

## "I Am the Resurrection and the Life"

John 11:25

--CEFC 1/10/21; cf. 4/11/93

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I have begun my read through the Bible again this year,  
and I couldn't help being impressed with a central theme  
that emerges in the early chapters of Genesis.  
It is the prominence given to death.

It first appears in the second chapter.

In the first command given to Adam,  
the consequence for disobedience is clear--it is death (2:17).

In chapter three, first Eve and then Adam do disobey God—

and they do not immediately die,  
though they are cut off from the source of life.

They are cast from the garden and the presence of God  
and are shielded from the tree of life.

So, in a sense, death has already taken hold of them.

Then chapter four begins with new life--

Eve gives birth to Cain and then to his brother Abel.

But very quickly we are told of the first physical death  
in the good world God had created,

as Cain kills his brother.

The sin of Adam and Eve against God in chapter three

now becomes the sin of Cain against another human being.

We move very quickly from eating a piece of forbidden fruit

to cold-blooded murder.

Then in chapter five the theme of death again stands out,

this time in the form of a genealogy.

We are given a list of more than 10 generations--

and four simple words are repeated over and over: **"and then he died."**

**"Adam lived 930 years, and then he died."**

**"Seth lived 912 years, and then he died."**

**"Enosh lived 905 years, and then he died."**

**"Kenan lived 910 years and then he died."**

and so it goes.

Eight times we read those ominous words.

They are like the tolling of a funeral bell.

This is a genealogy of death--

death has now entered the world--

and this genealogy charts its methodical progress.

However one interprets those incredibly long life-spans,

human beings in the line of Adam are destined to die.

And even after the flood,

by which God judged the wickedness and violence of humanity,  
and the Lord begins again with Noah and his family,  
that refrain continues –

Gen. 9:29--“Noah lived a total of 950 years, and then he died.”

Death is universal,

and death casts a question mark over all of life.

What can our lives mean in the light of our certain death?

Yet, we live as if it wasn't there.

It is certainly not a subject you ever mention in polite company.

There's the joke about how different our culture is from that of the Victorian era—

They were obsessed with thoughts of death, but never talked about sex;

Our culture is obsessed with sex, but is afraid to talk about death.

We try to deny death and pretend it will never come--

we try to hide it and even run from it.

And people just aren't exposed to it as they once were.

I remember presiding at a funeral once

and meeting a young man who was nearly thirty years old

who had never attended a funeral before.

How different from the experience of a person of the rural 19th century

like Abraham Lincoln--

Before Lincoln was twelve years old,

He had seen his mother and one of her babies die.

He had seen his sister and one of her babies die.

And on the farm, he had seen death come like a wave--  
during a single week, a milk disease killed four cows and 11 calves,  
and nearly killed his father.

For Abraham Lincoln, death was a question that cried out for an answer.

But today we put it out of sight and out of mind.

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But there is no doubt that the coronavirus has raised death's profile significantly.

What is it now?--Some 370,000 American deaths have been related to the virus.

That's more than 1 out of every thousand people in this country--

a number we would have thought unimaginable a year ago.

I think about,

I've never had a disease before where I could say to myself,

"You know, I could die from this."

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We try to avoid the subject,

but death refuses to be silenced--

it inevitably makes its presence known, often when we least expect it.

The reality of this struck me vividly once when I was in Tampa visiting my father

who was fighting a losing battle with cancer at the time.

On the day I arrived, a woman was killed in an automobile accident.

I'm sure the Lord was trying to get my attention with this tragedy--

For it just so happened that my older brother had driven by

the scene of the accident soon after it occurred.

It just so happened that the young man who was in the other car  
was in a hospital room just around the corner from my father.

It just so happened that when I stopped by to visit my mother-in-law,  
she mentioned that a longtime friend of hers had just been killed in an accident.

It was the same woman.

And it just so happened that this woman had been fighting cancer herself  
for five years.

She had been traveling to Texas for treatments.

Just two days before that fatal accident she had received a letter  
from the Anderson Cancer Center in Houston saying that she need not return--  
she was cured.

