

The Resurrected Saviour * John 11 and John 20
March 31, 2024 * Easter Sunday * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

I want to try something a little different with you this morning.

I want to look with you at the account of Jesus' Resurrection in John's Gospel, but I want to look at Jesus' death and resurrection through the lens of Lazarus' death and resurrection.

Jesus had a friend named Lazarus and a couple of months before Jesus died and rose again, Lazarus died and Jesus went to him and raised him to life again.

We're going to look at those two passages side-by-side today and when we do, I think we see two very important things: 1. The unique circumstances of Jesus' resurrection and 2. The real, living hope that we can have because Jesus died and rose again.

Ultimately, I want you to go away today with an unshakeable confidence in the hope of resurrection all because of what happened that first Easter Sunday.ⁱ

So turn with me to John 11, we'll look first at Lazarus' story. John 11, starting around verse 21.

For the sake of time, I'm going to paraphrase a lot of Lazarus' story. Jesus had a friend named Lazarus; Lazarus lived with his sisters, Mary and Martha, and one day Lazarus got sick. Really sick. The sisters sent word to Jesus to come (and to hurry) but Jesus knew that death was not the end for Lazarus. And so He stayed where He was a few more days before He made His way to Bethany.

By the time Jesus arrived, Lazarus had already died. In fact, he had been in the tomb for four days (17). When Martha heard that Jesus was on His way, she left her sister at home and went out to meet Him. Let's pick it up at verse 21:

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

Now this is a powerful statement. On one hand, it implies utter faith in the power of Jesus. 'If You had been here, You could have prevented this.' She is implicitly expressing her belief that Jesus could very well have healed her brother. On the other hand though, she is honestly mourning the fact that Jesus DIDN'T use that power to help her brother. 'If you **had** been here, my brother would not have died.'

This makes Martha a model for faithful prayer for anyone who is hurting and alone. Martha shows us that it's ok to pray honestly when we're feeling broken and let down. She shows us that God can handle our honest lament, when it comes from a place of ultimate confidence that God CAN do something about it. And we see that I think reflected in the next thing Martha says – verse 22 -

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

I can guess what she's hinting at here – 'I know that God will give you whatever you ask so go ask God to bring my brother back!' Jesus, I think, realizes that that's what she's getting at and so He says – verse 23 -

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

Jesus knows what He's going to do and He knows that He's going to do it sooner than later, but Martha doesn't know that and so she says:

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

Once again, Martha demonstrates that her faith is firmly rooted; even if Lazarus stays dead now, she is confident that she will see him again - when God raises people to life at the end-time resurrection that many Jewish people believed in. 'God will raise him up, I will see him then;' Jesus though wasn't going to make her wait that long and so He says:

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.

Jesus is making a profound statement here: not only does He enable resurrection, and not only does He give life, He IS the resurrection and He is the life. He is power over death and power for real life and so when people rely on Him, they live, even if they die.

Christopher Nolan's *Oppenheimer* film has pulled Oppenheimer back into the cultural zeitgeist; the mastermind behind the atomic bomb once quoted Hindu Scripture to say 'I am become Death.'

Why would he say that? Why not 'my bomb has killed people?' I think it's because he realized that for that time at least, his work, his life, his energy was poured into something that would cause unfathomable death. He didn't go around killing people but he became death in that he unleashed profound dying on the world.

Jesus on the other hand is saying the exact opposite. "I am the Resurrection and I am the life. I am in My very essence power over death and power for true life. When you believe in Me, I unleash LIFE in your life. When you believe in Me, the Resurrection and the Life, you have power to live, even if you die, and if you live believing in Me, you will never truly die."ⁱⁱ

I want to spend more time with those verses when we think about Jesus' resurrection, so put them on the back burner for a minute and let's finish Lazarus' story, verse 25:

Jesus says 'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me will live, even though they die and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?' That's a question that we all need to answer.

Martha does and so she says:

27 "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world" (John 11:20-27 NIV).

In short, she's saying 'Yes, I believe in You. And not only do I believe in You, I am confident that You are the Messiah that God has sent into the world to deliver from our enemies, with Death being Public Enemy Number One.'

Martha gets a bad rap I think – we often think of her as the busy-body sister who didn't know when to chill out and listen to Jesus, but here, she understands who Jesus is better than the disciples do. She knows who Jesus is and puts her faith in Him – gold star for Martha.

With that, Martha went to find her sister Mary and Mary came to Jesus and fell at His feet and said the very same thing that Martha did. Verse 32 –

"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

You can hear the sorrow and disappointment in her voice and actions – sorrow and disappointment rooted in real faith that Jesus COULD have done something/could do something about it.

33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. [And what did He do?].

