

“The Resurrection and the Life”

Living as Light in a Dark World – part 4

John 11:1-44

[SLIDE 38] *Welcome.*

Life keeps us busy, doesn't it? Yet it is important in our busy-ness not to forget to pray. Throughout my time as a pastor, I promise that if someone ever reminds me that it is time to pray, I will pay them a dollar. I haven't given out many dollars lately, but I remind you that deal is still valid. Would you please join me in prayer now?

Dear God, we thank you for this day in which we live and move and breathe. This life you have given us is not to be taken for granted, for you have created us with a purpose: to worship you. Grant that we might feel the presence of your Holy Spirit in these moments now, as we consider how your Word speaks to us. Give us your grace. Give us your mercy. Show us the eternal life that is found in Jesus Christ. We pray this in his precious name. Amen.

[SLIDE 39] The past few Sundays, we have been learning to share our light in the world by looking to Jesus. Jesus is the Light of the World, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the Good Shepherd and the Door. I've added an object for each illustration on the table by the pulpit. Each of these “I Am” sayings teaches us something about being disciples of Jesus Christ.

[SLIDE 40] God works in mysterious ways. When I picked John 11 as my passage, I had no idea that I'd be officiating a funeral just last weekend. But I'm glad the Holy Spirit guided me in my planning. Death is a part of life, and we need to be open and honest about it.

Our Christian belief of life after death is one of our most crucial teachings. Today's scripture is the basis for every message I preach at every funeral; specifically, why we hope in the resurrection.

[SLIDE 41] Life and death are common occurrences on a farm. When I was young, I watched lambs being delivered. It was messy, but amazing. These poor little creatures seemed so helpless at first, but within a few minutes, they could stand and move. Some of the lambs, however, were stillborn. I vividly remember my dad, a veterinarian, giving CPR to them and how some of them, against all

odds, were resuscitated, and after a good coughing fit, they came back to life. It was amazing to watch something that seemed to be dead actually begin breathing.

[SLIDE 42] For many of us, our first memory of death is when a beloved pet dies. I still remember the backyard funerals for our dogs “Toby” and “Maggie.” Flushing “Blinky” the goldfish down the toilet. Those experiences were as moving as going to my grandparents’ funerals, and I can still feel the pain of their absence and how much I wished I could have them back.

Many of us have felt that way. There is something about the finality of death that we resist. In our grief, we go through shock and denial. We don’t want it to be true. We are all created with an inherent desire for life. We want to live in relationships. This is a good desire, one that God has given us.

And I think that is why for many of us who experience grief, the story of Lazarus is both comforting and confusing, even frustrating. Where can we find hope in this strange story of Jesus at a funeral?

[SLIDE 43] Few things in life make us more upset than when our loved ones are ill. In John chapter 11, Jesus finds out that his good friend, Lazarus, is sick and dying. Jesus is even told, “The one you love is sick.” And yet, the Bible says that Jesus waits two extra days before traveling to Bethany to see him.

We live in a world that expects instant answers. Have you ever prayed to God and wondered why God didn’t respond immediately? I can find information on the internet in the snap. I can go to the pharmacy and get medicine for my pain. We are addicted to instant gratification. So we think, “Come on, God, I’m in a hurry. Get this over with, so I can get back to my normal life, would you?”

Everyone in this story is anxious: the disciples, Lazarus’ family, the people who come to mourn. Everybody, except Jesus. Jesus doesn’t worry. He knows that God’s timing is always perfect. In fact, he tells his disciples, “Don’t worry, Lazarus is only sleeping.” And they think, “So then what’s the problem? Won’t he just wake up and feel better?”

[SLIDE 44] Jesus clarifies, “Lazarus is dead.” And Jesus adds, “And for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe.” (verse 15).

There is a really strange thought. It is better for the disciples that Jesus does not show up when he is first called. Have you ever thought, in your urgency,

that God might do something amazing if you just hold on a little longer? Jesus says if we have patience, we will believe. Let’s admit, that is tough to do.

[SLIDE 45] When Jesus finally goes to Bethany, he receives a bit of a tongue lashing from Lazarus’ sisters Martha and Mary. Both of them say, “If you had been here, our brother would not have died.” (verses 21 and 32.) That’s a cry I can understand. “God, if you had only shown up, this would not have happened. Why did you allow this, God? Don’t you even care?” Everyone has wondered this at some point.

Jesus’ response to Martha is the focal point of the whole story. Look again at verses 21-26. [SLIDE 46]

²¹“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

²³Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

²⁴Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

[SLIDE 47] *²⁵Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;²⁶and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”*

Do you believe this? In the face of death, do you believe in resurrection? That is no idle question. Jesus is not saying, “Someday, we will understand. Someday, this will make sense. Someday, death won’t matter anymore.” NO. Jesus is saying, “I am the resurrection. I am the life.” Right here, right now, standing before Martha, Jesus says, “I am the answer. You do not have to wait anymore. You must only believe.”

[SLIDE 48] Martha’s response is a testament to her faith. (Verse 27) “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.” Wow. If only we all could answer with such faith.

