

I am the Resurrection and the Life

Recently I came across this set of statistics:

- **20% of all fatal accidents happen in cars**
- **17% occur in the home**
- **14% happen to pedestrians on the street or pavement**
- **16% by air, rail or water travel**

Yet only 0.01% of all deaths occur in a worship service.

The moral being: Come to Church it may just be the safest place you could possibly be.

Health

I suppose one of the things we quickly notice about ourselves is our preoccupation with our health – It's the subject of lots of jokes, but for many, health is no joke.

One of the reasons we are preoccupied with our health is because none of us have really come to terms with our deaths.

But if the Christian faith has nothing to say about death, it has nothing to say.

Young

When we're young of course, we don't think or talk very much about death unless it intrudes into our world – And even when we're older we avoid the subject as much as we can.

In death we lose – It might be a parent, a child, brother or sister, a friend, or husband or wife.

However much we try to disguise it, to keep it away, to confine it within the sterile walls of a hospice or hospital, death only speaks loss to us.

Sometimes we joke about death:

You know Woody Allen's quip: **"It's not that I'm afraid of death, it's just that I don't want to be there when it happens"** – And I think we can all identify with that.

But you know death can be a real problem for Christian believers – It raises all kinds of questions about God and His goodness, and power.

- **Is God good? Then why does He allow death?**
- **Is God powerful? Then why doesn't He put an end to it all?**

In many ways those two questions are the sub-plot to the story we are going to look at in:

John 11

This story raises a number of questions:

- **Does Jesus really care?**
- **Does He really care for me?**
- **Does Jesus really care about my predicament, about my health, my loved ones, my family, the concerns I have?**
- **Does He really care?**

Here is the story of someone who was a well loved friend and brother – But those relationships ended when his life ended, and that raises some problems.

This passage of Scripture is for those of us who have problems with Jesus' ways – For the whole story opens up to us something about the ways of Jesus with His people.

Sisters

Here are the sisters experiencing the natural anguish of people who have seen someone they love grow sick and die.

But we won't understand this story unless we realise that their anguish is compounded by their relationship with Jesus.

They enjoyed a very close personal friendship with Him – There is no question of their love and trust for Him, nor of His love of them. So it was the most natural thing in the world for them to send for Jesus when their brother was sick for they had confidence in Him:

V 21, 32

There is no indication here that they thought Jesus' friends should be exempt from sickness just because they believed – But they came to Him, appealing to His love and their relationship to Him and they say:

V 3

Now I wonder whether you can identify with these sisters because we have a relationship with Jesus:

- **We've been adopted into the family of God**
- **We have Jesus as an elder brother**
- **We have been redeemed and now belong to Him**

We too have a relationship with Him and can say **“Lord the one you love is sick”, “Your property is in danger”**.

So you can imagine the added distress that came into their lives when Jesus apparently didn't act.

Heal

They knew He could heal, they'd seen Him do it – They knew He could heal from a distance, they'd seen Him do that too.

I don't know what they expected Jesus to do – But they certainly knew He had the power to make their brother better – Yet He didn't even come.

He apparently showed indifference.

Can you imagine the heart searching they must have gone through?

By the time Jesus arrives, Lazarus had been dead for 4 days and to them that made the prospect of a miracle impossible and the state of the dead irreversible.

The thing that strikes me here is this:

- **Jesus may be completely aware of your troubles and yet apparently act as if He were indifferent to them.**
- **We learn that prayer for the sick, which is encouraged in the Bible, may not be answered in the way we expect**
- **And we learn that what happens in our lives may appear to contradict the direct words of Jesus.**

Just look at:

V 4 > Death

What must they have thought when they heard the report of those words?

But let's make this personal – Have you got a problem with Jesus' ways with you?

If so then this story tells us that:

1. Jesus' ways are shaped by His Love

There's a lot said in this chapter about Jesus' love for these people, and I think John had a theological purpose here.

Lazarus, the one whom Jesus loves, is being held up as the representative of all those Jesus loves – And it strikes us, doesn't it that those whom Jesus loves get sick and eventually die.

You may be struggling with the question 'Does Jesus love me?' – And yet in this story Jesus' love is linked with His delay:

V 5 – 6

Jesus loved Martha, Mary and Lazarus, yet when He heard Lazarus was sick He stayed two more days – Do you see the link? He loved them, but stayed where He was two more days.

What kind of love is this that doesn't jump when we call? Or give us what we ask for every time we ask it?

