

The Resurrection and the Life

John 11:1-44

Happy Resurrection day!

I have chosen **John 11:1-44** as our text for this morning's Easter message. While perhaps not a typical Easter passage, it none the less has far reaching implications for us today.

Whether the story is familiar or not, let us consider its correlation with Easter and the resurrection.

Verses 1-3

It could have been anyone who was sick and it could have been in any town. You could put your name and town in there.

Now a man named Rich was sick. He was from Howell.

Now a woman named Mary was sick. She was from Fenton.

Now a man named Ken was sick. He was from Brighton.

Now a woman named Heather was sick. She was from Hartland.

Now a man named Jerry was sick. He was from Flint.

It could have been any one of us from any town at any time, but here in the time of Jesus there was a man named Lazarus from Bethany who was sick.

We all have a sickness. Oh, I'm not talking about communicable diseases like colds or the flu or the mumps or other illnesses like cancer or coronary or muscular diseases. The kind of sickness we have can't be cured by medicine or rest or visiting the doctor. It's a sickness that doesn't even show up on the disease charts with the Center for Disease Control. I'm sure they wouldn't even recognize it. Yet it's a sickness that has been passed on from one generation to the next. It's not seen by x-rays or MRIs or CT scans or ultrasounds. Although it has symptoms, it doesn't show itself through coughing

or sneezing or swelling or shortness of breath or visible rashes or aches and pains, yet it is fatal.

Many people walk around with visible symptoms but don't know they have this sickness. Some may only show symptoms once in a while and reason that in time they'll get better. Some believe they aren't sick at all. But left alone it won't get better. It can't. Any attempt on our part to cure this disease is futile. It is a sickness of the heart, but not this muscle that pumps blood providing the life source our body needs to remain alive. It is another sickness of the heart and **Romans 3:23** says we all have it. **"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."**

As a matter of fact, when asked a direct question Jesus emphatically states that no one is good. (**Matthew 19:17**) Our sickness is sin. Sin affects our destiny, it affects our will, it affects our body, our sin even affects others. In the Old Testament David states that we are sinners by birth (**Psalm 51:5**). Our genetic makeup can't avoid it. It can't be altered through genetic manipulation. It can't be extracted from the DNA code that makes us who we are.

Sin has been defined simply as an offense against God. From a theological perspective sin **"is that which proves unlike the character of God."** It is the opposite of virtue. It is wickedness.

If God is love, hate is sin.

If God is patient, impatience is sin.

If God is just, injustice is sin.

If God is moral, immorality is sin.

Sin is anything that is unholy, that is unlike the character of God. It is lust and envy and discord and murder and greed and pride and swearing and lying and the list can go on.

As a matter of fact, Jesus goes so far as to say that even if we think such thoughts it's as if we had committed the very act. We are all guilty of sin.

There was a man from Bethany named Lazarus and he was sick.

There is one more thought here. It's in **verse 3**. Martha and Mary, sisters of Lazarus, send word to Jesus that the one He loves is sick. It is in hopes that Jesus will come and in some miraculous way attend to the immediate need of His friend by healing him from this sickness.

The implication for us is clear. God already knows about our sickness of sin and verses like **John 3:16** and **Romans 5:8** remind us that God loves us, even with this sin.

“For God so loved the world...”

“But God demonstrated His love while we were yet sinners...”

On this Easter Day, 2013, I hope you realize how much God loves you. Jesus died and rose again for you, because of your sin, to cure you of this sickness.

I Peter 2:24 “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by His wounds you have been healed.”

Now our story about Lazarus the sick man continues.

Verses 4-16

The scene has shifted from this small village about two miles east of Jerusalem to an undisclosed place where Jesus and His disciples are staying. From chapter 10 we infer that they are somewhere around the Jordan River near the Dead Sea. A discussion ensues between Jesus and His disciples about the physical state of Lazarus. Though word had reached Him about His friend, He chose to remain where He was. From our perspective it appears He didn't care or that He had other more important matters to attend to. He told them that God would be glorified and that the sickness would not end in death.

Now it might be a bit confusing to us when the passage says that Jesus loved these friends, yet chose not to go visit them. After all, isn't that what friends do? When sickness or hardship strikes don't we try to offer some comfort through a visit or phone call? Jesus' actions seem contradictory, yet He had a purpose in everything He did. So they stayed put.