Next, Mary comes out of the house to meet Jesus. What follows is as miraculous as it is confusing. Remember, Jesus knows what he is going to do. He told the disciples that Lazarus’ illness would not end in death. God would glorify Jesus through this sickness. Read again with me from verse 32 to 37. [SLIDE 49]

³²When Mary 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.”

³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. [SLIDE 50] ³⁴“Where have you laid him?” he asked.

“Come and see, Lord,” they replied.

³⁵Jesus wept.

³⁶Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

³⁷But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

Jesus is troubled in spirit? Jesus weeps? What?! Why would Jesus weep in the face of a certain miracle? I’ll tell you why. Even though Jesus is fully divine, Jesus is also fully human. When faced with death and despair, he is troubled. Jesus mourns his friend. One Bible translation (AMP) says, he is “moved to the point of anger.” Jesus knows there is a battle between life and death. He sees his friends grieving, and he grieves with them. Jesus knows what sorrow is all about. He is a participant. He loves his friends. He feels their pain.

[SLIDE 51] There are some who think God is distant and aloof. The theological term for this belief is deism. Deists believe in God; they just don’t believe that God really cares much. Perhaps God cares for presidents or royalty, or major things like world wars or hurricanes, but in a deist’s mind, God wouldn’t glance down on a little country village where a poor family mourns the death of an insignificant peasant.

[SLIDE 52] The author of this gospel begs to differ. Jesus is moved to the point of weeping over Lazarus’ death. However, there is a major difference between us and Jesus. Unlike us, Jesus can actually do something about death.

I love this next part. As the people stand around doubting, saying, “Jesus opened the eyes of the blind, and yet he couldn’t heal Lazarus,” Jesus tells them to remove the stone. That’s an odd request. This is a very heavy stone to keep animals and grave robbers out. Besides, the dead body has been there four days, and as the KJV puts it, “he stinketh.”

[SLIDE 53] Jesus never does anything haphazardly. Every word, every action is deliberate. Yes, Lazarus stinketh, because death stinketh. This is no illusion, no scam. Jesus wants to show them proof of his miracle. He prays aloud, and he shouts with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth!” No one could claim it was a hoax. The man was dead four days – he was not in a coma. Lazarus had not fainted. He had not taken a 96-hour nap. This man was dead. Everyone knew it.

So try to imagine their amazement when the dead man comes out breathing, wrapped like a mummy, but very much alive, and, hopefully, no longer stinky. This would have blown everyone away. Aside from the resurrection of Jesus himself, this is the greatest miracle in the New Testament, if not in the whole Bible.

This is good news - great news - for Lazarus and his family. But what about us? How can this miracle from long ago be good news to us today?

[SLIDE 54] Jesus said, “I am the Resurrection and I am the Life... Do you believe this?” (v.25-26) Each of us has a desire for life to never end. At the funeral last weekend, a little girl asked me, “Can Grandma hear me when I pray?” I answered, “God certainly can.” I’ve had long conversations about what happens to us when we die. I don’t know exactly, because I haven’t died yet. But I know this: there will be a resurrection. The Bible teaches us that one day, after our hearts stop beating, after our lungs stop drawing breath, Jesus will miraculously bring us back to life, and we will stand before him. That is the hope of the Christian Church. That is the message we’ve preached for 2,000 years.

[SLIDE 55] This hope comforts us in our grief. This hope awakens us from our spiritual slumber. Truly, there are some who right now live as though they are dead. They live as though they have no hope. Biologically speaking, they are alive, but they do not have abundant life. They are wrapped up in the grave clothes of sin, despair, apathy, and darkness.

[SLIDE 56] To them and to all of us, Jesus speaks these amazing words: “Come forth! Eric, come forth! [Name], come forth! [Name], come forth! Come to life!” Christ wants to do CPR on our souls, and when we find eternal life in him, we are forever changed. Death and sin are no match for the Author, Creator, and Sustainer of Life!

At each funeral I preach, I offer the gospel message in some form. I truly believe that funerals are one of the most significant places where we consider eternity. And so today I offer you a chance once again to come to Jesus, to come out of your spiritual cave or grave. This is how we can have eternal life.

[SLIDE 57] First, acknowledge that God created you and know that God loves you. Second, admit that you have sinned and messed up. You have lived for yourself instead of for God. Third, ask Jesus to be your Lord and Savior instead. When you do that, Jesus walks into your life and performs a miracle. He blows away the stench of sin and death and he restores you. Finally, you must start living for your God-given purpose. When you come to Jesus, you have eternal life in him, and on that great day of Resurrection, you will stand before Jesus and worship him.

[SLIDE 58] Jesus is “the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in [him] will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in [him] will never die. Do you believe this?” If you do, you will always find the peace and comfort you need. I pray that your answer always is, “Yes, I do believe.”

Memory Verse: John 11:35-36 (NIV)

Jesus said, “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.

Reflection Questions:

1. What do you believe happens when you die? Why do you believe that?
2. How have you experience death and grief in your life? Have you ever questioned why God seemed not to show up?
3. The Bible teaches that there will be a general Resurrection. What would you hope to say when you stand before the Risen Christ?
4. Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life.” Do you believe this? What difference does it make in your life?
5. Whom do you know that needs to hear about resurrection?