

Power for the Grieving

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- [0 : 0 0] We're going to read together from the New Testament, from the Gospel of John chapter 11, and we're going to read today in two times today because it's a long story, but a beautiful story, the story of the death and resurrection of Lazarus.
- So let's read together from verses 1 to 27. And this is the Word of God. Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany.
- The village of Mary and her sister Martha. I almost have that printed wrong. Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill.
- So the sister sent to him saying, Lord, he whom you love is ill. But when Jesus heard it, he said, 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.
- Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. And so when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then after this, he said to his disciples, let us go to Judea again.
- [1 : 1 8] The disciples said to him, Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you. And are you going to go there again? Jesus answered, are there not 12 hours in the day?
- If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles because the light is not in him. After saying these things, he said to them, our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.
- The disciples said to him, Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover. Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest and sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, Lazarus has died.
- And for your sake, I am glad that I was not there so that you may believe, but let us go to him. So Thomas called the twin, said to his fellow disciples, let us also go, that we may die with him.
- Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Bethany was near Jerusalem about two miles off, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother.
- [2 : 2 6] So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. Martha said to Jesus, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.
- But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you. Jesus said to her, your brother will rise again. Martha said to him, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.
- And Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection in the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet he shall live. And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.

Do you believe this? She said to him, yes, Lord, I believe that you are Christ, the Son of God who is coming into the world. This is God's holy word.

Are the wonders of the Lord known in darkness? The answer in the New Testament is yes. And so let's read together from the rest of John chapter 11 from verses 28 down to 41.

[3 : 29] When Martha had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, the teacher is here and is calling for you. And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him.

Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. And when the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

And now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. And when Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.

And he said, wherever you laid him, they said to him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. So the Jews said, see how he loved him, see how he loved Lazarus.

But some of them said, could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying? And then Jesus deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave and a stone lay against it.

[4 : 41] And Jesus said, take away the stone. Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days. And Jesus said to her, did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?

So they took away the stone and Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, Father, I thank you that you have heard me. This is God's holy word. Let's pray before we look at it. Father, we ask now in the power of Christ, the name of Christ, and by the presence of the Holy Spirit, you would come and speak to us, oh Lord, through your holy word.

So we pray that now in Jesus' name. Amen. One thing I've learned over the years is that the scientists, the sociologists, the philosophers, the ministers, the pastors, they all tend to agree on one thing.

There's very few things we all agree on, but one thing. And that's that so far the death rate is one out of one. Right? So that every one person that's born dies.

And that means that today in this Christmas season, either you are in the midst of grief or you're going to be. You're going to be. Or somebody is going to be grieving about you at some point.

[5 : 58] And so we come this season knowing that we all lose people and some of us lose people disproportionately quickly in life. And we feel that in the holidays, we feel that more probably than any other season.

We are, if you're visiting today, we're in a series called The Wonderful Counselor. That's language from Isaiah chapter 9 verse 6 that prophesies about the Messiah that was to come, that he was to be the wonderful counselor.

And wonderful in the Old Testament, the Hebrew word there doesn't just mean great. It means surprising, unexpected, bringing something that you never saw coming, something that makes you feel full of wonder in all.

And we're told there that Jesus comes as mighty God and as wonderful counselor. And he comes, that means in an unexpected way to deal with the problems, the emotions of our inner lives.

The things that we struggle with most in our emotional life in this life. And we've looked already at anxiety, at boredom, at loneliness. And today we look at grief, loss.

[7 : 05] The four great emotions that we struggle with so much in the modern world from the dawn of history, from Genesis 3, we struggle with anxiety, boredom, loneliness and grief.

And so today we think about grief. Jesus says explicitly, remember if you were here the first Sunday of Advent, do not be anxious. He says implicitly, do not be bored. There's way too much meaning in life to be bored.

Last week, what does he say to the lonely? He doesn't say don't be lonely, no, not at all. Jesus Christ became lonely for the lonely. We saw that. And then today, what does he say to the grieving, to the people who are hurting in the midst of loss?

We get the story of Lazarus here. This is one of the great stories in the Gospels. And so this is what Jesus says to you, the wonderful counselor, what he brings to you in the face of death, in the world filled with death.

Jesus, for the grieving, he brings, he gives you his love, his tears, his anger and his power. So let's think about that. First, his love. Now Isaiah 9, wonderful counselor, wonderful means, unexpected.

[8 : 14] Something you never expected that fills you with wonder and awe. Jesus' love in this passage is certainly that. It is unexpected. The way he loves. So if you look down at verse one, it says Lazarus, a certain man, he is ill. Lazarus is Mary and Martha's brother.