I was told that on the next to last day of her life she showed the letter to a friend  
and said, "Look at this--I'm going to live forever."

It's not true—You're not going to live forever.

Getting cured from cancer will not conquer death,  
nor will getting a covid vaccine—  
it can only delay the inevitable.

The truth is, as Richard Neuhaus wrote in his book, *As I Lay Dying*,

"We are born to die.

Not that death is the purpose of our being born,  
but we are born towards death," he writes,

“and in each of our lives the work of dying is already underway.

The work of dying well is, in largest part, the work of living well.”

You could say that all of life is but a preparation for the day of our death.

In previous generations it was common practice

to have a graveyard immediately adjacent to the church.

That was a convenience, I suppose, for funerals,

But more importantly, it was an ever-present reminder of the reality of death.

As people came to worship God,

they were constantly aware

of what was inevitably ahead of them./

Death is the great question mark that hovers over all of life.

That’s why we need to hear the message that comes to us from God’s word this morning.

It is a message that gives us the answer to that most profound question of life—

What are we to do with the certain reality of death?

Turn back with me to John 11—the story of Jesus’ raising of Lazarus

in which Jesus makes the astounding claim—

**“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.”**

I want you to notice four reactions of our Lord in this story which have relevance for us—

and the last of which is the most important of all.

I. The first reaction that strikes me is this--

When confronted with the death of his friend,

Jesus could see **the outworking of a mysterious purpose.**

You see, when he got the news that Lazarus was sick,

Jesus didn't panic,

nor he did rush off to heal him.

In fact, **"he stayed where he was two more days"** (v. 6).

Jesus deliberately delayed his departure

for he knew that God's greater purposes can be worked out

even through the tragedy of death.

This has happened, Jesus says in v. 4,

**"for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."**

and again he says to his disciples in v. 14--

**"Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there,**

**so that you may believe."**

Certainly, in this case Jesus acted in a miraculous way,

but the principle still holds--

even in the tragedy of death, God can work out his mysterious purposes.

Through a severe mercy,

encountering death often provides an opportunity to learn about ourselves;

it enables us to grow in our relationships with others;

and most important of all,

encountering death can open us up a new understanding of God.

That's why the Preacher of Ecclesiastes writes--

**"It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting,  
for death is the destiny of every person;  
the living should take this to heart" (7:2).**

When we encounter the death of someone we have loved, we ask, Why?

Why did this person's life end in this way, at this time?

And in this life, it is unlikely that we will know the answer to our questions,

but those who know the love and power and wisdom of the Lord

can be confident that he knows why.

This is the confidence of the believer--

death doesn't make life meaningless,

for there is a mysterious purpose at work, even in death.

And Jesus can say, This has happened

**"for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."**

I have seen it--

I have seen God work graciously through the prolonged deaths

of those fighting cancer,

Susan and I have both seen it in the deaths of our fathers.

And I have seen God work graciously through the deaths of infants

who never saw the light of day.

Twice, in conjunction with the Assist Pregnancy Center,

I have been involved with women

who have gathered on a Sunday afternoon at our church

to grieve the deaths of their own babies who had died through abortion.



They recognized that God had created those little lives developing in their wombs,  
and he had created them for his own glory.  
And even though they had life for only a few short months--  
just a brief flicker of time--  
their lives had a lasting meaning  
through the new sense of God's forgiving grace  
that each of those women had come to know.  
God was glorified through their lives.

Yes, when Jesus encountered the death of his dear friend  
he could see a mysterious purpose at work.  
That should encourage us when we face the death of someone we love.

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II. But I see a second attitude displayed by Jesus--  
a quite different one.

We read that when Jesus saw Lazarus's sister Mary weeping  
and the other mourners with her,  
**"he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled"** (v. 33).

Actually, that's a mild translation.

The word in the Greek original was used to refer to the snorting of horses,  
and when used of human beings, it suggests anger, outrage, or deep indignation.  
We might say that Jesus was "ticked off."

It's what any good human being ought to feel in the face of real evil.

That's what Jesus felt when he looked death in the face  
and saw the pain that it caused.

