

I am the Resurrection and the Life

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Preacher: Tom Muir

[0 : 0 0] And good morning. It's good to be with you. It's good to see some friends and old faces. Many of you don't know me, but I live just south of Edinburgh. It's not too far away in a land called Midlothian where we've been planning a church for a few years now. So I'd like to look with you today at the passage that Corrie just read. And as we just get into it, this is John chapter 11, I'm picking up on the pastoral prayer that Corrie just prayed is so pertinent, isn't it? So many of the things that he prayed for touch our hearts because they're in our hearts. They bother us, or they have bothered us, or we're bothered that they will bother us, things that trouble us.

And I say that because I'm going to be thinking about life and the kind of life we experience. People talk about quality of life. How's your quality of life? Maybe something in the prayer that Corrie was praying made you feel like quality of life right now isn't very good.

Could be better. And you know, for all of us, that's different. Sometimes it can be something really sharp. Somebody's really sick. Quality of life feels at the forefront of our minds.

Sometimes we might look at other people and think, well, they're fine. All they're worried about is getting a six pack or whatever. That's what they think will make their quality of life better. Well, maybe it will. But we all experience quality of life at different times and in different kinds of ways.

Now, I say all of this because what we're going to be thinking about today in the passage is a kind of life that you get when you follow Jesus that is like nothing else. Because the passage today is about a man called Lazarus and about the fact that he was raised back to life from death, quite literally. So I don't know if you're not familiar, if you've never heard this story before, that may raise an eyebrow with you. And that's good because it's unusual. It raised an eyebrow when it happened. Stay with me and let's explore a little bit more about resurrection life. In the story of Lazarus, according to the claim of Jesus, and I want us all to be able to say, and in our life, how does that touch you, this promise of resurrection life? And is it just something that is slightly obscure and maybe for the future and doesn't really have anything to do with your now and certainly not your quality of life right now?

Well, hold those thoughts and we're going to think about this. Well, let me say a couple more things just by way of introducing this theme. Because like I said, we're looking at a man in history and a story and a theme, an essential biblical theme that comes out of the Bible.

[2 : 4 7] I'm not going to shy away. The Bible doesn't shy away from what you might think, the strangeness of this claim. In 1 Corinthians, the apostle Paul knew fine well how central this was. He said these words, if Christ is not raised, our preaching and your faith is futile. So Paul's writing to an early church in the city of Corinth and he goes so far as to say, resurrection and all that it means is so much of the heart of what it means to be a Christian that if it didn't happen, then this is pointless. So that means it's quite important, isn't it? That means that though many people today would raise an eyebrow or more and you might as well, if you're new to Christianity, if you're exploring, then this is definitely something you want to say, I need to know more about this.

Absolutely. Because it really is quite a claim, isn't it? But we don't shy away from having it at the heart of our experience of following Jesus, our belief and our experience of following Jesus.

And I want to go on and say one more thing, again, just by way of introduction. Some people might say when they come to John's Gospel and to this story, we're not really sure if John meant this as an actual story of resurrection. It was a bit of a story that Jesus told. It's maybe a kind of elaboration on a parable and maybe understandably, but maybe for different reasons, people want to hush down the significance of what happens here. But I want to remind you or show you, if you don't know, that in John chapter one, at the start of the Gospel that we're going to be focusing on here, John is really bothered about history. He says in John chapter one, all about the Word, which is a way of talking about Jesus. It's a way of speaking about Jesus as the Son of God, the wisdom of

God who came into the world to be the Redeemer, the different names for Jesus, but John uses the Word. But he says, very particularly in verse 14 of chapter one, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. So John wants us to know this is about stuff that happened in God's plan for this world, which is tangible, and we experience it. And he wants to say that so is to help deal with the stuff that we experience. And not just the quality of life that's about how's your Monday or your Tuesday, but how's our eternal life and our soul in the context of our life before our maker, Jesus came into this world to do something about that. And this is all a part of that big story. And so John would say, Jesus came into the world, incarnation, Jesus died and was bodily raised again. Absolutely. It's a pillar of what we believe as Christians. And it's a pillar,