We've met Mary and Martha earlier in the Gospels. They are followers of Jesus. They're friends of Jesus. And now their brother is ill. So we learn later, he's on his deathbed. He's very, very ill.

And then in verse three, it says that Jesus loved them because they say to him, the sisters sent him saying, the Lord, the one who you love is ill. Meaning they know that Jesus loves them. He loves Mary and Martha. He loves Lazarus. And the word that's used for love there is the word for friendship love, philaeo.

It's Philadelphia in the U.S., the city of brotherly love. That's the Greek word, the type of love of friends. And so he loves them. He loves them very much. And so what does he do? They call to him, Lord, he's some ways, he's up to 40 miles away.

They say, Lord, our brother is on his deathbed and we know you love him. Will you come? And they are hoping Jesus will come and put a stop to this event.

[9 : 34] And so what does Jesus do in the midst of his love? Verse six, when he heard Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer where he was and he waited. Jesus, who loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus deeply, waited until after Lazarus had died. He stayed two days longer.

And at the time he gets to Bethany, he has to move back from the east to the west towards Jerusalem. Lazarus has been dead four days already. It was quite a journey to get back there. And D.A. Carson, one of the commentators on this passage, he says, his two-day delay was motivated by his love for Mary and Martha.

Jesus in this passage allows death to take place. And it's in the context of saying that he loved them. And so he waited.

And we look at that and say, how? That's what Martha and Mary do. So down in verse 20 and 21, Martha comes and she says to Jesus, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

So she knows he has power, that God, the God band has power. And if you wouldn't, if you would have been here, my brother would not have died. Then Mary comes out of the city to him. And what does she say right after that in verse 32? The same thing. She cries, she weeps. She falls down at Jesus' feet.

[10 : 59] And she says, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. And in this question, it is the question, it is the statement, the pronouncement that we human beings feel.

In our lives. Lord, if you are all powerful, if you are the God that you say you are, why is this happening? Lord, if you had been here, this would not have happened.

If you would just come down and fix this, it would all be okay. I know you say you have the power. Are you willing? Will you come? Are you able?

It is the question that we all feel in our lives. It is the problem of suffering. And Mary and Martha feel it really deeply here. And it is not just death. It may be that you think, I prayed and I prayed for this. I prayed and I prayed and asked for that. And Lord, if you would have only come, if you would have only been here, that would have never lost that.

I would have been given this, that relationship, that person. They are experiencing here, Mary and Martha. What humans experience, we experience disappointment with God over suffering and pain and loss in our lives.

[12 : 20] And Jesus waits. He lets Lazarus die in this passage and he loves Lazarus. He loves Mary. He loves Martha deeply. And they know that. They fall at his feet weeping knowing he loves them and knowing that he waited.

And we, what do we say? We get a couple of answers here in the passage. First, Jesus waits because he does not want there to be any idea that he is merely coming to resuscitate Lazarus.

So in the Greco-Roman Jewish culture, there is a sense through the lens of some religions and some medical thought that a body, a person who has died can be dead visibly for three days yet still have life.

And so there is a big reason that Jesus shows up on the fourth day because he wants everybody to know Lazarus is definitely dead. And the other, but then Jesus tells us, he gives us the principle. He says, I'm glad I waited. It's for the good. And this is what he says.

It is for the glory of God so that the Son of God may be glorified through it. And for your sake, I'm glad I was not there so that you can believe. Everyone who believes in me will never die. That's the answer he gives. Now, let me say a couple of things about that.

[13 : 41] This is one of the hardest questions we face. Why does God, who is so powerful, allow suffering? Allow evil? Allow the pain that we experience in this life? And the first answer is, I do not know. That's the first answer. But in the Gospels we come and see this while God allows suffering and loss in this life.

We do know this. When you lift up your eyes and you look at the cross, the history of the cross, the reality of the cross, when you see Jesus hanging there upon the cross, what you can say is this, whatever the reason is, whatever the reason is, I do know that God loves me. I don't know why he allows suffering.

I don't know why he allows loss. But I do know that it's not because he doesn't love me. He loves me. He loves Lazarus and Mary and Martha. And we grieve and we say, why, oh, Lord? And you've got to first be willing to hear what the cross says to you. God is big. He's great. And he loves you.

And it's important to say that this problem, this question, the reality of evil, the reality of suffering, the problem of loss and evil we experience in our lives is a question that every single world view, religion, philosophy, has to deal with, has to answer. What world view, what philosophy, what religion has the best answer? That's one of the questions that's very important today.

