

John Chapter 11 v 17 - 44

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[0 : 00] And we're cutting in to the story and we're going to start reading at verse 17, which if you've got the church Bible, it will be Jesus Comforts His Sisters or Comforts His Sisters as the subtitle there.

Most of you will know that what's happened beforehand, Jesus' friend who He cared very much for, Lazarus, was very ill. He'd been sent a message saying, Lazarus is very ill, can you come over quickly?

But Jesus had waited, purposely waited, and it wasn't until Lazarus had died that Jesus then went over to Bethany. That's where He, Lazarus and His sisters lived.

And so we're taking out the story from when Jesus arrives at Bethany and see what happens. On His arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem. Many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet Him, but Mary stayed at home.

[1 : 08] Lord, Martha said to Jesus, if you'd been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.

Jesus said to her, your brother will rise again. Martha answered, I know he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day. Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life.

He who believes in me will live, even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this? Yes, Lord, she told him.

I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God who has come into the world. After she'd said this, she went back and called her sister, Mary. The teacher is here, she said, and is asking for you.

When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to Him. Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met Him. When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

[2 : 22] When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell at His feet and said, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. Where have you laid Him? He asked.

Come and see, Lord, they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, see how He loved Him. But some of them said, Could not He who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?

Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone across the entrance. Take away the stone, He said. But Lord, said Martha, the sister of the dead man, by this time there's a bad odor, for he's been there four days.

Then Jesus said, Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God? So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, Father, I thank you that you've heard me.

[3 : 29] 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. When He had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, Lazarus, come out.

The dead man came out, 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.

If you have access to a Bible, I hope you do, then have it open where we read just a few minutes ago from John and chapter 11, this incredible episode, miraculous rising, raising of Lazarus from the dead and from the words of Jesus and the power of Jesus revealed.

Probably one of the most difficult challenges that we face from time to time is knowing what to say to somebody who's been recently bereaved. It can be so difficult to know what to say.

It can be so hard, so worrying, that for some of us, maybe we even avoid those people who've been bereaved. Don't speak to them. Try and keep out of their way, as it were, as long as possible because we just don't know what to say.

[4 : 52] We simply don't know what we can say that will be helpful. But unfortunately, of course, when we are like that, when we're avoiding or silent, that can be misunderstood or even understood as being uncaring and unloving.

And it is, in one sense, selfish when we will not speak to those who are bereaved with some words of comfort. Of course, the other trouble is that often when we think we know what to say, we use sort of quite trite sayings.

It will all be all right. Or we say things, a phrase that we've heard elsewhere, or a sentence which is perhaps well-meaning, but actually can be maybe more discomfoting, or just as discomfoting, as saying nothing at all.

But the right words, spoken in the right way at the right time, can carry with them real comfort, real help, in the midst of great despair. They can lift up a very dark heart at that time.

Now, the Lord Jesus Christ always had the right words, spoken in the right way at just the right time. And when we come to what is the fifth of the I am sayings, there's seven of them in the Gospel of John.

[6 : 03] We've been looking at them over the past few weeks. We find that this fifth one, where Jesus speaks there in verse 25, I am the resurrection, the life, takes place in this very, very sad occasion.

The occasion of the funeral, and the fallout in one sense, of the death of his friend Lazarus. At the beginning of the chapter, we're told Lazarus loved, sorry, Jesus loved Lazarus.

He was like a brother to him, and his sisters, he cared for them very much. But now, Lazarus had been ill for several days, battling with some sort of illness, some sort of, we don't know what it was, but it had taken his life, he died.

Four days later, after his burial, as you can imagine, in that part of the world, people are buried on the day they die, or as soon as possible afterwards. So, it would only be four days after his death, it wouldn't be a week or so, and then, some days.

At last, Jesus arrives on the scene. At last, Jesus is there. He'd been summoned several days before, while Lazarus was still alive, but he hadn't gone.

[7 : 10] But here, Jesus steps into, a sad situation. And it's so important, again, for us to recognize, and remember, dear friends, that the Lord Jesus Christ, is in every circumstance of life.

He's not a fair weather friend. He's not someone who's just there, when things are going well. He's not just there, when everything's easy, and comfortable. He is the one, who is there, in all the spheres, all the settings, all the challenges of life.

He's there when it's raining, when it's sunny. And he finds a very sad situation, doesn't he? Naturally, he steps into this situation, he arrives, and what do we find happening?

There's Lazarus' sister, Martha and Mary. They're still in some state of shock. They're still in need of some comfort. They're still grieving, four days after his death.