The fact is that the Bible says He loves us and because He loves us and we love Him is no guarantee that we will be sheltered from the problems and pains of life.

Jesus

We see this principle of love and suffering in the life of Jesus Himself.

God loved His Son – 3 times He said 'You are my beloved Son' – And yet that did not stop the awfulness of the wrath of Calvary being placed on Jesus, in order that you and I might be delivered from our sin.

So Jesus' ways are shaped by His love.

2. They are shaped by His purpose

V 4

V 15 > Believe

V 41 – 42

What Jesus is teaching us here is that He has a long-term strategy that drives both His action and inaction in the world – His goal is doing the Father's will and achieving His purpose.

When Jesus talks here of God's glory, He is thinking supremely of the Cross – And in many ways it was the raising of Lazarus that was to lead directly to the death of Jesus.

Lazarus taking sick, dying, being buried, and then being raised by Jesus, were links in a chain leading to the Cross:

V 53

It was the final spark that ignited the hostility of the leaders against Him – They could no longer have Him around.

Now of course the reality is that Martha, Mary, the disciples and the friends of the family were all grieving – They didn't know the end of the story.

You see we don't get a print out at the beginning of our lives as to how everything is going to work out in our lives – There would be no point in our experience if that were the case.

Bible

The Bible doesn't tell us how every little part of our life fits into His ultimate purpose – But what it does tell us is that God does have a purpose.

Jesus' concern in these events is that finally He would be glorified – That's why He says some shocking words, and make no mistake they are shocking:

V 14 – 15 > Glad

Glad?? Would you like to rephrase that Jesus? Did you really mean to use that word right there in that context Lord? Glad that Lazarus is dead?

And He says to His children:

“Don’t you realise that I know the end from the beginning. I’m not taken by surprise. Don’t you realise that I am working with a much bigger picture here?”

There are cosmic powers and forces and your life is a part of that, and eventually I’m going to make you part of that bigger picture.

But I have a purpose and your life is being formed and woven into that purpose as I work with you and your circumstances. Things are not just happening by chance; It’s not just the roll of the dice – You are in my hands and one day you’ll understand”.

Dr Sangster, the Methodist preacher, had a brother who was severely handicapped and only lived to the age of six, of which he said in one of his books:

“I struggled with it as a boy and I struggle with it as a man, but I know that when I get to heaven and ask Jesus about it, I’ll be satisfied with His explanation”

His ways are shaped by His purpose.

3. Jesus’ ways are shaped by His wisdom

Frankly He knows more than you or I do – And He begins to redefine death:

V 11

You see the implication – Sleep is something you wake up from – It’s not the end.

His message to us is:

- **He knows what He is going to do**
- **He knows not only the end but the means to the end**
- **And He knows when to act**

But the question we often ask is **‘Why does God delay?’**

Answer

And the answer is: **“Because His grace makes room for people to repent”.**

That's why Jesus isn't back yet. He is being patient with us because He doesn't want anyone to perish but to come to repentance.

Why

Why does God often delay in our prayers for healing, or the meeting of a need, or the deliverance from a habit, or the salvation of a loved one?

I can't give you definite answer – One that's all neatly packaged – But be sure of this:

- **Delays are inevitable; We are finite; We don't see the big picture.**
- **Our desires and our prayers are shot through with our own selfishness and sin.**
- **But God's delays are not final – He will act in His own time and way, and we need to trust Him.**

In the story, you'll notice that Jesus actually puts Himself in an impossible position so that He might do the impossible – And that's His way with us

If He wants us to trust Him He allows us to be in a place of difficulty – If He wants us to trust Him greatly, He'll allow us to be in a place of impossibility.

Honest

If we're honest:

- ◆ **What is the thing that has driven us back to Jesus over and over again?**
- **What has brought us to our knees when we've become a bit comfortable with our spiritual lives?**
- **What is the thing that has really opened us up again to the word of God, and the Spirit of God and the things of God?**

Very often it has been when tragedy has struck, where there has been a failure on our part.

Are you struggling with Jesus' ways?

Then please learn from this passage that Jesus is saying to you:

- **My ways are shaped by my love for you**
- **By my eternal purpose for you**
- **And in my perfect wisdom**

Words

Now it may be that you are not struggling with Jesus' ways but with His words – Maybe we simply don't believe Him.

Martha had no doubt that if Jesus had been there He could have healed her brother – And now that Lazarus was dead she had no doubt that Jesus being there would bring comfort.