35 Jesus wept.

The shortest verse in the English Bible but one of the most profound. The Sovereign Son of God stared into the face of death... and wept. He didn't stuff His feelings; He didn't say 'cheer up chum, don't you know God will fix this?' He felt the pain of loss that death brings for Himself and He wept. When you lose a loved one, know that you are not alone. Jesus is with you and He weeps with you.

But the most amazing thing is that Jesus doesn't just weep. He does something about it.

38 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. [Does that sound familiar?]

39 "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha [ever practical Martha]... "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days."

40 Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"

41 So **they** took away the stone.

Then Jesus looked up to Heaven and said, 'Father I thank You for hearing Me. I know that You always do and so I am praying for the benefit of the people here so that they will understand that YOU are at work' and then He called in a loud voice: 'Lazarus, come out.'ⁱⁱⁱ

44 The dead man came out... I think that John has written that that way to drive home the point. The DEAD MAN walked out of his tomb. To quote Pinky Dinky Do, 'that's not something you see every day.' Something phenomenal has happened here. A dead man has returned to life. No, better, the Resurrection and the Life has shared that life to resurrect His friend.

But notice how the dead man came out -

44... his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

There is something almost incomplete about this resurrection. Death could not hold him and yet the grave clothes could. I remember once going to a church where the pastor preached on this and came out all wrapped in a big bed sheet and had to stumble around and wiggle as he Harry Houdini'd his way out of it. Lazarus was resurrected but he was helpless coming out of it. He was resurrected but he would die again someday. Keep that in mind as we jump ahead to Jesus' resurrection. Chapter 20, verse 1.

Just to set the stage, on Good Friday, Jesus was crucified. He died on a Cross and because it was about to be a holy day, His followers quickly prepared His body and laid it in an unused tomb.

NIV John 20:1 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.

A couple of similarities right off the bat – women are at the heart of both of these stories – Jesus is sympathetic to the plight of Mary and Martha and another woman named Mary is the first one to recognize that Jesus is alive. That's one similarity; two, there's a stone blocking the entrance of both tombs. With Lazarus' though, living people on the outside had to push it away; here, the stone's already been supernaturally shoved aside.

2 So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

3 So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb.

And they have this little footrace – so if you've ever wondered who was faster, Peter or John, the answer is John – John got there first and looked in but then Peter got there and burst right into the tomb and they both saw the linen lying there and the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head, folded up, apart from the linen.

Again, similarities – Jesus and Lazarus were both buried the same way. They both had burial clothes wrapped around their head to keep their mouths closed. They were both wrapped in expensive linen, folded into the middle of one big sheet then further wrapped. As they were wrapped, their loved ones would have put myrrh and spices in with them. They were both laid into a rock cut tomb with a stone rolled across the entrance. I think it's fascinating to see just how much agreement there is in these two accounts. This is just how their culture 'did' burial and these burials 100% reflect that culture.

But there are differences too and the differences in Jesus' resurrection make this all the more striking.

For one, the stone's already gone. The angels moved it. For two, the linens are already gone. Lazarus came probably hopping out of the tomb and needed help to get free, but not Jesus. There's actually a good argument to be made that those linens were left exactly where they were as Jesus was lying there and Jesus in His glorified body simply passed through them the way He would pass through walls later in this chapter. And then there's the face cloth; it's neatly folded at the head of the bier. The resurrected Jesus didn't need anyone to set Him free; God raised Him to life and out He went. He raised Him to life into a glorified body that would never die again. The Resurrection and the Life was resurrected and alive! The disciples believed it; Mary saw Him for herself.

And let's not sleep on that. We say 'He is risen! He is risen indeed!' but I don't know if that knocks our socks off the way it should.

Think about what you're saying when you say that – 'He is risen.' He, the Son of God, by whom and for whom all things were made laid down His life for me and for you; He died in our place, literally, sacrificially, gruesomely. He was dead, lifeless, gone.

But then God raised Him to life again into a body that will never die, so that we can say not just 'He WAS risen' but 'He IS risen.' The Crucified Saviour is risen and alive!

Let's go back to the beginning; I said off the top that we'd look at the unique circumstances of Jesus' resurrection and the hope that we have because of it. We've seen the unique circumstances; now let's think about the real, living hope that we can have because Jesus died and rose again. Let's go back to the Lazarus account and look specifically at verses 23-26:

Jesus says to Martha:

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."

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

Let's think about this in light of Jesus' resurrection that first Easter morning. Jesus says three very important things here – one statement and two implications.

One, the statement, we've already talked about. Jesus IS the Resurrection and the Life. The fact that HE died as a sacrifice to reconcile us to God and then rose again to life gives US hope for our own resurrection into our eternal life. If the Resurrection and the Life was not alive, we wouldn't have much hope in the face of death, would we? He is though and so we do. Because Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life, we are confident that death is not the end. And that confidence is expressed in two implications:

Implication one – Because Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life, anyone who believes in Him will live, even if they die and two – Because Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life, anyone who lives and believes in Him will never truly die.