Grief isn't something that you can turn on, on and off, is it? Sometimes people say, life must go on. That's not helpful. When we've lost someone very dear to us, that grief will go on, and on, and on, and on, and maybe all life long.

[8 : 12] We mustn't be those who sort of say, well, you've had your week, now get over it. That just is not right. Here we have dear folk grieving. We find also, not only that Mary and Martha are still grieving, still in some shock, and some sadness.

We find, of course, that there are family and friends, neighbors, people from Jerusalem as well, who've come, and they're staying with them, they're offering support, they're offering comfort, where they can. But amongst all these people, many people, including the two sisters, they're puzzled.

Why has Jesus taken so long to get there? You get that sense, don't you, in their voice. Lord, if you'd been here, but you weren't. And others as well are saying, well, look, this Jesus, who's done so many incredible miracles, he gave that blind man, who'd been blind from birth, his sight, he healed the man by the pool, who was lame.

Why couldn't he stop this man from dying? Or why didn't he stop him from dying? And so into all these emotions, into all these doubts, Jesus steps in, and he steps in with the words, I am the resurrection and the life.

As I've said, Jesus speaks the right words, on the right occasion. His words speak, not only to Martha and Mary, as I'm mourning and bereaved, or to others who are bereaved, but his words speak to every single one of us.

[9 : 31] See, with all of Jesus' I am sayings, we've got an insight. Jesus is revealing and telling us something about himself, something about his character, something about his tremendous work. He's opening up the curtains, as it were, so we can peek in and see, just who is this mystery man?

Who is this incredible person, who has shaped and changed the world in which we live? What is it about him? And his words are not only a revelation of himself, but his words, if we will take hold of them and believe in them, we will find in them comfort for ourselves, help for ourselves, of the greatest blessing.

There's a change here in Jesus' I am saying. In the other ones, he'd used familiar objects, bread, light, a gate, a shepherd, things that people saw all around them, things that they could understand, things that were tangible, but now he doesn't speak of an object, but almost like a power.

He speaks about something unseen, something intangible, but very real, invisible, but very present. I am the resurrection and the life.

So what is it that Jesus wants us to understand? What is it that we can grasp from what he says here? What is it that makes sense about himself, that speaks to us today? What is it about Jesus' statement that explains not only what it means to know him, but practically the impact that Christ has and can have upon our lives?

[11 : 03] Jesus introduces himself to us in one sense. I am the resurrection and the life. When you meet somebody, often who you don't know, you'll explain that, you'll reveal yourself, say, I am so-and-so who lives there, or I am so-and-so who teaches your son, or I am so-and-so who is a friend of, or a husband of, and so on.

But Jesus introduces himself and says, I am the resurrection and the life. And unquestionably, what the first thing Jesus again is doing and saying here is this, is that he is God living amongst man.

He is God living in our world. To say I am the resurrection and the life is to say that I am one with God, who himself is the only one who can give life, which is resurrection life.

If you know anything of the Old Testament, you'll know that from time to time, God did an incredible miracle of raising people from the dead. Abraham, we're told, believed that God could raise his son from the dead, Isaac.

The prophets Elijah and Elisha both saw God doing it in answer to prayer. In 1 Kings and chapter 17, Elijah prays for the dead son of a woman who'd given him some shelter.

[12 : 24] He prays in this way, Oh Lord my God, let this boy's life return to him. The Lord heard Elijah's cry and the boy's life returned to him and he lived.

Resurrection, Elisha does a similar thing, very similar, with another son of a lady who helped him. And in fact, if you know the wonderful account, even after Elisha had died, God raised a man to life again through him.

But now here's Jesus. He's already raised two people to life in his ministry. A young girl of 12. A young man.

We don't know his age, but almost certainly in his late teens or early 20s. And now for the third time, he's about to raise another man from the dead. The third of these incredible miracles.

And in one sense, before he does that, he says and declares to Martha, I myself, in my very nature, in my very person, is the power of life over death.

[13 : 31] We cannot come to any other conclusion that this must be God. I don't know if you are very keen on the type of films, the sword and sandal films, you know, the Spartacus and the gladiator films.

Or whether you know something of history, the gladiators. But in the Roman arena, there would be gladiator fights. Thousands of people would gather, especially in Rome, in the Colosseum.

And these two men would battle, or many more, or would battle in hand-to-hand combat. When one had beaten the other, and perhaps either inflicted a wound or knocked him down, he would take his sword and place it at the very throat of his defeated enemy.

But before he did anything, he would look up to the emperor, seated in his sort of magnificent box, waiting for the emperor's decision. And the emperor would hold out his fist, with his thumb pointing horizontally.