The second thing that Jesus does is he says, this is for the glory of God. This is for the glorification of the Son so that you might believe that the Son would be glorified one day so that you might believe.

[15 : 25] Now, I'll say a bit more about this at the end, but at least what Jesus is saying here is something like this. The allowance, not an easy truth, the allowance for grief in this life is somehow, some way, for a greater power and a weight of glory that we have not yet imagined.

Somehow, some way. Somehow, some way in the midst of grief and loss, God is healing something deeper in us and deeper in this world that we have yet to imagine and yet to see.

There is a weight of glory that is to come, a glorification that is coming that is beyond our imagination. Somehow, some way. I don't know why, I don't know all the answers, but through the suffering of loss, God is bringing about an eternal weight of glory.

That's what he says here. And that means that, I think the first thing to walk away with today is that the Gospels are showing us what we can't do if you're walking through grief in the midst of this holiday season, what you can't do with that grief.

And one of the things you can't do is you can't, if you've had a lot of loss in your life, if you've had a lot of suffering in your life, one of the things you can't do is come and say, all this has happened to me because God must hate me.

[16 : 46] God must be judging me. And the very first thing we see here is you can't say that. That God allows in the midst of his love. And you cannot come to say, there's a passage in Luke chapter 13 where people who have lost a lot of others come and talk about a tragedy that had happened in the time of the Gospels, the tower of Siloam that fell in the previous generation.

Luke 13. And they say, when the tower of Siloam fell and all these people died, was it them that sinned and were being judged or was it their parents that sinned and were being judged? And Jesus says, no. But you repent. The people that ask the question, you repent for trying to come in the midst of grief and charge others with sin and judgment.

You can't say it. And sometimes actually the way that the Bible works, the way the Bible speaks is that one of the ways of condemnation, the ways of judgment in our lives is when we're given everything in life that we want.

You know, one of the worst things that can ever happen to you is that you get everything you want in your life. And you never, and you don't experience loss. And you're comfortable and you never really see what you need. And he says, this has happened so that you, that the sun may be glorified and that you might believe.

There's a weight of glory that is beyond our imagination that is coming through the midst of suffering. The other way we cannot respond today to grief and loss and pain. Well, let me say it like this. Grief tends to move us either towards God or away from God.

[18 : 26] It's always doing one of the two. When we're struggling with loss and grief, we're typically moving towards God or away from God in the midst of that. And what we see throughout the Bible is a lot of disappointment in the midst of loss. Why, oh Lord, why, oh God, if you would have only been here, if you would have only come, we see that all throughout the language of the Psalms.

Why, oh God, where are you? But here's the difference. Here's what we're learning from the response of Mary and Martha, from the response of the Psalms. If you're suffering, if you're in grief, or if you're going to be, boy, you got to prepare. You got to prepare now if you're not. Because it's coming.

Are you, are you suffering Godward? You can say, why, oh Lord, why, why weren't you here? But are you doing it toward God rather than pulling back away from them?

Are you coming down to his feet and saying, why, oh Lord, are you crying Godward? The tears are good. Cry Godward. That's what we're being told. In the Old Testament, the Book of Lamentations, it's a whole book about grief and about sorrow. Israel had lost their city, lost their lands to Babylon.

And when you look at it, when the scholars who study it, they say that four-fifths of the whole of the Book of Lamentations is weeping out and saying why.

[19 : 49] And one-fifth is hope. So there's two big responses in the Bible for Christian grief, why, oh Lord, and hope. But in the Book of Lamentations, it's four-fifths, why? It's a whole lot more tears, a whole lot more grieving than it is lifting up the head and saying, and I have hope.

It's both, it's both, but it is a lot. It's a lot of sorrow. That's what we see here. I need to move on. Dostoevsky, the great Russian novelist, one of his wonderful books, The Brothers Karamazov, he says this, I believe like a child that suffering will be healed and made up for, that all the humiliating absurdity of human contradictions will vanish like a pitiful mirage, that in the world's finale, at the moment of eternal harmony, something so precious will come to pass, that it will suffice for all hearts, for the comforting of all resentments, for the atonement of all the crimes of humanity, for all the blood that they've shed, so that it will make it not only possible to forgive, but somehow to justify all that has happened. A weight of glory beyond our imagination.

Because of the love of Jesus for you, you do not grieve today as one without hope. That's what Jesus' love says. Secondly, and briefly, his tears. If you look down at verse 35, when he comes, what does the wonderful counselor offer to you today?

