

The Resurrection and the Life

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I Am

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Would you join me this morning and let's take the Bible and let's turn to the New Testament Gospel of John. We're looking for John's Gospel, chapter 11. In a moment, I'm going to start reading at verse 17 through the end of verse 27.

Before we read the text, if you received a bulletin when you came in, and most of you did, I'm sure, inside the bulletin is a response sheet and if you did not get a bulletin, there are some spread at the bottom of the chair in front of you, and the reason that I want to call that to your attention is we believe the Bible is the word of God and we believe that God is speaking, God is still speaking today through his Son, through what God has spoken to the Son and the Son came and spoke and given to the apostles and written in the Scriptures. So we believe today that as we proclaim the word of God, that God will speak to us and so it's important that we, in turn, are prepared to respond in some way and so if you'll hold onto that response sheet, a little later in the service toward the end of the message, we'll be calling your attention back to that. So keep that handy.

John's Gospel, chapter 11. I'm going to begin reading at verse 17.

17 Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 18 Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, 19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. 20 So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. 21 Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." 23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" 27 She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

This is God's word.

Heavenly Father, as we hear you speak today through your Spirit by your word, may you be pleased to add blessing and power to the proclamation of your word. Enable us to embrace it with joy and ultimate love for the Savior. In his name we pray. Amen.

If you listen closely, there are those occasions when you can hear stunning honesty in a world where there is so much suppression of the truth. There is so much stuff out there. You know, you hear so much but if you listen closely, every once in a while you hear some stunning honesty. A few weeks ago, I was listening to a podcast of the New York Times Book Review. This particular episode, Andrew Solomon, a very well-known writer in his own accord, had been given the assignment to read five current books about death, then to give a review on those books. What he had to say was absolutely amazing. It's one of those times where you just get this amazing honesty from someone who has taken on a project that is bigger than what he expected.

Here are some of the things that he said. "This was difficult territory. It made me think about a subject I wanted to avoid." Then he said, "I'm living more in reality as a result of reading these books." Then he said to the audience, he said this, he directed it just like to the entirety of the audience that was listening, he said, "Denial is not protecting you." In other words, if you live in some sort of denial about death, it's really not protecting you at all. But then his last three statements, simply amazing. After reviewing, after reading these five books about death and reviewing them he said this, "There is nothing out there to take the sting out of this experience." Then he said, "If only one could live through such an experience." Then he asked this question, "How do you prepare for death?"

Most of you know over the last few weeks as a church, we have been going through a series on the "I am's" of Jesus recorded in the Gospel of John and today, one final look, we look at, "I am the resurrection and the life." Now, it's so important to understand the context for which Jesus said these words. Jesus made this statement, "I am the resurrection and the life," in the difficult territory of death, the death of a friend, Lazarus, Martha and Mary's brother, who were experiencing the sting of death. This wasn't some abstract subject for them, their brother had died. They were feeling and experiencing the sting of death at that time and many of you in this room, some of you perhaps recently, you have experienced the sting of death. It might be the loss of a spouse. It might be the loss of a brother or sister. It might be even a miscarriage. It might be a parent. The sting of death and set in the midst of this difficult territory in the sting of death, that Jesus makes this astounding statement, "I am the resurrection and the life," and this forces us, for example, just like Andrew Solomon, he said, "This is tough territory. This is stuff I want to avoid."

Jesus' statement forces us to face some tough realities so this morning I want us to look at some tough realities and the first one is this: death's debut. Death's debut. What do we mean by that? Well, let me put it in the form of a question: do you ever think about where death came from? You see, we don't know exactly what Lazarus died from, we don't know whether it was cancer, it was some sort of an illness, heart disease, diabetes, we don't know, but we can say this, we can say that there certainly is an underlying cause for

Lazarus' death but where does death come from? You see, it occurs so often, it's so common that we often forget where death came from.

Actress Lily Tomlin once said this in an interview last year. She said, "Death doesn't make any sense to me." Larry Ellison is a billionaire and he gives away millions of dollars to fight and to conquer death. He said this in an interview, "Death makes me angry," and I agree with him. It makes me angry as well. But then he went on to say again, "It doesn't make any sense to me." I thought, how interesting. How interesting that there are those in our culture, when they think about where death came from and they face the reality of it, they honestly say, "It just doesn't make any sense to me."