Jesus knew that the tragedy of human death in this world is not God's fault.

For he knew that though death is universal,  
death is not natural--  
it is not a part of the good world that God created.

That may sound strange, for nothing seems more inescapable than death.

Everyone must die--everyone one of us.

But still, somehow, we sense that that ought not to be so.

Death always seems to catch us by surprise,  
we are never really ready for it.

Even in the case of those who struggle in a long, losing battle against disease,  
and it becomes clear they won't make it--  
the end still comes as a shock.

Death is an intruder, an enemy.

We cannot think of it as just a natural process. /

Why should we think of death in this way?

Because the Bible says God did not create us to die--  
death is not our natural state.

We were created in the image of God, to live in an eternal relationship with God.

Again, as the Preacher of Ecclesiastes has put it--

**"God has set eternity in the human heart" (3:11).**

Unlike all the other creatures in this cosmos,  
deep inside we feel that our natural state is immortality.

The Bible says that death is a part of a spoiled world, a fallen world,  
a world ravaged by the consequences of our moral rebellion against God.

Death entered the world because of our refusal to let God be God in our lives.

The New Testament says death is the wages of sin;  
it is a judgment, a curse, upon us.

That's why we can't perceive of death simply as a natural part of life--  
any more than evil itself is just a natural part of life.

And that's why when Jesus saw the awful pain of death--this great enemy,  
he was troubled in spirit--he was outraged--  
not at God his Father,  
but at the evil in the world that has so perverted God's good design.

Perhaps you've experienced that anger  
when you've had to face the death of someone you've loved.

Well, be encouraged.

You can be assured that the Lord shares your anger--  
he's angry, too.

Death is the enemy, and evil is its ultimate source.

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III. But there is a third reaction of Jesus shown here--  
a very touching dimension.

When Jesus went to the tomb of his friend Lazarus, we read in v. 35 that he wept.  
Jesus shed tears sadness and grief.

And those who saw him knew what those tears meant--  
“See how he loved him!” they said.

When Jesus encountered death, **he displayed a deep sadness--**  
he wept.

It is a tragic fact--

because of the inevitability of death, all human love must end in pain.

Love turns to grief when the object of that love is gone--

and death ensures that someday it will be gone.

Death destroys every human relationship,

and where there has been love, it will always hurt.

Death mocks love;

death casts its painful shadow over all of life,

but at the same time, we must recognize that the fear of that pain

can destroy us altogether.

As C.S. Lewis comments--

“Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken.

If you want to make sure of keeping it intact,

you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal.

Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries;

avoid all entanglements;

lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness.

But in that casket—safe, dark motionless, airless—

it will change.

It will not be broken;

it be become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable ...

The only place outside heaven where you can be perfectly safe

from all the dangers ... of love is Hell." (*The Four Loves*)

Jesus didn't play it safe.

Jesus loved deeply, so when his dear friend died, "**Jesus wept.**"

In this fallen world, love will always end in sadness,

but we must take comfort in knowing that Jesus, the Son of God,

shares in the sadness that we feel.

In the grief that follows death,

we need not feel that we are alone.

We worship a God who knows,

a God who understands.

He weeps with us.

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When Jesus encountered the death of his dear friend

he saw a mysterious purpose,

he had a troubled spirit,

and he felt a deep sadness.

We can take comfort in this—

it's all well and good;

And all this can help us cope,

But it still doesn't answer the question--

it gives no solution to the problem.

Death is still at large,  
the enemy is not yet subdued.

IV. So we must conclude with the most important point of all--  
when Jesus encountered the death of his friend Lazarus,  
**he expressed an ultimate hope.**

v. 23--Jesus said to Lazarus's sister Martha,

**"Your brother will rise again."**

**Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."**

Everybody believes that--  
that's what the Scripture says,  
that what the Rabbis taught us.

No, Martha you haven't yet understood--

Jesus said to her,

**"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."**

**Do you believe this?"**

As we've seen so often in our study of the last six weeks,

Jesus points to himself as the answer to our deepest human need.

And here Jesus affirms that he himself in the means

by which death--that great enemy--can be overcome.