When he comes to the tomb, when he comes to the graveside, we have the shortest verse in the Bible, verse 35, Jesus wept. Now, hold on a second. Jesus, he knew what he was about to do. He knew that he had the power to raise Lazarus back from the dead.

And yet, when he comes to the tomb, knowing that's about to happen, he weeps. You won't come to this and wonder, why didn't Jesus just say, alright, everybody calm down. Wipe your tears away. Stop crying. Just wait a second. It's going to be fine. No, he doesn't do it.

[22 : 06] He comes to the tomb and with the weepers, he weeps, he mourns, he cries out. And that means that one, Jesus Christ is truly human. He feels every human emotion. Christmas, it's Christmas. Jesus Christ came into the world. He's truly human, experiencing the weight of emotion.

And he comes as a counselor to tell us, to teach us, you should cry. You should cry. You should feel it. He says, you need to feel it and you need to cry.

As modern people, modern people, we struggle with a couple ways of reacting to death. For some of us, we come to death as modern Stoics, mostly throughout our lives, denying the reality of death. And we sort of forget about it. We try to forget about it. We really do think in the bottom of our hearts, this is never going to happen to me. And when you're in that kind of a space, you come to a funeral and you're sort of awkward the whole time.

Because you're in this place where you have to admit this is real. And yet at the same time, you spent so much of your time forgetting about it and denying it and pushing it down that you don't know what to do with yourself at a funeral. You feel sort of embarrassed that death even exists.

And you don't know what to say to people. You kind of pass through the line, you say something as fast as you can, move on to lunch. That's modern Stoicism. That's David Goggins' variety that says, you know, grab your bootstraps, you're going to be fine. You just got to forget about it.

[23 : 43] You got to deny it. Another form of that Stoicism is naturalist Stoicism. You'll have come across this, I'm sure, at some point. It's naturalist Stoicism of the Internet Atheism variety, YouTube videos. And it says something like this, I'm not afraid of death.

You know, it's like the Lion King said, it's the circle of life, it's beautiful. You know, we've got to feed the grass. And death is a wonderful thing and it's part of the evolutionary process. And you know, I'm not afraid, I'm going to take up courage, I'm going to face it.

And Jesus comes and says, no, to those responses. And does, and gives, the wonderful counselor gives you something so helpful, so important here in the face of death.

He weeps. He cries because he does something that Internet Atheism will not do. And that's say, tell the truth.

Christianity offers you the truth today. And the truth is this, death is a monster. Death is an enemy. It's a great evil. It is not good. It is not just the circle of life.

[24 : 52] And when you feel deep down in your soul that you hate death, that you don't want it to happen, that's exactly how you should feel. You should weep in its face. And you should say, death is a monster, death is an enemy. And Jesus here gives us one of the great ministries of the Christian life.

And that's the ministry of tears. The ministry of tears. Jesus gives you that. Do you have that ministry in your life? The wonderful counselor compassion and tears.

We can hear Paul's command, weep with the weeping. If you've been in church for very long in your life, you've heard that command, weep with the weeping. But it's such a quick and subtle phrase that we've let it pass by us and not embraced it. But here we have the tears of Jesus, weep with the weeping.

And that means that when you're becoming more like Jesus in your life, you're probably crying more. When you're taking on the character of Christ, you're probably in tears more often.

You're probably feeling the weight of sadness that other people are feeling. That stepping into tears is stepping more and more into the character of Christ, the wonderful counselor.

[26 : 07] He gives us the ministry of tears and compassion here. I was reminded this week, reading to our kids Chronicles of Narnia, the magician's nephew, first book in the series of seven, but fifth book that Lewis wrote.

There's a moment in it where Diggory, the young boy, his mother is dying and he comes to Aslan. It's a John 11 scene from Lewis. Aslan is a symbol of Jesus in these books and this is what happens. Up till then, Diggory had been looking at the lion's great feet and the huge claws on them.

And now in his despair, he looked up at the lion's face and what he saw surprised him as much as anything in his whole life for the tawny face was bent near his own.

And wonder of wonders, great shining tears stood in the lion's eyes. They were such big bright tears compared to Diggory's tears.

So big that for a moment Diggory felt as if the lion must really be sorry about his mother than he himself was. In verse 37, the people say, if this man can bring sight to the blind, why is he weeping? Could he not just simply raise Lazarus from the dead?