Some say that death is natural. Some have accepted the idea that it's just a part of life, it's just natural, it's part of the cycle of life. But did you know that the Bible provides an entirely different explanation? Actually, when you go back to the book of Genesis and you read through Genesis 1 and 2, you will find that death was never part of God's original creation, rather what you find in chapter 3 is death is an intruder, an enemy. It was only after man sinned against God that death became the horrible reality that we know it to be today. In Genesis 2 we read these words, "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'" Paul expounding upon this in Romans 5 said these words, "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned."

You see, Adam and Eve by sinning against their Creator, by disobeying their Creator, by rebelling against their Creator, had essentially cut themselves off from the very source of life. I mean, you could think about it this way: flowers are beginning to take bloom and it won't be long and you'll be going out to the garden and you might be clipping off a few and you bring them in and you put them in the vase and put water in the vase, and then you come back a few days later and their beauty is beginning to fade; they're beginning to die because they have been cut off from the very source of life. Some of you have gone through the painful experience of having to remove someone from life support, as they say, pulling the plug or turning it off. Some of you have gone through that difficult time where a person has been cut off from the very source of life.

This is what happened to Adam and Eve. Subsequently, this disobedience cut them off and, in fact, we were cut off and death entered into the world. When the horror of sin entered the world, everything changed and God's appointed response to the horror of sin was the horror of death. Where did death come from? It was God's appointed response. It was God's response. It's a horrible, it's a horrible, death is horrible but so is sin, and God's appointed response to the horror of sin was the horror of death. In Romans 6, we read these words, "For the wages of sin is death."

So this is where death came from both physical and spiritual, and we need to face that reality. We need to face that reality because of a second reality we need to consider and that is: death's culture of suppression. If you were to read through chapter 11 of John,

here are some of the things that you would find. You would find people grieving. You would find people mourning. You will find people weeping. You'll even find Christ weeping at the tomb of Lazarus. You'll also find consolation being given. Much as you would experience today, it's a funeral home, friends, family will come and they'll come to bring consolation, comfort, to the grieving. You also find in this chapter, it said that Jesus was greatly troubled in his spirit. Can I put it this way? Here's what you don't see: you don't see a celebration of life.

A few weeks ago in the Guardian newspaper, a popular paper in England, an article entitled, "Are we ready to face death without religion?" and the author makes it very clear that, yes, it's time to just get rid of religion and face death and here's what he said, "Rather than mourning, gloom and sermons on sin, we can have ceremonies that are joyful celebrations of the deceased person's life. We can design funerals that emphasize the good we did, the moments that made our lives meaningful and the lessons we'd like to pass on." Friends, this approach, this approach, the denial that there is nothing horrible about death, is new to history. This is not the way it has always been. You and I need to be aware of the culture that we are living in, how the culture around us views death. You see, you can go back in history and you'll find this continual mourning and agony and sorrow over death, saying it is an enemy, a horrible thing, but it's only been in the last 40 to 50 years in our time. That's why I bring this up because you need to be aware of this. You are swimming in the waters of a culture of suppression when it comes to the subject of death.

Diane Athill was a British editor and an article she wrote two years ago entitled this, "It is silly to be afraid of being dead." In other words, when you think about death, you're worried, you're scared, you're fearful, it's silly. You're just silly to feel that way, she said.

Jane Fonda in an interview with AARP said this and, oh, this is amazing. She said, "I made it a real point of cozying up to death and making it a friend. That's what I always do with things that frighten me. Death is inevitable so why not make peace with it? I'm not scared at all."

Now if you listen closely, words mean something. It's interesting that she would say, "I've made it a point to cozy up to death, make it my friend, because that's what I always do 'with things that frighten me.'" Then she says later, "I'm not afraid." Now what's going on here? It's the fine art of suppression. Suppression is holding down the truth. Suppression, repression, holding it down with something that we don't want to deal with, with something we don't want to face. We don't like the way it is so we hold it down and it's precisely what Jane Fonda is doing and many others.

Peter Kreeft gave the account of his next-door neighbor, a single mother raising a 7 year old son. This particular 7 year old boy had experienced the death of his 7 year old cousin and he was having trouble with it. He came to his mother and he said, "Mommy, where's my cousin right now?" Now his mother had bought into the modern explanation, the modern suppression of the horror of death. She did not believe in God. She did not believe in the afterlife and so here's what she told her son. She said, "Son, your cousin

has gone back to the earth from which he came. This is a natural part of life. When you see the flowers this spring, you will know that he was the fertilizer for the flowers." The little boy looked at his mother and he screamed, he said, "I don't want him to be fertilizer!" Then he ran out of the room. You see, the mother, the mother had suppressed the natural response to death but the little boy hadn't. You see, the mother was awash in the culture that we live in, the culture of suppression of death. The little boy hadn't gotten there. He was experiencing the natural, raw, right response to the horror of death.