I say again, of what we experience. Now, I'll get on to why I say experience a bit later. If by the end of this next 20 odd minutes, you've still got lots of questions, then you're in a good place. If you're a visitor, if you're a friend, and you've got questions that are people here, there's a minister here, there are resources out there that can help you process this whole question a little bit more. But now what I'd like us to do is just getting to the story and spend a bit of time seeing how here we find the story of Lazarus, the claim of Jesus, and your story too.

So the story of Lazarus, what I'd like to do is move quite quickly through most of what Corey read and then slow down to look at a couple of verses in particular, because Jesus makes, as Corey said, a claim, one of the I am claims that are really quite spectacular. So we're going to take, as one of my favorite pieces of music is called, we're going to take a short ride in a fast machine through a section of this story. Let me pick out with you some of the key things Jesus says that give us a sense of what's going on here. And I'm going to pick out the things that Jesus says that are startling. Some of them you might even think a bit shocking, the way he speaks about the events that are happening. Here's the first one, verse four. I'll read from verse three.

[7:16] The sisters sent to him, Miriam, Martha, saying, Lord, he whom you love is ill. This is Lazarus. So we're at the start of the news breaking. Something's not right. In Lazarus' life, his quality of life isn't so good. 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, have you ever heard somebody say that when they hear the news of a dearly beloved God being very sick? I've never heard somebody say that before. I'm not going to say a lot about it just now. I just want you to remember what Jesus said there. This illness will not lead to death.

The next statement is just in the next verse. So let me read on into verse five here. Now, Jesus loved Martha and her sister in Lazarus. So, it's not an interesting word.

We've just heard about the news of Lazarus' illness. We've heard Jesus' opening, remarkable statement about what's going to or not going to happen. And then it says, so, because he loved them, so, when he'd heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Now, Jesus in John's gospel is presented as the one who does things that nobody else can do. This is one of the miracles. We've been looking at the miracles in the church that I'm a part of over the summer. When people were sick and ill and Jesus was in the vicinity, he healed them. And here in the news that Lazarus is very sick, he decides, wrapped up in the fact that he loves these people to stay where he is for two more days. He delays his response. That's remarkable as well. Timing is important in this passage.

Third verse, I'd like you to move down, so this is our quick survey of what happens in this story, to verse 14. Here we find a little bit of time has passed, and Jesus breaks some news to the disciples. And so he says, in verse 14, Jesus told them plainly, Lazarus has died, and for your sake, I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe, but let us now go to him. Again, another amazing thing, quite a startling thing, a callous thing that Jesus says. Where is he coming from? Doesn't he care? Sometimes you and I, maybe in your experience of searching for God or being a follower of God, wonder about the timing of God, the events that have happened in your life, things that are difficult to deal with, and you think if only God had intervened earlier.

[10:06] Well, again, Jesus has delayed, and Jesus here says, I'm glad I wasn't there, and he seems to indicate that good will come from this, in terms of their hearts and their faith in Jesus.

Okay, now one more as we move rapidly through this story. As they move into town and they go to the place where this has happened, Jesus is confronted by Martha. Martha and Mary are at the heart of this story. And this is important because all that's happening here isn't like Jesus' treatise on the theory of life after death written in some document left somewhere. This is a story about Jesus walking into town and meeting a woman who's bereaved. She's desperately sad, and Jesus

speaks to her. What does he say? I'll read from verse 21, but it's verse 23 I want to point out. Martha said to Jesus, Lord, if you'd been here, my brother would not have died. How does that sound? Some people think that's accusatory. I'm not sure. It might just be a statement of faith. She believes that if Jesus had been here, he would have healed Lazarus.