[27 : 28] And the answer is absolutely yes, he can. And he is sorry for the death of Lazarus than even Mary and Martha are. The compassion of Jesus. He feels with you the pain of loss and grief. Thirdly, he offers here his anger.

Now in verse 33, boy, talk about wonderful unexpected counselor in verse 33. Jesus. Well, the translators just don't really give it to you all the way. And then some I think it's every once in a while important to point this out.

In verse 33, it says when Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews, they're weeping to he was deeply moved. And then down in verse 38, you can see it again. Then Jesus deeply moved again, came to the tomb.

You might have a footnote if you have a print Bible in front of you that says footnote deeply moved indignant. This is a Greek word that when we find it in extra biblical materials, materials outside of the Bible, typically means refers to an animal, a verb for an animal who is snorting in anger. So it's a verb that deeply moved indignant.

It means nostrils flared, quaking with anger. This text says in verse 33 and 38 that is Jesus stood in front of the tomb weeping that all of a sudden he became absolutely incensed, raging with anger, righteous anger.

[29 : 03] It says here that he was so angry it uses a verb for it's often used for a war horse. The picture of a war horse standing on the hill preparing for battle stomping its foot.

You know, you've seen that with the nose, the nostrils of the horse, the war horse flaring. This is the verb. So Jesus stands here with his nostrils raging. What is he so angry at?

And we learn here that as he looks around and he sees Mary and Martha weeping, he sees the Jews around him weeping, he sees the tomb rolled over the grave. It says that he is so angry at what sin has cost this world, death, a decay, a Satan.

At all that is wrong with the world, he is so angry in this moment. And it's so important to say that this is what he offers you. Jesus Christ is raging at the darkness and his anger, we might say this moment, this is the beginning of the turn.

Every great story has a turn. Tolkien referred to it as the Eukatastrophe. We started this wonderful counselor series with that special word. Eukatastrophe is a word, J.R.R. Tolkien, the writer of the Lord of the Rings, coined. And it means you, Eve or E.U. means good.

[30 : 22] Eukatastrophe, something terrible. In every great story there is a moment where there is a turning point where everything is wrong, everything is hopeless and all of a sudden there is a sudden good that comes through it.

This is the great turn. Jesus is angry, then he weeps, then he steps towards the tomb and the verb that gets used is he was so angry he was like a war horse in the face of death.

I can't help but think the thought that came to my mind on this image of Christ reminds me of one of the classic tropes of literature and storytelling and things that happen very regularly in life, the image of a great dad, a great father, A great dad who has a daughter, if this is a story we know well, the daughter goes and has a relationship with a guy and he mistreats her, the guy mistreats her, she's abused in some way, but then dad shows up.

In the beginning of that moment, the first thing what does dad do? First he consoles and he weeps and he brings her in. But then what does he do? Jesus here, he shows up at the tomb and the first thing he does is he weeps, but then it says, what does dad do?

The first he consoles, he weeps, but then he stands up and oh boy, that young man, he's in for it. Dad has come to console, to weep with the weeping, but then to bring justice.

[32 : 00] Jesus Christ weeps with the weeping and then the wonderful counselor stands in front of the tomb and he's indignant. He hates death, he's angry death. It's like the scene in The Lord of the Rings from the movies when Helms Deep, this great fortress, this fortress is lost, you know, 10,000 orcs overtaking this fortress and there's no hope, there's no hope. And then the prophecy, look, lift up your heads, oh men, on the fifth day the light will come over the hill.

And on the fifth day of the battle, they looked up and on the back hill, there was Gandalf, the white, dressed in all white, clad in shadow faxes, war horse, bringing in the ultimate eukatastrophe, destroying something that seemed totally unimaginable.

He's hopeless and lost, right? This is Jesus. He's standing here having wept for you and with you. Now, wonderful counselor, mighty God, angry. Dad's come.

And so finally, what does he do? What does Jesus offer you this Christmas? Power. Jesus angry in the face of death, he says Lazarus, come out.

Lazarus comes back to life and comes out of the grave. Now, I just want to close with this last point. One, it is important today if you are a Christian, if you have been in church for many years to hear this said and to really let this soak in on you, Jesus Christ can raise people from the dead.

[33 : 39] Jesus Christ can raise people from the dead. This resurrection is a sign of his resurrection. What does he do? He stares in the face of a tomb that has a stone, a closed tomb, and he says Lazarus, come out.

And Jesus will raise himself from the dead. The Son of God will raise himself from the dead just a few days later from this. This is a sign of the resurrection that was coming and his resurrection. And that means the very first thing to say in the face of grief today. The most important thing in terms of power is that we've got, you've got to let your head get involved today so that you're prepared to suffer when your heart gets involved.