Yes, death destroys every human relationship,

but here Jesus points to another relationship that death cannot destroy--  
through him, we can enter into a divine relationship.

a relationship with God.

That's why Jesus says that to know God is eternal life (Jn. 17:3),

for to know God is to enter into an eternal relationship.

Through Christ there is a life after death--

life lived in the presence of God.

and through Christ that life can be enjoyed even before death.

Earlier in John's Gospel, we read these words--

**"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me**

**has eternal life and will not be condemned;**

**he has crossed over from death to life.**

**I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come**

**when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God**

**and those who hear will live" (Jn. 5:24,25).**

And near the end of his Gospel John says

**"these [things] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God,**

**and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31).**

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The story from John's gospel reaches its climax, of course, when Jesus cries out,

**"Lazarus, come out!"** and he does, miraculously emerging from the tomb after four days.

That dead man heard the voice of Christ and received new life--  
but the sad fact is, Lazarus would one day die again.

This was simply a temporary resuscitation.

But this miracle means more than just a few more years added to Lazarus's life.

It is a **sign**-- a sign signifying the truth about life and death for all of us.

The dead,

that is, those who are spiritually dead--

if they hear Jesus' voice ***now***, they enter ***now*** into the life he has to offer;

they will not be condemned,

they have crossed over from death to life.

And that experience of spiritual life even in **this** life

gives them assurance that they will be raised to new life with Jesus ***then***,

on that day when we receive our glorified resurrected bodies with him.

This is the hope that Jesus has when encountering death,

and it is the hope that we can have, too.

Jesus asks us all--"**Do you believe this?**"--

Do you really believe it?

Not just as an article of the Christian creed--

like Martha, when she says,

**"I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."**

Her orthodoxy was impeccable--she knew the right answer—she could recite the creed.

But somehow her mere orthodoxy was inadequate--



she had not yet believed Jesus.

**"I am the resurrection and the life,"** Jesus says.

**"Do you believe this?"** he asks,

And again, she responds in v. 27 with a creedal formulation--

**"Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God,**

**who was to come into the world."**

That's an answer right out of the book.

But just giving the right answer is not good enough.

For notice her hesitation later when Jesus ordered

that the stone be taken away from in front of the tomb.

**"But, Lord, wait a minute--haven't you forgotten something--**

**my brother has been dead for four days--**

**If you open up that tomb there's going to be an awful smell.**

**What are you doing?"**

Yes, she believed, but only up to a point.

Then Jesus said, **"Did I not tell you that if you believe,**

**you will see the glory of God?"** (v.40).

A mere orthodoxy won't do--

we must believe—we must believe in such a way

that we respond to the Lord's call in our lives personally, obediently,

with deeds that reflect our faith.

Only then will we see glory of God.

And Martha did believe--

they took away the stone,

and Lazarus came out.

And she did see the glory of God.

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But of course, this raising of Lazarus is but a preview, a foreshadowing,

of an even greater miracle--

the raising of Jesus himself--

for his resurrection is not just a resuscitation,

but a full and complete victory over death.

Jesus was raised in glory--

to an immortal state from which he was forever safe from death's ravages.

**"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."**

Here is the answer to the problem of death—

Jesus is that tree of life—now made available

to all who would come to him and take of its life-giving fruit.

But I'm afraid many people never take hold of this answer

simply because they don't even consider the question.

They are afraid to think about death—

I like what Jerry Seinfeld said about death--

Did you know, according to most studies, people's number one fear is public speaking.

Number two is death.

This means to the average person,

if you go to a funeral, you're better off in the casket than doing the eulogy.

Or I think of what Woody Allen once said, "I'm not afraid to die,

I just don't want to be there when it happens."

Three centuries ago the brilliant French mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal

contemplated some friends who seemed to be avoiding

the most important questions of life.

Here is how he characterized them:

"I know not who put me into the world," they say,

"nor what the world is, nor what I myself am."

I am in terrible ignorance of everything. ...

All I know is that I must soon die,

but what I know least is this very death which I cannot escape.

