

Death is not the end * John 11

Easter Sunday * April 12, 2020 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

The other day, I logged on to Twitter and found this message waiting for me – “My dad died early this morning from COVID-19. Heartbroken.”

It was no one that I knew – it just popped up in my newsfeed – but it captures I think the scary reality of COVID-19. People are dying because of it. WE could die from it. I know that some of you have already brushed up against it; you’ve lost loved ones that you talked to just weeks before. As a culture, we are more aware of death I think than we’ve been in a long time.

So where’s the hope in the face of this? People are working together and doing kind things for one another and that’s great! But coronavirus can swoop in and steal your loved ones away; cancer’s still out there and trying to retake its spot as the big killer C, and even if we avoid disease, well, what do they say about death and taxes? Where’s the hope?

The hope is in the empty tomb.

The hope is in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Death is not the end because Jesus rose again.

He died a sacrificial death to make us right with God; then He rose again to life to defeat the powers of death. He rose again, victorious over death.

And because Jesus rose again, so too shall we as we trust in Him. We have the hope – the certainty – of resurrection as we trust in Him.

Let me take you to the Gospel of John to show you why I say that and we’re actually going to look at a passage we’ve seen before. John 11 tells us about friends of Jesus – Mary and Martha and Lazarus – and in John 11, Lazarus has just died. When Jesus arrives, Martha goes out to see Him and says –

21 Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

You can hear the pain in her voice, can’t you? ‘Why, Lord, did you let this happen? If you had been here, my brother would still be alive.’ And notice, Jesus doesn’t scold her for bringing her honest disappointment to God; He weeps with her. If you ever find yourself in Martha’s shoes, just know that God can handle tough questions – He is sovereign and He is powerful but He is also compassionate and merciful. He knows pain, He knows loss – so take those feelings to Him and let Him handle them in His merciful hands.

21 "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

22 But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

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

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

(Joh 11:21-24 NIV).

Martha's a good theologian – she knows that this world is not all there is – (and by the way, if anybody ever says 'don't be a Martha' like 'don't be a busybody,' they've got a point, but this is something you SHOULD do – 'BE a Martha – know the promises of God!')

24 Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life.

Martha I think is still thinking about the resurrection in abstract terms but Jesus says *I* am the Resurrection and the Life. If you know ME, then death is not the end and you WILL live again. And He continues -

He who believes in me will live, even though he dies;

26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (Joh 11:25-26 NIV).

God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son so that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life – well, this is how it works – the people who die believing in Jesus will live again and those who live and trust in Him will never truly die. That's the hope of eternal life!

And then Jesus asks the million dollar question – Do you believe this? Do you believe that I truly am the Resurrection and the Life? That He came from God to triumph over death and rescue souls for all eternity?

Martha replied 'Yes!'

27 "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." (Joh 11:27 NIV).

Again, excellent theologian.

But what about you? Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, sent into the world to save sinners and give life? Do you KNOW Jesus, the resurrection and the life?

If so, then you will be there at the resurrection. You will never truly die and the end of this life is the not the end; just like Jesus, so too will you rise again.

And we know that because Jesus followed through, didn't He? He didn't just say 'Martha, do you believe in Me? Well just have faith and 'don't stop believing.' No, He wasn't just full of hot air and we know that because He went on and raised Lazarus back to life. And then Jesus Himself died and came back to life so that death no longer has authority over us. Jesus rose again from the grave and so to shall we when we trust in Him.

So let's think about this in the face of COVID-19 – even if you die, believing in Jesus, your life is not over. Death is not the end, because Jesus rose again! He rose to life again and you will too. There will come a day when mourning and grief are no more and we will live with Christ in glorified, perfect bodies that never get tired and never get sick. I've been reading this little book called "Cancer and Theology" (Jake Bouma and Erik Ullestad) and in it, they write "Resurrection stands up against the tide of suffering and

death, it proclaims hope over despair and it tells us that whatever happens to us, thanks be to God, even the end of things is not really the end..." (Greg Garrett, 39).

Let that spur you on as you walk through this life. There will be pain, there will be sorrow, there will be death; but that death is not the end. Death could not keep Jesus down and it has no grip on you either. Let your heart be filled with hope as you trust in Him, knowing that we too shall rise again.