Let's just take those one at a time.

Because Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life, anyone who believes in Him will live, even if they die.

This is the great hope that we have when we are laying a loved one to rest. This is the hope that I want to express every time I conduct a funeral. If this person has died believing in Jesus, they will live again. Forever.

Jesus has shown us by His own resurrection that Death has no power over Him and so Death has no power over His people either. Even if a loved one dies, if they have died believing in Him, they will live. There will be a day when just like Lazarus our departed loves ones will hear Jesus say 'Rise' and they will live.

So, anyone who dies believing in Jesus will live and anyone who lives believing in Jesus, who has not yet died, will never truly die.

This is especially relevant for us. If we are alive and trusting in Jesus, then we will never truly die. Our vital signs in this life may stop but that doesn't mean that life is over; it simply means that we have entered into our eternal life.

And it doesn't mean that we have entered into our eternal life as some kind of disembodied, spirit floating on clouds and eating cream cheese; the eternal life that Jesus lays before us is lived in glorified bodies like the one Jesus had when He rose to life in the tomb. It's like 1 Corinthians 15:42-43 says:

~~42 So will it be with the resurrection of the dead.~~ The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; 43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;

44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body (1Co 15:42-44 NIV).

The one who believes in Jesus will live even if they die and the one who lives and believes will never truly die because Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life.

Which makes Jesus' question to Martha an important question for us: do you believe that? Do you hold tightly to it and draw hope from it and build your life upon it?

And notice here that Jesus is not asking us to believe in resurrection as a theory or eternal life as a concept. Our hope is not in the intangible idea of 'resurrection' but in the Person who IS the Resurrection and the Life, who HAS BEEN resurrected who IS alive!

Believe in the Resurrected Saviour and live for the day when He says 'Rise!'

That's your take home for today. Believe in the Resurrected Saviour and live for the day when He says 'Rise!'

When Jesus went to the Cross on Good Friday, He carried my sin to the Cross, He carried your sin to the Cross, He took our place on the Cross and He died to save us. That makes Him 'Saviour' and for that alone He is worth trusting.

Easter Sunday though, Jesus rose again, into a glorified body, giving us a glimpse of what awaits us when we trust in Him. Anyone who believes in Him and dies will live and those who live and believe in Him will never truly die; if that's the case, the response is obvious: Believe in Him, the Resurrected Saviour.

There may come a day when I am conducting your funeral and I read John 11:26 and say 'whoever believes in Me will live, even though they die. Do you believe this?' I want to be able to say, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that 'Yes, this person believed in Jesus and so I am absolutely confident that just as Jesus was raised to life, they too will be raised to life.' So believe in the Resurrected Saviour...

But don't just believe in the Resurrected Saviour, live for the day when He says 'Rise!' Live with the conviction that if you are still living when Jesus returns, you will be transformed to be like Him and if you have died, you will be raised to life again to be like Him.

Take that certainty with you to the hospice, to the funeral home, to the cemetery, knowing that there will come a day when the resurrected Saviour will say 'RISE.' Draw hope from that reality. Be confident in that reality.

I'm not telling you to not be sad – we've already seen that Jesus wept in the face of loss – but know that because of what Jesus did, this is not the end. For the believer, death is simply a passage into something that is better by far. Let that give you confidence in the face of death...

And let it motivate you in all your life. Really live for the day that Jesus says 'Rise.' Fix your eyes on eternity and let it shape how you live now. Jesus – the Resurrection and the Life incarnate - calls you to walk with Him and to live a resurrected life every day.

In a very real sense, if you are a believer, the old is gone, the new has come and we are living in the new reality that understands that Jesus will bring us back in glorified bodies forever. Let your life reflect that reality. Let yourself bear fruit in keeping with that reality. Live with the kind of love and confidence and generosity that comes from knowing that you are eternally secure.

Believe in the Resurrected Saviour and live for the day when He says 'Rise!'

ⁱ ALT INTRO Have you ever gone to a restaurant where the kids' menu has two pictures side by side where some of the details have been changed on one and not the other? The fun part is to go through and find all the things that are different and unique about one picture relative to the other. (I'm pretty good at that so if you're ever in a pinch, FaceTime me or something and I'll help you out ;)

That's what we're going to do today, but with Scriptures, not pictures. We're going to look at two passages of Scripture to see how they're similar and how they're different – the account of Lazarus's resurrection in John 11 and the account of Jesus' resurrection in John 20.

ⁱⁱ Gary Burge puts it like this: "...Eternal life and rescue from the finality of death are not merely gifts obtained by appeal to God, they are aspects of what it means to live a life in association with Jesus. If Jesus is life, then those who believe in Him will enjoy the [same] confidence and power over death [that He has]" Burge, John, NIVAC, 317.

ⁱⁱⁱ *"41 Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."*