I know not whence I come, so I know not whither I go.

I know only that, in leaving this world,

I fall forever either into annihilation or into the hands of an angry God,

without knowing to which of these two states I shall be forever assigned.

Such is my state, full of weakness and uncertainty.

And from all this, I conclude that I ought to spend all the days of my life  
without caring to inquire into what must happen to me.  
Perhaps I might find some solution to my doubts,  
but I will not take the trouble, nor take a step to seek it.”

Isn't our secular world full of people like that--  
concerning themselves with all sorts of things,  
but neglecting to pursue the most important questions of all.

Perhaps there are some people like that among us this morning--  
people unwilling to face the question of death  
and so unable to grasp the answer that Jesus offers.

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This epitaph appears on an old grave-marker in an English country churchyard--  
Remember man that passeth by,  
As thou is now so once was I;  
And as I am now, so must thou be:  
Prepare thyself to follow me.

But then underneath this, someone wrote--  
To follow you I'm not content,  
Until I learn of where you went.

Jesus said, **“I am the resurrection and the life.  
I am the way, the truth, and the life;  
No one comes to the Father except by me.”**

Here is the answer--

Will you face the question—the question of death?

Death stalks each one of us with relentless and persistent pursuit.

And there will come a moment when the reality of your own mortality  
will come crashing down upon you.

Perhaps it will be a doctor's office,

when you hear the results of that biopsy;

Perhaps it will come through a sudden pain in the left side of your chest;

Perhaps you will feel it when you look down at the grave of your mother or father,  
your brother or sister, your son or your daughter.

Maybe covid will strike, and you will be one of the unlucky ones

who ends up on a ventilator.

Death will most certainly come--

but why wait for that moment of crisis

when you can deal with that question, that most pressing question,

once and for all--right here and now.

You can settle the matter--

you need not fear death ever again.

On this Sunday morning,

won't you see in the raising of Lazarus,

won't you see in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the answer you need.

A mere orthodox assent won't do--

you must respond personally to the invitation of Jesus Christ in your life.

You must turn to him in faith,

you must set your trust in him alone.

He is saying to you now,

**"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."**

**Do you believe this?"**

Can you hear his voice calling out to you today?

Will you respond and find the life that he gives?

What's holding you back?

What's holding you back from embracing the answer

to the greatest question of all?

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**Prayer--**

**Closing Hymn: #292 "Because He Lives"**

**Benediction:**

“Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?”

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

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The "I Am" Statements of Jesus

Jan. 10, 2021

## "I Am the Resurrection and the Life"

(John 11:25)

"We are born to die." Death is the inescapable question mark that hangs over all of life. But our passage this morning gives us the answer to that deepest question as it confronts us with the astounding answer of Jesus: "I am the resurrection and the life."

### I. In the face of death,

Jesus could see the outworking of a mysterious purpose.

*"This sickness will not end in death.*

*No, it is for God's glory*

*so that God's Son may be glorified through it." (v. 4)*

### II. In the face of death,

Jesus was angry.

*"When Jesus saw [Mary] weeping, . . .*

*he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled." (v. 33).*

### III. In the face of death,

Jesus displayed a deep sadness.

*"Jesus wept" (v.35).*



IV. In the face of death,

Jesus provided an ultimate hope.

*“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.”*

*Do you believe this?” (vv. 25,26)*

**Sermon Discussion:**

**“I Am the Resurrection and the Life”**

**(John 11:25)**

- Death can be a very sensitive topic. What has been your experience with death? Have you attended many funerals? Have you been with someone when they died? Do you think much about your own death? When you do, how does that make you feel?
- Death is, in many ways, a mystery. How do you feel about Jesus’ decision to deliberately wait two days before going to see Lazarus? Does it help to know that God has a purpose in a person’s death even when we don’t understand it?
- Why is anger an appropriate response to death? Are you encouraged that Jesus was angry at Lazarus’s death?
- Why is weeping also an appropriate response to death? Are you encouraged that Jesus was sad at Lazarus’s death?
- What is this “life” that Jesus offers us? How is it “eternal”? How is it something that can be ours now?