After two days' time Jesus announced that it was time to visit their friend who was sick. Now the disciples were confused and they raised an objection, not about the wellbeing of their friend but about their own safety. It wasn't all that long ago that they had been in the very same area and were thrown out of town. The people wanted to stone them. Now Jesus wanted to return there. They were concerned for their own skin. Jesus said that the event would bring about glory for God and yet here are the disciples unknowingly attempting to keep God from getting glory.

The delay of Jesus was not from lack of love or unconcern for His friends or for fear of the Jews who had threatened them just a short time earlier. Jesus had a reason and purpose for the delay. The day He heard it was not the right time. Two days later it was. As Jesus spoke to them it becomes clear that they did not understand. They thought Lazarus's sleep was a sleep of rest. Jesus spoke about Lazarus's sleep as death, but not permanent death and through it Jesus would be glorified. This event demonstrates the power and obedience of Jesus to the Father and we see that what is about to take place will be one more reason the religious leaders will want to put Jesus to death. Yet, it is in His death that He is glorified.

Jesus did not need to be concerned about the antagonism against Him. Because He walked in the will of the Father, He knew that by going to Bethany it was not yet time for Him to die. As long as we are obedient to God, nothing will happen to us that He doesn't want to happen.

Lazarus had died and Jesus referred to it as being sleep. Wherever in the New Testament death is spoken of for the Christian it is always referred to as sleep.

Acts 7:60 “The he (Stephen) fell on his knees and cried out, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ When he had said this, he fell asleep.”

I Corinthians 15:20 “But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

This is not an unconscious soul sleep, but a time of separation between the body and spirit that one day will be joined together again.

The text states that what was about to happen to Lazarus was to help build the faith of the disciples. Thomas spoke up and showed his commitment to Christ to even die with Him if that should happen.

Let’s turn our attention to **verses 17-24**.

The scene has moved ahead two days. Jesus and His disciples have arrived at Bethany. Lazarus has now been dead and buried for four days. With the warm temperatures decomposition sets in rather quickly. **If I could be so graphic as to say that when you hit a deer in the winter in Michigan it can stay in the ditch for a long time with little decay. Hit a deer in the summer one day and you’ll be crying foul the next. You get my drift.**

During this time of grief friends had come to offer support and comfort. When Martha heard that Jesus was on his way near the town she went out to meet Him. Knowing His supernatural ability to heal, even raise the dead, she stated the obvious. It was the same point that was probably on the minds of the disciples when they initially heard that Lazarus was sick. “Jesus, if you had only come when you heard he was sick, you could have healed him and we wouldn’t have experienced this loss. Lazarus wouldn’t have died.” Then she sums it up with the

obvious – **“But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”**

Let’s take this as Martha’s confession of faith, her ability to believe that with God all things are possible if it is in His will, His plan. **Do we have such faith? Do we believe that all things are possible with God? Do we believe that those now dead can live again?** That was a question posed one day to Ezekiel. Taken by God to a valley filled with old, dry bones He asked as Ezekiel gazed on the scene if it were possible for the bones to live again. **“Only you know for sure, Lord.” (Ezekiel 37:1ff)**

“Lord, even now God will hear You and do what You ask.”

Jesus comforted her with words she already knew but did not fully understand. **“Your brother will rise.”** Martha understood this to mean at the resurrection that would take place sometime in the future. It was a belief that all Jews held, that there would be a resurrection some day. She had no thought of an immediate resurrection, but only thought of a day yet future when that would occur.

In **verses 28-37** we find Martha running home and informing Mary that Jesus had arrived and wanted to see her. Quickly going to meet Him, her response is the same as that of her sister, “Lord, if only you had come sooner, Lazarus would still be alive.” That Jesus was deeply moved and troubled indicates the empathic nature of His character to understand our groaning and to sympathize with us. **Hebrews 4:15** **“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses.”**

The term **“deeply moved”** can also mean angered and in the context seems more likely because it also says He was troubled, a word that means to be agitated or bothered. He was not angered or troubled because of the lack of faith on the part of the hypocritical wailing of the crowds or because

they had no reason to grieve. It rather suggests that Jesus was troubled because of the oppression Satan had brought on mankind through suffering and death because of sin. His response was one of grief and sorrow, not for the pain they were experiencing from this death of a loved one but because death it is the consequence of sin. Physical death is a result of sin's curse and yes it is okay to grieve when our world is rocked by it, but let's remember why there is death in the first place and as we see in **Hebrews 9:27** physical death is something we will all experience and without the resurrection of Jesus and new life in Him because He bore our sins on the cross we will experience an eternal spiritual death. Jesus may have shown His humanity by weeping over the effects of the body as it succumbs to death, but He grieved more because death was a natural consequence of sin.