She could trot out the orthodox Jewish believe about the resurrection on the last day:

V 24

She believed what every devout Jew believed and was ready to confess it – But you know Jesus is not happy with a cerebral faith with a mere intellectualising or theorising of religion.

He gets personal:

V 25

Do you believe this?

Jesus wants to turn Martha's focus away from an abstract belief about something that will take place on the last day, yet to be defined – To a personalised faith

He is saying **“I am Resurrection, I am Life. Do you believe me Martha?”**

Jesus won't let us sit in the pews, keeping faith at a distance, talking objectively about “The Truth” – Jesus insists on making His truth personal to us.

He is saying to us, personally, “Do **you** believe this?”.

Doctor

You see, when you're sick you want a doctor, not a medical textbook; When you're being sued you need a lawyer, not a book on jurisprudence; And when you are a sinner you need a Saviour. Words, of course can lack power and authority unless the one who speaks them can demonstrate his ability to do what he says.

That's why Jesus always turns the attention onto Himself – He claims to be your sufficient Saviour, who died for your sin.

And He backed it up by rising from the dead.

So look for a moment at what Jesus says – He turns Martha's thoughts to Himself – Who He is and what He can do.

Death

The statistics on death are quite impressive, aren't they? One out of one people die – We may be able to stave it off for a while but when it comes it's final.

But what Jesus is saying here is that there is one in the human race for whom death is not final.

Shadow

For many in the OT, as it would have been for Martha and Mary, the teaching about life after death was obscure and shadowy at best – But here is Jesus, and He comes to turn the spotlight onto the whole issue of death.

“I am Resurrection” He says, - By His words, miracles and His resurrection, He brings life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Power

It’s not just that He raises people – He has risen power in Himself. This means that He has to die for us, so that He can demonstrate that risen power of God in His own life.

He is saying, you and I need never be afraid of death again, because I have beaten death – In Revelation we see Jesus with the keys of death and Hades in His hands, for He is in control.

Life

But Jesus not only says “I am the Resurrection” but also “I am the life” – That means the quality of life He gives now is real.

To know Him right now means spiritual life – It means no longer to be dead in trespasses and sins, to be cut off from the life of God. To be a Christian right now is to know resurrection life – It’s the power of His resurrection.

Me

Unfortunately there have been many times in my experience when I’ve looked at my life, and at the power of the resurrection and thought, there’s a big divergence between the way I’m living and the power of the resurrection life of Jesus.

And yet I have to come to the Bible and say, seriously, that if I know Jesus, I know this resurrection power is available to me.

Moments

There have also been those moments where the resurrection power of Jesus has meshed with my life and I have experienced the reality that Jesus is life.

Not just resurrection – He is life right now – Eternal life, Spiritual life, that ends in glory itself.

Claim

It’s a staggering claim for us – Jesus’ people are living among the dead.

These are the words of Jesus – Do we believe them or do we have a problem with them?

Works

This passage is speaking to people who have a problem with Jesus' ways, and with His words – But also to those who have a problem with His works.

I think Martha and Mary might have been asking the question, “Is there anything Jesus can do now?”

Even knowing Him as they did, even having seen Him perform miracles, they were not expecting Him to raise their brother from the dead.

As they were standing with their weeping friends at their brother's graveside, wondering what can Jesus do anyhow? – I want you to notice that Jesus' work starts where they are and ends where He is.

It starts with:

1. His Anger

When a person first hears the bad news about a diagnosis or a prognosis, or when we hear of the death of a loved one, anger is often the first reaction – And this story begins with anger.

V 33

The German translation of this verse says “**He was outraged in spirit and troubled**” – It wasn't that He had stopped loving the sisters or people in general, but Jesus was angry.

What was He angry at?

- **Maybe at sin that leads to death**
- **At sickness and the havoc it causes in people's lives**
- **Angry at the unbelief of those wailing as if they had no hope**

We are just told He was angry – Profound anger in the face of bereavement or bad news is something Jesus experienced.

Today

And He is angry today when a child dies of AIDS, or a people are wiped out through ethnic cleansing – Jesus feels anger at the injustices and evils that rock our world.

Have you experienced anger at the sound of bad news, maybe a death or terminal illness? If so you are not alone – Jesus is right there alongside you – He is angry let me tell you.

2. Jesus Grieved

V 35

Literally the Greek says “**He burst into tears**” – I guess most of us know what that’s like.

Hadn’t Isaiah prophesied that Messiah would be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief?

