boots that belonged to the dad. They said that he told them what they used to look like, and they wanted to do something really special. Brought the boots to the repair shop to get them restored. And part of the reason they decided to bring his old boots in was because he had been diagnosed with brain cancer. Now, the team got to work, they did a brilliant job with the boots, they really looked like new. But by the time the mom and daughter came in for the big reveal tragically, the dad had died. And it's really sad to watch this bereaved family holding onto these boots and trying to look really pleased, but sobbing, because the one that they had done it for was gone, and wasn't going to get to see them. As skillful as the team at the repair shop were, they couldn't fix what was really broken that day. They'd given a new lease of life to an old pair of boots, but they couldn't bring their owner back from the dead. They couldn't restore this broken family. Death is the biggest break of all, isn't it? Some of you know that very, very personally today.

And even if you don't, even if you have never lost a loved one, it's almost certain that one day you will. It's something we don't like to say, isn't it? But it's one of the things we can say for certain, is that we will all die. And so it is pretty certain that at some point, someone that you love will die. So what do we do with a break so final, so ugly, and so harsh? Someone said that if life is like a weaving together of different colored threads into a beautiful and a rich tapestry, all someone's experiences and relationships and loves, all woven together, then death is like somebody taking a pair of scissors and hacking through it. Sometimes very quickly, sometimes very slowly, but always we are left holding the pieces, completely helpless to put it back together. Who can possibly fix something so big, bad, and broken? Who can restore life to the dead? Well, up until he did, nobody believed that he could.

You heard a part of John's gospel read for us that tells us about a time when one of Jesus' best friends got sick and then he died. And it's what Jesus says and does when his friend dies that tells us he can not only restore health to the sick, but he can restore life to the dead. I wonder, do you believe that? Well, let's take a closer look at this true story and see. Now, Jesus was very, very close to this guy and his whole family. We're told Jesus loved Martha and his sister and Lazarus. He cared for them very, very deeply. In the next chapter, we actually read about him spending time with them at dinner in their house. You get the impression this was a family he would drop in and stay with on his way past.

[5 : 09] So this is a really personal scene in Jesus' life. But bizarrely, we read, he loved them, so when he heard Lazarus was ill, he stayed where he was two more days. Someone he loved was sick, so he didn't go to see them. Now, we would understand, wouldn't we, if that was a but. Jesus loved these people, but he stayed where he was. But that's not what it says. It says, so he loved them, therefore he didn't go. Or to put it the other way, he stayed where he was because he loved them. Now, how does that hang together? Is that right? Surely the loving thing to do would be to go straight away to be with his friend. Hanging back, it doesn't seem like a very loving thing to do, especially when Jesus waits so long that Lazarus dies from his illness before he is set off. Lazarus is dead, he says. So here's the question. Why does he wait? Why does he wait?

It's the question that the sisters want to know, Mary and Martha, isn't it, when Jesus finally arrives at the family home? Martha first. Lord, Martha said to Jesus, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. Then Mary, when she reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. Heartbreaking words, aren't they? If only you'd been here. We sent you the news so that you could come. And we know that if you had come, you would have made him better. We know that you can restore health to the sick. You can hear it in their voices, can't you? The question, why did you wait? Why did you wait? And the presumption, you left it too late. It's nice of you to come, Lord, but it's too little too late. If only, if only you'd been here sooner. It's any wonder, as Jesus spoke with these grieving sisters, that his own heart broke when Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who'd come along with her also weeping. He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.

Where if you laid him, he asked, come and see, Lord. They replied, Jesus wept. See, it wasn't because he didn't love this family that he didn't come, nor is it because he didn't think that death was a problem. Jesus didn't turn up at the house, did he, and say, your brother isn't really gone. It's as if he's only in the next room.

He didn't say, don't cry. Death is just a natural part of life. Let's celebrate his time here. No, as Jesus went to the graveside, he wept. I said this death was a personal one for Jesus. It was his friend. No doubt that is part of why he cried. As we all do, he is truly human.

But it's personal for Jesus in a bigger way, too. See, John, in this book, in his gospel, has been at pains to show us that Jesus isn't only a man, but God himself. He is the creator.

[8 : 49] Only three lines into his gospel, and John writes, He brought the universe, the world, plants, animals into existence. He made human beings in his own image and gave us life. But in the beginning, the first humans broke his design. Death was not part of his world in the beginning. Death was not part of his design. But the first people listened to the lies of a creature instead of the words of the creator. They did what they thought that they wanted instead of what God wanted for them. In a word, they sinned. And their sin brought death into the world.

Human beings could no longer live at peace with our creator, so we were cut off from the life source, like flowers cut from the stem. And like cut flowers in a vase, we keep our beauty and our fragrance for a while. But really, we died the moment that we were cut off from our creator. And in time, death begins to show on us. We grow old. Like flowers, we wither and fall and begin to decay. We were made for life forever with God. But because of the very first sin, we began to die. So as the creator walked to the graveside of his friend, he cried because this wasn't how it was meant to be. People made in his image decaying in a grave. He cried because death is a violent intruder in his world.

B.B. Warfield was a minister about 100 years ago. He wrote a really well-known article called The Emotional Life of Our Lord. And he says that day, Jesus' tears flowed from a surprising place. He said Jesus' tears flowed from his wrath, from his righteous indignation at the presence of death in his world, from his anger at what death had done to people he'd lovingly created.

[11 : 12] Perhaps you know the saying, your enemy's enemy is your friend. Well, friends, let me tell you, that is never so true as when it comes to death.