And to let your head get involved, to let your brain work today is to say Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. He raised himself from the dead. And the first century Jews did not believe that resurrection was possible.

The Greeks did not believe that resurrection was possible. The Romans did not believe that resurrection was possible. And yet more than 500 people saw Jesus Christ after his resurrection. And they couldn't keep it within. They had to explosively talk about it. They had to give their lives away to say this man was dead and he rose from the dead.

It's a historic fact. It's a proclamation of history. And today you've got to let your head tell your heart Jesus Christ was dead, but he's risen from the dead.

[35 : 07] You've got to let your head get involved before suffering ever comes into your life so that you're ready. And that means that when Jesus says in verse 25, I am the resurrection in the life. Anyone who believes in me, though he dies, he will live.

What is he saying? He says I am the resurrection in the life. And he's saying here, my very body, my very humanity is bringing resurrection into this world.

I am the resurrection. My very body is bringing resurrection into this world. I'm the first fruits. He's the first sign of the harvest. He's the beginning of a wonderful harvest. And he says if you believe in me, you will not die. You will live. Though you die, you will live.

And that means he's saying today this, if you're a Christian, if you have come to believe in Jesus in your life, he is saying that you have already had a funeral. You've already had a funeral. When you come to Christ, there's an experience of death that takes place in your life. You die with him as he died.

And you are already risen with him as he has risen. You have already received a spiritual resurrection that is the beginning and promise of a future physical resurrection that is to come.

[36 : 25] And you've got to look at that. You've got to believe that. You've got to think about that. That's the content of Christianity. It is the heartbeat of Christianity that in his death you died, that in his resurrection you've already come to life spiritually and one day physically.

And that is why counseling is so good. The therapy we need in this life is so important. In the midst of a cursed and bruised and broken world, boy, we need our emotional lives treated with counseling. We need it all the time.

But here's the important thing. When Jesus Christ comes into the world, when Christianity comes, it offers something more. The only way to really treat the problem is to get rid of the need of counseling altogether.

And the only time that that will ever happen is at the moment of resurrection. The moment where Jesus brings us back from the dead. I want to ask you today, this Christmas, do you have the peace of resurrection, hope in your life?

Paul has the audacity in 1 Corinthians 15, the strength to taunt death, to say, oh death, oh grief, where is thy sting?

[37 : 35] He has the audacity, the strength, the power, the hope to look at death's face and taunt it and to say, oh death, where is thy sting? And one of the ways you can know today that you have the power of resurrection, hope in your life is that in the midst of grief, not despite grief, not despite tears, but in the midst of tears, there is a subtle hope arising in you that can look at the face of death and say, death, where is thy sting?

You have been swallowed up. You've been swallowed up. You've been engulfed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You can say with the great American spiritual, what have I to dread? What have I to fear? Leaning on the everlasting arms.

Last thing. In John chapter 11, Jesus stands before the tomb, the face of death, and he weeps. He weeps. In Revelation chapter 21, Jesus Christ, the resurrected king of glory, he gets down on the knee and he wipes away tears.

And this Christmas, if you're in the midst of grief and sorry, you've got to let yourself contemplate that moment, the intimacy of that moment. You know how intimate it is in a relationship, how serious a relationship has gotten?

Very serious relationship when you can wipe away somebody's tears. But you've got to contemplate that, that Jesus Christ one day is going to get down on the knee and wick your tears away and say, grief be gone, no more.

[39 : 13] And it's no coincidence that here in John's gospel, the very first miracle that Jesus performs is that he goes to a wedding feast and he takes a party that was totally dead because the wine had run out.

And he refills all the wine and he turns a dead party into a great wedding banquet. And the very last miracle that Jesus performs before he goes to his cross is he goes to a dead man's tomb and he takes a funeral and he turns it into a feast.

And in his own death, in his own cross, Jesus Christ enters into the belly of death. He lets it swallow him so that from the inside he can cut it open.

He goes down into the midst of death to stab the belly of death from the inside and come out. He turns a funeral into a feast. John chapter 11 says there is a funeral.

He cries with you. Revelation chapter 21 says he will, he has turned the funeral into a feast. He will wipe your tears away.

[40 : 24] And so today, friend, this Christmas, you do not grieve. You do not grieve as a person who does not have hope. Let us pray. Father, we ask that you would give us great hope in Easter as we celebrate Christmas.

And so we look to the power of resurrection this morning and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.