If the thumb pointed upwards, the wrist turned upwards, the defeated gladiator's life would be spared. But if the emperor turned his thumb downwards, that would be the sign that the gladiator who had beaten was to execute his foe immediately.

[14 : 50] In one sense, the emperor was showing to everybody that he had the power of life and death. It was his to give, and it's his to take away. But when Jesus says, I'm the resurrection, the life, he's claiming much greater authority than any human power, or human person, or ruler.

To take away a person's life is an act of power. It's a sinful thing. It's a wicked thing. But to give life to those who don't have life, that's a different authority and power altogether.

Jesus is about to prove the truthfulness of his words by raising from the dead Lazarus, a man four days dead.

But what he's actually talking about here when he says, I'm the resurrection and the life, is something much greater simply than the restoration of physical life to a person who's died.

And it's to that practical application that Jesus explains in the second part of verse 25 and 26 that we need to turn to and understand here.

[15 : 56] See, the resurrection that Jesus is talking about when he says, I'm the resurrection and the life, is the resurrection to eternal life, not merely to life again of the same type.

See, all the people that God raised to life in the Old Testament and the people that Jesus raised to life, including Lazarus, all went on to die a second time. They may have lived several more years, maybe several more decades, but ultimately they became ill, ultimately they became older, ultimately they died.

When Jesus raised them back to life, he raised them back to the same life that they had left a matter of hours or days before. They were the same age before they died. Their bodies still needed food to eat to keep them alive.

They still continued to get older, just like before they died, and inevitably, they died a second time. So the resurrection that Jesus is talking about is not that type of resurrection.

The resurrection he's speaking about and is promising is life that is beyond death, life that is unending, life that is eternal, a life which is certain.

[17 : 04] That's why Jesus says, I am the resurrection and the life. It's in that order that there comes a resurrection unto life everlasting.

And Jesus is the one who raises us up to life and a life that is undying. This isn't a new concept that Jesus is bringing out. It's not something new he's saying.

He said it again and again, and John has written about the words of Jesus earlier on in the Gospel of John in chapter 6. Here again, Jesus speaking. Just after he's been talking about being the bread of life, he goes on and says, verse 28, For I've come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.

And this is the will of him who sent me that I shall lose none of all that he's given me but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day.

The reason that Jesus Christ came into the world, the reason that God the Father sent him, the purpose for his being born as both God and man and living amongst us was this goal that he might raise to eternal life those he came to save.

[18 : 28] The reason that he lived that life, the reason that he died and suffered upon the cross for our sins, the reason that he rose again from the dead himself was that we who put our faith in him might have life everlasting and eternal.

You see, the world in which we live, the life that we live here and now is not all there is. We don't just have these three score years and ten. We don't just have this world to live in.

We don't just sort of live, die and that's oblivion, nothingness, which is the very popular concept for many. No. The guarantee that there is real life beyond death is seen in the resurrection of Jesus Christ himself from the dead and from the assurance and declaration that I am the very source of power for resurrection life.

He who believes in me will live even though he dies. We often live for today. We might even say, well, I've only got today.

I'm only guaranteed today. I might as well live for today. Get the most out of life while I've got it before I get too old to enjoy it or before ultimately death comes. For many people, all that they hope for in life is in the here and now.

[19 : 46] I hope to have a nice home to live in. I hope to have good clothes to wear. I hope to enjoy the pleasures of the day. I hope that the sun will shine. I hope for the things that are now. But all these things we know must pass away.

They are only for a moment and to live for them is foolishness. When ultimately we must live forever. We must and can have life everlasting. The reality is that we will, whoever we are, live beyond this life.

The great question is how will we live beyond this life? Where will we live beyond this life? For just as certainly and surely as Jesus promises, life for those who believe in him beyond death.

So the Bible promises and assures us that there is everlasting sorrow and grief in living beyond death without Christ. There is a real thing such as hell.

There is a real thing such as the day of judgment. And as Jesus declared before, at the last day everyone must stand before God. So Jesus says, I'm the resurrection and the life.

[20 : 56] Who believes in me will live even though he dies. What are you living for? Are you living for today? Are you living for the moment? Are you living for what you hope you can get out of this day and the next few days that you might have before you die?

Or are you actually living for that which is going to last? That which is everlasting and eternal. That which is worth living for. So that when you pass, when you die, you have got something real.

But then Jesus says something which on the face of it may seem to be contradictory. He says, he who believes in me will live even though he dies. Then he says in verse 26, whoever lives and believes in me will never die.