The Bible says that death is the last enemy, but death's enemy is Jesus. And so Jesus is the very best friend that we could ever have.

He felt our grief. He's cried our bitter tears. He stood with us at the graveside and felt the crushing sadness of losing someone he loved as a man, but infinitely so because he is God.

But if that is where the story had ended, then you would be right to say, well, that's great, but tears don't change anything. People on the day said the same thing. When Jesus wept, the Jews said, see how he loved him.

But some of them said, could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying? He loved him so much, but now he's as helpless as the rest of us.

[12:20] Or is he? Is he just a sympathizer? Or is he also a savior? I wonder if you've got an answer yet to that question.

Why did Jesus wait? Clearly the answer isn't because he lacked love for this family. Clearly it isn't because he didn't see death as a problem.

But Jesus has insisted throughout this story that he waited for Lazarus to die to show that it wasn't too late. He waited so that he could show us something off the charts amazing about himself that he can restore life to the dead.

It's a huge thing to claim. If you've got your Bible open, look at it with me. In verse 5, when Jesus heard Lazarus was ill, he said, this illness will not end in death.

No. It is for God's glory so that God's son may be glorified through it. He says this sickness will show us something about his glory because death won't be the end.

[13:25] But how? Well, verse 11, our friend Lazarus, he explains, Jesus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to wake him up. His disciples replied, Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.

Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. So then he told them plainly, Lazarus is dead, and for your sake, I am glad I was not there so that you may believe.

He is glad he wasn't there. Why? So that he could show us his glory when he goes to wake up Lazarus from death. He's glad he wasn't there sooner.

This is why he waited, he says, so that they could see for themselves that he can restore life to the dead. But again, how? Well, because of who he is, he gets to the graveside.

Once he's there, he says to Martha, verse 23, your brother will rise again. I know he'll rise again, she says. I know he'll rise on the last day at the great resurrection when everyone will rise again to stand before God.

[14:38] That's not what I mean, says Jesus. Jesus. I am the resurrection and the life. The resurrection isn't somehow, someday.

I am it, he says. Even those simple words, I am, are borrowing from the name of the eternal God. I am that I am. He is the one who has life in himself.

He is life, and he is squaring up to death at the graveside. And there can only be one outcome. The one who believes in me will live, he says.

Though they die. And whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Death does not get the last word, he says, when I am here. Do you believe that?

Yes, says Martha. I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world. But even when Jesus walks to the tomb and tells him to take away the stone, do you notice what she says?

[15:43] But, Lord, but, she says, by this time there will be a bad odor, for he has been there for days. Even now, she can't believe what he's doing. I believe, but, you are the Savior, but, you can't be serious.

Jesus said, did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God? So they took away the stone. Jesus called out in a loud voice, Lazarus, come out.

And the dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, take off the grave clothes and let him go.

They thought it was too late. They thought it was beyond fixing. They thought he couldn't do what he said he would do.

And if we're honest, if we hadn't seen it, wouldn't we have wondered if he really could? Wouldn't it seem beyond belief? Until he did it, nobody believed that he could restore life to the dead.

[16:55] But then he did it. Then he did it. And he did it, friends, brothers and sisters, to show us that he could and that he can.

He did it to show us that he is the son of God and God himself. He did it to show us that death is not too big, bad, and broken for him to fix, heal, and restore.

He can restore life to the dead. He can give new life today in our hearts and raise our bodies from the grave on the last day to live forever in God's kingdom.

How do we know? Because he not only gave life to the dead, but laid down his own life in death on the cross, only himself to take it up again and rise from the dead on the third day to secure eternal

life for anyone who would trust in him.

He is the resurrection and the life. So the only question left to ask is, do you believe him? Do you believe him?

[18:07] He did this sign, he says, so you could believe him. He didn't have to, but he's given you a sign, a physical resurrection for you to hang your faith on today.

And he wants us to believe him. Because he says, whoever lives by believing in him will never die. That's what he came for. He came to give life to the dead.

He came to save us. And he can bring us into a right relationship with God, back to our creator who made us to live forever with him, back to the source of eternal life so that we will never truly die.

Friends, whoever you are, whatever's brought you here today, however young you are or old you are or somewhere in between, if you are not yet friends with Jesus, you have something broken that needs to be restored.

Your relationship with God, if it's broken, the price is death. If it is fixed, the price is eternal life.

[19:14] It's something the repair shop can't mend. I can't. None of the leaders can. Only Jesus can heal our broken relationship with God and give us eternal life instead of eternal death.

So do you believe him? Is your faith resting in him alone today? If you're not sure, I would be delighted to chat with you more after the service.

I'm sure that Jerry and Johnny would as well. or any of the Christians here, if you've been at holiday this week, grab one of your leaders and talk to them about it. But let me urge you to come to Jesus and take hold of him by faith because he is the resurrection and the life.

And he gives eternal life to anyone who would believe in him. Let's pray together for that now. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever would believe in him would not perish but have eternal life.

Our Father, we thank you for that gift of your love to us, your son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for what we've seen about him today, that he does give life to the dead.

[20:36] And we pray by your Holy Spirit that you would give us faith to believe in him. Oh Lord, if we grieve today, we pray that we would know the presence of he who is the resurrection and the life.

We pray, Lord, that you would help us set our hope in him. Lord, if we fear death today, we pray that you would give us a trust in Jesus that takes away our fears and anxieties.

Lord, if we are not worried about our death today, we pray that you would lead us to Jesus to see that he truly is the only answer. to that deepest problem. Lord, lead us to Jesus, we pray, for he is our only hope and we ask in his name.

Amen. Amen.