

## **I am the Resurrection and the Life**

HN/SS 25/09/05 am

Reading: John 11:17-44, Philippians 3

Study Text: John 11:25-26

Sing Psalms: 16:5-8, 49:7-11, 49:12-15, 16:9-11

'Near-death' experiences frequently grab the headlines in popular magazines. Sometimes the suggestion is made that the person had briefly died. What they experienced or saw is described in deliberately deceptive detail. For all his vast scientific knowledge, modern man remains ignorant about what happens after death – yet there is this fascination and desire to know more.

I wonder if anyone asked Lazarus what it was like being dead – for four days! He would have been a popular man today, selling his story to the some media mogul. What would his story have been? Surely he would have pointed to the man who 'woke him up', who called to him to come out of the grave. Would the media and the readers be interested in hearing from this man?

Well this man called Jesus has a message to tell all who will listen. His message is just as amazing today as it was in the first century. It is a message about life. And the message is *I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.*

### **I Am**

Jesus went to Bethany to wake up Lazarus, for the purpose that his disciples, that Martha and Mary and that many Jews might believe. Believe what? We have seen that Martha's faith was not strong – it was 'mingled with unbelief' according to Bishop Ryle. She believed that Jesus was the Christ the Son of God. But what does this mean?

To some this belief is merely intellectual. 'I am a Christian' they say. 'I believe in God' they say. They live a good life and help others. But then when facing death they find no comfort. They have not grasped the life – changing, the death – shattering truth of what Jesus is saying about himself here in this great passage.

*I am the resurrection and the life* said Jesus. In these verses we come to the high point, the climax, of this chapter. Lazarus had not yet been raised to life. The miracle has not yet been performed. But the point of Jesus raising him from the dead when he does is that people might believe this truth he is revealing to Martha. Do you believe this he asked her?

This is the fifth of seven 'I am' declarations by Jesus in this gospel. The 'I am' has divine overtones as we have seen (*cf.* 8:58). You will remember after multiplying the loaves Jesus said 'I am the bread of life come down from heaven'. In healing the man born blind he declared 'I am the light of the world'. Before raising Lazarus from the dead he declares 'I am the resurrection and the life'.

These claims that Jesus makes regarding himself are bold to say the least, but who is willing to dispute them when they are backed up by such mighty works – only a fool. Jesus works bear witness to his words and to who he is.

## **I Am the Resurrection**

The bodily resurrection of the dead at the last day was a widely held belief among the Jews – Martha included (11:24). The sect of the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection – Jesus sought to set them straight in this regard. He told them to look at what the Lord spoke to Moses at the burning bush – I am (not was) the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Matthew 22:32). Daniel (12:2) also spoke clearly about the resurrection saying *many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awaken, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt.*

In explaining to Martha what he meant by ‘resurrection’ Jesus said *he who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live.* He was referring here to physical or bodily resurrection. The believer, as well as the unbeliever, will die. Physical death will come to all people. But what Jesus tells us is that the one who believes in him will come back to life in a bodily resurrection.

In John 5:28 Jesus spoke of the coming hour when those who are in the grave, all who are in the grave, will hear his voice and come forth. We saw that this was the second resurrection, the first being a spiritual resurrection – we will come to this in the second part of our text here in John 11.

Do you believe in the resurrection of the body? You must if you truly believe, for as Paul said *if the dead do not rise then Christ is not risen and if Christ is not risen your faith is futile; you are still in your sins* (I Corinthians 15:16f). The resurrection of the dead is central to the gospel. It was at the heart of Paul’s preaching. *If in this life only we have hope in Christ we are of all men to be most pitied.* We can so easily get comfortable with life in this world and for many Christians this is their main focus. They do not look beyond the grave, they do not prepare for life after the grave.

Let us not forget that death came into this world because of sin. *For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all will be made alive* (I Corinthians 15:21f). Jesus is the resurrection for through him all who believe in him will be raised from the dead. They will be raised unto life; they will be raised with new bodies, glorious bodies, bodies fitted for everlasting life in heaven.

This is the power of God, this is the power of the resurrection which Paul longed to know more of (Philippians 4:10). This is the power which Jesus was about to demonstrate through Lazarus. Jesus had previously raised Jairus’s daughter, and the son of the widow of Nain. Ultimately and supremely this power would be shown in God raising Jesus Christ from the dead (Ephesians 1:20).

You may be saying but the raising of Lazarus was different to the raising of Jesus – and you would be right. Lazarus came back with his originally earthly body. He would later die again. Jesus however was raised with a glorified body, a body in which he ascended into heaven. Jesus

is the firstborn from the dead in this sense – the firstborn into the glory of heaven (I Corinthians 15:20). Lazarus would again die and be raised at the last day with a spiritual and imperishable body.

What of this miracle then? ‘The raising of Lazarus from the dead is a paradigm or a sign pointing away from itself to Christ and his resurrection’. Many Jews wanted to see Lazarus and some plotted to kill him (12:10). But there was no point in following Lazarus, nor any point in killing him. It was Jesus who had called him from the grave. Lazarus was raised from the dead but it is Jesus who is the resurrection. He who believes in Jesus though he die yet he shall live.

## **And the Life**

*He will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.* This is what Martha believed and Jesus did not correct her for this was true. What Jesus did was make this belief more real by bringing it into the present. The one standing before her was the one in whom that resurrection would be realized. If Martha wanted to know about this resurrection then all she had to do was ask. If she wanted to be raised to life on the last day then all she had to do was believe in Jesus. And you, like Martha, can ask and you can believe for Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

Jesus is the life. We were told this truth in John 1:4 – *in Him was life* – and in subsequent chapters. It is explained further here where it is linked to the resurrection. *Whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die – do you believe this?* (11:26).

Death here refers to spiritual death – the one who believes shall never die. Back in John 5:25 Jesus spoke about spiritual resurrection. *The dead will hear the voice of God of the Son of God and those who hear will live.* Whoever believes in Jesus, the Christ and the Son of God, has passed from death into life – they will not come under condemnation (5:24). This can happen now. We do not have to wait until the last day – indeed then it will be too late. Those who believe in Jesus are born again. They receive new life in Jesus Christ who is ‘the life’. They will not go through the second death.

Speaking of baptism, Paul describes it as being buried with Christ and being *raised from the dead by the glory of God the Father* (Romans 6:4). So you who believe, you who are regenerate, have already been raised from the dead. You have been given new life – spiritually. And as you were united with him in the *likeness of his death* so you *shall also be in the likeness of his resurrection* (Romans 6:5).

Today you can walk in newness of life – are you doing so? You who have received Jesus Christ have received life, for Jesus said ‘I am the life’.

Are you aware of his Spirit dwelling in you, the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead? He who raised Christ from the dead will give also life to your mortal body through his Spirit who lives in you (Romans 8:11).

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