On the face of it that sounds contradictory. He just said that he who believes in me even though he dies. But then he says will never die. So which is it? Are we going to die or not die? Is Jesus' words contradictory?

People like to think so. They like to say, oh look at this, here's Jesus. He's saying one thing and he's saying another. It's so confusing. No, it's pretty obvious that Martha knew what he was talking about.

[22 : 06] He says to her, do you believe this? Yes, Lord. She isn't confused and say, well hold on, you just said that and did you mean this or did you mean that? People like to make the words of God, they like to make the works of Jesus, they like to make Christianity confusing.

Oh, it's too difficult to understand. No, it's simple and it's plain. Martha understood it and she affirms her faith in Jesus and what he said. So what is he saying?

He's saying simply this, although our bodies shall die and be raised to eternal life, our souls shall never die. You see, we are body and soul.

We're not just body, we're not just physical, we're not just this bunch of chemicals and elements and minerals all bound together. Each of us has a spiritual dimension, the essence of who we are, our soul.

It's what separates us from animals. It's part of our being made in the image of God. That's right, you and I, incredibly, whoever we are, are made in the image of God.

[23 : 07] We bear something of his likeness in us. And the Bible says that God is spirit. Jesus said that himself, God is spirit in John 4. And so we have a spirit like his, we have a soul, a spiritual element within us which is indeed us and makes us like God.

Now that image of God has been broken because of sin, because of our rebellion against God, because of our turning away from him. That image is broken but we still see aspects of the likeness of God in our lives.

I don't know if you've ever broken a mirror. Don't worry, you won't get seven years bad luck. That's rubbish because it's superstition. But breaking a mirror can be annoying because then you've got to go and buy another one.

But if you've ever broken a mirror, it often sort of shatters, doesn't it, in sort of slithers and pieces. But you can still make out something of your reflection in it. And so it is with human beings.

We are broken. We have been broken by sin. We've been shattered by sin. But they're still reflected in every human being something of the image of God just in pieces here and there. We're able to love.

[24 : 15] We're able to hate. We're able to create, to be inventive. We're able to reason and to think things through. That's all because we are made in the image of God and many things beside. And although they are imperfect attributes in us, they still reflect God's character and nature.

So you have a soul, dear friend, not just a body. You may be concerned about what you wear and what you eat, but let me ask you, are you concerned about your soul? Because that's the thing that's going to live on beyond death.

death. It's the essence of who we are. It's our character, our personality. And even when this heart stops beating and the body lives no longer, the essence of who we are lives on.

That's what Jesus is saying. We see that, of course, with Jesus himself when he died upon the cross because Jesus, we're told, understood this, of course, much better than us.

As he was on the cross, as he was about to die, Jesus said this, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. He recognized that there was the soul and the spirit and they were being separated by his death.

[25 : 23] And then it says when he had said this, the AV puts it, he gave up the ghost or he gave up his spirit. At death, the body is separated from the soul.

The soul goes on living. And for the Christian, the wonderful truth is this, the soul goes on living enjoying the relationship with God or waiting that day when it should be united together with a new body, a resurrection body, to enjoy life everlasting.

See, heaven is not floating around on the cloud playing a harp with a pair of wings. It's not some disembodied, weird spiritual thing. Heaven is more real than the things that you can touch and see now.

And we should have real bodies to live in. But they won't be the decaying body we have now, the corrupt body, the falling apart body, the body that needs new parts and pieces added to it as we go on.

It will be a glorious body, a heavenly body. In fact, if you really want to know what that body is going to be like, you'll have to come back tonight because I'm going to be preaching on the resurrection body, what we're going to have when we, when Jesus comes again, that new body.

[26 : 33] What will it be like? We're going to find some of the answers to that. But Jesus says here, doesn't he, I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies.

The body will die, but God, Jesus promises us a resurrection life, life beyond the grave. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die. There is life now and life which is ongoing for the spirit.

But look at what Jesus says as well. He who believes in me will live. Whoever lives and believes in me is not automatic. Life everlasting, life with God, life beyond the grave is not automatic.

Not the life that Jesus is talking about, the life which is a life of fullness, a life with God, a life of fellowship, a life of joy. And so Jesus says whoever believes, that's the criteria.

Not whoever is good enough, not whoever is nice enough, not whoever is religious enough, but he who believes, he who believes. And so he asks the question of Martha which is a question which is set before every one of us this morning.

[27 : 43] Do you believe this? Do you believe that what Jesus has said about himself is true? Do you believe that he's a resurrection and the life? Do you believe that he is God the Son who's come into the world and died in your place on the cross?