Anyway, even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you. And Jesus said to her, your brother will rise again. Another amazing thing that Jesus says to somebody else, think about how would that sound to somebody who's just lost their beloved? Now, Martha's response, again, if you're new to the story, you might be surprised by her response. She doesn't say, what? Somebody says to you, you've just lost your loved one. We'll see them again. What?

But Martha says, verse 24, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day. So you've got to put yourself to a degree inside the minds of the context here of the people who live the way they thought about life, quality of life, eternal life. Because there was a belief among some, not all, Jews that there was a future resurrection that was to come governed by their God.

[12:16] So what Jesus is saying here fits to some degree within the framework of Martha's belief system. It surprises us. To some extent, it may have been surprising in its immediacy to Martha here, but Martha can kind of handle it because it fits within her worldview, her religious worldview, her way of understanding the world. Thus far, the short ride in a fast machine as we've moved quickly through the story of Lazarus. And what I wanted you to say was the way in which Jesus seems to be dealing with something that we would be all at sea with. We have no control over events like this. Jesus is in the story, and yet he seems to be directing it, doesn't he? He slows down time.

He remains where he could have dashed immediately. He speaks of what is to come in a way that would be way outside of our ability to say anything. And so just to kind of pull together this section and what we're saying about Lazarus here, here we meet in John's Gospel. And John is very, very deliberate about this. Somebody who is like nobody else. You meet somebody in John's Gospel who has come into the world, remember, the Word of God and who does behave in a way that is startling to us, and maybe even jars, because he deals with life in a way that has an authority, a control that is outside of our grasp, and that we need to look up to in a sense, because John is signposting here the person of Jesus, the capacity of Jesus, and all that he is and is able to do. So, so much for the story of Lazarus. There's more to wonder about and points we could have made, but I want to move on now and look at the second point, and that is the claim of Jesus. And to do this, I want, as I said, to just slow down a bit and look at two verses in particular. So, Jesus says, if you move down with me to verse 25, well, let's just remember what Martha has just said to him. Remember, Martha has said, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day, and Jesus says, I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. And everyone who lives and believe in me shall never die.

Do you believe this? So, a big claim of Jesus. Let's take a bit of time to look at what it means, and what we can understand. Jesus is trying to help Martha see about life here.

Jesus, first of all, says, I am. Now, Martha has an idea, an understanding of a future resurrection that is to come. There is a degree of afterlife. Now, we could say you don't have to be a Christian today to have some kind of idea in afterlife. Different religions have different kinds of ideas about afterlife. People, we would say they have no religion, but are maybe spiritual, have a sense of the soul going to somewhere, a good place to be. Martha's was more defined, a resurrection, a time to come governed by God. And what Jesus wants to say immediately is to take that from just being some thing that is like a belief that is future and say, you will understand that and you will get access to that in me. He says that about so many other things. You know, I am the bread of life. He's saying he is the one who fulfills us. He is the one who can give us something that nowhere else or nobody else can give us. He says that in an ancient age and he says that to our modern age as well, I am the resurrection and the life. Now, I was reading an article a little while ago about how people apparently over claim on applications now in all kinds of ways. It's maybe getting easier to apply for a job and to exaggerate experience or qualifications so as to get ahead. Understandable. It's a competitive world out there, isn't it? And people want to be able to say, yes, I can do this job. Give me this job. I will do this job and I will be excellent at this job. Though if they were being 100% honest, they would have to say that they didn't have the experience. They had never done the thing that they were being asked to do before and they weren't really sure if they'd be able to. Now, maybe that gives them a bit of a buzz. Maybe you could put yourself in that position and think, yeah,

if I really thought I could do a job, I would just go for it. But surely also, it's the most terrifying thing in the world when you get the job and somebody on the first day says to you to do something that you've never done before and you actually know deep in your heart you've got no qualifications for. Am I going to be able to do this thing that I claimed? You can't get away from the fact that everywhere Jesus goes, he says things about himself that are always the biggest claim in the room. Nobody else could get away with saying the things that Jesus says. Jesus says to Martha in the middle of her grief, Jesus says to you faced with your quality of life, however it is today.