Jesus then asked where they had laid His friend. As He grieved the crowds misunderstood His tears as a sign of love and even questioned His ability to keep His friend from dying. But Scripture tells us that Jesus had the ability to heal or restore life whether He was present or not.

In **Mark 5** there is the story of Jairus whose daughter had died. Jesus went to his home, spoke a word to the dead girl and she came back to life.

In **Luke 7** we find Jesus traveling with His disciples through the town of Nain. They happened upon a funeral procession that was carrying the coffin of a young man who had died. He was the only son of a widow. Touched with compassion for her He reached out and lay a hand on the coffin and spoke to the corpse and instantly the young man sat up and began to talk.

In **John 4** we see the story of Jesus in Cana where he was met by an official who wanted Jesus to heal his son because the boy was close to death. Jesus spoke to the man and told him to go his way

because the boy would live. At that very moment the boy was healed.

Wherever Jesus was prior to traveling to Bethany He could have chosen to speak and Lazarus would have been healed, but He didn't. He had a greater purpose through his death.

When He came to the tomb, He ordered the stone to be rolled away, but Martha objected because after four days the body would smell from decomposition.

Present at the scene was the curious but disbelieving crowd, a sister who wept and a sister who objected. The same types of people would be at Jesus' crucifixion: the mocker, the skeptic, the antagonist, the disbelieving, and the weeping.

Out of obedience they removed the stone, Jesus gave a word of thanks to the Father for hearing Him, and then He gave a simple command, **"Lazarus, come out."** The Bible says here that he came out as ordered and at the request of Jesus, his grave cloths were removed. From that day on, our text says that many put their faith in Him.

When we believe in the living, resurrected Christ the grave clothes of the old nature are taken off and we released from the bondage of sin and death and given new robes of righteousness. When we trust in Jesus as Savior, He has in effect told us to "come out."

Look back at **verses 25-26**. This is the heart of the story and the heart of the Easter message. I purposely left out the heart of the story. It's not about Martha and Mary. It's not about the disciples. It's not about the crowds who witnessed and believed. It's about Jesus.

In His statement **"I am the resurrection and the life,"** Jesus gives us four truths.

We see the person of the resurrection.
 We see the possibility of the resurrection.
 We see the power of the resurrection.
 We see the purpose of the resurrection.

I. THE PERSON OF THE RESURRECTION – “I”

Jesus is identifying Himself as the cause of the resurrection. He uses a personal pronoun to indicate that the basis or source of the resurrection is in Him alone. Aside from Jesus there is no power that can raise someone from the dead. I don't have it in me to raise myself and you and I don't have it in us to raise even one other person.

When a little boy was brought back to life by Elisha, it was the power of the Lord who did it. When Paul preached his sermon and a young man fell out the window and died as a result, it was the power of the One who claimed to be the resurrection and the life that restored life to this man.

If we have any hope of being resurrected someday we must recognize that Jesus alone is the source. But it is more than just resurrection from physical death. We must understand that through what Jesus did on the cross and His triumphal resurrection on the first Easter, He is able to resurrect us from spiritual death. If Jesus was not raised from the dead, then there is no after life and physical death is all there is.

Can anyone who is physically dead be raised again? Can anyone who is spiritually dead be given spiritual life? The answer is yes to both. Because Christ rose again He has the power to do it.

It is only possible through Christ. Only those who are **“in Christ”** can become a new creation.

Jesus didn't say that through obedience to the law Lazarus would be resurrected.

Jesus didn't say that through following any other religion Lazarus would be resurrected. Jesus didn't say that through being good or going to the synagogue regularly Lazarus would be resurrected. Jesus is the person, the source of resurrection – both physical and spiritual.

We see next that He is the possibility of the resurrection.

II. THE POSSIBILITY OF THE RESURRECTION – “AM”

It doesn't say He will be.
 It doesn't say He has been.
 It says **“I am.”** That word speaks of His resurrection power in the past, the present and the future.

We can take that in two ways. The first is to consider it at a time yet in the future. We believe Jesus will return and all those in Christ will be resurrected when He calls their name.

I Corinthians 15:52 “...in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”

I Thessalonians 4:13-18 – when the trumpet sounds the dead in Christ will rise first.

That is a day yet to come. Those who have tasted physical death already will one day be resurrected.