Do you believe that if you put your faith and trust in him you will have life everlasting? Or do you just say it's a lot of old rubbish, it's for old women and children, it's got nothing to do with me.

Let me tell you this, everything's got to do with you because you're going to die. So it's got to do with you, hasn't it? And it's got to do with me. He asked Martha, do you believe this?

And she says, yes Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God who is to come into the world. We have to believe this. Jesus doesn't say just do you believe.

Do you have some sort of vague faith? Do you have some sort of concept that there might be a heaven or there might be a God or that this way may be the way to God or that way may be the way to God or I'll find God in my garden or whatever it may be.

[28 : 41] Now Jesus says specifically, do you believe this about me? Do you believe what I've said? Do you believe my words are true and that I am trustworthy and that you can put your faith in me? When we put our faith in Jesus again, it's not simply that we're saying, oh yes, I think in my head I believe that Jesus was God's Son.

I believe in my head that he came into the world. I believe in my head. It's something more than that. It's not just a mere intellectual acceptance about things about Jesus. It's the springboard of a living trust and faith in him.

It's got to be a personal like Martha, yes Lord, for myself personally I believe that Jesus is God who came into the world and he came for me to save me and to give me life everlasting and I've been trusting my life to him.

I'm saying, you save me Lord, you rescue me Lord because I know that I will die and I know that when I die I will face God and I will face the judgment of my sin and I will face the punishment my sins deserve unless you rescue me.

Have you that living faith this morning? Jesus asks you, I don't ask you, Jesus asks you, each one of you, do you believe this? Are you going through life facing death without this assurance and confidence that I'm the resurrection and the life?

[30 : 03] Are you facing death with the hope, with the fingers crossed, with the lucky horseshoe over your house door, with your sprig of four leaf clover?

I hope that I might get to heaven, I hope that God will look on the things that I've done which are bad and hopefully the good things I've done will outweigh them. None of those things count, none of those things will get you there, none of those things are anything to put your hope in, it is only Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the resurrection and the life.

God doesn't say, do this, do that, do the other and I will accept you because there's nothing that you and I can do to outweigh the sins that we have done. But God in his love and Christ in his love for us came and suffered and died on that cross, death itself, to pay the penalty for your sin and mine and rose again to life everlasting so that those who put their faith in him may be assured and confident that that sin has died with him and that they have life with God.

Do you believe this? Because when you do and I would urge you, urge you, urge you, dear friends, whoever you are, the many of you I don't know because you're on holiday, I'd urge you, do believe this, do put your faith in Christ, do come to him, then you too will know not just that his words are true but you'll know the power of them.

Lazarus knew the power of the words of Jesus. His words aren't like my words or your words, his words contain the dynamite of God, the resurrection life of God so that when we receive his words as Lazarus did they go pow pow and we're changed and transformed.

[31 : 50] Jesus talks about it in this way, 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. I am the resurrection and the life Jesus said and do you believe this?

We're going to sing our final hymn. Let me encourage you if what you've heard this morning is something that you want to follow up, if you'd like to know more about the Lord Jesus or what it means to be a Christian, if you have questions or concerns about life and death, please speak to myself or some other Christian that you know.

I'm going to be too glad to point you to Jesus and help you to come to know and trust him. But we're going to sing this wonderful hymn that reminds us of Jesus' resurrection and the assurance that because he has been raised, those who have faith in him will also be raised from the dead too.

281, Thine be the glory. Thine be the glory, Thine be the glory, Thine be the comfort of the sun, And thus is the victory Thou art ever strong.

[33 : 26] Angels sing, Thine be the glory, Thine be the glory, Thine be the glory, Thine can find omen were The glory, Thine be the glory, Thine be the glory, Jesus, I'm glad that he transmits Bhavavavavih, and who are saved maybe Thine be the glory, He ikime who is Himself zakowi Heahli, His word blesseszu, All even Jesus, Heit, He Of Most.

Heahli, The glory, I am glad he is Heahli, Did he know Let the church with gladness Hymns of triumph sing For alone now live Death has lost its sea Thine be the glory Risen, conquered Son Endless is the victory The whole death has won O Lord, without thee Glorious Prince of Light Thine is not without thee Pain us in our sky Pain us more than conquest

Till thy death does not Pray the sacred Jordan Till thy home are born Like the glory Risen, conquered Son And that is the victory The Lord, without thee For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath But to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ He died for us so that whether we are awake or sleep in death We may live together with him Therefore comfort one another And encourage one another With these truths As you are doing Amen

Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amart Amen Amen