[17 : 50] I am the resurrection and the life. In other words, if you're looking for a life beyond the life you have now, however you conceive that today, however you understand the best quality of life you could possibly have and whatever might be life beyond this life, which would just be amazing, Jesus says to all cultures and to all peoples, to all the peoples mixed in the room today, come to me.

You'll find what you're looking for in me. That's the first claim. Second thing he says is I am specifically the resurrection. And so all of this talk about not just an ethereal life to come, because again, a lot of people's understanding of life after death, even in the Christian sphere, is of some disembodied bliss state. Jesus wants to say I am the resurrection. I am the coming back to life of that which was dead. I am that. And he says that because he knows what's going to happen. We didn't read the whole story, but go home and read it. Please go home if you've got time this afternoon. Read the rest of John chapter 11. Lazarus will see, you'll see if you read it, who had been dead four days. And that's important because again, within the context, there was some kind of an idea that the soul may remain for around three days and potentially be reunited with the body. But no, four days, so that couldn't have been the case.

Lazarus was definitely dead. Jesus, by the power of his word, calls Lazarus from the grave, calls this decomposing body. This doesn't happen. It's not normal. The Bible doesn't shy away from that. Jesus does this by the power of his word. And as is so often the case with the miracles, and I want to use this word again, and is definitely so often the case with John's gospel, John wants us to see the miracles that Jesus do as signposts. He's saying, look at what Jesus can do. This is supposed to take you to something else in Jesus and show you more about who he is. Because of course, the miracle here, as Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, will shortly be fulfilled in Jesus himself, because he's to be put to death, though innocent, though having done nothing wrong.

[20 : 10] And after he's put to death on the third day, Jesus himself, again by the power of God, is raised to life eternal. The Bible talks about that in a different image. You might have heard it.

It talks about him being the first fruits of what we can expect. In other words, Jesus was raised again, not quite in the same way Lazarus was in the story here, because Lazarus is raised back to life for a time. He would die again. But when Jesus is raised to life, it is life eternal. He will never die and ascended to heaven. Now he lives, and he will always live. And so we learn here again something of what is going to happen of Lazarus, something of what is going to happen of Jesus. And when you take that image of the first fruits, in other words, when a person who knows what they're talking about looks at the early crop on a fruit tree, they can tell there's good stuff coming. We're supposed to look at Jesus' resurrection, the first fruits of the blessing of a new kind of life, eternal life in him that all who put their faith in him may have.

There is great to have in Jesus when you put your faith in him. So we're seeing in this little verse here, in a nutshell, if you like, this great explosion of truth that has such significance for human beings and is all wrapped up in that big picture I was talking about earlier, the reason why Jesus, the Word, became flesh, came into the world, died on the cross to pay for the sins of those who trust in him. And being raised to life himself, displaying the vindication of the fact that he was not guilty but died for our sins, now offers to all who put their faith in him resurrection, life. This is an amazing truth. And so we see this again in the passage in verse 25.

I'll just take you back to the text that I want us to focus in on a little bit. Jesus goes on to say, I'm the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me though he die yet shall he live. He says that to you this morning. He says, as though he, whoever believes in me though he die yet shall he live. He knows that like Lazarus, you still face death in this life. That might be something immediate right now because of your worry about quality of life. But he says you will live. That's a promise Jesus makes. And seen here in this raising of Lazarus is the signpost pointing forward to the capacity he has to give eternal life to all those who live in him. It's a remarkable hope. But he said, I am, he's talked about resurrection and I want now to focus on the word life that he uses here.

I am the resurrection and the life because not only do you have to kind of endure the here and now, I mean, you might live a great life. I hope you do. You might live a really troubled life.