You see, it's very possible that you're seated here today and it wouldn't be a stretch to say that you've been influenced by this because you're living in a culture of suppression when it comes to death unlike any time, unlike any time in history. However, the truth that we so often work hard at suppressing and holding down has a way of popping back up.

Actress Susan Sarandon in an interview a couple of years ago said, "I've given up on organized religion. I don't want anything to do with the church anymore." That sounds pretty hip. That sounds pretty modern. She said, "I don't believe what the Bible teaches about original sin. I don't believe in a God of wrath, I believe in a God of love only." However, at the close of her interview the truth popped up. She said, "The only thing I'm really afraid of is death. I still haven't got to the point where I think that's cool."

Jerry Lee Lewis had a hard time suppressing the truth. He said in an interview recently, "I was always worried whether I was going to heaven or hell and I still am. I worry about it before I go to bed. I mean, you worry. When you breathe your last breath, where are you going?" It would not surprise me at all if there are some here today that can relate to that kind of midnight thinking.

Larry King just this last Fall, his wife said in an interview that Larry is fixated on dying. He can't get it off his mind. He's gripped by the fear of death. Larry has arranged to have his body frozen and then thawed out when a cure is discovered for whatever kills him. But here's what he said about it, he said, "I know it's nuts." That's something Larry and I agree on. He said, "I know it's nuts but, listen," he said, "but at least it gives me a shred of hope. Other people have no hope."

Well, Larry, I would have to disagree because Christians are people who have hope. You see, Christians understand the impulse to celebrate a life well lived for Christ. Celebration of life, yes, a life well lived for Christ, a life well lived for the glory of God, a life well lived trusting in Christ as Savior even as we mourn. You see, Christians know that death is not the final word, still it doesn't exempt us from the sadness of death. As Christians, we live in the tension of sin-cursed death and resurrection hope and the reason for the Christian hope is the final reality that we must consider. We considered death's debut, we considered the culture of suppression of death, but finally we look at: death's defeat.

Look at verses 23 and 24 in our text. Jesus has arrived on the scene. Lazarus has been in the tomb dead for four days. Verse 23, "Jesus said to [Martha], 'Your brother will rise again.'" Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last

day." Now, Martha has a biblical worldview. Martha has a biblical, the way she sees the world, there is ultimately coming a resurrection in the last day and she's absolutely right. However, Jesus said something very interesting on the tail end of this in verses 25 and 26, "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?'"

Now what is happening here? Can't you see this? Jesus is diverting Martha's focus from an abstract event in the future. You see, her focus, her view is, "I know he'll rise again in the future. I know. I know this is coming." But Jesus takes this opportunity to divert her focus from an abstract event in the future to a personalized belief in himself who alone can provide resurrection and life. That's key. You see, you might be here today and you have some abstract theory about the future. It may be right. It may be wrong. But what Jesus is saying is our focus needs to be upon him. Not a particular event necessarily, but upon him. He said, "I am the resurrection and the life."

And later in this chapter we find that Jesus does, indeed, raise Lazarus from the dead but why? That's something Jesus had to tick off on his list of things to do for the day? Oh no. We know exactly why he did this. Chapter 11, verse 4. Swing your eyes up to verse 4 in chapter 11, "But when Jesus heard," he's hearing about the illness of Lazarus, he said this, "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." Friends, what we have recorded in chapter 11 has taken place and been preserved for us that Jesus might be glorified; that we might see him as the Supreme One; that we might see his beauty, his splendor, his greatness, his power. It's been recorded and taken place so that our attention would be rooted to Jesus.

Why? Because everyone struggles to have hope and courage to face the enemy of death and God in his mercy wants to help us in our struggle. He does. God knows. God knows about our struggle and the courage we need to face the enemy of death and God in his mercy wants to help us. And how does he help us? He wants us to see that death in the hands of Jesus is robbed of all of its terror. He wants us to see Jesus. He wants us to see the glorified Christ in the midst of the struggle and the need of courage as we face the enemy of death.