Sometimes I think we forget that we are talking about a real flesh and blood person here – The Lord Jesus Christ – He became a true human being like one of us and burst into tears, when confronted with the death of a friend.

Reality

There’s a strong reality here – In the gospel of John, which of all the gospels talks most about the deity of Christ, here we see Jesus bursting into tears.

This had a profound affect on the onlookers:

V 36

Have you spent sleepless nights in tears over some personal tragedy?

Then you need to believe that Jesus has wept with you.

This great God who made the universe actually cares so much for the human beings He created that He weeps with you in your griefs and trials.

He loves you and is calling you to Himself in a deeper, more intimate way, and is asking “Do you believe Me?”

Experience

But there is something in this story that leaves your experience and mine – Anger we share with Him; Grief we share with Him; But there’s a third element here that we don’t share:

3. Power

Often our anger and grief are mixed with a sense of frustration and impotence because we can do nothing.

We feel powerless to change our circumstances or those of others. But not Jesus – For alongside anger and grief there is that element that is only His > Power.

V 38

The Greek literally says He “Bore down” on the tomb – He just focused and terrifyingly, threateningly, He made His way towards that tomb > He was going to deal with death that day.

If death could shake in its shoes, it was doing so right there – For Jesus came in power.

Nothing can divert Him from the task – He comes to remove their fears and to deal with death.

Isaiah 25:8 says as much **“He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces”**.

And His power is in stark contrast to the helplessness of the situation.

Events

Remember these events happened to a prominent family before crowds of witnesses – This was not done in a corner > It happened in a town just 2 miles from the capital Jerusalem.

It happened at a time in Jesus’ life when absolutely everything He said or did was noticed, recorded and observed by His opponents because they were looking for something to get Him on.

Days

It happened, we are told, 4 days after the death of Lazarus – By this time putrefaction would be well established, which the NIV sanitises for us in:

V 39

She said literally **“There will be a stink”** – And from a human point of view the situation is irretrievable.

Lazarus represents not just the recent dead, but the long dead – Those who have dissolved and disappeared, the decomposed.

Do

And what does Jesus do?

Well He takes command, He engages in prayer out loud for our benefit, so that we might know where His power comes from – He does nothing outside the will of His Father.

The miracle will be performed by the power of God, to the glory of God.

Speaks

And then He speaks to Lazarus.

Why did He say **“Lazarus come out”**? – Well because if He hadn’t said ‘Lazarus’ there would have been a mass resurrection: For earlier in John 5:28-29 Jesus had said **“For a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out”**.

And so He said “Lazarus, come out”

Lose

The only loser in this story is death, and him who has the power of death – Satan.

And the message of the story is this:

Jesus speaks, and in listening to His voice the dead receive new life.

It happens right now, as people come to spiritual life, awakening to a whole new life experience of God, as they respond believingly to the claims of the Lord Jesus.

And it will happen at the end of history, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will come out to be raised, to be transformed and be with Him for evermore.

Film

In the film 'Shadowlands' the powerful story is told of C.S. Lewis and Joy Gresham:

- **They meet**
- **Engage in a marriage of convenience**
- **And only later fall in love**
- **But their time together is short because Joy dies of cancer**

The film ends with Lewis's faith intact but shaky – In real life he emerged through that period of shaky faith with a triumphant hope. He then wrote this poem about the one he loved:

**Here the whole world (stars, water, air, and field and forest, as they were reflected in a single mind)
Like cast off clothes were left behind
In ashes yet with hope that she
Re-born from holy poverty
In lenten lands, hereafter may
Resume them on her Easter Day**

If Christianity has nothing to say about death, it has nothing to say.

Book

In Lewis's Narnia book 'The Last Great Battle' the great lion Aslan speaks to the children and tells them that their parents and each one of them is "**as you used to call it in the Shadowlands – Dead**".

And as he speaks, they realise that, as Lewis puts it, all their life before has been only the cover and title page – And that now they are beginning Chapter One of this great story "**In which every chapter is better than the before**"

Do you have a place in that great story?

The raising of Lazarus and the rising of Jesus one week later point to the trustworthiness of His claims:

- **You can trust His ways with you for He loves you**

- **You can trust His words to you because He has backed them up in actions**
- **And you can trust His works – What He did for Lazarus, He will do for you**

One day we will hear His voice, one day we too will rise, one day our eyes will see the King in all His beauty – And we will be in His presence forever and ever,
Amen.