[23 : 29] We all live trouble at different times. And when we have that, we do have the hope of eternal life. It is a blessing and you need to remember it if life is tough, that in Christ you have the promised hope of eternal life. But is that all? You just kind of wait. One day things will get better.

One day I'll be in a better place. I don't think so because look at the detail of what Jesus here says. Again, I'll read verse 25. I'm the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die yet shall he live. And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Hang on a minute, you say, maybe. You've just said, though we die yet shall we live. And you're saying, whoever lives in me will never die. So which is it? And the answer is both. We will die and we will rise again to eternal life. But your experience of eternal life, if your faith is in Jesus, begins now. You can live knowing that Jesus has conquered death. Doesn't that change your outlook on life? There is one who had the power to not only face the cross, lay down his life, though innocent, so as to pay for sin. But there is one who was raised, who broke through the terror of death, the uncertainty, the powerlessness that we face. And he has lived through that, and he now lives in glory in heaven. Hallelujah. Praise God that there is somebody who has done this. And so you live now with the knowledge of that. But you also now live with the knowledge that death for you, wherever or however it comes, is a moment, and I'm not trivializing death here, is a moment between your physical life now and your continued life with him in heaven until the day he comes again, until the day he raises the living and the dead and on into eternal life. And what that means is when we start to wrap this together, and we start to put ourselves in the place of Martha, who's asked a really pertinent question at the end, and I want to close with this. We are asked to consider the quality of life relates not just to how well we're doing in the here and now, but whether or not you, with Martha, believe in this Jesus who promises you eternal life. Live with the promise of eternal life. Get up on your Monday morning when it's raining and you're sad and you've got a terrible day and your boss is going to give you grief. Oh, you're the boss and you've got some really difficult decisions to make. Or your loved one has only got a few days. All the things that we face. And you know that Jesus has done what nobody else can do, and he wants you to trust him in that today and live in the knowledge of life eternal. Jesus says in John 10, 10, I have come that they may have life unto the full. What's he talking about? Followers of Jesus are super successful, brilliant people. We know that's not what he means. That's not our experience of life.

But life to the full means not just the knowledge of what he will do in raising us to life again, but it's life with him now. He comes close to you. He comes close by his Holy Spirit and he counsels you as to what he's achieved and what he's done. He tells you that he's with you now and you'll always be with him. And not only is that something that he's just done for you because it was a job given to him, but it's his delight. And it's what he wants to do because he wants to take you in your finiteness as a human being. I mean, you might be a genius, but you're still finite. You're still contingent on lots of different things.

And he wants to live with you. He wants you to trust him. And he wants to give you this gift of eternal life. And so he says, do you believe this to Martha? What a question.

[27 : 52] Do you believe this? Right after her loved brother had died. And so he asks us today, do we believe this? We think in all kinds of different ways about the quality of life and what will make it better. You might have a plan to do things to have a better life. It might involve going for a new job. It might involve getting a new fitness app on your phone. All good.

But I do want to ask you today whether you'll go away with the question that was asked of Martha and how you answer that question. Because that question is one of the single most important questions you can ask yourself. And it has one of the most profound impacts for your life, not just in eternity, but right now. Do you believe this? Do you believe that Jesus is the resurrection in the life? And is that something that you pull into your life, call to mind, believe again and again the truths of Jesus and remember that He lives with you by His Spirit to tell you this and remind you of this over and over again. I hope so. And by God's grace, we will continue to remember this. Let me pray and ask Him to help us remember this and help us to trust Him and then we'll sing. One of the biggest problems we have, Lord, in life is we worry about big things, but we're often so busy thrown around by the chaos of demands on us or distractions in a very cluttered modern world. So right now, we want to pray that you would clear space in our hearts and minds to receive your truth and to hear the testimony by the Holy Spirit of who Jesus is.

Help us to trust in this great truth and may it make a difference in our life. Amen.