How can we see him? Look at these words in Hebrews 2. Amazing. "For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder," now you see that word is in italics, it's also translated "captain, champion." The founder "of their salvation perfect through suffering," to, "deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery."

Now let's just walk through this just for a second. What does this tell us? This in chapter 11 took place so that we could see Jesus, get our eyes off everything else, for the glory of Jesus, to see Jesus, but what do we see when we look to Jesus? We see him as the founder, okay? Interesting word. Founder, captain, champion. It's a word used for a person who would run toward the danger rather than away from danger. It's a word used for one who would get between you and the enemy, okay? This is a unique person. It's a

founder, a champion who would step onto the battlefield and would run toward the danger and would get between you and your feared enemy.

Now what does that mean? Well, that word is being attached to Jesus. He said to make the founder, the captain, the champion of their salvation perfect. Jesus got between us and the enemy of death. At the cross, he stood, he's the champion, the founder. He got between us and the enemy of death. His death took the place of our death.

Think about it this way, when the creditor calls and says, "Hey, you owe So-and-so," and they keep calling and they keep calling and they keep calling and you're trying to suppress the truth and avoid the reality, but when the creditor is paid and the penalty is paid, the creditor has no more power over you. You see, what we see at the cross is Christ standing as a champion between us and the penalty for our sin which is death. Death has no more power for those who trust in Christ.

But this word "founder and champion" is also used for one who opens a way for others; leads the way; he goes first. You see, Jesus Christ entered into the jaws of the horror of death. He went in and he blew out the back. We've been singing about it today, "Christ is risen." It's another way of saying he went into the jaws of death and he blew out the back so that you and I who have been subject to the fear of death that haunts our very existence, that we might be free, and that he provides for us the life of God that we lost. Remember being cut off at the stem, cut off of the very source of life. Jesus provides for us the very life of God, the very life that's worth living, the only life that's worth living, a life that death can't even take away.

Yes, friends, there is a resurrection beyond the grave. Martha is absolutely right. There is a resurrection beyond the grave. There is a resurrection unto life. There is a resurrection unto judgment. So no one ceases to exist at death. No one goes back to just merely be fertilizer and food for the worms. No. No one ceases to exist at death and so the question comes back to us again now: so how do we prepare for death? How do we prepare for death?

Imagine being in a car. All the windows are sealed up; you can't see outside. The car is going 80 mph. Just try for a moment to feel that sensation. I don't like going 80 mph when I can see, but imagine 80 mph and all the windows are blocked out and you can't see. I think that's a good image. I think that's a good image for many who are headed toward death and we are, we're headed toward death, for the Christian, however, they are prepared for the crash. You say, "That kind of sounds arrogant." No. No. I don't mean it to sound arrogant at all. No. You see, the Christian can see. Because of Jesus Christ, they can see that all death can do is lead them into the arms of Jesus.

So how do you prepare for death? How do you prepare for the crash? Well, this past week, there were some terrorists who blew up over 30 people, including themselves. Well over 200, 300+ were injured. You'll notice their pictures here on the left, far left are the two and you'll notice there are red circles and they're just to show that those hands had gloves on them and they suspected that inside the gloves to conceal was a detonator for

the explosives that they were bringing into the airport. I point this out because I guess it kind of boils down to two ways to prepare for death. These two gentleman are moments away from their death. The car is going at 80 mph. The windows are blocked. They have decided the way that they will prepare is that they will offer their lives because in the religion that they believe in, you can commit suicide and take out the lives of women, children, and that somehow that will earn you entrance into paradise. It's a Christ-less religion. It's a hopeless religion. But it's like so many other religions in this world all based upon what we can do to earn our salvation.

So you might be here this morning and so, "I don't believe in Islam and I don't believe in organized religion, I don't believe in this." Well, how are you preparing for death? What are you believing in? For these two gentleman, they prepared for death by laying down their lives. No different than some here today, you're convinced that your good deeds, your being a good man, a good woman, a hard worker, a good business person, whatever it may be, you're convinced that what you can do can earn you salvation and acceptance before God. Oh, there is that way. That's one way to prepare but there's a better way. There's a better way and it's found in verse 27. Jesus has just explained to Martha that he is the resurrection and the life and whoever believes in him, though he die, yet shall he live, and then he asked at the end of verse 26, "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.'" Others will put their hope and trust in themselves and what they can do, Martha will put her trust and belief in Jesus Christ who is the resurrection and the life.

How about you? How about you?

Let's bow our heads.