But the term **“I am”** also means that Jesus is the resurrection right now, in the present. Resurrection power is a present reality in Jesus. Paul prayed that he might know the power of the resurrection, not just when the last trumpet sounds, but to know it, to experience it every day. That power is what helps us live a godly life now. It is the resurrection power that we call on today to help us overcome

temptation and be victorious over sin. It is the same **“I AM”** power that Moses came to know at the burning bush.

The resurrection is not just a nice, wishful thinking that we hope will occur, but otherwise have no assurance. Jesus’ own resurrection is the guarantee that we too will be resurrected. The possibility of our resurrection rests in the person of Jesus. It is with confidence that we can be sure that what He said He not only is capable of doing, but He will do it. If He said He is the resurrection, then we will be resurrected.

Now let me also say this: when Jesus stated that He was the resurrection, it wasn’t just in reference to Himself. He wasn’t saying that He only had power to raise Himself and no one else. He was saying that His resurrection power would be available to all who believe in Him by faith. That leads us to our next point.

III. THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION – “RESURRECTION”

Resurrection is simply rising from the dead, to come back to life. It literally means “out from the dead.” That there is a resurrection must mean there was death prior to that. Jesus is the resurrection. That He has power to do this of His own accord is something He spoke about.

John 10:17-18 “The reason My Father loves Me is that I lay down My life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from My Father.”

This is not just a prediction about His own resurrection, it is also an indication that He has sovereignty or authority over His own destiny. He has the power to give His life over to death, but He has the power to take His life back from death.

I Corinthians 15:12-23, 54-55

The power of Jesus’s resurrection assures me and everyone who believes in Jesus will also be resurrected by that same power that raised Jesus from the dead and the sting of death and the power of the grave will no longer have authority over me.

Because He was raised victorious from the dead and lives I too will be victorious and live by His resurrection power. There is resurrection power to live godly in this this life and to rise again when this body tastes death.

Tomb, You shall not hold Him longer,
Death is strong, but life is stronger
Stronger than the dark, the light;
Stronger than the wrong, the right;
Faith and hope triumphant say; Christ will rise on
Easter Day.

While the patient earth lies waiting
Till the morning shall be breaking
Shuddering beneath the burden dread
Of her Master, cold and dead,
Hark! she hears the angels say; Christ will rise on
Easter Day.

And when sunrise smites the mountains
Pouring light from heavenly fountains
Then the earth blooms out to greet
Once again the blessed feet;
And her countless voices say; Christ has risen on
Easter Day.

(Author: Phillips Brooks)

Christ is the resurrection. Because He had the power to raise Himself from the dead He has the power to raise us from the dead as well. This resurrection from the dead is over physical and spiritual death.

But the resurrection isn’t enough and isn’t the end.

We see one more truth revealed in Jesus's statement to Martha.

IV. THE PURPOSE OF THE RESURRECTION – "LIFE"

According to the dictionary "life is the property or quality of a plant or animal that distinguishes it from inorganic matter or dead organisms."

That Jesus gives life means there must be death. To all of us who are spiritually dead because of sin, Jesus is the source, the author and giver of life.

Ephesians 2:1-2, 4-5 "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air...But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved."

The purpose of the resurrection is so that we may have life, eternal life. If He had remained dead in the grave then there is no possibility of our resurrection or of new life.

Paul wrote about it when he said that in Christ we are a new creation. Faith in Him gives us life, new life, life that is eternal. It is not just endless existence. It is never to be condemned for sin. It is never to be separated from God. It assures a place in heaven among God's people sharing in the benefits of His rewards.

Jesus is the source and power of this new life. Jesus said He came that we might have life and have it to the full. If we want this new life we must believe in Him. We must acknowledge our sin, confess them. We must trust that the death Christ paid on the cross for sin was accepted by God as payment and believe that He is the only way to merit eternal life.

John 1:4 "In Him was life, and that life was the light of men."

John 3:14-17 "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him."

John 3:36 "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on Him."

John 5:24 "I tell you the truth, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."

John 14:6 "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, no man can come to the Father except through Me."

I John 5:11-13 "And this is the record, that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in the Son. He that has the Son has life; and He that has not the Son of God has not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may believe on the name of the Son of God."

It was not just any man who died that day on the cross. He died for our offenses toward God and then was raised again because His sacrifice justified us. Because of our faith in Christ, God sees us just as if we had not sinned. He sees us robed in the righteousness of Christ. His death accomplished its intended purpose and He no longer needed to remain in that state of death any longer so He rose again. Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

I want to ask the same question that Jesus posed to Martha. **"Do you believe this?"** Do you believe that He is the resurrection and the life? To do so is to receive eternal life, to become a new creation. Jesus is alive!